

D E U T E R O N O M Y

study two : a God who made the first move (Deut 5)

Introduction

How do you see The Ten Commandments? ...

- (in terms of a running race) are they like the starting pen, the timekeeper, the official looking for infringements, or the medal ceremony?
- (in terms of a journey) are they like the transportation, the map, the destination, or the road works?
- (in terms of a home) are they like the fire in the hearth, the foundations, the boundary fence, or the living room?

Get people to write down their answer for each, then share together. (This may sound silly, but it does work!)

Getting started

Dt is three sermons that Moses preached to Israel as they prepare to enter The Promised Land for the second time. Dt 5 is the start of the second sermon (which last through to Dt 28). His concern is that Israel understands who their God is, for only then will they treat him right. Dt 4 has emphasised that God is 'the one-and-only'. This study emphasises another thing about God: he is the one who makes the first move in any relationship.

Who started it?

Read Dt 5:1-6 ('covenant' in 2 is like our word 'contract', an agreement between two parties).

Who made the contract?

How was it with 'us' (3) since it was the forefathers who actually at Horeb?

What does this tell us about any relationships which we may have with God, even now centuries later?

It's always God's move to make the first move like that.

What event does God refer to (in 6) that was the point when God made the first move?

Why is the story of Exodus 1-15 so important to this nation?



Stop and Think!

What difference would it make to our relationship with God if he were not the God who makes the first move?

This chapter lists the Ten Commandments. Why is it important that we first understand this about God?

The fact that God made the first move rather begs the question 'why?'

Read Dt 7:6-9

Why didn't God chose Israel? (Think about what 7b means rather than merely reading it out!)

What did God choose Israel? What was his motivation?

Put on your NT spectacles

In these notes, we're looking to the NT to help us understand what Dt means to us as Christians.

Turn up Romans 5:6-8; Ephesians 2:8-10; 1 John 4:7-10 and ask of each ...

- how did God save us?
- why did God save us?

What similarities are there between our relationship with God, and Israel's (as we've seen it in Dt 5 and 7)?



Stop and Think!

Considering how God has acted towards us, how do you think we should respond?

Why is our response to God often less than it should be?

Why do Christians do good works?

If we are to be like God, what has this study shown us about the way that we should act towards each other?

Now start walking!

The Ten Commandments did not start Israel's relationship with God. That friendship was already in existence. Keeping the Ten Commandments is not what saved Israel. They were already saved. This may seem obvious, but even as Christians we keep slipping back into thinking that we have to earn salvation by doing good things like going to church or having Quiet Times. Actually the reverse is true: we resist friendship with God, yet he persists in taking the initiative and offering us that friendship.

Read Dt 5:6-33

What were the 'terms' of the contract between God and Israel? Write a sentence to summarise them.

What was to be the function of the Ten Commandments for Israel? (cf 5:28-33 if stuck)

The Ten Commandments can seem like just a list of 'dos and don'ts'. How does it change our view of them when we know that they are part of God's covenant with Israel?

In what ways might these Ten Commandments help Israel to walk with God?

What are we Christians supposed to do with the Ten Commandments, do you think?



Stop and Think!

Imagine that a friend says to you: 'It's OK for you, you're religious. But if you knew some of the things I've done, you'd know that I'm too bad for God to be interested in me. I'll never change.' How would you reply?

How would you summarise what this chapter teaches Israel about God?

How would you summarise what this chapter teaches Israel about how they should 'walk' with God?

The Big Idea

God makes the first move in every relationship, and calls his people to walk in the way he commands.

Digging deeper

The chief theme of this study is that God takes the initiative. In fact, as we've seen, he must take the initiative in establishing a relationship with us since, left to our own devices, we'd remain enemies against him.

You could say that God made the first move towards Israel in Genesis 12 (which we looked at in [Study 1](#)), when he made the promises to Abraham that he is fulfilling at this point in Dt. Why then does Dt 5 not refer to Genesis 12, but rather to the Exodus, in 5:6? The point is that, at the Exodus (taking Israel from Egypt to Sinai), God deals with Israel as a nation for the first time. Before that point, God had dealt mainly with individuals. At the Exodus, you could say that the nation is born: Abraham's descendants are brought together as the people belonging to the Lord.

The NT thinks this is very important. It looks back to Israel's rescue as the model for how God saves. We too were powerless and trapped in our little, sinful worlds, but, through Jesus' death for us, God performed a 'second Exodus', rescuing us from slavery to sin. Like them, God redeemed us (in fact, everywhere the word 'redemption' is used in the NT, it's a look back to that first redemption out of Egypt [eg Colossians 1:13-14]). In [Study 1](#), we discovered that the NT parallels their Promised Land with our entering heaven (Hebrews 3:7-4:11). Now we've seen that our starting points are also paralleled. Their journey was from redemption to rest ... just as ours is. The application is that on this journey we must beware lest we disobey ... like they did!

So what is the continuing role of The Ten Commandments? Are we in the same position towards them as Israel were in the OT? Theologians have had a lot of debate over the centuries about this, so beware that you don't get bogged down in this paragraph! One helpful way of thinking about the law is that it has three roles:

- 1 **to reveal sin as sin** (cf Romans 5:20-21). The law shows us clearly what God's standards are, and therefore exposes the fact that we fail these standards and are sinners. (Actually, sin even uses the law to entice us to want to do what the law forbids [Romans 7:7-12]!) This is all part of God's plan, for when he gave the OT law, he also included instructions about sacrifices. The God who says 'You shall not ...' also says '... but I know that you will, so here is a way to deal with your law-breaking'. The purpose of the law therefore is to send us to Jesus on the cross, because there is where God finally deals with our sin.
- 2 **to restrain evil**. The law threatens the direst of punishments for law-breakers, so that 'by the dread of divine vengeance they are restrained at least from outward wantonness' (Calvin). It seems that Paul is talking about this kind of deterrence in 1 Timothy 1:9-10 when he talks about who the law is for.
- 3 **to show us how to live as believers**. Christians have God's law written in our hearts, and this means that we long to obey. But the written-down-in-the-Bible-in-black-and-white law clearly spells out for us what is God's will and it actively stirs us to want to live that way rather than slipping back into sin. cf Romans 7:21ff.

Let's take an example (which would apply equally to Israel in the OT as to us Christians now). Say that I covet my neighbour's BMW (or turbo-charged camel, in Israel's case!). The law tells me that I am a sinner because I covet like that (= role 1). And since I am a sinner, I know that I deserve to die, unless God does something to deal with that sin and to forgive me (= role 1). But that helps me to realise how seriously God takes coveting ... it's clearly a much more significant thing than I'd thought if he says that it deserves death (= role 2). And since I am clear that it now matters to God so much, and because I want to please him, I determine that I'm going to fight against coveting much more in the future (= role 3). [NS]