

What does the LORD your God require of you?

When Moses saw the Israelites dancing around the golden calf, he smashed the tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments (9:17; cp. Exodus 32:19). The Lord told him to carve out two similar tablets on which he would inscribe the commandments. These tablets were kept in the ark of the covenant (1–5). The Levites had a threefold ministry (8):

- They were to bear the ark of the covenant.
- They were to stand before the Lord to minister to him (or ‘to serve him’).
- They were to bless the people in the name of the Lord (cp. Numbers 6:22–27).

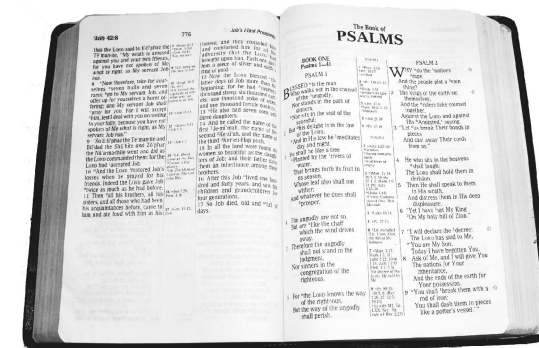
After completing his review of Israel’s journey to the borders of Canaan, Moses called on the people for total commitment to God: ‘*What does the LORD your God require of you?*’ (12). God wanted Israel to fear him, to walk in all his ways, to love him and serve him with all their heart and soul, and to obey his commandments (12–13). God is awesome in his greatness and power (14,17, 21–22) but he is not remote. He is full of compassion for the poor and the needy (18).

The tragedy of Israel was that they became taken up with outward observances in their religion. Their heart was not in it. God required more than fleshly circumcision from them. He wanted spiritual circumcision of the heart (16; cp. Romans 2:28–29).

What does God requires of each one of us? He wants our whole-hearted love for him and obedience to his word. This is not too much to ask for when he gave up his beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to suffer and to die in order to save us. Born again believers are often described as ‘committed Christians’. The fact is that if you are not committed to love and to obey Christ, you cannot claim to be a Christian at all. **There is no such hybrid as an uncommitted Christian. What kind of commitment do you have to God?**

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God’s holy Word simply explained and applied



January 2015

Bible readings from Deuteronomy chapters 1 to 10

Dear Friends

Reza Aslan's family came to the United States from Tehran in 1979, fleeing the Iranian Revolution. He converted to evangelical Christianity at the age of 15 but later converted back to Islam

In August 2000 he was appointed visiting Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Iowa, becoming the first full-time professor of Islam in the history of the state.

He claims to be a scholar on Jesus but he shows his ignorance of the Bible when he claims that the New Testament is not a historical document adding that it was written by communities of faith many years after the events that they describe ('Time' magazine; 5th August 2013). This is not true. Paul wrote to the churches he planted within months of their establishment and the apostles Peter and John wrote to encourage Christians facing persecution and to deal with false teaching.

The Bible is a historical document and in many of the Old Testament books, dates or the particular period in Israel's history are given. Even some of the poetical books were written with regard to specific events (eg. Psalm 54). Isaiah had his great vision of the Lord 'in the year that King Uzziah died' (6:1). A long earthly reign had ended, but we are reminded that God sits on an eternal throne and that he is the awesome Sovereign over all his creation. What an encouragement!

Bible history and church history are important for our instruction and encouragement. Let us be determined in the coming year to know God's Word better and to read books of church history. We will be challenged and encouraged as we do so.

May God bless you through the coming year.

Yours sincerely in Christ

Alec Taylor

30 JANUARY

Deuteronomy 9:1–29

You provoked the LORD your God to wrath

The Israelites were about to cross the Jordan and go into Canaan and Moses had words of encouragement for them. God would go ahead of them as a consuming fire to destroy nations far more powerful than themselves. They were to understand that this was a supernatural work of God (1–3). Moses warned them that they were not to imagine that the Lord was giving them mighty victories and possession of the land as a reward for their righteousness. The inhabitants of Canaan were very wicked and Israel was the instrument of divine judgment to drive them out of the land as God had promised their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (4–5).

Moses reminded the Israelites that they also deserved judgment rather than his blessing. He said, '*Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath.*' They had provoked God throughout the forty years from the time they left Egypt (7). They had made and worshipped the golden calf at Horeb (Sinai) while Moses was away receiving the Ten Commandments. Moses had been very distressed by their idolatry and they saw him break the two tablets of stone on which God had written the Ten Commandments (8–17). The Lord would have destroyed them but for his intercession. God had also been angry with Aaron for his part in the idolatry and he too would have been destroyed but for the prayer of his brother (8–29).

The Israelites were also reminded of three other instances of rebellion when they had '*provoked the LORD to wrath*' (22; cp. Exodus 17:7; Numbers 11:1–6, 31–35). Disobedience to God provokes him to wrath. **Christian, are you provoking God to anger and grieving the Holy Spirit because of disobedience to his word in your life?**

Stubborn, wicked Israel (27) deserved judgment but God gave them many blessings. How wonderful his grace! We too should remember that we have been saved by grace though we deserve judgment. Let us humbly thank God for his great kindness and love to us (Titus 3:4–5).

The LORD your God led you all the way

Moses called upon the people to obey every commandment that God had given to them and to remember his dealings with them during their forty years in the wilderness: ‘*You shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way*’ (1–2). It is important to see that God led them all the way, even in all their difficulties and trials. He led them in order to humble them and to test them. He allowed them to suffer hunger and he provided them with manna to teach them to trust in him (2–3). God also chastened them as a father chastens his son so that they would walk in his ways and fear him (6).

When we think of God’s leading, we often remember how he has led us through difficult times or into pathways of blessing and joy. He also leads us into situations where he designs to make us more dependant upon himself. He chastens us when we go astray and these experiences are painful but the end-result is good. Such discipline *yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness*. God chastens us because he loves us and we must never despise his chastening (Hebrews 12:5–11).

Canaan was well watered by brooks, fountains and streams and was blessed with fertile ground and an abundance of minerals (7–9). Moses again warned the people not to forget God in times of prosperity (10–14; cp. 6:10–12). He said, ‘*When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which he has given you*’ (10). Earthly wealth and comforts are prone to cause us to forget that we are a pilgrim people who are citizens of heaven. The wealthy person must not proudly say to himself, ‘*My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth*’ (17). Jesus told a parable of a rich man who had such an attitude and God called him a ‘fool’ (Luke 12:16–21). It is God who gives us the *power* (health and strength) to obtain wealth (18). If we forget him and disobey his voice, we are in grave danger (19–20). **He blesses us in so many ways and we should praise him every day with grateful thanksgiving.** *Bless the LORD, O my soul* (Psalm 103:1–2).

- All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible unless stated otherwise. They are printed in italics. **If you have a different translation of the Bible, you will still be able to use these notes.**

- The number in brackets eg. (7) refers to the verse number in the passage that we are reading; (14:34) refers us to another chapter and verse in the book of the Bible from which we are reading. When we read from Proverbs, this would be Proverbs chapter 14, verse 34.

- Where verses from other books of the Bible are brought to our attention, the name of the book is also indicated in the brackets eg. (Psalm 19:1).

