

Deuteronomy 5:6-21

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He said, ‘I am the LORD your God [יהוה אלהים *Yahweh Elohim* – God’s covenant name] who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery [Israel’s Redeemer who rescued them from bondage].⁷ [#1] ‘You shall have no other gods before Me. [to worship an idol was tantamount to treason, and because of this violation, Israel and Judah went into captivity]⁸ [#2] ‘You shall not make for yourself an idol [פסל *pesel* – carved image], or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.⁹ ‘You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God [a healthy expectation of faithfulness], visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those [those = children; cf. Ezek 18:1-4] who hate Me [hate = reject],¹⁰ but showing lovingkindness [חֶסֶד *chesed* – loyal-love] to thousands, to those who love Me [love = choose] and keep My commandments [walk in obedience].¹¹ [#3] ‘You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain [attach to something vain; Lev 19:12], for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain [i.e., using God’s name in a vow one did not intend to keep].¹² [#4] ‘Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you [as a sign of the Mosaic Covenant; Ex 31:16-17].¹³ ‘Six days you shall labor and do all your work [God intended a six day work week],¹⁴ but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you [even sojourners, who were not part of the covenant community, were to benefit from this law as long as they were physically within the community], so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you [disobedience punishable by death; Ex. 31:15; Num 15:32-36].¹⁵ ‘You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore, the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.¹⁶ [#5] ‘Honor [כבד *kabad* – to be heavy, weighty – i.e., to regard as important] your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you [a special blessing was attached to this command].¹⁷ [#6] ‘You shall not murder [protecting human life made in the image of God; Gen 9:6].¹⁸ [#7] ‘You shall not commit adultery [protecting the marriage, and punishable by death for both the man and woman; Lev 20:10].¹⁹ [#8] ‘You shall not steal [protecting private property].²⁰ [#9] ‘You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor [i.e., bring false charges against the innocent in a judicial setting].²¹ [#10] ‘You shall not covet [i.e., wrongly desire what belongs to another] your neighbor’s wife [lust after; see Matt 5:27-28], and you shall not desire your

neighbor's house, his field or his male servant or his female servant, his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.'

Summary:

The main point of this pericope is that God personally spoke the Ten Commandments, giving them as the foundation for the whole of the Mosaic Law and the revelation of His holiness (Deut 5:6-21; cf. Ex 20:1-17). The Mosaic Law provided a framework for healthy relationships and worship within the theocracy of Israel. It gave every Israelite a basis for freedom within a sphere of righteous laws designed to protect God's people. In the opening statement, God identifies Himself, saying, "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Deut 5:6). The name of the LORD (יהוה אֱלֹהִים *Yahweh Elohim*) is His covenant name, and He is related to Israel as the One who liberated them from bondage. He is their Redeemer and has graciously entered into a covenant relationship with them. The first four commands refer to Israel's relationship to Yahweh, their Redeemer, and the last six relate to their relationship to each other. Daniel Block states, "This document functions as an Israelite version of a bill of rights. However, unlike modern bills of rights, the document does not protect one's own rights but the rights of the next person."¹

The first commandment was, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Deut 5:7). Because there is only one true God (Isa 45:5-6), it is aberrant to worship anything other than Him. When people turn away from God, they must find something or someone to fill the God-place in their heart, so they manufacture a god that resembles something familiar.

The second commandment was, "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them" (Deut 5:8-9a). The Lord was married to Israel (Isa 54:5; Hos 2:19-20; cf. Ezek 16:32), and to worship an idol was tantamount to spiritual adultery (see Ezek 16:1-63). Eugene Merrill writes, "Israel had been redeemed from bondage or service in Egypt in order to serve Yahweh. To serve other gods, then, was to reverse the exodus and go back under bondage, thus betraying the grace and favor of Yahweh."² Thomas Constable adds:

¹ Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 161.

² Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 147-148.

By making and using images of Yahweh the worshipper would gain a sense of control over Him. God is the Creator, and we are His creatures. He is also sovereign over all. Rather than accepting his place as subject creature under the sovereign Creator, the person who makes an image of God puts himself in the position of creator. In effect he puts God in the place of a created thing. He usurps God's sovereignty. Since God made man in His image it is inappropriate for us to try to make God in our image much less in the image of an animal.³

God desired to protect His people, saying “for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Deut 5:9b-10). God's jealousy is a healthy desire to protect His relationship with His people. He informs them that if they turn away from Him, there are consequences that will come upon them as well as their children, to the third and fourth generation. Sin impacts the sinner as well as those in connection with him/her, and this is especially true in the family. Children may perpetuate the sin of their parents as they adopt their values and mimic their behavior. Though children may experience, to some degree, the punishment of their parents, the children are judged for their sins (Ezek 18:1-4). Alternatively, if they keep covenant and obey Him, He will bless to the thousandth generation. Thomas Constable states, “Apostasy has effects on succeeding generations. Rebellious, God-hating parents often produce several generations of descendants who also hate God (cf. Exod. 20:5; 34:6–7). Children normally follow the example of their parents. Note that God's blessing exceeds his discipline a thousand-fold.”⁴ Clearly God prefers to bless rather than curse. Warren Wiersbe states:

