

Inscribed in Stone

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[0 : 00] And let's pray again. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you spoke your words so clearly and audibly to Moses and to all Israel in speaking the words of the Ten Commandments all those centuries ago.

Speak to us, we pray tonight, similarly clearly and give us, like ancient Israel then, a will to obey and keep your laws so that we may glorify you in our lives.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, cabbages, for some reason, are quite an important vegetable. I'm not averse to a cabbage every now and again, let me tell you.

In my menu. But you might be interested to know that the Ten Commandments contain 297 words. The Bill of Rights of the US is 463 words, a little bit longer.

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, 266 words. That's a bit shorter than the Ten Commandments. But a recent US federal directive to regulate the price of cabbages contains 26,911 words.

[1 : 17] Now, I vaguely remember hearing that a couple of years ago, so I found it on the internet. I actually found two accounts of it. One in which the EU had issued a directive about regulating the price of cabbages.

And their number of words was about 700 less than the US. Which made me wonder whether it's simply an urban myth or whether it's in fact true. And it just happens that the American directive about pricing cabbages is just slightly and marginally longer than the EU directive about pricing cabbages.

But obviously cabbages are pretty important, given all the words that are directed to them. And they must be more important than worshipping God and murdering and all those sorts of other lesser things. So for those who despise the cabbage, let me warn you.

Well, we're dealing tonight with the most famous legislation in history. It's recited in many Christian church services down through the centuries and still these days.

It's been the subject of at least one blockbuster film. A TV series in recent years, apparently. And a music CD of the TV series of the Ten Commandments was released last year by somebody called Randy Edelman.

[2 : 25] Who I'd never heard of, but others might have. It's also the subject of a great deal of humour. For example, somebody said that, a novelist, Malcolm Bradbury, I think.

If God had been a liberal, we wouldn't have had the Ten Commandments. We'd have had the Ten Suggestions. And somebody else whom I'd never heard of said that one of the reasons why the Ten Commandments are so short and to the point is the fact that they were given direct and did not come out of committees.

Which is a thought echoed by Ronald Reagan, who said, I have wondered at times what the Ten Commandments would have looked like if Moses had run them through the U.S. Congress.

Somebody else said, there are Ten Commandments, right?

Well, it's like an exam. You get eight out of ten and you're about the top of the class. If Moses had been paid newspaper rates for the Ten Commandments, he might have written the 2,000 Commandments.

And, of course, we live in an age of bargain hunters. If it had been this way in biblical times, we'd probably have been offered another commandment for free if we'd accepted the first ten.

[3 : 32] Well, there you are. Some thoughts about the Ten Commandments. Despite their fame, I wonder how many of us could actually recite all ten in order. I tried that on my Old Testament class at Ridley a few years ago once, and it was such a failure that I haven't tried it again.

We often think that we know the Ten Commandments, but sometimes we actually struggle to remember them. The emphasis in Chapter 5 of Deuteronomy is not so much on the content of the

Ten Commandments, though they are rehearsed for us in detail.

The emphasis is on do them, keep them, which is a consistent emphasis in Deuteronomy. And as I said, I think it was, if it was not last Wednesday, it was last Sunday.

The nature of Deuteronomy is that as a preached book, the focus is do it, keep it, obey it, trust it. The law is not new.

It was there 40 years before. It still applies. So the information is given to Israel not just for their information, they know it, but that they may do it and keep it and trust it and obey it.

[4 : 39] And, of course, Chapter 5 virtually begins after the brief Moses convened all Israel and said to them, Hear, O Israel. Words which we'll see in Chapter 6, Verse 4, and we see several times throughout this book.

Hear, O Israel. Not just listen, but hear with the sense of and heed. That's the nature of the Hebrew word shema. Hear and heed the words that are coming.

And what's next said in Verse 2 is that the Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb, the name that Deuteronomy uses for Mount Sinai. It's important to understand this before we actually get to the Ten Commandments.

They are the heart or the prime content, I suppose, of a covenant, a formal relationship, a treaty virtually, between God and Israel.

The idea of this being a covenant goes back to the events of Mount Sinai recorded in Exodus 19 onwards. Especially Exodus 20 to 23, which contains the Ten Commandments and laws that follow, is often called in biblical scholarship the covenant code.

[5 : 53] And Chapter 24 of Exodus gives us a ceremony where the covenant is ratified by Israel with God. So there is a formal relationship that is being acknowledged under the term of covenant.

It's not a new relationship because the relationship between God and Israel had already begun. Exodus 19 made that clear. You've come to this mountain. You are a holy people, etc.

That is, you're already these things before I give you the laws. But the covenant idea of Mount Sinai is that there's a sense now in which Israel as a nation accepts the relationship that God has established.