- Where I ask you to compare another verse of Scripture, I prefix the reference with cp. (eg. cp. Psalm 1:1). I prefer this to the more common abbreviation cf. which relates to the obsolete word ‘confer’.

The word ‘Lord’ in the Old Testament

The Hebrew words translated ‘*Lord*’ are:

- ‘Adon’ which is used with reference to men (Genesis 42:33; 45:8–9), and with reference to God (Joshua 3:11,13; Psalm 8:1).
- ‘Adonai’ literally ‘my Lord’ (Exodus 4:10; Psalm 68:19).
- ‘Yahweh’ (‘Jehovah’), the sacred name for God, considered by many Jews as too sacred to utter. They regularly used ‘Adonai’ in its place. ‘Yah’ is a contracted form of ‘Yahweh’ (Isaiah 12:2; 26:4). The word ‘Alleluia’ or ‘Hallelujah’ (Revelation 19:1–6) means ‘Praise Yah.’

Dale Ralph Davis writes with reference to Exodus 3:12,14: ‘In light of verse 12, God does not here stress his being or existence so much as his presence and “Yahweh” captures and summarizes that thought – **he is the God who will be present to be all that his people need him to be.** “Yahweh” means the God who is present to help ... “Yahweh” is a personal name, while ‘the LORD’ is a title ... there’s a devotional warmth in a personal name that a title can’t convey’ (THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN THE MUCK OF LIFE – PSALMS 1–12, page 8).

NB. Our Bible translators have made it possible for us to recognise when ‘Yahweh’ is used in the Old Testament. ‘Yahweh’ is printed ‘*LORD*’, whereas ‘Adon’ or ‘Adonai’ are printed ‘*Lord*’.

DEUTERONOMY

28 JANUARY

Deuteronomy 7:17–26

The word ‘Deuteronomy’ means ‘second law’ or ‘repetition of the law.’ It is taken from the title of the book in the Greek version of the Old Testament, whose translators incorrectly rendered the words of Deuteronomy 17:18, ‘*a copy of this law*’ as ‘repetition of this law.’ The Hebrew title is ‘These are the words’ (see 1:1; 29:1).

Most of the book is taken up with three addresses given by Moses to the people in the plains of Moab (1:5) shortly before they were to enter the promised land under a new leader. Almost forty years had passed since they left Egypt and Moses knew that he was soon to die. The people had fresh difficulties and temptations to face and the aged servant of God encouraged them; he also warned them against disobedience to God. There are over eighty quotations from Deuteronomy in the New Testament and the Lord Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy more than any other Old Testament book. The coming of our great Prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ, is foretold in chapter 18. The reading of this book led to revival in Judah at a time of apostasy, wickedness and violence (2 Kings 22:8 to 23:25).

The Theme of Deuteronomy is the love of God for his people and the obedience that he requires from them. The love of God is not directly spoken of between Genesis and Numbers, but it is referred to for the first time in Deuteronomy (4:37; 7:7–8; 10:15; 23:5; 33:3). The LORD (Yahweh) had redeemed his people by mighty saving acts (4:33–38), and had made a covenant with them (4:23; 5:2–3), which he would remember and keep, for he is faithful (7:9,12). God had committed himself to them by covenant and he expected their whole-hearted loyalty and devotion. Christians also belong to God by covenant – a covenant sealed in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 12:24; 13:20). He demands our joyful obedience to his commandments (John 14:15,21; 15:10).

Key Words — ‘Do’ (over 100 times) – ‘keep’ – ‘observe’ – ‘hear’ – ‘remember’.

You shall not be afraid of them

Moses now promises the people that the Lord would lead them to victory in their conquest of Canaan. Humanly speaking, defeat was certain, but the Lord knew their fears. Moses told them not to fear and to remember well the things that God had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians: ‘*If you should say in your heart, “These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them? — You shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt ... So shall the LORD your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid”*’ (17–19).

Moses reassured them further, ‘*You shall not be terrified of them; for the LORD your God, the great and awesome God, is among you*’ (21). When God is with us and among us, what have we to fear? (Romans 8:31; Hebrews 13:5–6)? John Currid comments, ‘The Israelites in our story are afraid of the wrong thing: they fear the Canaanites who can kill the body. And it appears they fear the Canaanites more than they fear God. Do we not often behave in the same way?’ (EP STUDY COMMENTARY ON DEUTERONOMY, page 195).

*Fear him, ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear*

The Israelites were to be ruthless in destroying the idols that they found in Canaan. They are described as ‘*an abomination*’ and ‘*an accursed thing*’ (25–26). God promised to drive the nations out of Canaan *little by little* (22). He was aware of Israel’s limited capacity to take full advantage of a quick and complete victory. There is a lesson for us here. **We long for greater success in our work for the Lord but steady, gradual growth is far better than apparent sensational success which is often very shallow and fails to last.**

You shall be blessed above all peoples

Moses encouraged the people to obey *the faithful God who keeps covenant* (9) by showing how the Lord would then bless them in Canaan. *‘He will love you and bless you ... you shall be blessed above all peoples.’* God would give them prosperity and good health (12–15). Some misguided people take these promises as a blank cheque for Christians to claim ‘Divine health and wealth’. They look on sickness as evidence of unbelief or of disobedience to God’s will. Such people are greatly mistaken. Christians do have physical weaknesses and they do fall sick and in God’s will they are not healed (1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:20). **Jesus and the apostles did not enjoy a lavish lifestyle and those who would follow Christ are called to self-denial and not self-indulgence (Luke 9:23,58; 2 Corinthians 11:23–28).** The Israelites were again warned of the perils of idolatry (16).

Christians are indeed *blessed above all peoples*. We have priceless spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3). Let us think about some of these blessings (all references here are from Ephesians):

