



Leaves From the Tree

Studies from God's Word

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



DEUTERONOMY 1 - 6

Deuteronomy 1

1:1-5 - "These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel and Laban and Hazeroth and Dizahab. It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea. In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the children of Israel, according to all that the LORD had commanded him to give to them, after he had defeated Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth and Edrei. Across the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this law, saying,"

Deuteronomy is the last of the five books of Moses along with Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers which are collectively identified as the Torah, or the books of the Law. The name Deuteronomy is a close translation of a Greek word derived from the Greek translation of the words "this law" from Deuteronomy 17:18. An early Latin translation mistook the meaning of that phrase and applied this name to describe the book as the second law. There is no second law in Deuteronomy. There is only the one Law of God which was revealed through Moses on Sinai. However, the name Deuteronomy which literally means second law is not a terrible name for the book because there is one sense in which the subject of the book fits the meaning of the name. Deuteronomy is not a second law in the sense of adding a different and second law to the first, yet it is a retelling of the original law. In that sense it is a second declaration of the original Law. This second declaration of the Law is not a simple rehearsal of what has previously been declared. Moses does not recite word for word the Law revealed on Sinai here. Instead, Moses expounds the Law previously given by God. To expound is to explain and expand upon an original theme in order to make clear what was originally spoken.

In Deuteronomy, Moses expounds upon the Law so that Israel will understand all of the implications of God's Law as they move forward into the Promised Land. The circumstances of this book have everything to do with the timing of when it took place. Israel is now at the very end of the 40 years of their wilderness journey. There is a poignant reminder in these introductory verses that the journey from Horeb (also known as Sinai), where Israel originally received the Law, was only an eleven-day march to where they were currently camped. Yet, it actually took them 40 years, not eleven days to reach this point. That 40-year delay occurred for only one reason. Israel had rebelliously disregarded the Law of God and the Lord. Their rebellion extended their difficult journey from eleven days to 40 years. Now, at the end of that 40-year judgment, the Lord is reminding Israel that the same issue will determine their experience going forward. If they embrace the Law of God as Moses expounds it to them and trust and obey the Lord, then they will not delay to enter and conquer the land of Canaan ahead of them. If they disregard the expounded Law and disobey the Lord as they move

forward they can expect that they will not escape the same kind of consequences that the generation that died in the wilderness suffered.

Their success or failure in the Promised Land will be directly proportional to their understanding and obedience to God's revealed Word. While our physical circumstances today are considerably different than theirs, the core of our own success or failure is similar to theirs. How we respond to God's Word is the determining factor. Obedience to what God has spoken is rewarded by Him with blessing. Disobedience to His Word is answered with consequences. It is not sufficient to have good intentions alone in obeying God. If we do not properly understand His Word as He intends it to be understood and obeyed, then

The great significance of expounding the Word of God is in bringing the people of God into a clear understanding of what God has spoken. If we do not clearly understand the Word of God, we will end up heading the wrong direction, doing the wrong thing for the wrong reasons no matter how good our intentions were. This is why one of the continuing priorities in true Christian ministry is expounding God's revealed Word. This study is simply that; expounding the Word with the goal of gaining a more clear understanding of what God has spoken. Christian leaders are not called to invent new doctrines and spiritual concepts for each new generation. Our calling is to grasp all the principles and implications of what God has already spoken and expound them so that each believer is equipped to apply the truth to every area of their lives.

1:29-33 - "Then I said to you, 'Do not be shocked, nor fear them. The LORD your God who goes before you will Himself fight on your behalf, just as He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you have walked until you came to this place.' But for all this, you did not trust the LORD your God, who goes before you on your way, to seek out a place for you to encamp, in fire by night and cloud by day, to show you the way in which you should go."

This passage directs Israel to look backwards over the 40 years of their wilderness experience. The experience was difficult and challenging both physically and spiritually. The people were constantly tempted in the strain of the circumstance to grumble and complain to Moses. Their attitude and behavior were shaped by this perspective. Their grumbling hearts undermined their faith in the Lord to protect them in their battles. The Lord did not want them to bring any of that grumbling and complaining across the Jordan into the Promised Land. He wanted all of that to die in the wilderness and for them to enter their new life in Canaan with a new attitude and new behavior. In order for them to leave the old patterns behind they would first need to have their eyes opened to see the truth of the story of their wilderness years. Moses reminds Israel here of the real story behind their journey.

When Israel left Egypt, they did so not because they were stronger than Egypt and the armies of Pharaoh. They left Egypt because the Lord fought for them. They survived their 40 years in the wilderness not because of their superior survival skills in a harsh environment, but because the Lord cared for them and constantly watched over them. Moses uses a touching description of how the Lord cared for Israel throughout the wilderness years. Moses declared that the Lord, "carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you have walked until you came to this place." They made it this far in all their challenges only because the Lord had carried them this far. It was not their strength, their numbers or their resources that got them this far. It was the Lord. Not only did the Lord carry them, but He did not carry them like a sack of potatoes, but He carried them like a father carries his son. This means that the Lord carried them with compassion, care, concern and commitment.