The idea of covenant goes back at least to Abraham. Genesis 17, in a sense, codifies the promises of God from Chapters 12 and 15 into a covenant relationship marked with the sign of circumcision. Even there, the notion of covenant goes back even further to Noah, though that's probably slightly a separate matter. The language here is, in verse 2, is made a covenant, is strictly cut a covenant.

[7 : 01] That's how Hebrew would express to begin a covenant. You would cut a covenant because your way of ratifying it formally would be to kill an animal and perhaps to separate the animal into two, to walk between it, or to burn it in a sacrifice, to eat some of it, etc.

Variations in the ancient world. The idea being that, in a sense, the blood of the animal symbolizes what you're prepared to happen to you if you break the covenant stipulations.

Now, this sort of nature of covenant and relationship is something that the Old Testament uses to express the relationship between God and his people. It comes out of the ancient world because there were covenants between kings and peoples and conquering kings and conquered peoples. So when the conquering Hittites defeated the Egyptians, a covenant was made at a place called Kadesh in modern-day Syria near the northern Lebanon border and one of the earliest ones that's been found, archaeologically speaking.

And it has a very similar structure to Deuteronomy. Now, I don't want to go into the technicalities of that, but it begins with a bit about the history leading up to the relationship and then a list of all the stipulations that are imposed upon the conquered peoples.

[8 : 17] Now, Deuteronomy and the Old Testament's notion of covenant is similar but different. So Deuteronomy began with three chapters of historical lead-up to where we've got to on the edge of the promised land.

Then come the stipulations, general and then specific, and what will happen if Israel keeps the covenant and what will happen if it doesn't. So that's just by way of a little bit of structure, the bigger picture, if you like, of Deuteronomy before we get into these prime laws.

The covenant also is not probably limited just to the Ten Commandments, but to all the laws that God gave at Mount Sinai, the Ten Commandments and all that followed back in Exodus 20 to 23 and beyond through all of Leviticus into numbers as well.

And then Moses goes on to say some odd words in verse 3. Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us alive here today.

Now, that's odd because these people mostly were not alive 40 or 38 years before. The ones who were there at Mount Sinai have died out, at least those who were 20 plus, the adults of that Exodus generation.

[9 : 31] The ones who are alive now when Moses speaks Deuteronomy were either children then or have been born since. But he emphasizes not with our ancestors, that is the predecessor generation, I think in this case, but with us.

Now, there's a couple of senses behind this. One is the unity of God's people through generations. That is, God is dealing with Israel and it's still Israel a generation later and it will still be Israel a generation after that.

But the other thing is for a rhetorical purpose. That is, Moses is emphasizing it is you whom God has brought into this covenant relationship. And when those covenant laws were given at Mount Sinai 40 years ago, they were actually given to you.

And in 40 years' time, another generation's time, the next leader could, if he wanted to, say exactly the same thing and beyond. That is, God's word is still binding generation by generation through the Old Testament times.

And so Moses, by emphasizing this in verse 3, is wanting to give no loophole or escape clause for the generation in front of him to say, oh yes, but they were given to our parents for the wilderness and we're going into the land and that's different so we're not bound by those laws.

[10 : 43] That is, Moses is, in a sense, heightening the responsibility being placed upon ancient Israel and the generation before him. Verse 4 is striking because he goes on then to say that the Lord spoke with you face to face.

Now, at one level that's not true because face to face they didn't see God's face. Moses, though, is not lying here. Face to face is idiom for immediate, that is, without a mediator in effect.

They heard the voice, at least of the Ten Commandments. The rest was mediated through Moses, but the Ten Commandments were not. So it's not saying that they saw God, but that they, in a sense, met with him and they heard his voice immediately, without a mediator.

And out of the fire. And at that time, I was standing between the Lord and you to declare to you the words of the Lord, for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up to the mountain.

Going, in a sense, from the immediate to the mediated word, back at 38 years before at Mount Sinai. And then finally, by way of context, we come to verse 6.

[11 : 57] I am the Lord your God. Now, here now are God's words beginning, but they don't begin with a command. They begin with a preamble, we might say.

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

They're God's first words that Israel heard, all Israel heard, including Moses.

They're important words because they remind us of a consistent biblical truth. That law follows on from grace.

God established the relationship with ancient Israel. He saved them, redeemed them, liberated them, and as a result, the laws that follow is their obligation to respond.

But it's not a works righteousness. That is, Israel is not being told, don't murder, don't steal, and then I'll consider you to be my people or I'll accept you. None of that at all. There's no hint of that.

[13 : 05] They are already in a relationship with God, established by his grace. Exodus 19 made that clear. You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, etc. A treasured possession, very intimate and highly prized language that's used.

The relationship goes centuries before Mount Sinai and that's being summed up in this verse 6 here. I am the Lord your God. And the context of emphasizing out of the house of slavery, yes, they were slaves, of course, in Egypt.