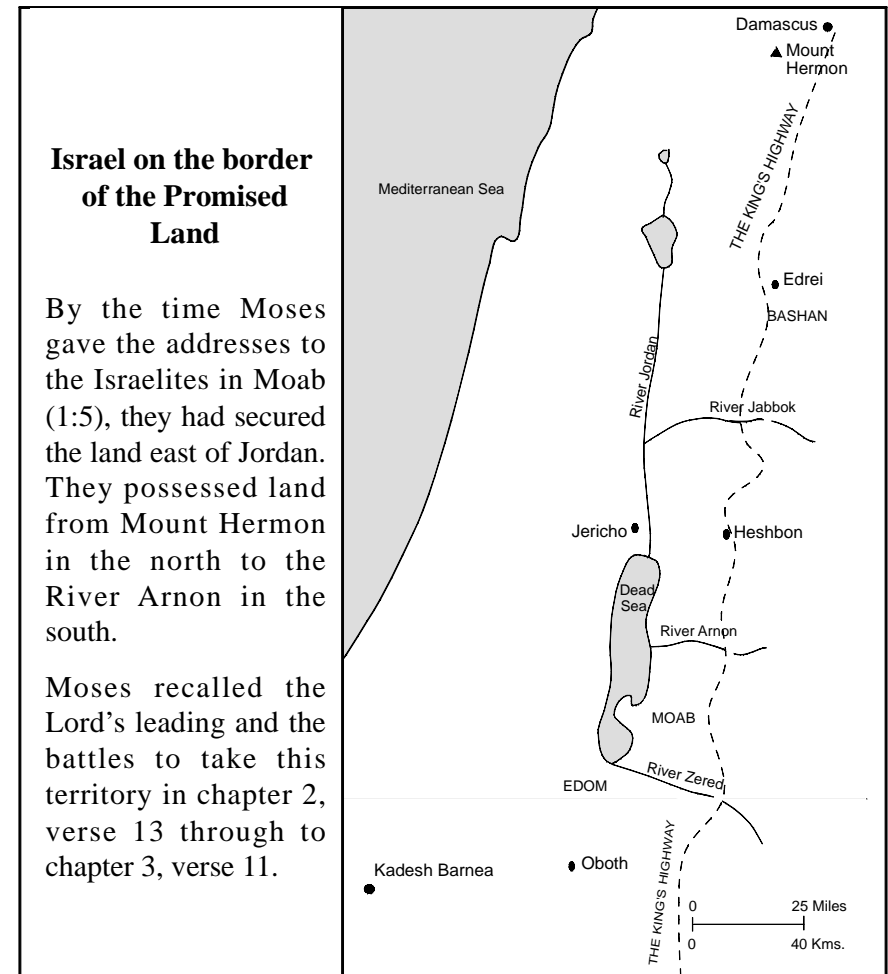
- We were loved by God and chosen by him in Christ in eternity past (1:4; 2:4).
- We have been adopted into God’s family (1:5).
- We have redemption through the blood of Christ and our sins are forgiven (1:7).
- We have eternal life and an inheritance in heaven (1:11,14,18).
- We have fellowship with Christ (2:6).
- We have access to God the Father through the Holy Spirit (2:18) who dwells within us (3:16).

*God of the covenant — changeless, eternal,
Father, Son, Spirit in blessing agree;
Thine be the glory, our weakness confessing,
Triune Jehovah, we rest upon thee.*

(Jessie F. Webb)

Outline of Deuteronomy

1. First Address (Review of God’s leading) — 1:1 to 4:43.
2. Second Address (Restatement of God’s laws) — 4:44 to 28:68.
3. Third Address (Regulations for the promised land) 29:1 to 31:13.
4. Moses’ Last Words and Death — 31:14 to 34:12.

**A recommended Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy**

For further study, I warmly recommend John Currid’s commentary on Deuteronomy, published by Evangelical Press. Currid is a Bible scholar whose love for the Lord is seen throughout his commentary.

You shall not be afraid in any man's presence

Moses reminded the Israelites of the Lord's dealings with them from Sinai (Horeb) to Kadesh Barnea (2). John Currid comments, 'Moses begins his speech with the expression, "**Yahweh our God**". This title is common in the book of Deuteronomy, but rare in the rest of the Pentateuch. God's covenant name is used here with a plural personal pronoun in order to underscore the close, personal relationship between God and his people. It is Yahweh's law that Moses is expounding (1:3). – COMMENTARY, Page 30). Before he left Sinai, Moses set apart *wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men* from each of the tribes to help him judge the people (9–18). Though the Israelites had seen God perform great miracles on their behalf after they left Egypt, they still had problems and burdens. They showed little gratitude to God for his goodness to them.

The great need of our day is for *wise, understanding and knowledgeable men* to pastor and to lead our churches. We may not have great responsibility like those leaders, but the same principle is valid for us; those who are appointed for spiritual leadership must be godly people (see Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:1–13). We are not to appoint men as elders or deacons on the basis of their success in the world of work or business, but on their spiritual qualifications. Pray that the Lord will richly endow us with such men.

Moses had warned these men that they must be impartial in their judgment and he had told them, '*You shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's*' (17). We must not compromise our Christian testimony whatever the pressures we are facing. *The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe* (Proverbs 29:25). *The fear of man* spoils our witness and silences us when we ought to speak. It dishonours God and may cause us to be entangled in a web of compromise and in other sins. **We must be more concerned about what God thinks of us than what people think of us.** We will then do what is right and pleasing to him. The fear of the Lord in our lives will drive away any fear of man.

The faithful God who keeps covenant

The people were again warned against intermarriage with the heathen of Canaan and of falling into idolatry. They had to be ruthless in destroying the people of the land and everything to do with their idol worship. A holy people must not compromise with sinful practices (1–6). We have no mandate to destroy the heathen around us today, but we must preach the gospel to them and let them see that we are holy.

Why did God choose Israel? Because they were great in number? Not at all! They were very few (7). There was nothing in them at all to attract the love of God, yet he chose them to be *a holy people ... a special treasure* to himself (6).

Why did God predestine (choose) us before the world was made (Ephesians 1:4–5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13)? Could it be that he foresaw some faith or goodness in us? Not at all! We are saved by grace, not works! (Ephesians 2:8–10). God's grace reaches the most unlikely people, humanly speaking. No wonder John Newton, saved from the depths of wickedness, could write, 'Amazing grace! how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me'.

How wonderful that God should save hell-deserving sinners and make them his *special treasure!* God has chosen us to be holy (Ephesians 1:4). *You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people* (1 Peter 2:9). If our lives do not honour God in holy living, we should be asking ourselves if we are truly saved.

The LORD is *the faithful God who keeps covenant* (9). **He will never fail us nor forsake us, for we are his own special people in whom he delights.**

*But saints are lovely in his sight ;
He views his children with delight;
He sees their hope, he knows their fear,
And looks, and loves his image there.*

(Isaac Watts).

Beware, lest you forget the LORD

Prosperity has its perils. God warned his people of the danger of forgetting him when they had received from him *houses full of all good things* and stomachs full of good food (11–12). Moses warned the Israelites, ‘*Beware, lest you forget the LORD.*’ This warning was important and necessary enough to be repeated in later chapters (8:10–12; 11:15–16; 31:19–20).

Materialism has been a greater enemy of true religion than any persecution. ‘*Houses full of all good things*’ have ensnared many a Christian, leading to lukewarmness and a lack of zeal for God. Scripture warns us against desiring riches (1 Timothy 6:9–10) and also declares, ‘*If riches increase, do not set your heart on them*’ (Psalm 62:10). The rich, complacent church at Laodicea was rebuked by the Lord Jesus (Revelation 3:15–19). Perhaps we will never worship carved images, but our possessions may become our gods and cause us to forget the Lord. Read Proverbs 30:8–9 and make it your prayer today.

Our Lord quoted verses 13 and 16 when he overcame the temptation of the devil in the wilderness (Matthew 4:6–11). We must not only love God (5) but also fear him and serve him (13). These principles apply to God’s people of all ages and not just to Israel of old (see Hebrews 12:28–29). Israel was to make its oaths (solemn promises) in the name of the Lord and not in the name of idols. God is jealous over us because he loves us (13–15).

What does it mean to tempt (or test) the Lord our God (16)? The Israelites were reminded of the time when they tempted the Lord in Massah by their unbelief. They had seen the Lord do great wonders on their behalf but they complained rather than prayed when there was a shortage of water. They asked, ‘*Is the LORD among us or not?*’ (Exodus 17:7). We tempt the Lord by unbelief (cp. Hebrews 3:12–15). Let us beware of this sin!