The Lord doesn't punish the children and grandchildren because of their ancestors' sins (Ezek. 18), but He can permit the sad consequences of those sins to affect future generations, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Children are prone to imitate their parents, and Eastern peoples lived in extended families, with three and four generations often in the same home. It's easy to see that the older members of the family had opportunities to influence the younger ones either for good or for evil. But the Lord also blesses successive generations of people who honor and obey Him. My great-grandfather prayed that there would be a preacher of the Gospel in every generation of our family, and there has been. I minister today because of godly ancestors who trusted the Lord.⁵

³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 5:8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Dt 5:8.

⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Equipped*, “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Pub., 1999), 36.

The third commandment was, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain” (Deut 5:11). Taking the name of God in vain meant attaching it to something vain; such as when a person takes an oath they know they will not keep (Lev 19:12). Rather, God’s people were to honor His name, which meant they were to speak and act in such a way as to make God look good to others.

The fourth commandment was, “Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you” (Deut 5:12). The word “sabbath” (שַׁבָּת *shabbath*) means rest. For Israel, this was specifically related to a day of physical rest from their labor and production, as God said, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God” (Deut 5:13-14a). Other ancient Eastern cultures took a day off from work, but it was usually reserved only for the upper classes and did not apply to the poor, slaves, and certainly not to animals. However, God’s commandment was all inclusive, saying, “*in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you” (Deut 5:14). Here, the law pertained to everyone, regardless of their social status. And the commandment was to help Israel remember their heritage, as the Lord explained, “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore, the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day” (Deut 5:15). Daniel Block comments, “In grounding the ‘holiday’ on Israel’s memory of their own experience in Egypt (v. 15), Moses calls for a sympathetic disposition toward those under one’s authority. In their treatment of children, servants, animals, and outsiders, the heads of households were to embody the superior righteousness of the revealed laws of Yahweh (Deut 4:8).”⁶ The Sabbath was also a sign to Israel concerning their relationship to the Lord (Ex 31:16-17), for this reason it ceased when the Mosaic Law was rendered obsolete (Heb 8:13). The Christian is related to God by means of the New Covenant, and the sign of that covenant is the unleavened bread and red juice (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26). Because we are not under the Mosaic Covenant (Rom 6:14), Christians are not required to observe the Sabbath. Thomas Constable states, “God did not command Christians to observe the sabbath (cf. Rom 10:4; 14:5–6; Gal 3:23–29; 4:10; Col 2:16–17). From the birth of the church on Christians have observed the first day of the week, not the seventh, as a memorial of Jesus Christ’s resurrection (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2).”⁷ Warren Wiersbe adds:

⁶ Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 164.

⁷ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible*, Dt 5:12.

Many well-meaning people call Sunday “the Christian Sabbath,” but strictly speaking, this is a misnomer. Sunday is the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day, and the Sabbath is Saturday, the seventh day of the week. The Sabbath symbolizes the Old Covenant of Law: you labored for six days and then you rested. The Lord’s Day commemorates the New Covenant of grace: it opens the week with rest in Christ and the works follow. Both the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day emphasize the importance of devoting one day in seven to the Lord in worship and service. Every day belongs to the Lord and it’s unbiblical to make the observance of days a test of spirituality or orthodoxy (Col. 2:16–17; Rom. 14:1–15:7; Gal. 4:1–11).⁸

Though Christians are not obligated to keep the Sabbath, we may do so if we please; however, we may not require it of others. Furthermore, God designed the work week, and He also designed the human body to be at regular rest from labor, and it’s to our harm if we do not follow our Designer’s operating manual concerning time off from work.

The fifth commandment was, “Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you” (Deut 5:16a). This commandment assumes a normal family, with father and mother, as God intends. The word “honor” translates the Hebrew word כָּבַד *kabad*, which means *to be heavy*, or *weighty*. The idea was to treat their parents as important. This command came with a promise of blessing, as the Lord said, “that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you” (Deut 5:16). Personally, this does not mean we approve of all our parents do, but that we respect them, privately and publicly, seeking to meet their needs. Even Samuel, though angry with Saul because of his foolish sin (1 Sam 15:1-29), still honored him when asked to do so (see 1 Sam 15:30-31).