The number one reason why they made it through the wilderness was a Father's love. This is one of the first passages in Scripture that hints at what Jesus would later develop for us in the New Covenant when He revealed God as the Father of His people. If Israel could grasp that it was the Father's love that had sustained them from Egypt to this point, then they would see all the challenges and trials of the wilderness years with new perspective and appreciation. In the same way, every believer today should look back on the circumstances of their life; even the most challenging and difficult circumstances, and recognize that it was the Father's love that sustained them in those circumstances and carried them through it. Israel did not understand this while they were in the wilderness, but their lack of understanding did not change the reality of it. Looking back, I can now clearly see how the Lord was carrying me through every trial I have ever faced as His child.

Deuteronomy 2

2:2-3 - "And the LORD spoke to me, saying, 'You have circled this mountain long enough. Now turn north,'"

The setting for this verse is the description of the 40 wasted years that Israel spent in the wilderness because they had not trusted the Lord to enter the Promised land when He first brought them to its borders. As a judgment upon their unbelief and disobedience the Lord had sent them back into the wilderness until that first generation perished in the wilderness. While this does not cover the entire 40 year delay, this verse explains what Israel was doing for many of the wilderness years following that early failure. An unknown number of those years was spent traveling in a circle from camp to camp around Mount Seir. We have all seen stories depicted in movies or on TV of people lost in the desert who think they are making progress through the desert, but then discover that they have arrived right back to where they started. This is no drama for entertainment

though. Israel lived through the frustration of these years day by day, hour by hour. These years circling Mount Seir were deep lesson years for Israel. Each time they circled the same mountain they were being reminded of the serious consequences of disobeying the Lord. We don't know how many times they circled the same mountain, but we are meant to consider the possibility of us following in their footsteps.

It is easy to read this account of Israel's circular journey around Seir and shake our heads in bemusement at their circumstance. However, the Lord led them in this way not to give us a sense of spiritual superiority, but to warn us of the danger of us falling into the same pattern in our own lives. If I had the time and the freedom to share personal details I could describe for you the experiences I have had over the years in pastoral counseling. I have counseled many individuals and couples that were experiencing the difficulties of the consequences of their own disobedience toward the Lord. Those who received the principles of God's Word, believed them, and began to diligently apply them found the grace to leave behind old patterns of attitude and behavior. Others, who were given much needed answers from God's Word and for whatever reason chose to disregard them and continue to do things their own way have experienced a life pattern that is all too similar to Israel's repeated journey around Seir. I have counseled some who ten years later were continuing to struggle with the exact same issues, only to a greater degree because of the growing weight of the unresolved issues. Those counseling sessions have a strong sense about them of having camped with those people in the same place before.

It is a wise person that recognizes the recurring pattern of revisiting the same situations in their lives over and over again. In spite of the initial reaction of frustration in seeing yourself back where you have been before, the Lord does have a redemptive purpose in such repeated experiences. We should realize that the Lord has lessons to teach us in these repeating patterns, and that He is patient enough to wait for us to be ready to learn them. Hopefully, the wait will not take 40 years for us like it did for Israel. We should not presume though, that the Lord will shorten the time for us just because He is tired of waiting. The lesson to be learned from the way that the Lord dealt with Israel here is that some lessons in the Lord's discipleship curriculum are so important for us to learn that He will wait as long as it takes until we get it. There is no skipping over these kinds of lessons.

In spite of the hard lesson of the continuing journey around Seir, there is also a note of hope in this passage. The Lord announced the end of the pattern in His declaration that Israel had circled the mountain "long enough." When the Lord speaks to us that we have been in the same spot long enough and gives us a new direction to pursue, there is grace in His direction for us to change. The time had come for Israel to move past the wilderness wanderings and fulfill His purpose for them as a nation. Israel was called to enter the Promised Land and be established there as God's holy nation. These simple but powerful words from

the Lord were not just the end to a 40-year-old pattern, but were also the beginning point for a change that would shape Israel's future. When we find ourselves stuck in long-term patterns of circling behavior that is getting nowhere fast, our hearts should cry out and our ears should be tuned to hear the Lord say that we have been in this place long enough.

2:4-7 - "and command the people, saying, "You will pass through the territory of your brothers the sons of Esau who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful; do not provoke them, for I will not give you any of their land, even as little as a footstep because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession. You shall buy food from them with money so that you may eat, and you shall also purchase water from them with money so that you may drink. For the LORD your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing."

As Israel was about to pass through the territory of the sons of Esau the Lord gave Israel a warning. They were to avoid provoking them because the Lord did not want Israel and Esau to go to war against each other. This is a beautiful expression generations later of what we last saw in the relationship between Jacob and Esau. Remember from our study in Genesis that in spite of the strained relationship between Jacob and Esau throughout their lives, that in their final meeting they were restored to fellowship with each other. Once Jacob had learned the lessons from the Lord of his own discipleship, the Lord healed the longstanding rift between them and they parted the final time in peace. Now, many years later, the descendants of both men are to meet as their fathers did. The Lord commanded Israel to honor the peace He had established between Jacob and Esau. Israel was to honor Esau by respecting their ownership of their land, and not presuming upon them for food and water. The Lord allowed Israel to seek food and water from the sons of Esau as they passed through on the way to Canaan, but they were instructed to not take them, but to buy them.