Do you want to know the blessing of God in your life? Do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD (18).

You saw how the LORD your God carried you

Moses now reminds the Israelites of their journey from Mount Sinai, almost forty years earlier, to Kadesh Barnea. At Kadesh Barnea, he had encouraged the people to face the challenge of possessing Canaan and not to be fearful nor discouraged. God had promised them the land and it was waiting to be possessed (19–21). Moses had been pleased with the plan to send the twelve spies into Canaan but ten of them discouraged the people with reports of the military strength of the people and of their fortified cities. For them it was ‘mission impossible’. They had complained and wickedly accused God of hating them and of planning to destroy them at the hand of the Amorites (various tribes in Canaan; 22–27).

Joshua and Caleb, the other two spies, encouraged the people to possess the good land which God was giving them (23–28; cp. Numbers 13:1 to 14:10). Moses had urged them not to fear these people; what the Lord had done for them in Egypt, he would do again and would fight for them (29–30). He reminded them, ‘*You saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son*’ (31). The Lord had led them by a pillar of fire at night and in the cloud by day, but for all that, they did not trust in him (32–33).

God carries every Christian and he will never fail us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5-6). He cares for us better than the best human father cares for his son. John Currid writes, ‘When we face peril, or any apparently adverse circumstances, we need to be reminded of God’s past work that demonstrates that he is providentially caring for us — and then we need to believe and trust in him!’ (COMMENTARY, page 51).

*His love in time past
Forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last
In trouble to sink;*

(John Newton).

He wholly followed the LORD

The Lord had heard the complaints of the people and was angry with them. He was also angry with Moses at Kadesh who had been arrogant and rash in his speech to the people (34–37; cp. Numbers 20:12; Psalm 106:32–33). Thoughtless words and unbelief cost Moses and those people who were twenty years and older (except Joshua and Caleb) the privilege of entering the promised land (Numbers 14:29). Let us be careful to control our tongues. Careless words and statements do not please God and can do much damage in a church.

Joshua and Caleb were men of great faith and they were prepared to stand for God, whatever obstacles lay in their path. Caleb *wholly followed the LORD* (36; cp. Numbers 14:24). Could this be said of you? What is involved in wholly following the Lord?

- Love for God and wholehearted obedience to his word.
- Seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness – being godly.
- Loving truth and hating sin.
- Loving our fellow-Christians, even the awkward ones.

There is not only a warning against rash speech in today's reading, but also against hasty actions. The ten spies died in a plague and the Lord rebuked Israel through Moses. The people then stupidly attacked the Amalekites and the Canaanites, ignoring God's command not to take this course of action. They rebelled against the Lord and were defeated (41–46; cp. Numbers 14:39–45). Let us be sure that all of our plans are prayerfully made. **Rash action is not faith but presumption, and to presume upon God is sin.** Joshua was to lead Israel into Canaan and the Lord told Moses to *encourage him* (38). Even leaders need to be encouraged. Do you encourage your pastor and church leaders, or do you bring them sorrow and heartache?

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart

John Currid observes, 'For the Christian, as for the Jew, this passage ought to be written in gold — that is embossed or highlighted for us in some way.' (COMMENTARY ON DEUTERONOMY, page 161). Jews throughout the world include verses 4 and 5 in their daily prayers; these verses are known as the 'Shema' (the Hebrew word for 'hear'). *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might* (5). The Lord Jesus confirmed that this is the greatest commandment when a scribe asked him, 'Which is the great commandment in the law?' (Matthew 22:36–38). **Jehovah (Yahweh) alone is God. He will not tolerate any rival. He demands first place in our lives and affections.**

We must not only hear and read God's word, but also hide it in our heart (6). Before the invention of the printing press, Christians and Jews did not each possess a copy of God's word and many could not read. They copied out portions of Scripture but they also memorised God's word. We have our Bibles, but we must also memorise Scripture if we are to enjoy a healthy Christian life. *Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you* (Psalm 119:11).

The need for parents to instruct their children in the things of God is again stressed (7, 20–25; cp. 4:9–10). We must spend time with our children and teach them God's word and talk about the things of God to them. We should encourage them to ask questions about Scripture (a child's natural curiosity will lead him to question us). We should be sure to pray with our children each day. Timothy owed much to the instruction of a godly mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15).

The Pharisees had phylacteries (boxes) which contained written portions of the law were worn on the forehead and on the left arm before morning prayers except on Sabbaths and Feast days. The Lord Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their pride in wearing these phylacteries (Matthew 23:5). It is easy to display an outward show of love for God's word, but it is best hidden in our hearts (Psalm 119:11).

Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear me

Moses recalled the circumstances in which the Lord spoke to him and gave him the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone. Mount Sinai had been covered with thick darkness and the people had heard his voice from the midst of the fire. They saw for themselves God's glory and greatness and had been overwhelmed with a sense of great awe and fear (22–26). God gave the commandments to the Israelites because he loved them and desired their well-being. Christian, he loves you too and longs for your whole-hearted obedience to his word. Do you have such a heart in you that fears God and obeys all his commandments?

Moses reminded the Israelites of the promises made at Sinai when he received the Ten Commandments from God (see Exodus 19:7–9; 20:18–21). They had solemnly promised to obey God and he heard those promises which were soon to be broken. Their words were right, but not their hearts (27–29)! God not only hears what we say, but he also sees into our hearts.

The Lord yearned over the Israelites, desiring their love and obedience. He said to Moses, *'Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear me and always keep all my commandments'* (29). What is this fear of God? In his COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS (published by The Banner of Truth Trust), Charles Bridges describes *'the fear of the LORD'* as *'that affectionate reverence, by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his Father's law'*. Do you worship and serve God with reverence and godly fear (Hebrews 12:28)?

As Israel prepared to enter the promised land, Moses warned them that they must not deviate from God's word, but should walk in all his ways (32–33). Obedience to God's word brings a healthy Christian life and it is a delight to those who love the Lord. The Lord Jesus said, *'If you love me, keep my commandments'* (John 14:15). **True and lasting happiness is only found in a reverential fear of God and obedience to his commandments?**

He knows your trudging through this great wilderness

The Israelites had to pass through territory belonging to the Edomites (descendants of Esau), and Moab and Ammon (descendants of Lot), in order to reach the promised land. The mountains of Edom, called here Mount Seir (1), are found to the south and east of the Dead Sea. Moab and Edom were to the west of the Dead Sea (see map, page 5).

The Lord had reminded Moses that he had given these people their land and that Israel was not entitled to possess what God had given to them. He commanded, *'Do not meddle with them'* (5,9,19). The Hebrew word translated *'meddle'* is translated *'contend'* (verse 9). The Israelites were to be sensitive to their fears and not harass them nor provoke them to fight. They were not to plunder the fields of the Edomites but to purchase their food and water from them (6). We are spared unnecessary conflict and trouble when we try to understand the feelings of others. Though the king of Edom had refused the Israelites passage through his land, some of his people were more kindly disposed to them (28–29; cp. Numbers 20:14–21).