We see that at the beginning of the book of Exodus. But it's probably got an implicit connotation that from slavery to liberation. They've been liberated by God and the law that is about to follow is not a contradiction of liberation.

The law itself is liberating. We ought to see that because that's part of the context of law. We often think of law as being a bit restrictive and wowsy-ish and all that sort of thing.

It's actually liberating law. And that's, I think, implicit here. And this pattern, of course, of grace that leads to law is a thoroughly biblical one.

[14:13] We see it structurally in, say, the letter to the Romans. Romans 1 to 11, what God has done, basically. Romans 12, therefore, in the light of God's mercy, offer yourselves as living sacrifices, etc., etc., through the next few chapters.

That is, in a sense, the ethic or the law flows from the grace. The structure of Ephesians, the same. Ephesians 1 to 3, therefore, chapter 4, verse 1 says, live a life worthy of the Lord because of all of chapters 1, 2, and 3 in Ephesians.

That's just a couple of instances. But permeating the whole Bible is that grace precedes law. The Old Testament's not sort of a law righteousness that fails and therefore something new comes in Christ.

The way God deals with and redeems people and calls them to be his people is the same pattern both in Old and in New Testaments. He acts by his grace and mercy to save and in a relationship that he establishes, he then issues his laws to his people.

So we must make sure that we understand then that the Old Testament's not opposed to the new in its terms of salvation and relationship with God. Most of the laws in the Old Testament are what are called casuistic laws.

[15:32] Now, don't worry about the technical term, but what it means simply is if this happens, then this is what you should do. So if you find your neighbour's ox straying down the road, then you should look after it.

That's casuistic law, case law. A situation is described and then a command about what to do in that situation. Unlike most of those laws, which are distinctive in the Old Testament really, we find in the Ten Commandments what are called apodictic laws, to give you the other technical term.

That is, laws that don't have a particular situation, they are in a sense for any place at any time. Do this, or in most of the cases, don't do this.

In fact, only the fourth and the fifth ones, the Sabbath and the parents' commandments are positively expressed. That is, do this. The other eight are, don't do this.

Remember that law is liberating. And so in a sense, the prohibitions, don't do this, the eight of them, are in a sense setting boundaries within which Israel is to live.

[16:40] So that's, in one sense, not boundaries to be too restrictive, it's boundaries to be liberating. That is, don't go beyond the boundaries, but enjoy being within the fence, safe within the law.

The laws that are positively expressed, honour your parents and keep the Sabbath, are in some senses even more demanding. They actually give us a description of what it's like within the boundaries to live.

And in some senses, therefore, are perhaps even more demanding, but still nonetheless, liberating laws also. It would be fair to say that the Ten Commandments is not so much a summary of the laws of the Old Testament, but it does give us the key principles.

There's an element of hierarchy in the Ten Commandments as well, from most important, not down to least important in the sense of trivial, but from the most important to the not quite as most important sort of hierarchy, if I can put it like that.

The importance of them is shown in the fact that they come first of all the laws that are given, both in Exodus 20 and here in Deuteronomy. They're the only ones spoken by God verbally to Israel.

[17:50] The rest are spoken to Moses, who relays them to Israel. And later on, they're the only ones, of course, they're written by God on the stone. The rest are written by Moses in scrolls or papyrus or whatever.

And they are the only laws that are placed inside the Ark of the Covenant. The other laws are placed next to the Ark of the Covenant, eventually in the holy place, the tabernacle and later the temple.

So the Ten Commandments do take a very high priority in Old Testament law as well. Well, what do they say? Some senses I'm probably dealing with material that's well known to most people, even if we can't quite remember them all in order.

Perhaps you can. The first commandment is verse 7. You shall have no other gods before me, beside me, apart from me. There are variations of how that preposition could be understood.

Really, it's about who you worship. You only worship Yahweh. That is, the Lord. Usually the word Lord in capital letters in the Old Testament versions that we read. Only he is to be worshipped.

[18 : 56] Nobody else. That is that it's anti, what's called syncretistic. You can't share your worship of God, the living God, with the worship of any other God.

It is only to be God who is to be worshipped. It is an exclusive relationship, therefore, that's being commanded here. Remember that it comes out of a polytheistic ancient world.

All the nations round about, maybe with a brief exception of Egypt under the so-called heretical Pharaoh who was a monotheist, Akhenaten, about this sort of time, all the other nations were polytheistic.

So they would happily incorporate other gods. And of course, 1500, 1400 years after Moses, it's still the same in the ancient world with the Greeks and the Romans. A whole pantheon of gods, all with their little portfolios, a bit like government cabinets and so on.

And add a few more in, it doesn't really matter. Well, here we find very distinctively, strangely and unusually in the ancient world, monotheism, in effect, being commanded.

