

The Voice of God
Deuteronomy 5

Turn to Deuteronomy 5, please. Deut 5 has the Ten Commandments, but this week we'll ignore them. We'll get to them the next time I teach.

This week we'll look at the introduction to the Ten Commandments. We'll also look at the three way conversation right after the Ten Commandments, between Israel and Moses and God.

Relationship, Today! Deuteronomy 5:1-6 - *Moses summoned all Israel and said: Hear, Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them.* ² *The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb [that is, Mt Sinai].* ³ *It was not with our ancestors that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today.* ⁴ *The LORD spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain.* ⁵ *(At that time I stood between the LORD and you to declare to you the word of the LORD, because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain.) And he said: I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*

Relationship – The LORD made a covenant with us, made this covenant not with our ancestors but with us. “I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

The Ten Commandments have in mind people who have been rescued by God, and who are in a covenant relationship with God. The LORD rescued the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt, and led them to Horeb (which is Mt Sinai), and then he offered them covenant.

He said (Exodus 19), “You’ve seen how I rescued you. Now, if you obey me, I will be your God and you will be my special people, my treasured possession.” The people said “yes, we will obey you, we want you to be our God.” That’s covenant. And THEN God spoke the Ten Commandments.

This is an important thing to know about the Ten Commandments, and about all God says about how we should live: these things are for people who have been rescued by God, and who have said to God, “I want you to be my God, and I want to be one of your people.”

That’s covenant, that’s relationship with God. God’s ways are good for everyone to follow, no doubt about that, but God does NOT give them for everyone to follow. He gives them to people he has already rescued, and who have said, “I want you to be my God.”

It is the same for us now. While we were sinners and enemies of God (Romans 5), Christ died for us. At some point you and I understood that this rescue was for **us**, that Christ died for **us**, and we said, “I want to be forgiven, I want to be your child, I want you to be my God.”

And **then** God tells us things like the Ten Commandments, God tells us how to live in relationship with him. We don’t obey God **so that** we can be his people and he will be our God.

We obey God **because we already are** his people and he is our God. The relationship starts because God out of his love and kindness rescues us. And then we live his in ways **because** we are bound to him, and he is bound to us.

Today – Deut 5:2-4 - *The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb [that is, Mt Sinai].³ It was not with our ancestors that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today.⁴ The LORD spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain.*

It was 40 years earlier that God made the covenant at Horeb, and it was with these people's ancestors, their parents and grandparents. Everyone over 20 years old at that time had died.

The covenant was **not** with those who were alive there on that day in front of Moses. Some of those under 20 at the original covenant would be in front of Moses when he said this, but most in front of Moses were not even born. God spoke face to face with their parents and grandparents.

Moses knows this very well. Verse 5 begins, "at that time." Moses knows the original covenant happened 40 years ago. He spoke about these things in Deuteronomy 1 and 2 (1:35-36; 2:14-16).

Moses speaks this way because the covenant with God is entirely real for the people there that day. Verse 1, "I am telling you today," verse 3, "all of us who are alive here today."

Moses wanted the covenant to be as fresh on the day he spoke these things as it was 40 years earlier. And Deuteronomy was written so that it could be that fresh year after year.

We are not in a different position here, today, January 2014. Our God is still like this. Our covenant is a bit different, but a lot the same. More to the point, we are alive here **today** and God wants this to be as alive and real today as it was for those to whom he spoke from the fire.

If to us this is just a story about long ago, we have missed the point. It is written so that if this is our God, and if we are alive **today**, we will renew our loyalty to God today.

The Words of God – Deuteronomy 5:22 - *These are the commandments [literally "words"] the LORD proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and he added nothing more. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me.*

"These are the commandments" – The OT does not speak about the Ten Commandments very often, but when it does, they are never called "commandments," they are "words," "the Ten Words." See Deuteronomy 4:13; 9:10; 10:4.

"Commandment" is a common Hebrew word, but never used with the famous Ten Commandments. I am not sure what the significance of this is, but I mention it anyway.

What's more interesting is that Israel heard the Ten Words in God's own voice. See Deut 5:4 – *The LORD spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain.*

And 5:22 – *These are the words the LORD proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly from out of the fire, the cloud, and the deep darkness.*

A Request from Frightened Israelites: No more Voice of God, please – Deut 5:23-27 - *When you heard **the voice** out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leaders of your tribes and your elders came to me. ²⁴ And you said, “The LORD our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and **we have heard his voice** from the fire. Today we have seen that a person can live **even if God speaks with them.** ²⁵ But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die **if we hear the voice of the LORD our God** any longer. ²⁶ For what mortal has ever heard **the voice of the living God speaking** out of fire, as we have, and survived? ²⁷ Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey.”*

What scared the people mostly was the voice, and secondly the fire. They feared for their lives. Keep in mind that the LORD was not angry with them, not hostile or upset in any way. The LORD was simply introducing himself. Israel needed to know what kind of God they had.