God had blessed Israel throughout their long and dangerous journey though they had often sinned against him (there is a reference to the unbelief of the Israelites in verses 14 and 15; cp. Numbers chapter 14). They had enjoyed his gracious presence with them and his provision for all their needs. The Lord knew their difficulties and he watched over them throughout their journey to the borders of the promised land. Moses told them, *'He knows your trudging through this great wilderness'* (7). They had not lacked anything despite their frequent ingratitude. Let us be glad that the Lord does not forsake us when we sin (though we may feel that he has). **God knows all our ways and is good to us. We know that he is with us, even in the wilderness experiences.**

Begin to possess it

The Israelites were not to seek a fight with the Edomites, Ammonites or Moabites, but they were to fight against the Amorites. Moses recalled the Lord's command to him to rise up and to cross over the River Arnon to fight Sihon the Amorite king (see map, page 5). The Lord had encouraged Moses by reminding him that he had destroyed the giant warrior tribes on behalf of the descendants of Esau and Lot (20–22). If he had fought for them, he would surely fight for his covenant people! The Lord promised Moses that he would destroy the confidence of their enemies by putting the dread and fear of Israel upon the nations (24–25). We can also take heart from the principles found in these verses. The Lord is with us when we obey him and work for him. We are not alone in our spiritual warfare. *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8:31).

God is in absolute control of all people and he hardened Sihon's heart to make him hostile to the Israelites (30). God's word to Moses was, *'See, I have begun to give Sihon and his land over to you. Begin to possess it, that you may inherit his land'* (31). The Israelites had to take possession of the land and that would not be without a fight. As they stepped out in obedience to God, he gave them victory. The fortified cities were not strong enough to resist Israel (33–36). God's promises are not to be used as an excuse for laziness or inactivity, but should rather encourage us to stir us up to work for the Lord.

Obedience to God's word brings great blessing! Are you proving the joy of fellowship with God in your Christian experience? If you are not, *begin to possess* by taking hold of God's promises in his word and be sure to repent of any known sin in your life.

*You shall not covet***(Additional reading: 1 Timothy 6:6–11)**

The tenth commandment is concerned with the motives and attitudes within our own hearts. *You shall not covet*. Covetousness (or wrong and selfish desire) lies behind many of the sins forbidden in the commandments. Achan coveted and became a thief (Joshua 7:21). David coveted another man's wife and became an adulterer and a murderer (2 Samuel 11:1–4, 15–17; 12:9). Absalom coveted his father's throne and thus dishonoured him, a sin that led to his rebellion and death (2 Samuel 15:1–10; 18:15). There are many warnings in Scripture against covetousness which is described as *'idolatry'* (Colossians 3:5). This idolatry causes us to violate the first commandment.

Persuasive advertisements in magazines, television and the internet pressurise us to covet the latest gadgets or things in fashion. Many people get into debt so that they can indulge their lust for these things. Covetousness brings discontent and restlessness in our lives because material things and pleasures cannot give lasting satisfaction.

The church is often a breeding-ground for covetousness. Paul warned that a covetous man must not be appointed as an elder or a deacon (1 Timothy 3:3,8). The desire for riches has ensnared and ruined many a believer (1 Timothy 6:9–10). Beware of the false teachers of the so-called 'prosperity' or 'health and wealth' gospel. They promise that if you give generously to God (to their organisation), God being no man's debtor, will reward you tenfold or more. Such evil men who appear to be evangelical, deliberately encourage covetousness. They have become rich at the expense of those whom they have deceived.

Let us search our hearts and repent of any lurking covetous spirit within us. *Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have* (Hebrews 13:5) *because godliness with contentment is great gain* (1 Timothy 6:6).

*You shall not bear false witness***(Additional reading: James 3:1–12)**

God is absolutely just and he expects us to be fair and just. The ninth commandment is concerned to uphold truth and to prevent injustice. *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour* (20). Witnesses in a court of law must speak the truth. False witnesses were used to pervert justice when Naboth was wickedly condemned (1 Kings 21:1–16), and against the Lord Jesus (Matthew 26:57–61). *Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are his delight* (Proverbs 12:22).

The tongue is a part of the body which is very difficult to keep under control; *it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison* (James 3:8). We may shun outright lies but how we need to beware of gossip. Half-truths and rumour have caused great damage in the church of God (gossip tends to exaggerate ‘the facts’ as they are passed on). **We must not spread gossip or even listen to it.** Why do so many who profess the name of Christ enjoy gossip? Is it that it makes us feel so much better than our weaker brother or sister? The Lord Jesus warned that we will be judged by our words (Matthew 12:36–37). If we have anything to say about another, we should first ask ourselves, ‘Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it helpful? Is it kind?’ *Let all bitterness ... and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice, and be kind to one another* (Ephesians 4:31–32).

*If you your lips
Would keep from slips,
Of five things please beware —
Of whom you speak,
To whom you speak,
And when, and why, and where!*

(Matthew Mercer).

Prayer: *Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth;
Keep watch over the door of my lips.* (Psalm 141:3).

Utterly destroying men, women, and children

The kings of Heshbon and Bashan were defeated with Israel ‘*utterly destroying men, women, and children*’ (3–6; cp. 2:33). There are many today who will not accept that God would order such slaughter. They put it all down to tribal warfare and mistaken ideas of God by Moses. These critics are the ones who are out of order. The vile and depraved practices of the Canaanites had to be judged. The evil had to be torn out of the land if Israel was to survive as a people who were set apart to God (cp. Genesis 15:16). The Israelites did not complete their conquest of Canaan and this was an important factor in their fall into idolatry, which proved to be their ruin.

John Currid raises the question, ‘How could a holy and loving God be depicted as ordering the destruction of the Canaanites?’ He points out that ‘One need only consider Leviticus 18 and Deuteronomy 18 to see the depths and types of sins the Canaanites were committing: incest, adultery, child sacrifice, and temple prostitution, to name but a few. Thus what we see in the conquest is God’s justice going forth against those who refuse to acknowledge him, to obey him’ (COMMENTARY, pages 76 & 77). God is a God of love, but he is also holy and just. The Lord Jesus himself spoke much of judgment and of hell (eg. Matthew 5:22, 29–30; 11:22–24; 13:40–43; 25:41–46). We must accept what God says in his word because the Bible is true. We cannot pick and choose what we want to believe. We must tell sinners of judgment and hell as well as the grace and mercy of God. **It is when we realise just how much God has saved us from and at what cost, that we really appreciate the greatness of his amazing love.**

The tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh opted to remain east of Jordan rather than go into the promised land (12–20; cp. Numbers 32). They were attracted to the rich pasture land and though they helped Joshua fight in Canaan, they often suffered the brunt of enemy attack in the later history of Israel (see Judges 10:8,17–18; 2 Kings 10:32–33; 15:29; 1 Chronicles 5:26).

The LORD was angry with me ... and would not listen to me

God had given the Israelites great victories over Sihon, king of Heshbon and Og, king of Bashan. Moses used these successes to encourage Joshua, who succeeded him to the leadership of God's people. Joshua had many battles ahead of him but he must not fear his enemies because God himself was fighting for him (21–22).