The Lord explained that He had greatly blessed Israel with an abundance so that they were in a position to pay a just amount for whatever they needed on their journey. This requirement of the Lord for Israel speaks to an issue that some Christians struggle with in their dealings with others. This issue has been identified before as an attitude of entitlement. Some believers see themselves as so privileged because of their relationship with the Lord that they see themselves as being entitled to whatever they need and desire in the world around them. I have seen believers take advantage of others (both believers and unbelievers) with the justification that as a child of God, others should help them whenever they require it. As a pastor I have experienced some in financial need approach the church, or other believers as though it was the obligation of others to give them whatever money they needed. This kind of spiritual presumption is contrary

to what the Lord commanded Israel here. We are the specially privileged children of God, but we are not to be the spoiled children of God.

2:25 - "This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you upon the peoples everywhere under the heavens, who, when they hear the report of you, will tremble and be in anguish because of you."

The Lord's purpose for Israel was to enter Canaan and conquer the Promised Land. Each of the resident nations of Canaan would have to be faced and defeated in turn. The battles ahead of them would require Israel to fight for every foot of territory that they would eventually possess as their own. They would not simply waltz into the Promised Land and face zero resistance. Each battle would contain its own test of faith and obedience. However, the Lord did not command Israel to conquer Canaan and then turn them loose to accomplish that great goal without any help from Him. When the Lord calls and commissions His people, He also work with them until they fully accomplish what He assigned to them.

In this case, the Lord went ahead of Israel and prepared the way for them for when they arrived. The Lord's preparation for the battles to come was in His influence upon the hearts and minds of the inhabitants of Canaan. From this day, the Lord put the dread of Israel upon the hearts of the Canaanite nations. He did this by causing reports of Israel and their exploits as a nation to travel ahead of Israel along the grapevine so to speak. Before Israel even set a single foot on the soil of Canaan to conquer it, the people of Canaan had all heard terrifying stories about Israel. The people throughout Canaan were trembling in fear about facing Israel before the first blow was struck in battle. Israel was still required to fight, but the Lord had softened up their enemies for them.

Deuteronomy 3

3:11 - "(For only Og king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim. Behold, his bedstead was an iron bedstead; it is in Rabbah of the sons of Ammon. Its length was nine cubits and its width four cubits by ordinary cubit.)"

Og, the king of Bashan was notable for his extraordinary size. He was similar to Goliath, the giant that David defeated, in this way. It is common in our generation for people to read an account like this and dismiss it as a mythological legend of ancient history. Each person must decide for themselves whether Moses was inventing fables as he wrote these accounts, or whether they represent actual history. I'm convinced that this is history, not fantasy. Og's size is emphasized, not by a measurement of his personal size, but by a measurement of his bed. The cubit used to measure his bed is roughly equal to eighteen inches. His bed measured out to about thirteen feet long by six feet wide. Og's size would be

something less than the dimensions of his bed, but the clear implication is that he was a physical giant compared to any normal sized man.

He was also identified as the last of the Rephaim. The Rephaim were giants that inhabited this region. There were also a remnant of giants in other places, but they were given different names in each region. Throughout the passages that focus on the Rephaim and the other groups of giants that are encountered in the Old Testament the Lord is intent upon eliminating them from the earth. There is a strong indication that there is more to the story of the giants than that they were simply a genetic oddity. Their history is traced all the way back to the days prior to the Flood is which they first appeared in the world (Genesis 6:4). The destruction of the giants is always portrayed as an expression of the judgment of God.

3:21-22 - "I commanded Joshua at that time, saying, 'Your eyes have seen all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings; so the LORD shall do to all the kingdoms into which you are about to cross. Do not fear them, for the LORD your God is the one fighting for you.'"

Moses describes the defeat of Sihon and Og and their respective kingdoms by Israel as a foretaste of what the Lord will do in the future. They won complete victories over these kings in spite of their great size and military power because the Lord fought for them in those battles. Israel was meant to take encouragement from the victories that would prepare them to fully trust the Lord for the even greater challenges that were still ahead of them. Moses was directing the people to connect the present to the future in the right way. It is not uncommon for believers to experience a powerful demonstration of the Lord's grace and power at work on their behalf in their life circumstances, only to later be faced with a similar kind of challenge of faith and crumble in fear and anxiety over what might happen to them.

Israel had already proven how prone they were to forgetting the wonderful works of God for them when they most needed to remember them. All of Israel had witnessed with their own eyes the Ten Plagues on Egypt, the opening of the Red Sea for them to cross on dry ground, the daily supply of manna, the miraculous water from the rock, and the pillar of cloud and fire that led them through the wilderness. Yet, when the Lord brought the same people who had witnessed all of these things to the verge of the Promised Land and urged them to simply trust Him and enter the land to conquer it, they feared that they would be easily defeated by the Canaanites. That generation failed to connect what God had done for them in the past to what God had promised to do for them in the future.