[20 : 04] God alone, the living God, Yahweh, the one who's rescued you from slavery, he alone is to be the object of your worship. And it flows from what we saw on Sunday night in chapter 4, that he is the only God.

There is no other. That is, Yahweh is both incomparable, no other so-called god or idol comes anywhere near. In fact, all those idols and other gods, they can't eat or taste or hear or smell. They are actually senseless. Only Yahweh is the living God. He is incomparable. And in the end, the conclusion that's not quite reached in Deuteronomy 4, but virtually there, it's the only real outcome is, there is no other god at all.

The other gods are non-gods. They're nothings. Now, the second commandment builds on the first. The first is really who to worship. God alone, Yahweh alone. The second one is, well, something about how he is to be worshipped.

And here in these verses, verses 8 to 10, are the prohibition of making images of God. Not so much of making idols of other gods, but making images of God.

[21 : 14] So you shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. That's pretty comprehensive. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.

For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. So, yes, there's a prohibition of idols of other gods, and that's been implied even in the first commandment. You can't worship another god.

But verse 2 is applying that to worshipping Yahweh. You're not to worship him by worshipping statues or images, whether that's in birds or animals or fish or anything else, any other human representation at all as well.

Here we find this statement that God is jealous. For I, the Lord your God, in verse 9, am a jealous God. I think the only times this word occurs with relation to God in the Old Testament are here, the equivalent in Exodus 20.

Deuteronomy 4, which I looked at on Sunday night, and a couple of times in Exodus 34, also at Mount Sinai at the end of the golden calf incident.

[22 : 21] The jealousy of God means his passionate loyalty. That is, it's his exclusive right and desire for a relationship with his people.

And as I said on Sunday night, it's the relationship of a husband to a wife and vice versa. That is, there is an exclusive loyalty within a marriage relationship that is analogous with the relationship between God and his people.

It's not to be shared with other gods. It's not to be shared with other idols. And the jealousy means that God will be wrathful and punish if that is broken and infringed.

Now one of the ethical dilemmas of this second commandment comes in verse, at the end of verse 9. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me.

I'm not sure that that's, in the end, the best translation of the sense, although the words can be translated that way. We don't find in the Bible God's wrath on innocent children.

[23 : 27] In fact, we find that a couple of times that's explicitly denied, later in Deuteronomy itself, in Ezekiel 18 as well. But what we do find are these things.

God punishes succeeding generations who keep on in the sins of their fathers or grandfathers or great-grandfathers even. And that's the sense here. It's not that God will punish the children who are innocent because the parents are guilty.

If they, those children keep on in their parents' sin, they too will be punished. And the third or fourth generation suggests a limit by which God will tolerate perhaps that sin continuing.

We also need to bear in mind that in the ancient world you might live to see the third or fourth generation of your children, slightly shorter generations than we're used to, and multi-generational houses or compounds, less sort of scattered like our families tend to be these days.

And that leads on to then perhaps I think the more likely understanding of this verse that yes, God will punish the children if they do the father's sins as well and down the generational train.

[24 : 36] But also children will suffer the consequences or the effects of their parents' sins and to three or four generations suggests a limit either because that's how many children will see, you know, you might know your grandfather, great-grandfather, et cetera, and live close proximity.

Or that's the limit imposed by God on the consequences and effects of the sins of the parents. keep reading and we see a huge contrast because in verse 10 we see that God shows steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Again, the sense here, I think, is not just that one generation will be steadfast and therefore their great, great, great, great, great down a thousand times are going to be blessed by God. But rather, if they keep God's commandments and the next generation does, and the next, and the next, and the next, and the next, they'll all be blessed by God.

And the thousandth generation is probably idiomatic for forever. You know, no count, limitless. And so when the, verse 9 limits to three or four generations and we see the contrast to the thousandth generation who benefit from God's steadfast love, a very strong word of commitment, then we see the emphasis is placed on the love and the mercy of God that will continue and continue and continue.

But the wrath and punishment and the effect of sin will be ultimately limited by God. We move on.

[26 : 08] The third commandment, verse 11. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God. Older translations, of course, you shall not take the Lord's name in vain. That is Yahweh's name in vain.

Wrongful use is probably a fair translation of what's intended by this commandment. Literally, you shall not take the Lord's name in vain is in emptiness.

That is, you shall not use it emptily, that is, without meaning or substance or real purpose. Now, there's a whole range of things that would cover, be covered by this law most likely.

Certainly, I think the sorts of things would include people who make rash oaths that they don't intend to keep. You would make an oath sworn by the name of the Lord and that, in a sense, you're invoking God's holy name to show your seriousness in making a promise or an oath.