Moses longed to see Canaan and to enter the promised land. He pleaded with the Lord to be granted his desire. We have already seen that he had forfeited entry to Canaan through speaking rashly to the people (1:37). He recalled this incident, saying, '*The LORD was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me*' (26). God was not angry with Moses 'on account of his plea, but rather because of the rebellion of Israel at Kadesh Barnea' (Currid, page 91).

The Lord told Moses that his request to enter the land would not be granted and that he was not to pray any more concerning the matter. We are the children of God if we have been born again, but we must never presume that our loving heavenly Father will not be angry with us when we sin. **Moses learned that the Lord freely forgives us when we repent of our sin, but we still have to live with the consequences of our sin. The Lord chastens us because he loves us (Hebrews 12:5–11).**

God did grant Moses' request to see the promised land, however. The Lord told him to go up to the top of Mount Pisgah from where he would be able to view the land he longed to enter (27). Moses was to stand on another mount which was in the promised land. He stood on a high mountain in that land, speaking with the Lord Jesus at his transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–3). What God denies us in this life through his loving and wise discipline, he may be pleased to give us in the next life in a way more wonderful than we can possibly imagine.

*You shall not steal***(Additional reading: Malachi 3:8–10)**

Eve was guilty of the sin of stealing when she took the forbidden fruit in Eden (Genesis 3:6). The first recorded sin after Israel entered the promised land was that of stealing (Joshua 7:21). Judas Iscariot was a thief (John 12:6) and those crucified with the Lord Jesus were robbers (Matthew 27:38,44). Kidnapping is the worst kind of theft; it deprives a person of their freedom. In Israel, it attracted the death penalty (Exodus 21:16). Hostage-taking is a heinous crime in the sight of God.

God commands, '*You shall not steal*' (19). The thief has no right to steal what belongs to others. The Bible teaches that we are entitled to have personal possessions provided that they have been lawfully gained by our own work, by gift or by inheritance. We must never allow wealth ('*mammon*') to become a god in our lives however; it is far better to be poor than to be a slave to material things (cp. Matthew 6:24; 19:21–22)! Christian standards are very different from those of the world. The words of C.H. Spurgeon are so true: 'If faith does not make a man honest, it is not an honest faith' (quoted by John Blanchard in THE COMPLETE GATHERED GOLD, page 315).

Stealing was rife in New Testament times just as it is today. Paul wrote, '*Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need*' (Ephesians 4:28). We may shun the more obvious forms of theft, but do we steal our employer's time by wasting hours at work? Do we waste time browsing websites? Do we use his phone, his stationery or his components for our own personal use and without his permission? **Perhaps for Christians, the most common form of theft is that described in the book of Malachi (3:8–10) — the sin of robbing God by withholding tithes and offerings.** Dare we rob God of our money or time? *You shall not steal.*

You shall not commit adultery

(Additional reading: 1 Corinthians 6:13–20)

The seventh commandment was given to preserve the sanctity of marriage. A man and a woman are made *'one flesh'* in marriage and are joined together by God (Matthew 19:3–6). Adultery violates marriage, and together with other forms of sexual sin, it will be punished by the Judge of all the earth (1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Hebrews 13:4; Revelation 21:8). Sexual immorality was rife in apostolic times and there are repeated warnings against adultery in the New Testament (eg. 1 Corinthians 10:8; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3).

We have seen an explosion of immorality in recent years. Propaganda put out on television, in cinemas and in newspapers would have us believe that extra-marital affairs are quite in order. **Christians must be different.** We must not be influenced by this world's attitudes (Romans 12:1–2). Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit and we must honour God (1 Corinthians 6:18–20). Marriage vows are made before God and must be kept. The influence of the world has taken its toll in the church. The sin of adultery has blighted the life of many a Christian and destroyed many Christian marriages. David's experience is a warning to us all (2 Samuel 11:1 to 12:15). *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality* (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Let us be careful in our choice of reading matter and of the things we watch on television and the internet. Let us beware of foolish, flippant talk that panders to unholy desires. **Adultery begins in the heart, in the thoughts** (Matthew 5:27–28). Are you guilty of entertaining unholy fantasies in your heart? Stop! Repent and seek God's forgiveness, and sin no more (cp. John 8:11). Take Philippians 4:8 seriously and hide God's word in your heart (Psalm 119:11). *You shall not commit adultery.*

God so near ... for whatever reason we may call upon him

Moses left his review of God's dealings with Israel to call upon them to keep God's commandments. They were forbidden to add to God's word or to take from it (2). We need to remember these principles today. Some, who claim to be Christians, take away many passages from God's word by denying the historical account of Creation which is treated as historical fact in this chapter (verse 32). Others refuse to believe that Jesus did mighty miracles during his ministry on earth or that he rose bodily from the dead. Many misuse Scripture, adding to God's word by imposing man-made doctrines upon their followers.

Moses was plain and urgent in his warning against idolatry as he spoke to the people in the valley opposite Baal Peor (3:29). He reminded them of Israel's idolatry in that place when the Lord destroyed twenty-four thousand of them in a plague (3–4; cp. Numbers 25:1–9). They had themselves witnessed this visitation of God in judgment. Moses urged them to live by the commandments of God (5–6). God's word is our wisdom and our understanding, and if we love the Lord, we will gladly obey his word (John 14:15).

Israel enjoyed great blessings as God's special people. The Lord was near to them and they had his righteous commandments and word to guide them (7–8). Moses asked, *'For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon him?'* Christians are described as God's *own special people* (1 Peter 2:9). God makes his home with us and nothing can separate us from his wonderful love (John 14:23; Romans 8:35–39).

Christian, are you passing through difficult times? Have you burdens that weigh heavily upon you? Do you need wisdom and direction for decisions that you have to make? **Oh, remember that God is near to you and that he will hear you when you call upon him.** Come boldly now to his throne of grace where you will obtain mercy and find grace to help you in this time of need (Hebrews 4:15).

Take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself

Moses urged Israel, ‘*Take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself*’ (9). This exhortation is repeated in verse 15. We all need this timely reminder to watch ourselves (cp. 1 Timothy 4:16). Why is this so necessary? We are prone to forget what God has done for us and the precious things of his word can soon depart from our hearts (9). The Lord urges us, ‘*Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life*’ (Proverbs 4:23). We must be careful not to slip into a sloppy, careless Christian life lacking the discipline of prayer and obedience to God’s word. ‘*Take heed to yourself.*’ When did you last think seriously about your spiritual life?

Christian parents have the added responsibility of instructing their children and grandchildren in the things of God (9). Many professing Christian men play very little part in the godly upbringing and training of their children. This is an abdication of God-given responsibility (Ephesians 6:4). It is true that Timothy received his godly training from his mother and grandmother, but his father was not a believer (Acts 16:1; 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). **Christian fathers, how do you view your privilege and responsibility before God to train your children?** The sooner we begin to read the Bible to our children, pray with them and instruct them, the better. We will then find it much easier to discuss spiritual matters with them as they grow older. We will need to have patience and above all, by example teach our children.

Moses recalled the awesome occasion when the Lord spoke to Israel at Sinai (10–14). They heard his voice but they could not see him. The Second Commandment thus forbids us to make or worship any image that is supposed to represent the Lord. What an impression that must have left on the hearts of the young! Our children must be taught the fear of the Lord (10) and we must take them to worship with God’s people each Lord’s Day and to other meetings (cp. Acts 21:5). The evil influences of society around them are like poison to their souls. We must expose them to godly influences.