The sixth commandment was, “You shall not murder” (Deut 5:17). This commandment assumes the right to life. The word “murder” translates the Hebrew verb רָצַח *ratsach*, which is commonly used for homicide in general; however, capital punishment and killing during times of war were commanded by God (Deut 13:5, 9; 20:13, 16-17), so this must be distinguished as unjustified intentional homicide. Jesus revealed there is a mental murder we commit when we hate our brothers or sisters (Matt 5:21-22). Thomas Constable writes:

There are several reasons for the sixth commandment (Gen 9:6). The first is the nature of man. Not only did God create man essentially different from other forms of animal life (Gen 2:7; cf. Matt 19:4), but He also created humans in His

⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Equipped*, “Be” Commentary Series, 37.

own image (Gen 1:28). Consequently, when someone murders a person, he or she obliterates a revelation of God. Second, murder usurps God's authority. All life belongs to God, and He gives it to us on lease (cf. Ezek 18:4a). To take a human life without divine authorization is to arrogate to oneself authority that belongs only to God. Third, the consequences of murder, unlike the consequences of some other sins (e.g., lying, stealing, coveting), are fatal and irreversible.⁹

The seventh commandment was, "You shall not commit adultery" (Deut 5:18). This commandment assumes the institution of marriage, which was created by God for happiness as well as the stability and perpetuation of a just society. The command was intended to protect the marriage union from unhindered passions. Under the Mosaic Law, adultery was punishable by death for both the man and woman (Lev 20:10). Jesus revealed there is a mental form of adultery that makes one guilty before God (Matt 5:27-28).

Adultery was considered a capital crime because it undermined the integrity and covenant of marriage, violated the sanctity of sexual union, defiled a human being as the image of God, and threatened the stability of the community. Like murder, adultery pollutes the land and ultimately causes it to spew out its inhabitants (Lev. 18:20, 24–25). And like murder, adultery is not only a crime against one's spouse or children or parents; it is a crime against God (cf. Gen. 39:9). Whereas elsewhere instructions on adultery focus on the female adulteress, this regulation focuses on male adultery.¹⁰

The eighth commandment was, "You shall not steal" (Deut 5:19). This commandment assumes the right to possess private property, which has been obtained either by the production of labor or family inheritance. Eugene Merrill comments, "There obviously is an inherent evil in the illegitimate appropriation of another's property, but on an even higher covenantal and theological level theft betrays an essential dissatisfaction with one's lot in life and an acquisitive desire to obtain more than the Lord, the Sovereign who dispenses to his vassals what seems best, has granted already."¹¹

The ninth commandment was, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Deut 5:20). This command forbids lying about others, whether in a coffee shop or a court of law. If we're not careful, what we say can ruin the lives of other people. Naboth was falsely accused by worthless men sent from King Ahab and his

⁹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Dt 5:17.

¹⁰ Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 166.

¹¹ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, *The New American Commentary*, 155.

wife, Jezebel, and the result was he was murdered and his property stolen (1 Ki 21:1-16). And, of course, Jesus was falsely accused and crucified by those who hated Him (Matt 26:59-61; John 19:15). Warren Wiersbe adds:

Truth is the cement that holds society together, and things fall apart when people don't keep their promises, whether contracts in business or vows at the marriage altar. This commandment also prohibits slander, which is lying about other people (Ex 23:1; Pro 10:18; 12:17; 19:9; 24:28; Tit 3:1-2; Jam 4:11; 1 Pet 2:1). God's people should be known for speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15).¹²

The tenth commandment was, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field or his male servant or his female servant, his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Deut 5:21). Nine of the Ten Commandments deal with outwardly observable behavior, but the tenth commandment is invisible until some action is taken that reveals it. Biblically, coveting is the unwarranted desire for other people's possessions and the willingness to step over boundaries to get it. Eugene Merrill adds:

As has been noted repeatedly by scholars, the tenth commandment differs greatly from the other nine in that it has to do with an inner disposition more than with an outward act. That is, it has to do with the desires and not the practical steps to satisfy those desires. What is less frequently observed is that this is in line with the progression of violence or disruption in a descending spiral from the shedding of blood to the ruin of personal reputation. What has been manifest empirically in acts and words is now hidden in thoughts and cravings.¹³

The tenth commandment is what helped Paul understand his own sinfulness, as he said, "I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'you shall not covet'" (Rom 7:7). The command of God is holy and good, but Paul was a sinner, unable to keep the command. This is why he said, "But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind" (Rom 7:8a). As regenerate people of God, we have the capacity to obey this command, and we do so when we learn to be content with what we have (Phil 4:11-13; 1 Tim 6:7-11).

Though the Church is not under the Mosaic Law (Rom 6:14), we are under the "Law of Christ" and have an obligation to know His will and walk in it (Gal 6:2). God's grace-system teaches us "to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly,

¹² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Equipped*, "Be" Commentary Series, 38-39.

¹³ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary, 155-156.

righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” (Tit 2:12-14). The Christian does not obey God out of an obligatory sense of duty, but rather from an appreciative sense of thankfulness in response to God’s great love (1 John 4:10-11, 19). Biblical love motivates right behavior.