If you've got no intention of keeping it, you're using his name wrongfully or in vain with an empty purpose, so to speak. It would certainly, I think, include using the Lord's name in swearing, although I'm not sure that like people do today, but I'm not sure that that's its primary intention, but certainly, I think it would be included in that.

[27 : 25] I suspect also wrongful use of the Lord would be the wrong ascription to God of false motives by him. We saw that in chapter 1, verse 27, where the Israelites said, grumbling, God's just brought us out because he hates us.

I think that would be a wrongful use of the name of the Lord. That is, ascribing him hateful motives rather than, rightly, loving motives. Of course, in Jewish tradition, their fear of breaking this commandment meant that they came not to use the name of the Lord at all.

And there's many laws in the Old Testament which are what are called hedging the laws. That is, if the law says, don't do this, they would draw a big fence around and say, well, let's not go anywhere near it.

So in order not to say the name of the Lord wrongly, we won't even use his name at all. Now, my reckoning on that is that that could even be worse than the actual prohibition to start with.

It is a huge privilege when God gives his name to his people through Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3. It is a privilege to be used. It is a bit like when you meet somebody formally.

[28 : 35] Hello, my name's Mr. Smith. And you think, I wonder whether I can call him Fred or not. Until you're invited to use the sort of personal name, there's an element in which, depending on who the person is, you may want to keep a proper reserve.

When God invites us to use his name, Yahweh, in Exodus 3, but the name above all names of Jesus, we're not to shy away from that privilege at all. It is a great privilege and one that I think in

Jewish tradition they've misunderstood the priorities of what's being said here, I must confess. The fourth commandment is the command about the Sabbath. It's the first of the two positive commandments. That is, it's not a prohibition.

You shall not do something. It's do something. Observe the Sabbath day. The Sabbath is actually the last day of the week. The hymn that we just sang talked about the Lord's Day or the Sabbath day as being the first day of the week, but it's actually the last day of the week.

And it would have begun on a Friday sunset and would finish at a Saturday sunset, as it still does, of course, for Jews today. Note the context is six days shall you labour.

[29 : 46] In some ways, that's something that I reckon Australian modern society probably needs to hear even more than the keep a day off. And for us Christians, those who work, say, five days a week, need to keep this in mind, I think.

We're actually exhorted to work six days a week. I don't mean by that that we have to go into the office six days a week, but that the two days that we have as a weekend, we've got to think differently about those two days and how we work on one and not the other and how we use our time rightly, not necessarily for paid employment, but maybe in the service of God or whatever it is. So the context is work. It's not saying be lazy for a week and then have a sort of special day as the Sabbath day. Work for six days, labour for six, but it does limit that labour as well and so that we're to work for six days, not a seventh.

And for those of us who are workaholics, we need to hear that note as well and take more care, perhaps, to try and preserve days off. Verse 15 gives us the motivation in Deuteronomy for this, which is different from the motivation given at the first giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.

I don't think we should read that as contradiction. I think we should read it as supplement. In Exodus, the reason for the Sabbath day is the Lord worked for six days and then he had a Sabbath rest at the beginning of Genesis 2, in effect.

[31 : 19] Now we're told, remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

What I think is happening is that, in a sense, a creation pattern in Genesis 1 and 2, which is picked up in the Exodus 20 version, is being added to by a remember your deliverance and liberation. In the same way that all the Jewish festivals, the Passover, Tabernacles and Festival of Weeks, are largely harvest festivals, but each with some aspect of redemption added in.

The Passover is the harvest of grain or barley or whatever. It's added in that you, in particular, remember your liberation from Egypt. Seven or eight weeks later, it's the next harvest.

I think that's the barley harvest, the Festival of Weeks, but in that one, you remember also the giving of the law at Sinai, ultimately. And the Feast of Tabernacles is the summer fruits harvest at its end, but in particular, remember the Lord's provision during the 40 years of wilderness.

[32 : 24] So in the same way, the Sabbath has got a creation pattern to it, but it's now being added to by motivation. God has liberated you, which means that the creation day, the Sabbath day, is not just a day of rest, as in idleness.

It is a day of rest and celebration of God's liberation. It has both a worship and a recreational aspect to it, it seems to me.

Both of those things together. In that, it is anticipatory, of course, of heaven. And of all the days in the week, it is meant to be the one that, in a sense, we look forward to our heavenly rest, to use the expression from Hebrews 3 and 4.

That, of course, is what the seventh day after Genesis 1 is about, the perfection of the creation and the enjoyment of it by God and by it of God.

and that's, in a sense, what we've tried to try and get samples of on our Sabbath days in anticipation of our heavenly rest at the end of our history.

[33 : 36] The next commandment is, again, positive. Honour parents, your father and your mother, as the Lord commanded you, that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

We're told here to honour, to show respect, what are the consequences of that? It certainly does, I think, have some consequence of obedience.