You shall not murder

(Additional reading: 1 John 3:10–15)

Human life is sacred because man is made in the image of God who commands, ‘*You shall not murder*’ (17). Cain, the first murderer, asked God, ‘*Am I my brother’s keeper?*’ (Genesis 4:9). The sixth commandment teaches us that we are our brother’s keeper. Any person daring to take another’s life deserves to die. The death penalty is the only adequate punishment for murder (Genesis 9:6; Romans 13:4). Accidental killing (manslaughter) did not attract the death penalty but if deliberate carelessness caused loss of life, the crime was considered as murder (cp. 22:8; Exodus 21:28–29). This principle applied today would make killing through drunken or dangerous driving not manslaughter but murder. We are our brother’s keeper.

The appalling effects of the teaching of evolution and secularism are only too apparent. If man is only an advanced animal, as some people would have us believe, his dignity is destroyed. Life is considered a cheap thing by so many; witness the increase in violence and murder in society and the practice of abortion. Those who claim that the death penalty for murder is a barbaric practice are often the very ones who support the killing of the unborn child through abortion. We live in a fallen world with topsy-turvy values.

The Lord Jesus took this commandment to a far deeper level. He taught that anger against a brother without cause will be in the same category as murder in the day of judgment (Matthew 5:22). Moreover, if we hate our brother, we are guilty of murder in our hearts (1 John 3:15; cp. Matthew 15:19). **Hatred of fellow Christians should be unthinkable. We must not only have an absence of hatred, but also a practical love for other believers** (1 John 3:14–18; 4:20 to 5:1). Let us think seriously about the implications of this commandment. Are you harbouring hateful thoughts towards anyone, believer or unbeliever? *You shall not murder.*

Honour your father and your mother

(Additional reading:– Ephesians 6:1–4)

The breakdown of family life in so much of our society and the lack of parental training and discipline of children has brought chaotic and tragic consequences. Thousands of young people are homeless and know little stability. Children are commanded, *‘Obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord’* (Colossians 3:20). Parents must bring up their children *in the training and admonition of the Lord* (Ephesians 6:4; cp. Proverbs 1:8–9; 6:20–22). Fathers must seek to understand their children and not provoke them by making unreasonable demands upon them (Colossians 3:21).

How should a Christian young person behave when ungodly parents make demands which would cause him to disobey God? He must place obedience to God first, but never use such a principle for dishonouring parents (cp. Matthew 15:3–6). A Christian must be sensitive to the fears of non-Christian parents who are lovingly concerned for him and may be fearful that their own child is becoming ‘a religious fanatic’. He should show that he is now more thoughtful and ready to help in the home than ever he was before he came to Christ. Practical Christianity will do much to convince parents that their child is far better for becoming a Christian. God will honour such a testimony.

Though adults are under no obligation to obey their parents and have their own lives to lead, they must continue to honour them. Joseph became great in Egypt, but he still bowed down in honour of his aged father (Genesis 48:12). King Solomon honoured his mother (1 Kings 2:19). The sinless Son of God obeyed his earthly parents and was practically concerned for his mother even as he hung on the cross (Luke 2:51; John 19:25–27). We are to care for the needs of our parents as far as we are able (1 Timothy 5:16). *Honour your father and your mother* (16). There is a promise with this commandment (cp. Ephesians 6:2–3). **How are you honouring your parents?**

You will find him if you seek him with all your heart

Moses reminded the people about the God to whom they belonged by covenant. God was near to them (7,37); invisible (15); holy (24); jealous (24); merciful (31). God is our Creator (32); almighty in power (34,37) and in love (37). He is unique (the one and only God, 35,39). Theologians call this wonderful subject about the character of God, ‘the attributes of God’. John Currid writes, ‘Religious modernism teaches that all religions basically hold to the same things and to the same god by different names. Religious pluralism and tolerance are the mantras of the day. This, however, is clearly false teaching. Yahweh is not Allah; Yahweh is not Buddha; Yahweh is Yahweh, and there is no other’ (COMMENTARY ON DEUTERONOMY, page 117. ‘Yahweh’ is the Hebrew name for God translated ‘Jehovah’ or ‘LORD’).

It is a great privilege to belong to such a wonderful God (32–38) and Moses gave a strong warning about forsaking him to worship idols or the sun, moon and stars (15–19, 23–25, 28). God cannot be seen (12, 15–16) and we must not represent him with carved images. He is jealous for our whole-hearted devotion and obedience. This is the pathway of blessing (*‘that it may go well with you’* 39–40).

Moses warned the people about falling into idolatry when they had *‘grown old in the land’* (25). You may have been a Christian for many years, you have been in ‘the land’ a long time. ‘Growing old in the land’ brings its perils. We become used to God’s blessings and take them for granted, becoming complacent and this may lead to backsliding and coldness of heart. We can so easily become taken up with the idols of materialism and earthly pleasures that we lose the joy of the Lord in our lives. Does this describe you? There is a promise here for you: *You will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul* (29). This means being serious about seeking God so that you will put aside all distractions and repent of any known sin in your life. **Are you seeking God with all your heart and with all your soul?**

The law which Moses set before the children of Israel

In some nations long ago, the nearest relative of a murder victim was expected to take vengeance by slaying the murderer. There was always the possibility that revenge would be taken on someone who had not intended to kill, but was guilty of manslaughter. If an attack was unprovoked it was not considered as accidental killing but as murder (Numbers 35:16–23). The Lord provided for doubtful cases by setting apart six of the cities belonging to the Levites as ‘cities of refuge’. Three of the cities were to be on the east side of the Jordan, with the other three to the west of the river. Verses 41 to 43 describe the setting apart of the three cities of refuge on the east of the Jordan (cp. Numbers 35:10–14).

A person who killed accidentally was able to flee to a city of refuge where his case was fairly judged. If found guilty of murder, he was handed over for execution. If he was guilty of manslaughter, he had to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest when he was given an amnesty. He left the city before such a time at his own peril (Numbers 35:24–29).

Moses’ second address to the people is introduced in verses 44–49. *And this is the law which Moses set before the children of Israel* (44). The Lord did not leave his people without direction and the law is detailed in chapters 5 to 26. We should not be surprised that many object to rules and regulations because *sin is lawlessness* (1 John 3:4).

Samuel Bolton wrote, ‘The law sends us to the gospel to learn how to be saved because the law cannot save us, and the gospel sends us back to the law to learn how to live.’ (THE TRUE BOUNDS OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM – first published 1645, now published by Banner of Truth Trust). Real liberty and happiness come from keeping God’s word (Proverbs 29:18; John 13:17). **Do you love and obey God’s word?**

Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy

(Additional reading:– Isaiah 58:13–14)

Some Christians believe that observing Sunday as a Christian sabbath is legalism. Is it any more legalistic than keeping the first three commandments? There has been much controversy about the commandment to keep the Sabbath. Some believe that Christians are not bound by it, but the Lord Jesus never once said that he had done away with the Sabbath principle. He stated that *the Sabbath was made for man* (Mark 2:27). It was given for the well-being of all people. God blessed and sanctified (set apart) the seventh day at creation (Exodus 20:11; Genesis 2:3). He expected the people to keep the Sabbath before he gave the law at Sinai (Exodus 16:23–29).

