

The Ten Commandments - Part 1 of 2

(Deuteronomy 5:1-15)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Deuteronomy

I. Background / Review

- a. **Deuteronomy** captures Moses's final speeches to the people right before his death at the age of 120 after leading the Israelites for 40 years in the Wilderness.
 - i. Recall that Stephen summarized the life of Moses as consisting of three 40-year periods (**Acts 7:20-36**)
 - ii. He recounts the past journey and gives warnings and encouragements to prepare the next generation before they enter the Promised Land.
 - iii. Moses knows he will die soon, and not enter the Promised Land.
- b. In **chapters 1-4**, what many consider the first speech of Moses in this book, Moses recalled a few specific events on their journey, and reminded the people that after he dies and Joshua leads them across the Jordan River into the Promised Land, they must obey all the teachings the Lord gave them through Moses, without adding or subtracting anything.
 - i. Moses retold the story of the Israelites defeating the nations led by kings Sihon and Og. The 2-1/2 tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh will inherit that land, which is on the east side of the Jordan River (before the people cross over).
- c. Now in **Deuteronomy 5**, at the start of his second address to the Israelites in this book, Moses begins by recounting the story of the Lord initially giving the Ten Commandments, which was first told in **Exodus 19-20**.

II. Retelling the Story of the Lord Giving the Ten Commandments

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 5:1-5**.
 - i. “Horeb” = Mount Sinai
 - ii. This encounter happened almost 40 years before Moses is giving his speech.
 - 1. Due to the sin at Kadesh Barnea about 38 years prior, all those 20 and over at that time (except Joshua and Caleb) had to die off before the end of the 40 years, before the Israelites would cross the Jordan River into Canaan.

2. Therefore, other than Joshua and Caleb, those hearing this speech would have been 18 or younger (or not yet born) when these events at Mount Sinai happened. At the time of Moses' retelling the story here, the oldest would be around age 58. Everyone else would be younger, since the first generation (all those over 20 at Kadesh Barnea) would have died off by this point in time, when Moses is speaking.
3. Mount Sinai had been engulfed in fire when the Lord descended on it. Moses went up to meet with the Lord. The voice of the Lord was heard by the entire assembly.

iii. Read **Deuteronomy 4:9-13**.

1. This event is referred to as "the day of assembly" (**Deuteronomy 4:10**), an expression that will become significant later on when we touch on an important prophecy.
 - a. Also, note that the Greek word rendered "assembly" here in the LXX (ekklesia / ἐκκλησία) is the same word that is typically translated "church" in the New Testament.
 2. This is one of the three places I am aware of that the term "Ten Commandments" is used.
 - a. The other two are in **Exodus 34:28** and **Deuteronomy 10:4**.
- b. **Trick Question:** *How many commandments* are there in the 10 Commandments?
- i. If we look at a commandment as an *imperative statement* ("Thou shalt do X" or "Thou shalt not do Y", how many are there on this list?
 - ii. By my count, it seems like there are at least twelve commandments. I have seen 12 sometimes, and perhaps as many as 14. On the other hand, some of these commandments are very closely tied to adjacent ones, so some could be reasonably aggregated together to get the number down to ten.
 1. The same challenge is there regardless of whether you use the **Exodus 20** or **Deuteronomy 5** version.
 - iii. Historically, everyone has agreed that there are ten. However, I am aware of three major different systems of numbering the commandments (which will explain some of the confusion depending on the background of the author writing about them). Biggest

difference is how they handle numbering the first and last commandments to make it all add up to ten. Consider the following numbering approaches to dividing the 10 Commandments:

1. Jewish system of numbering;
 2. Catholic system for numbering (going back at least as far as Augustine); and
 3. Orthodox/Protestant Reformers numbering system.
- c. Actually, despite how modern English translations render the three phrases in the Law where the expression “Ten Commandments” is found, it does not actually say that these are “Commandments”. In the LXX, two Greek words are used in the LXX in the three places, neither one of which means “commandment”. A more accurate translation is “Ten Words”, “Ten Sayings”, “Ten Statements” or something like that.
- i. The same appears to be the case in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament (a more accurate translation is “Ten Words” or “Ten Sayings”).
 1. Note that our technical term for the Ten Commandments, “Decalogue”, comes from two Greek words that mean “ten” and “words”, a transliteration of the expression used in two of the references in the Law of Moses.
 - ii. You can see this for yourself in interlinear Bibles, and then see how those words are used elsewhere in Scripture.
 - iii. Examples from older, more literal Bible translations:
 1. “He proclaimed his covenant to you, which he ordered you to obey, *the Ten Words*; and he wrote them on two stone tablets.” (**Deuteronomy 4:13**, CJB; a Jewish Old Testament from the Hebrew)
 - a. Note that in the traditional Jewish numbering used, the first of the ten statements is “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”
 - i. That is not even a commandment (we are not commanded to do anything in that statement). It is just a statement of fact!
 2. “And he shewed you his covenant, which he commanded you to do, and the *ten words* that he wrote in two tables of stone.”