The people knew this. They said (v24) *he has shown us his glory and majesty*, they knew this was simply God’s normal talking voice. God can speak in a still small voice, if he wants to, as he did with Elijah, 2 Kings 19:12. But this was God’s usual voice, the way he would talk to a group outside.

What is it like to hear God’s voice? We don’t know what it sounded like. These people heard the Ten Commandments, the Ten Words, spoke directly to them by God, all given in God’s voice. When it was over, they were surprised that they were alive. And they doubted that they would live if they heard his voice again.

Vv24-26 - *We have heard his voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a person can live even if God speaks with them. ²⁵ But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer. ²⁶ For what mortal has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived?*

V27 – The Request: *Moses, you go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey*

God Agrees – Deuteronomy 5:28-29 - *The LORD heard you when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me, “I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good. ²⁹ Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!*

Hear the longing in God’s voice: if only they would always fear me and obey me, so that it would go well with them and their children forever. God wants life to go well for his people, for them and their children, forever.

We don’t earn God’s gifts by obeying. They are not given as a reward for obeying. That is never the sense in Deuteronomy.

Rather, we have bound ourselves to God and he has bound himself to us, and he is the source of everything good. When we turn away from the Source of life and everything good, we are living on borrowed time.

In the NT the consequences are delayed in some ways. Both judgment and blessing are postponed until Christ returns. But the principle is the same, and what God wants ever so much is that his people would live in his ways, so that it would go well with them forever.

I don't think this has changed one bit.

Moses Appointed as the Voice of God - Deut 5:30-31 - *“Go, tell them to return to their tents. ³¹ But you stay here with me so that I may give you all the commands, decrees and laws you are to teach them to follow in the land I am giving them to possess.”*

It seems that God would have given all his instructions directly to Israel with his own voice, if Israel had not asked for Moses to go between God and Israel. Only because of Israel's request do we get God's ways through the mouth of Moses, not God himself.

Voice of God to US – We have this story so that we who do not hear God's voice out loud, face to face, would take all this to heart. God has no intention of speaking his ways out loud to every person.

The story was 40 years old when Moses told this story. 75% of the people listening to Moses on this day had NOT heard the voice of God 40 years previously, and those that had heard it were just children.

And yet Moses can say, “All of us who are alive here today: the LORD spoke to YOU face to face out of the fire on the mountain.” God has spoken out of the fire to more people than who were there in Exodus 19 and 20.

The NT says in several places that these OT Scriptures were written for us, for NT believers. Romans 15:4 – “everything that was written in the past was written to teach us.”

God only spoke these things out loud once. After that it comes in human voice and in writings. But we need to make no mistake about this: it is the voice of God.

The Will of God

What is God's will for your life? It is that you would live this way, the way the Ten Commandments teach, not selfishly, but completely loyal to God, and respectful of other people. We would love God and love people, the two great commands of Jesus; that is the will of God for your life.

Last Sunday in our church we heard a sermon about Elijah calling Elisha into ministry, into so-called full time service for God (although according to the first three commands everyone is in full time service for God). That is God's secondary call, his secondary will.

God does call people into ministry, God called me into ministry, my own story is a little bit like Elisha's story. But, my brothers and sisters, the primary will of God for your life, the first and most important, is to live daily life in God's way. That's the big choice, the important choice.

Do you want to hear God speak his will to you? He HAS spoken what he wants, out loud, to all of us who are alive today: the Ten Words, the Ten Commandments. It is his call to faithful life, day by day, and week by week. God has spoken, and that is his will.

These other calls about what our job will be, or where we will live, are all secondary. They are NEVER the most important voice of God or will of God. There are quite a few stories in the Bible of God calling people to leave what they are doing to serve him in a different way.

But not once does the Bible ever say we should seek that kind of call, or wait for it, or not move without it. God sometimes calls people in that way, but he does not want us to waste much energy on that if it is not happening.

Biblically speaking, it is absolutely impossible to be living a godly life by obeying what's in Scripture, but to be out of God's will because you are doing in in the wrong place or because you have the wrong job. In the Bible that never happens.

God has spoken, and made his will clear. As Jesus said it: seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness every day, every week. We have been called to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

That's the voice of God, and the will of God. And we have heard it TODAY. Amen.