Later on in Deuteronomy 21, we find a disobedient or rebellious son. If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son, this is Deuteronomy 21, verse 18, you don't need to look it up, who will not obey his father and mother, who does not heed them when they discipline him, then his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his town at the gate of that place. They shall say to the elders of his town, this son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he's a glutton and a drunkard. So honouring parents means not being glutton or drunkard, it seems at least in that illustration or law.

Of course, it's broader than that as well. I don't think there's necessarily, well, there's no age limit given here for when parents, children are to stop honouring their parents, but presumably the nature of discipline and obedience changes as children go from being dependent to adult and themselves becoming married and having children and so on in ancient society.

[35 : 02] But I think the honouring probably has a couple of other implications. One is that the motivation about living long in the land is usually associated with keeping the faith in Yahweh.

And so possibly here the context also has got the connotation of honour your parents' faith by keeping the same faith. That is, they're believers in the Lord, the children are to be believers in the Lord.

Now, I know that that doesn't always happen and there's an element of presupposition that the parents are believers and that may not of course always be true either. But the motivation is often tied with keeping the general faith in Yahweh, living long in the land.

The other thing I think too is that in honouring parents there's probably also a deliberate connotation here of your care for them in old age. Without social security the family was much more responsible for looking after parents in older age and that's probably part of it as well.

But all of that is sort of reading out some consequences from a general law and principle. The purpose of it is not to say where does honour end, where does the time end so that I don't have to honour my parents because now I'm an adult.

[36 : 17] If we begin to think like that about this or any of the other laws we've actually lost the purpose of them. That is, there's an element in which it ought to be a delight always to keep on honouring parents as it is to keep the Sabbath day etc.

etc. In one sense the laws are boundless and we should rejoice in that boundlessness of the laws. Sometimes people say that the first four commandments are all about how you relate to God and five to ten the second six commandments are about relating to people.

At one level that's a bit obvious. Sometimes it's depicted by a church I went to in England used to have two big tablets at the front on the wall of the ten commandments.

I think it had the creed on the other side. And the two tablets of the ten commandments one had one to four and the other had five to ten. And that's often a way how they're depicted. Sometimes they're depicted as great big tablets Charlton Heston carrying this huge thing down Mount Sinai in the Hollywood film or whatever it is or whoever it was.

Probably the tablets are very small. You can see in the British Museum and other museums tablets of the law codes of Hammurabi and other law codes that are much longer than the ten commandments and they're all quite small really.

[37 : 29] So we're dealing with a couple of small tablets and probably on each of them was all ten because in the ancient world when you made a covenant treaty each party would keep a copy.

Where does God keep his copy but in the holy place? Where should Israel keep a copy? Well in the holy place. They both get put in the holy place in the end in the ark but one in one sense is God's copy and one is Israel's copy.

Not that I think that distinction was particularly made but I think our picture should be two copies of all ten not five and five or four and six or something like that. And the other thing about is it really worshipping God and then loving people the second half?

Well simplistically yes but the trouble with that distinction is our love of people if we say commandments five to ten is actually a love of God.

So not murdering someone and actually positively loving them is an expression of love of God. So I'm cautious to separate love of God to love of people because it looks as though when we love people we've just become in a sense humanists and we're not.

[38 : 35] It's all about loving God. Commandments one to ten and beyond. Well let's move on to the next one. Murder. The word is whilst the word can mean kill here in the context it's clearly specifically murder.

It does not include manslaughter. It does not include capital punishment. It does not include murder or killing in some war obviously because of laws that allow that in certain cases.

It's premeditated murder of another person. And the consequence of it is capital punishment as indeed the consequence of all the six laws so far are capital punishment.

You break them that son who's rebellious the drunkard and glutton in Deuteronomy 21 he's stoned to death if he's unrepentant. So capital punishment ensues for breaking the first six.

The seventh commandment verse 18 is adultery and there are many laws later in Deuteronomy and earlier in Exodus and so on that relate to this theme flesh it out in different circumstances and cases. If this is the case then this is what you do.

[39 : 34] If that's the case this is what you do. They're sort of samples to show how the law in general works in specific cases. You shall not commit adultery. Male or female shall not commit adultery.

It's general. It's again boundless. In some cases capital punishment ensued for breaking this commandment as well. The next one is theft.

We're seeing here a clear order of priority. Human life is valued above property. Human life matters more than animal life or tree life or plant life or anything else.

And whilst it's right that we care for our environment and right that we care for animals and right that we look after property human life is at a premium in God's economy.

And that priority is demonstrated in these order murder, adultery, stealing. It's also demonstrated in the punishments that are attached to them. Capital punishment is not attached to theft.

[40 : 35] Theft of anything. Neither shall you steal anything. And so for those who say oh does that really mean stationary at work or time from my boss? Anything. You see as soon as we start trying to hedge the law and say well that's not really theft or that's not really lying or that's not really adultery we've actually lost the purpose of these ten commandments which are so boundless as they're given here.