(**Deuteronomy 4:13**, Douay-Rheims Bible; based on the Latin Vulgate)

3. "And he declared to you his covenant that he commanded you to do, *the ten words*, and he wrote them upon two tablets of stone." (**Deuteronomy 4:13**, Lexham English Septuagint)
4. "and He declareth to you His covenant, which He hath commanded you to do, the *Ten Matters*, and He writeth them upon two tables of stone." (**Deuteronomy 4:13**, Young's Literal Translation)
5. "And he schewide to you his couenaunt, which he comaundide, that ye schulden do, and 'he schewide *ten wordis*, whiche he wroot in two tablis of stoon." (**Deuteronomy 4:13**, Wycliffe)

III. First Group of Commandments: Pertaining to How We Relate to God

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 5:6-15**.
 - i. No other 'gods'.
 - ii. No images of other gods (or of God the Father, Himself).
 - iii. Don't misuse the name of the Lord, taking it "in vain".
 - iv. Set aside the Sabbath (the seventh day of each week) as holy; do no servile work on that day.
- b. You will have no other Gods besides me.
 - i. Worship only one God. No other 'gods'.
 - ii. Our God is the only one. At the burning bush he told Moses his "name" was "the existing one", literally in the LXX "the being one". He is the only God that exists.
 - iii. This was a problem for Israelites for centuries, picking up the 'gods' of the nations around them.
 - iv. Polythesism (worshiping multiple 'gods') is still a problem in much of the world today, especially in places like India, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region. There are over a billion Hindus in the world, plus several million who practice various polytheistic 'folk religions'.
- c. Do not make any images (of 'gods', or of the one God).
 - i. While this is tied to polytheism (making idols of other 'gods' and venerating them), it has implications that go beyond that.

- ii. Read **Deuteronomy 4:14-18**. The logic here: at Horeb you saw no form of God. So don't try to reduce Him to the form of some created thing (male or female human, animal, anything on earth or in the heavens).
 - 1. I think of the famous painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican in Rome. In it, God is portrayed as an old white male human with European features and white hair, reaching out to touch (and give life to) Adam, the first human.
 - 2. This is one of the most well-known works of art in Western history, by Michelangelo. People come from all over the world to gaze at it. However, it is perhaps the most famous and destructive violation of the Second Commandment in Christian history.
 - 3. Unfortunately, this picture has implanted in the minds of many thousands of people that the God we worship looks like an old man with white hair and a beard. As opposed to the One "dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see". (**1 Timothy 6:16**)
 - a. And images like this have been a stumbling block for those coming from Muslim backgrounds.
 - b. This image also trivializes God to Christians.
 - iii. It seems to me that this prohibition applies to the Father (who was never seen), but not to the Son of God (who took on human form and was seen and handled by men).
- d. Do not take the name of the Lord in vain.
- i. The name of God represents God Himself. Need to honor it at all times.
 - 1. We cannot use it carelessly or casually.
 - 2. We cannot use the Lord's name to "spice up" or add emphasis in our conversation.
 - 3. I realize this is so common it is second nature for some people.
 - ii. Early examples of reverence for the name of God: early manuscripts of Scripture, including the New Testament, where scribes would *abbreviate direct references to God, Jesus, Christ, Lord, Holy Spirit, etc.*
 - iii. Words definitely do matter.

1. "Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that *for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.* For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (**Matthew 12:34–37**, NKJV)
 2. "Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh." (**James 3:5–12**, NKJV)
- iv. **Bottom Line:** Keep a guard over your mouth. Don't use God's name, or the name of Jesus Christ, carelessly. Never. And don't use abbreviations or expressions that try to hide or modify what your heart wants to say. Others hear it, and you are thereby polluting their hearts and minds as well.
1. Don't justify yourself by not actually using a swear or the name of Jesus Christ by using abbreviations or switching in something that sounds almost like the name of the Lord.
 - a. Have nothing to do with the deeds of darkness. Honor the Name of God and honor the name of Jesus Christ.
 2. Call other Christians to the same standard of self-control with our tongues.

IV. Observing the Sabbath

- a. Re-read **Deuteronomy 5:12-15**.
- b. **Questions:**
 - i. Does this still apply to us today?

- ii. Does the Sabbath refer to Saturday or Sunday?
 - 1. If it is Saturday, should we be gathering on that day?
 - 2. If Sunday, does that mean it is a sin to work on Sundays?
- c. Clearly this commandment came up during Jesus' ministry. He was criticized for healing people on the Sabbath, and for his disciples picking and eating grain as they were walking through a field on the Sabbath.
- d. Strict Jews today make a point of not working (or walking long distances) on Saturdays.
- e. What the Scriptures says regarding the Sabbath.
 - i. The Sabbath was the seventh (last) day of the week, the day on which God 'rested' from His work of creation (**Genesis 2:1-3**).
 - ii. It was (and still is) the seventh day of the week, the last day of the week: *Saturday*.
 - iii. Sunday, the first day of the week, is the day Jesus rose from the dead. It was on the morning of the day immediately after the Sabbath (**Matthew 28:1**). It is referred to as "the Lord's Day" (**Revelation 1:10**).
- iv. Read **Colossians 2:8-17**.
 - 1. We Christians no longer need to follow circumcision, food and drink restrictions, festivals *or Sabbath requirements* that were included in the Law of Moses.
 - 2. Those things all foreshadowed things that have now been revealed to us, in Christ.
 - a. For example, early Christians understood the dietary restrictions that we could eat cows and sheep but not pork as pointing to how we should live (eating only pure grass rather than everything/garbage, not diving back into the mud spiritually, etc.). For more on this, see the lesson on Clean and Unclean Animals in **Leviticus 11**, in the expository series on **Leviticus**.
- v. Paul also addresses this problem (Judaizers who are trying to get the Gentile Christians to follow the rules in the Law of Moses) in his letter to the **Galatians**.
 - 1. In **Galatians 3:24-25**, Paul explains that the Law was like a tutor for a young child, given for a time to lead us to Christ.