The question for each believer is whether we have witnessed enough proof of God's love, power, and plan to have sufficient reasons to trust Him implicitly as He leads us in our own challenges. As much as the Israelites of that day had witnessed of the wonderful works of God, we have witnessed far more. Through

the testimonies of God's Word, we have witnessed all they saw plus all that God continued to do throughout the Old Testament and most important of all; what He has once and for all time done in His Son on our behalf. We have every reason to trust God in the midst of our greatest trials and challenges.

3:23-28 - "I also pleaded with the LORD at that time, saying, 'O Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand; for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as Yours? Let me, I pray, cross over and see the fair land that is beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and Lebanon.' But the LORD was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me; and the LORD said to me, 'Enough! Speak to Me no more of this matter. Go up to the top of Pisgah and lift up your eyes to the west and north and south and east, and see it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan. But charge Joshua and encourage him and strengthen him, for he shall go across at the head of this people, and he will give them as an inheritance the land which you will see.'"

This is a personal prayer by Moses near the end of his life. Moses had previously heard the word of the Lord's judgment upon his own life for his serious disobedience when he twice struck the rock that represented Christ in symbol. At that time the Lord had declared to Moses that he would never enter the Promised Land. Now that time had come. Moses appealed here to the Lord to be allowed to cross over the Jordan River and see with his own eyes the good land that God had promised to His people. The Lord's response reveals His character as a heavenly Father. He is tender hearted, but He is no pushover. He will not be manipulated even by the emotional appeals of His favored children when critical principles of the kingdom are at stake.

Not only did the Lord not grant this last appeal by Moses to be allowed to cross the Jordan, the Lord responded to the prayer of Moses with anger directed at Moses. Why would the Lord ever be angry when one of His children is praying? The Lord was angry with Moses because this request of Moses was more concerned about himself than about the greater purpose of God in the judgment which prevented him from entering the Promised Land. Moses was in essence asking God to bend His own standards so that he could enjoy the reward of seeing the land with his own eyes. The Lord did not, and will not honor any prayer which seeks to compromise any of His standards or purpose. Many times believers struggle trying to understand why certain prayers that they have prayed in selfishness have gone unanswered by God. It is important to recognize that prayer is not God's way of giving us whatever we might desire, but His way of training us in participating in the accomplishment of His will and purpose.

The Lord disappointed Moses by giving him a strong parental answer of no to his prayer, and commanding him to not bring it up in prayer again. What we can learn from this is that even in his final days of his life, Moses still had some deep

lessons to learn from the Lord. Then, immediately after rebuking Moses regarding his request to enter Canaan, the Lord blessed Moses with a gracious provision for him to see the land, but from this side of the Jordan by climbing Pisgah where he would have a clear view of the land. The Lord also commissioned Moses to prepare the heart of Joshua for the final transfer of leadership between them. Even though Moses had led Israel as far as he would be allowed to take them, the Lord wanted his leadership influence to carry on through his influence on the heart of the next leader.

Questions from Deuteronomy 2:

Question: Deuteronomy 2:25 - God said, He will begin to put a dread...everyone who will hear a report will tremble and be in anguish because of you. Does this verse connect to the present situation of Israel today? If it is not happening today, does it mean that Israel will be feared by many people in the future?

Answer: No, this verse does not apply to Israel today. It also does not apply to Israel in the future. It is God's description of what He did to go ahead of the armies of Israel and prepare the nations of Canaan to be conquered by them. The Lord had promised Abraham that his descendants would one day return and possess this land and this verse is a demonstration of the faithfulness of God to keep that promise.

Deuteronomy 4

4:1-2 - "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you."

Moses is rehearsing and expounding upon the Law of God previously revealed to him from Mt. Sinai. He describes God's Law to Israel as the foundation for their future. It is as though the Lord is planning to build the house of Israel in the Promised Land, but unless the foundation is properly laid and preserved, the house cannot stand. The success of their future life will depend upon their relationship with God through His Law. What will be necessary for that relationship to flourish will be the preservation of the entire Law of God. Moses was the only one on the summit of Sinai in the cloud of the Lord's glory. He was the only one to hear the Lord's voice declare each one of the laws that would shape the standards for God's holy nation. Moses here vouched for the purity and completeness of the Law, but at the same time he was passing on to Israel a great responsibility toward the Law.

This specific responsibility was more than the basic responsibility they had to obey the Law. This was a responsibility to act as guardians of the integrity of God's written Law. This was one of the most important of all the responsibilities given to Israel because of its impact not only on their own future but upon all nations. Israel was chosen from among all the nations to be given the Law and to safeguard it throughout the generations to come so that all future generations would have a complete and unaltered copy of the Law to read and study. Though Israel failed in many of its spiritual responsibilities, the Lord worked among them to insure that His written Word was preserved intact through the generations.

Israel was commanded to, "not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it..." This commission from the Lord through Moses made Israel the guardians of the Law. They were themselves to never add to or take away from the words of the Law and they were not to allow anyone else to do so either. Adding to the Law would involve adding new words, phrases, or whole new laws to the revealed Law of God which would in effect change the Law and render it a mixture of divine and human law. The Law could also be corrupted by removing words, phrases or entire laws from the revealed Law which would also change the Law. This second danger would not add any human words, but would still change it into a human document by eliminating something God had revealed. For instance, by removing the law against murder, the entire Law has been changed even if the other laws are not modified. The result no longer represents the righteousness and holiness of God in the same way. Remember that the Law of God is an expression of God's righteousness and not just a loose collection of individual laws. Any additions or subtractions change the unity of that complete expression.