Ninth one is not bearing false witness. Not lying probably specifically in a legal context. A good example comes in 1 Kings 21 where the king wants Naboth's vineyard and so the queen sets up two scoundrels to give false evidence.

You needed two witnesses but they gave false witness. Naboth was killed. So you shall not give false witness false evidence in court.

But again because the law doesn't say in a court situation even though maybe that's the primary focus we ought to think well I'm not in court therefore I can give false evidence.

Not at all. Again we've misunderstood the nature of the law. And then finally coveting which of all the laws of the Ten Commandments is the one that you can't actually legislate for. You can't be dragged before a court and say you coveted that thing over there.

[41 : 51] How could you prove it? Because coveting stems from the heart. But by being the final of the Ten Commandments there's something said here it's not just about our external actions. It's what comes out of the heart that matters.

An emphasis that we've already seen in Deuteronomy 1-4 a little bit and we will see growing as a theme in chapter 6 especially but also in 8, 9 and 10 and later at the end of the book if you ever get that far to chapter 30.

That is it's from the insides that matter. And when our heart is right then we won't be trying to restrict the laws of thieving or lying or adultery or murder. That is when our hearts are right we will keep the laws with willingness and joy I guess.

So here is a reminder that the heart is important. There's a debate about whether the word for covet and actually two words are used in Deuteronomy one in Exodus doesn't mean desire desire plus the ensuing action.

In the Deuteronomy one you can see verse 21 neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife neither shall you desire your neighbor's blah blah blah the things that are listed.

[43 : 05] In Exodus it's just the second word desire. They both mean the same sort of thing. At one level I think it's about the desire not necessarily I mean the action that follows would be wrong but it's not restricted to the desire that leads to action.

And yes I mean all of us have fleeting things as you sort of open a travel brochure and you see an exotic holiday destination that you haven't been to I'd love to go there. I don't think that's coveting.

Or you see someone's sporty fast red car on the road and you think oh I'd love a sporty fast red car that's faster and sportier than my fast sporty red car. I don't think that sort of fleeting thing is really what coveting is about.

There is a sense in which the desire does become a bit set. It may or may not lead to the action but the desire itself when it becomes set and we actually want something even if we don't quite plan to get it I think that's what the law is prohibiting as well as the action that may follow if it does.

I remember meeting someone once I can't remember who this person is where I was door knocking a few houses or people who never came to church and trying to meet them I remember someone saying don't worry about me I'm a Christian I keep all the Ten Commandments and my reaction to the person was something along the lines of I don't think you do I must say I was quite taken aback that that was their judgment of what determined who was a Christian but I said that that person didn't I think I sort of brought up short I wish that I said tell me what they are and seen if they remembered them but the question remains should we should we keep the Ten Commandments or not well some points of thinking we're dealing here with the old covenant of the

[45 : 11] Old Testament it's a covenant between God and Israel does it apply to us the new covenant is the law of Moses written on our hearts Jeremiah 31 that suggests a continuity and Jesus came and said I've come to fulfill the law and Paul said I'm not coming to abrogate the law or speaking about tossing it out the law is good if anything what we see in the New Testament is the raising of the standards of the law Jesus in Matthew 5 in a sense not redefining but lifting the barrier or the bar rather for what adultery is murder is and so on hatred and all the attitudes of the heart but having said that there are clearly some laws that we don't keep and probably ought not we do not need to keep them maybe outside the Ten Commandments it raises an issue I'm going to illustrate this a bit more next Wednesday night in the talk on

Deuteronomy 7 but how do we deal with this some people say if the New Testament reinforces the law repeats it in some place we keep it and no one really disagrees with that but if that's the case then what's the point of the Old Testament law at all why bother even reading it when we might as well just read what's in the New Testament because that's all that we need to keep there are some who say that if the New Testament supersedes an Old Testament law explicitly that is don't do this anymore because of Jesus and whatever then we don't keep it and pretty much there's no disagreement and so on the dilemma is the middle ground what happens when the New Testament is silent there's some it reinforces some it says it superseded what about the middle ground where do we go there some people say well the law can be divided into civil ceremonial and moral we keep the moral but not the ceremonial and the civil the trouble is those distinctions are not biblical and some laws intertwine in some places well next week

I'll give you a bit of a model for that but what about the Ten Commandments now specifically is the man right to say well not say I keep the Ten Commandments but is he right by implication that we should keep all the Ten Commandments well nine of them are reinforced in the New Testament in some way or other the exception of course being Colossians 2 verses 15 and 16 I think is not unimportant with thinking about how do we relate to the Jewish Sabbath that is if we believe that we're bound to keep this then we should actually insist on our Sabbath being Friday night to Saturday night is the sort of significance of this Paul in Colossians chapter 2 verse 15 says this verse 16 and 17 therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food or drink or observing festivals new moons or