Now that we have been led to Christ, we no longer need that tutor.

2. Paul then laments in **Galatians 4**, “You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.” (**Galatians 4:10–11**, NKJV)
- vi. Early Christian writers commented on this question about whether Christians were expected to observe the Sabbath.
1. From Justin Martyr, writing c. 160 AD. The following quotes are from his *Dialogue with Trypho, A Jew*, which records an extended debate between Justin Martyr (a Christian from a Samaritan background) and Trypho (who was a Jew):
 - a. [from Justin] “But the Gentiles, who have believed on Him, and have repented of the sins which they have committed, they shall receive the inheritance along with the patriarchs and the prophets, and the just men who are descended from Jacob, even although they neither keep the Sabbath, nor are circumcised, nor observe the feasts.”
 - i. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, a Jew, chapter 26; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 207)
 - b. [from Trypho, a Jew, challenging Justin] “Why do you select and quote whatever you wish from the prophetic writings, but do not refer to those which expressly command the Sabbath to be observed?”
 - ii. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, a Jew, chapter 27; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 207)
 - c. [from Justin] “As, then, circumcision began with Abraham, and the Sabbath and sacrifices and offerings and feasts with Moses, and it has been proved they were enjoined on account of the hardness of your people’s heart, so it was necessary, in accordance with the Father’s will, that they should have an end in Him who was born of a virgin, of the family of Abraham and tribe of Judah, and of David; in Christ the Son of God, who was proclaimed as about to come to all the world, to be the everlasting law and the everlasting covenant...”

- iii. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 43; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 216.)

2. From Tertullian, writing c. 197 AD:

- a. "It follows, accordingly, that, in so far as the abolition of carnal circumcision and of the old law is demonstrated as having been consummated at its specific times, so also the observance of the Sabbath is demonstrated to have been temporary.
- b. "...Moses said to the people: 'Remember the day of the sabbaths, to sanctify it: every servile work you shall not do therein, except what pertains to life.' Whence we (Christians) understand that *we* still more ought to observe a sabbath from all 'servile work' always, and not only every seventh day, but through all time."
 - i. (Source: Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, chapter 4 – Of the Observance of the Sabbath; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 155)

3. From *The Apostolic Constitutions*, compiled c. 390 AD from earlier sources:

- a. "He who had commanded to keep the Sabbath, by resting thereon for the sake of meditating on the laws, has now commanded us to consider of the law of creation, and of providence every day, and to return thanks to God."
 - i. (Source: *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, book 6, section 4; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 7, p. 461)

vii. So what was the Sabbath for? What did it foreshadow?

- 1. It was a temporary practice (like circumcision and the dietary requirements) that pointed to a deeper spiritual significance, the spiritual sabbath (rest at the end) that we look forward to.
- 2. As Paul reminded us in **2 Corinthians 3:12-15**, when the Jews read the Law of Moses, they do not understand the significance of what they are reading. Figuratively speaking, it is as if they have a veil over their hearts that obscures their understanding. The mysteries contained in the Law can only be understood when that veil is lifted, when someone turns to the Lord.

3. In **Hebrews 3-4**, the writer quotes several times from **Psalm 94** (designated **Psalm 95** in the LXX), which speaks of the time the Israelites were in the Wilderness.
- a. In that psalm, David admonished the Jews: “Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion” if they want to “enter My [God’s] rest”.
 - b. The Hebrews writer uses that text to explain to the Christians that we must be diligent as well, if we want to enter God’s rest at the end. Those in the Wilderness who did not persevere in faith *did not* enter in to God’s rest, the one offered by the first ‘Joshua/Jesus’.
 - c. Recall that since the week starts on Sunday, the last day of the week is the Sabbath (Saturday).
 - d. Read **Hebrews 4:1-13**.
 - i. We have the hope of the rest at the end.
 - ii. It is the second Jesus, the Son of God, who will deliver that final rest for God’s people..
 - iii. As Christians, we are called to be occupied with the Lord’s work now, so that at the end (represented by the Sabbath, the last day) we may enter the final rest prepared by the Lord for His faithful ones.
 - iv. Let us be diligent to enter that rest, not imitating the mistakes of those who were in the Wilderness, who did not remain faithful to the end!