In this warning, the Lord emphasizes the essential difference between His Law and all the laws of the nations. All other collections of laws for all nations throughout history are flexible and change over time as the nations those laws govern change. God's Law never changes because it is designed to reflect Him, Who never changes. An allowed addition or subtraction would imply that God Himself needs an addition to His nature or a subtraction in order to keep up with the times.

The question we should ask from this passage is why anyone would want to change the Word of God by either adding to, or taking away from what God has spoken? The answer is simple, but not attractive. Throughout history people have been motivated to make changes to God's Word because they simply do not like the Scriptures as they are. The most direct way to escape the accountability we all have to God's holy standards is to change the standards until they conform to our personal standards. This alteration can be as subtle as changing a single word here and there in order to change the clear meaning of the text such as the Jehovah's Witnesses have done in their corrupted New World Translation. It can also be a major overhaul of the Scriptures such as early American President Thomas Jefferson attempted with his Jefferson Bible in

which he eliminated major portions of the four gospels by removing all supernatural elements from the story of Jesus in an attempt to reduce Him to a moral philosopher rather than have to deal with Him as the Son of God. One of the great lessons of true discipleship is learned when we embrace all of God's revealed Word as the standard for our lives and refuse to change it in preference to our own standards.

4:6-8 - "So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?"

Each nation has certain qualities or accomplishments to which they point in pride in order to distinguish themselves among the nations. The Lord wanted Israel to be distinct among the nations. The Lord did not distinguish Israel among the other nations so that they could point to themselves in pride however. The Lord marked Israel out from the other nations to represent Him among the nations. As His holy nation, Israel was set apart to reflect the Lord and His ways in the eyes of the curious nations of the world. What made them special among the nations was the wisdom produced in their lives from their relationship to God's Law. No other nation had a Law like this one. Therefore no other people in the world were as wise and understanding as Israel. All other nations had laws that were produced by men and reflected in varying degrees what was true and right for human behavior. To the degree that Israel embraced the Law of God and practiced it, they would be a noticeably different society from all others. In the same way Christians today stand out from the world in thought, speech and behavior to the degree we embrace God's Word and live it. We have nothing in ourselves to point to as being any better than anyone else, except our relationship with God through His Word.

4:15-19, 23-24 - "So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth. And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today... So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything against which the LORD your God has commanded you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

In the original Ten Commandments, or ten words, the Lord had given Israel a prohibition against making graven images. Now, the Lord rehearses and expounds upon that commandment by giving more details as to what this required of Israel and why. The Lord had appeared to Moses and Israel at Sinai, but when He appeared, He did not appear in any form. The Lord appeared in the cloud of His glory called the Shekinah, but the cloud served to hide His appearance. The Lord chose to not appear with any specific form to reveal to Israel that His nature was spiritual rather than physical. He also knew that an appearance in the form of any familiar thing would only lead Israel to respond by creating physical representations of the form they had seen. Even without appearing in a form, the danger remained for Israel to fall into the pattern of using familiar forms to represent the Lord. All of the nations around Israel commonly created their own forms to represent the gods they worshipped. The Lord was strong in His warning that Israel was not to follow the example of those nations and make any image or form to represent Him. The Egyptians, the Canaanites, and all other ancient nations made images of their gods which became idols for them to worship.

The inherent problem with any image that is created to represent God is that it cannot adequately portray Who He really is or what He is really like. The image always falls short of the reality of God and leads those who use such images to have a deficient perspective of God. The people who throughout history have argued for the use of images of God in worship claim that the image helps to focus their worship and is therefore beneficial. The Lord does not want deficient worship. He does not want His people to try to capture His essence with any thing so limited as an image no matter what its form.

The Lord ends this warning with a declaration of one aspect of His nature. "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." The reference to Him

being a consuming fire means that God is no One to be trifled with. He will meet any violation of this law of graven images as a consuming fire. The implication is that God Himself will burn up or consume all idolatrous rebellion among His people. The consumption by fire of any idolatrous images used for "worship" by His people is a purifying fire which consumes all such spiritual impurities among His people. He also declares Himself to be a jealous God. This is not the kind of jealousy which often reveals a character flaw in us. This is a holy jealousy in which God is zealous for our full heart's devotion. He will not share our devotion with any image made even to represent Him.

4:25-31 - "When you become the father of children and children's children and have remained long in the land, and act corruptly, and make an idol in the form of anything, and do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD your God so as to provoke Him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will surely perish quickly from the land where you are going over the Jordan to possess it. You shall not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed. The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD drives you. There you will serve gods, the work of man's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice. For the LORD your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them."

At this point, Moses speaks in a more traditional prophetic mode. People often think of prophets as foretelling the future. Most prophecy in the Bible is not concerned with the future as much as it addresses the present issues between God and His people. However this prophecy is concerned with the future of Israel. It is not a description of future blessings as the relationship between God and Israel grows closer and stronger through the generations. It prophetically describes just the opposite. Even though Israel was in a good place with the Lord the day Moses spoke these words, it had not always been that way, and it would not always be that way going forward.