The Sabbath prevented the exploitation of servants and even working animals were to have their day of rest (14). The scribes and Pharisees later imposed many man-made rules for Sabbath observance. They were in constant conflict with the Lord Jesus on this issue (eg. Mark 2:23 to 3:4). The early church kept the first day of the week as the Sabbath when they met for worship and called it ‘*the Lord’s Day*’ (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10).

This commandment also legislated for six days of work each week. Many of us are not required to work six days out of seven and we have generally become very leisure orientated. God’s work suffers because many Christians spend increasing time and money on leisure pursuits and less on supporting the interests of God’s kingdom. We enjoy more free time than believers of earlier ages. Are we using it wisely for the Lord?

Let us use the Lord’s Day to give ourselves to worship, praise, meditation and works of mercy. Look at the promise of Isaiah 58:13–14. Is the Lord’s day special to you? *Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain

(Additional reading: Colossians 3:8–9; 4:6)

The third commandment teaches us that we must always be careful to reverence the name of God. The name of God reveals his holy character (cp. Exodus 3:13–15). God's name may be taken in vain through word, behaviour or worship:

- Many people use the name of God when they swear or curse. Such blasphemy violates this commandment and will not go unpunished. It is permissible to use God's name to confirm an oath (6:13; Matthew 26:63–64; 2 Corinthians 1:23; 11:31; Galatians 1:20). If we are not being truthful when we make such oaths, we take God's name in vain (Leviticus 19:12; Isaiah 48:1).
- Christians are called by the name of the Lord. If we behave in an unchristian manner, we blaspheme his name and thus we break the third commandment (Luke 6:46; cp. Amos 2:6–7; 1 Timothy 6:1).
- **It is all too easy to take God's name in vain when we worship or when we pray. We do this if we use his name thoughtlessly or lightly.** Some people keep repeating, 'Hallelujah' (which means 'Praise Jehovah') or 'Jesus! Jesus!' when they pray. They give little thought to what they are saying. This is not a mark of being spiritual but of being immature. We must not sing non-religious songs which use God's name or the word, 'Hallelujah,' eg. 'Michael row that boat ashore, hallelujah!' Does this sound too restrictive? Remember the third commandment and take it seriously. *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.*

When we use God's name in speech or song, let us think before we open our mouths. Let us revere his holy name and be thoughtful in our worship. The Lord Jesus teaches us to pray, '*Hallowed be your name*' (Matthew 6:9).

The LORD our God made a covenant with us

Moses now addresses the people with a call, '*Hear, O Israel*' (1). His call to the people to listen is also a call to obedience to God's commandments (cp. 4:1; 6:3–4). He reminded the people that they were bound to God by covenant. He said, '*The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb*' (2). A covenant is a binding agreement between two or more persons, bringing them into a special relationship and commitment to each other. The covenant brought great responsibilities as well as great privileges to the people of God. The Ten Commandments and the laws recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy are an essential part of this covenant. Those who loved God found obedience to his laws a delight rather than a burden.

Every Christian belongs to God by a covenant sealed with the precious blood of Christ (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 12:24). This new covenant replaces the covenant made at Horeb. This is *a better covenant, which was established on better promises* (Hebrews 8:6). A sure sign of belonging to God is that we want to obey him. When God promised the new covenant through the prophet Jeremiah, he said, '*I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*' (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Hebrews 8:7–13).

The new covenant does not make us lawless. God has written his law in our hearts in order that we keep it. The Ten Commandments which follow these verses are still binding on the Christian.

Our love for the Lord Jesus is seen in our obedience to his commandments, and this includes the Ten Commandments (John 14:15). **The Lord is totally committed to us in this covenant. Do you show that you are committed to him by leading a life of obedience to his word?**

*You shall have no other gods before me***(Additional reading: Joshua 24:13–28)**

Notes on the Ten Commandments are adapted from the notes written on Exodus chapter 20. Additional readings are given to throw further light on each commandment.

The Lord had brought the Israelites out of bondage and they owed it to God to love him and to obey him (6). God has brought us out of a bondage far worse than that of Egypt at tremendous cost (John 8:34–36; Ephesians 2:1–3; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20; 1 Peter 1:18–19). When the Lord Jesus was asked, ‘Which is the great commandment in the law?’ he replied, ‘*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*’ (Matthew 22:36–37).

God emphasized the importance of keeping the first commandment, ‘*You shall have no other gods before me*’ (7). This does not mean that having additional gods is permitted as long as God is first. The words ‘before me’ indicate ‘before my face’ or ‘over against me’ (see John Currid’s EP COMMENTARY ON DEUTERONOMY, page 130).

If we keep the first commandment, it will follow that we will seek to keep the other nine. We show our love for God by obeying him. Israel solemnly promised that they would serve the Lord (Joshua 24:24), but they repeatedly broke this promise (eg. Judges 2:11–12; Jeremiah 2:11–13).

We tend to think of ‘other gods’ as pagan deities, idols of wood and stone, but there are other gods which we may serve. Paul pointed out that *there are many gods and many lords* (1 Corinthians 8:5). We live in a materialistic society where people will go to any length to accumulate wealth and possessions. Jesus said, ‘*You cannot serve God and mammon*’ (‘riches’ – Matthew 6:24). **We may find ourselves building our lives around some of these ‘gods’ without realising just how much we are sinning.** Let us be like Joshua who said, ‘*As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD*’ (Joshua 24:15).

*You shall not make for yourself any carved image***(Additional reading: Psalm 115:1–11)**

The second commandment forbids the making and the worship of images. Pagan worshippers in ancient times believed that the god or spirit represented by an image, was brought nearer to them as they bowed down and performed their ritual before it. God is scathing in his condemnation of idol worship (Psalm 115:1–8 and Isaiah 44:9–20). Idols are useless blocks of wood or stone which have speechless mouths, sightless eyes, deaf ears, unsmelling noses and unfeeling hands. The Lord is a jealous God who will not share his glory with images or pictures (Isaiah 40:18–20; Romans 1:21–23). He will surely punish idolaters (8–9).

Some churches stand condemned by this commandment because of their veneration of statues, crucifixes, and the wafer in the Mass (which they believe is transformed into the actual body of Christ and sacrificed afresh by the priest). It is interesting to note that Roman Catholic catechisms miss out the second commandment and split the tenth commandment into two to make up the number. **God requires us to worship him with simplicity, and without man-made ritual or so-called ‘aids to worship’.** *God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth* (John 4:24).

A more subtle form of idolatry has entered some churches. It is the technique of ‘visualising’ where you concentrate your mind, for example, on Jesus, just as you imagine him to be. Those who practice such techniques in prayer and so-called ‘inner healing’ claim that they can actually touch and be held by the visualised image of Jesus. Scripture does not sanction such practices. They violate the principles laid down in the second commandment and are derived from occult practices. Thousands of professing Christians have been enticed into such practices. Let us beware. *Keep yourselves from idols* (1 John 5:21).