Sabbaths these are only a shadow of what is to come but the substance belongs to Christ now without expounding that passage at length simply I think Paul is saying in a sense the detail of Sabbath observance has been lifted higher when we worship Christ the substance is Christ not traditions about what you do on a Sabbath and even maybe when it's observed perhaps and certainly we know that the early Christians met on the Lord's day being the Sunday the day of resurrection rather than or perhaps in addition to the Sabbath day rest to the Sabbath rest remains important it's based on the creation in Genesis 1 and 2 in Exodus but I think the precise day is unimportant myself there doesn't seem to be biblical justification for insisting that it has to be precisely the Friday to Saturday sunset periods and so on well the aftermath of this passage just to finish up briefly is I think salutary for us.

We tend perhaps sometimes to take God's word too lightly. Israel on this day at Mount Sinai, 38 years before Moses preached these words, did not. Verses 24 to 26, they express their fear at what they are sort of experiencing and their desire not to keep on experiencing it quite like that.

[49 : 59] Look, the Lord our God has shown us his glory and greatness, even though they didn't actually see him. We have heard his voice out of the fire. Today we've seen that God may speak to someone and the person may still live.

So now why should we die? For this great fire will consume us if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer we shall die. For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the fire as we have and remained alive?

That's a godly fear. They are sinners in the presence of a holy God and they know that they need a mediator. They call for one in verse 27.

They want Moses to go near himself, hear all that the Lord our God will say, then tell us everything the Lord our God tells you and we will listen and do it. It's not an idle claim. I don't think they realize how hard it is to keep the law, but they need a mediator and they call for Moses to be that mediator for them.

He's a limited mediator. He's only a prophet, not a priest. And of course he can't make atonement for sin, but he's the forerunner of the mediator whom we both need and have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[51 : 08] Their desire for a mediator is associated with their willingness to obey. They're not reluctant to accept God's word. They want Moses to tell them everything that God tells us and we will obey, they say in those verses, verse 27.

And God acknowledges that their desire is a right one in verse 28 and 29. I've heard the words of this people, which they've spoken to you. They are right in all that they've spoken. If only they had such a mind as this to fear me and keep all my commandments always.

That is, here is a high point for Israel. They want to obey and fear God, but God knows they're not going to do it always. God knows it's not going to last very long.

Indeed, it didn't last more than a few days before they made a golden calf, remember? If only, God says, if only. But they can't.

Two verbs are used to describe Israel in verse 29. If only they had such a mind as this. And two things, to fear me and keep all my commandments. To keep the commandments is easy to understand, that's obey. The other one, fear, is not so much terror from God, but a godly fear.

[52 : 18] Fear. God is God. And I'm a sinner. It's a relational term to fear. Fearing God is always positively expressed in the Old Testament. That is, it's you're fearing a God whom you know, not something that you don't.

And many times in Deuteronomy, it's commanded of Israel, fear the Lord your God. And nobody else. And nothing else. Fear acknowledges that God is God.

And that we are not. We are but sinners. Well, this recollection by Moses of the events of Mount Sinai ends at the end of verse 31.

He now then, in a sense, says, well, this is all that happened before, 40 years ago, previous generation. What about for now? You, verse 32, must therefore be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you.

You shall not turn to the right or the left. You must follow exactly the path that the Lord your God has commanded you. Three commands. Be careful. Don't turn.

[53 : 22] Follow exactly. This emphasis on being careful to do what is right is because it doesn't come naturally. We don't automatically obey God, even when we belong to his people.

We've got to take care that we obey God. And that we don't turn away from his law. That we follow it exactly as he has given us. What Moses is demonstrating there is that God's word still speaks.

We don't have to go to Mount Sinai to hear it. We hear it in the words of Deuteronomy here to us tonight. And if God's word still speaks, the requirement to keep the law still holds.

And yes, though we live after the Savior who has perfectly and only, the only one who has perfectly kept God's law, the obligation to obedient faith still remains.

We understand and are thankful that one has perfectly fulfilled the law. And through his perfection and atonement, we may be received by God and changed from within.

[54 : 28] But our perfection is still yet awaiting us on the final day. And before then, we still are to strive to shed every sin that slows us down to pursue God's word, to obey it with fear and faith.

Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us to keep your word, we pray. Help us not to despise it or treat it lightly. Help us as we hear your word to know that we are on holy ground.

Help us to recognize the Lord Jesus Christ as our mediator with thankfulness in our hearts. And we thank you, Lord God, for your mercy.
That means that we can hear your word, though we be sinners, and look forward to seeing you face to face in your heavenly kingdom. Amen. Amen.