The Lord describes what will happen to Israel sometime in the distant future. They would eventually begin to act in a corrupt way in the Promised Land after settling there. They would even make idols to worship. When they do, the Lord promised that they would suffer the consequences of turning from the Lord. They would perish from the land. They would be scattered by the judgment of the Lord among the nations of the world. Only a few of their number would survive this judgment. Once scattered among the nations they would serve the idol gods of those nations. Eventually, in the bitterness of this national consequence, the remnant of Israel would begin to seek the Lord and search for Him. Those who

will seek for Him with all their hearts will be allowed by the Lord to find Him and be restored to Him. They will return to the Lord and His ways and experience once again His great compassion toward them. The Lord promised in this entire future process of Israel's defection from the Lord, their hard experience of His consequences, and eventual merciful restoration to covenant relationship with Him that it will be His faithfulness to the covenant that will one day bring them back to Him. The entire history of Israel from this point forward throughout the Old Testament plays out exactly according to this pattern that the Lord reveals here.

Deuteronomy 5

5:2-3 - "The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with all those of us alive here today."

A full generation has passed since the Lord appeared to Israel in the Shekinah cloud upon Sinai and established the covenant of the Law. Now Moses refers to that day some 40 years prior in an unexpected manner. Moses declares that the Lord made a covenant that day with this present generation of Israelites and not with the generation that was alive at that time. However, at that time, the Lord said that He was making a covenant with them. This seems to be a bit of a contradiction as we first read this passage. Certainly Moses was fully aware of how and with whom the Lord made the covenant since Moses was himself the one that the Lord chose to receive the revelation of the covenant.

The point is not that the Lord is here invalidating the covenant formed 40 years earlier, but instead emphasizing the present nature of the covenant. The Lord is addressing through Moses the natural tendency that each succeeding generation has to see the formal documents of previous generations as less binding on them because they were not the original focus of that agreement. An example of this tendency is seen in how many in our generation view the Constitution of the United States. The Constitution was a document drawn up with the intention that it would shape not just the generation that saw it written, but all future generations of the United States as well. While we still have the Constitution today, it is treated more as a flexible document which can be modified or interpreted to fit the constantly changing standards of society. God's Law does not and can not function in that way. His standards do not change to suit the changing morals and standards of society.

The Lord emphasizes in this passage that the covenant and the Law apply the same 40 years later as they did on the day they were first revealed. The Lord had not changed. The Law had not changed. The covenant had not changed. This would be true for this generation and it would be true for every generation of

Israel to follow. The people will change, but the covenant would be the one constant in Israel throughout the years to come. The people of each generation would be called to respond to the covenant as though the Lord had personally called each of them to the top of Sinai to personally see His glory, hear His voice, and receive the tablets of the Law.

While we have a different relationship to the Law because we are under a different covenant administration now in the New Covenant, this principle does have an important application for us. Often times Christians read the Bible as though it was a collection of interesting stories and requirements for the people that lived in Bible times and that it only applies to us in a kind of vague spiritual way. That is not the kind of relationship the Lord wants with His people in the New Covenant. When we read the four Gospels, Acts, Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, etc., we are not meant to see them as dusty letters of ancient history that mean the most to long dead people. Those letters were not originally addressed to us, but they were meant for us. God's Word is as 100% relevant to our lives today as it was to their lives 2000 years ago. The New Covenant is our covenant with the God through Christ.

5:21 - "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."

In our study of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20, we saw that the last of the ten served a special purpose. All of the ten revealed God's standards for His holy nation, but the tenth commandment placed extra attention on the hearts of His people in the way it was worded. None of the ten were meant to be reduced by the people to a simple external requirement which would leave room for the people to wiggle out of personal accountability to God's righteous standard. Yet, because of fallen human nature that is exactly what the people did with the Ten Commandments. The people searched for ways to create loopholes for themselves in what the Law required them to do. However, these ten laws all reflected an internal spiritual standard along with an external standard for behavior. As Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, the law forbidding murder was aimed at addressing attitudes of the heart and not just the act of murder. Since the Lord knew the tendency of Israel to limit the application of the Law in this way, He worded the tenth commandment as a strictly internal law to place the spotlight of the Law on the heart of Israel and not just their actions.

If the Lord had changed a single word in the tenth commandment it would have addressed a certain behavior more directly rather than the internal working of the hearts of Israel. If it was worded, "You shall not take you neighbor's wife, and you shall not take your neighbor's house, his field, etc.", then it would have functioned the same as the other ten commands. Certainly, the Lord did not want His people to take their neighbor's wife or anything else belonging to their neighbor, but the Lord chose wording that placed all the concern not on behavior, but on the heart.

"You shall not covet...you shall not desire." This law revealed to Israel in a more direct way than any other that the Lord was concerned that they maintain right behavior, but more than that, He required them to maintain right desires of the heart. Many people in the world, and sadly, even many within the church hold the perspective that as long as we end up doing the right things in our behavior that our private and secret desires belong to us and we are free to indulge them however we choose. Is that perspective consistent with the tenth commandment of God's Law?

The question is whether God has the right to prohibit certain desires from us and the right to require us to maintain our hearts free from prohibited desires. It is not just that God says "Don't do this," but that He also says "Don't want this." His Law standard extends to that depth. He holds his people accountable to not want anything that belongs to their neighbor. Of course, what is in view here is not a general desire for something similar to what your neighbor has, but a specific desire to have the exact thing that the neighbor has. It's not just wanting a nice car of the same make as the neighbor, but that I crave his car. Even with this one understood clarification, the tenth commandment was designed by the Lord to pierce the heart and expose the hidden cravings we all indulge at times.

5:22 - "These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain from the midst of the fire, of the cloud and of the thick gloom, with a great voice, and He added no more. He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me."

The Lord chose to reveal the Law in a specific format as a symbolic element. The Lord could have written the Ten Commandments on leather, but He chose stone purposefully. One of the reasons the Lord wrote these commandments upon stone was to represent their permanence. The Law would not wear out or fade from generation to generation, but would remain God's permanent standard for His covenant people. The other symbolic aspect of using stone in writing the ten words is that it reflected the heart condition of the people. The tablets of stone showed the true condition of the hearts of Israel. Their stone showed that their hearts were not soft and responsive to the Lord, but hard and unyielding. These passages from Ezekiel describe the work that the Lord would do in the New Covenant. "And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh," (Ezekiel 11:19). "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." (Ezekiel 36:26). The condition of the heart of Old Covenant Israel is described as a heart of stone. The saving work of the Lord in the New Covenant involves Him removing the old heart of stone and replacing it with a new heart that is soft and yielding to the Lord. Paul picks up this same theme in this passage and applies it to all believers in Christ. "You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of

Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." (II Corinthians 3:2-3).

Deuteronomy 6

6:4-9 - "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

This passage became one of the most important passages for Israel. It became known as the Shema, which is the first Hebrew word in the passage translated by the word "Hear." There are several critical aspects to this passage that formed a theological foundation for how all Israel was to live out their covenant relationship with the Lord. The passage shapes the basic understanding of the nature of God in the perspective of Israel and also gives direction for the appropriate response of each Israelite in their own walk with the Lord. The first word, hear is framed as a command and not a suggestion. What Israel was to hear was the revelation of the Law of God. The hearing required indicated more than simply listening to the words of the Law. The word translated as hear carries the meaning of both listening and responding to what has been heard. We know from this exhortation in James that the Lord does not take pleasure in those who listen to His Word, but neglect to act on the words they have heard. "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." (James 1:22).

The next phrase is a confession of faith identifying Israel's covenant allegiance to the Lord. By declaring that the Lord is their God, Israel was denying that any other god of any other nation was worthy of their devotion. However, this declaration was more than a comparison between the Lord and other gods as though Israel was stating that the other nations had their gods, but Israel had the Lord. When Moses declared, "The Lord is one!", he was giving a powerful theological assessment of the true nature of God. This is the foundation of monotheism. The doctrine of monotheism insists that there is only one God that exists. This concept is not a great shock to hear today because virtually all believers in God in our culture agree that there is only one God. Even most unbelievers agree that the concept of only one God makes the most sense.

Remember that in the cultures of the ancient world the most common belief was an expression of polytheism, not monotheism. Polytheism is the belief in multiple gods. The Canaanites, the Egyptians, the Philistines, the Greeks, the Romans,

the Babylonians, the Assyrians and all other ancient cultures were all polytheistic and worshipped several gods each. In today's world the Hindu religion in India is the most well known modern polytheistic religion. There are over 300 million gods identified in Hinduism. So, for Israel to make their fundamental declaration of faith that there is only one true God, they distinguished themselves from all the religions of the world around them. In this way, the Lord was establishing Israel as the light of the world. The rest of the world was in the darkness of believing and worshipping gods of their own imaginations while only Israel believed in and worshiped the true God.

Following the statement of faith in the one true God, Moses calls Israel to their covenant responsibility in their relationship with God. The principle of relationship with God in the covenant was itself a revolutionary concept. Other religions had a kind of relationship in their imaginations with the gods they served, but the relationship was characterized by fawning fear due to the inconsistent nature of those gods and the requirement to constantly earn their favor with sacrificial service. What was to distinguish Israel's relationship with the Lord was love. The primary quality of how Israel was to relate to the Lord was love. This was completely different than the way the nations related to their gods. The nations did not love Zeus, or Baal, or Austerity. That kind of relationship was reserved in their thinking to human to human relationships. Real love was not an element in the way they served their idols.

On the other hand, love is the necessary key element in the relationship between the Lord and His people. The Lord desired and called His people to love Him. In fact, in this passage the Lord commanded Israel to love Him. It was a statement stronger than "you ought to love the Lord your God." You shall love the Lord required the people give their heart to the Lord. Some struggle with the concept of love that is commanded and question whether commanded love can ever be genuine love. The Lord was not interested in false expressions of love, and He sees and knows the hearts of all people. The love He commanded to give Him was genuine love. The command to love does not diminish how right it is for us to love the Lord with genuine love. The Lord also commanded His people in the Law to do many other things that were right. A genuine wholehearted response is not dependant upon emotions. Jesus later quoted from this passage in Deuteronomy and identified it as the greatest commandment of God's Law (Mark 12:28-34). That should tell us how important it is for believers to understand this principle as the heart of our relationship with God.

The kind of love that God calls His people to give to Him is what I would describe as a fully engaged love. Moses used these descriptive phrases to help us to see what is involved in loving God the way that we should. We are to love Him with all of our heart, soul and might. Our love for the Lord should engage everything within us and all of our strength as well. Both our inner man and outer man should be fully involved. Half hearted, somewhat interested love is no love at all from the Lord's perspective. When some struggle to show any interest in pouring

out their hearts before the Lord in worship, or consistently nod off during Bible study, or simply have a difficult time coming to church regularly to worship the Lord it is a measuring stick of whether we are loving the Lord as fully as we should. "Love the Lord with some, or most of your heart" just falls too far short of true covenant relationship with God.

The Lord understands that maintaining fully engaged love for Him is a challenge for us living in this fallen world. Everything in the world around us influences us away from our love for Him. So the Lord urged Israel to maintain their covenant love by maintaining a certain kind of relationship with the revealed Word of God. Regularly exposing our hearts to the penetrating principles of God's Word keeps our heart accountable to the Lord and keeps us from wandering away from Him. The Lord instructed every family in Israel to maintain this relationship with His Word by making His Word a main focus of their daily life and conversations. The fathers were responsible to teach their children what they had learned from the Lord. They were also to do more than hold occasional family Bible studies. They were to lead their families in daily discussions of God's Law. These God centered conversations were to be the main topic at the dinner table, as the family spent time together resting in the evening, and even as they walked together during the day. The idea was that the Word of God was meant to permeate all of their lives on a daily basis and form the context for how they related to one another. The Lord wanted to be their first concern as they woke up each day and the last thought on their minds as they went to sleep each night. For the families that heard and obeyed this instruction the Lord would be no easily forgotten after thought that they briefly considered once a week in a formal disinterested way. The Lord called Israel to make Him the core of their life as individuals, as families, and as a nation.

Moses gives a word picture description in this section of what that kind of whole hearted daily remembrance of the Lord would be like. "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." While the Lord gave this description to Moses as a metaphor for the kind of focused devotion to Him and His Word He called Israel to have, what happened over the years to follow was that Israel took this verse and applied it in a very literal way. The description of binding a sign on the hand and forehead, and of writing the Word of God on the doorposts of the house was really meant this way by the Lord. He wanted everything Israel put their hand to in life and every decision they made to be influenced by the Word of God. He wanted every home in Israel to be under the influence of His Law. What Israel later did was reduce these descriptions to literal practices which ultimately replaced the concepts they were meant to represent. The use of phylacteries and the Jewish mezuzah originated from this verse. The phylactery was a small leather box that was strapped to the hand and forehead of the men of Israel when they prayed. The box contained these verses and two others written on rolled up parchment. The mezuzah was a small box with these verses that was put on the doorpost leading into the house. Those practices

missed the point entirely. The Lord was not encouraging an external, almost magical use of written portions of the Bible. What He wanted was for his people to live according to these principles every day of their lives.

6:21-23 - "then you shall say to your son, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand. Moreover, the LORD showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household; He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers.'"

In this passage, Moses was rehearsing the history of their journey from Egypt to the present. This review of the last forty years contains a brief description from the Lord's perspective of what this entire adventure had been about. We know that Israel had great difficulty maintaining a right perspective of their journey. At first they were thrilled to be released from their slavery to Pharaoh and to leave Egypt as free men. It did not take very long into their journey for all but a few to lose track of what the Lord had done for them and begin to seriously question whether He had their best interests at heart. Within the first weeks of their forty year journey through the wilderness Israel had fully succumbed to grumbling and complaining against the Lord and Moses, and even wanting to return to Egypt to their former lives. The entire time in the wilderness Israel wavered and drifted between bursts of faith and obedience, and long stretches of fear and rebellion. In their worst moments that even brought evil accusations against the Lord and claimed He had only brought them out of Egypt in order to let them die in the wilderness.

One line in this passage refutes that lie and affirms the plan and heart purpose of the Lord through it all. "He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers." The Lord was not leading Israel day by day and making up His plan as they went along. The Lord had a single plan in His heart when He first called and sent Moses back to Egypt. He had that same plan in His heart when He performed all ten of the plagues that forced Pharaoh to set Israel free. He had the same plan in His heart when He opened the Red Sea, when He rained manna from heaven upon Israel, and when He brought water for them out of the rock. He even held the same plan without wavering in His heart when Israel was unfaithful with the golden calf, when they grumbled against Him, and when they rebelled following Korah. The plan of the Lord always was and remained to bring Israel out of Egypt in order to bring Israel into the Promised Land. In other words, the Lord's plan was always to finish the work He began. The Lord is a finisher. He starts things beautifully, but He is not One to leave unfinished projects as we are. This has a great application to our lives. The Lord brought us out of the world in our salvation, in order to bring us in to the promise of growing to become more like Christ. He is committed to his plan and project of salvation in our lives. "For I am confident of

this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6).