

PART TWO
EXCLUSIVE ALLEGIANCE TO YHWH
DEUTERONOMY 4:44 – 11:32

Introduction to 4:44 – 11:32

Before having Moses communicate to the people the rest of the statutes and edicts revealed to him at Horeb (chapters 12-25), the Deuteronomists offer what Walter Brueggemann calls ‘the richest instructional, homiletical and theological materials in the book of Deuteronomy, for they articulate the historical memories and motivations that frame and give the context to the commandments to follow’(page 83).

Moses reminds the people of the ‘covenant which YHWH our God made with us at Horeb’(5:2) and goes on to spell out the ‘ten words’(the decalogue) which they heard spoken to them by YHWH on the mountain (5:6-21). They must observe these commandments diligently and teach them to their children. He goes on to speak of the necessity of giving their exclusive allegiance to YHWH.

If we are right in seeing chapter 1:1 to 4:33 as a later and expanded introduction to Deuteronomy, we can perhaps best understand these verses (4:44-49) as an earlier attempt to give the setting of what the Deuteronomic School presents as Moses' final testament. Some expressions used here are repeated in the expanded introduction which opens with the words 'These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan'(1:1), and goes on to say: 'Beyond the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this law'(1:5).

The solemn opening here in chapter four focuses immediately on the essential content of the Book, using four words that refer to YHWH's revealed will, words that will recur throughout the book:

- 'law'(tôrâ, 4:44; see 1:5). The Priestly School use this word for specific instructions (see, for example, Leviticus 6:2, where it is translated 'ritual'). The Deuteronomic School use it to cover the whole of YHWH's revelation, which teaches who YHWH is and what YHWH is doing, as well as teaching who we are and how we are to respond to YHWH.
- 'decree'('ēdūt, 4:45): that which witnesses to the will of the legislator.
- 'statute'(ḥōq; 4:45; see 4:1): a written law.
- 'edict'('judgment', mišpāt; 4:45; see 4:1): a court decision binding in law.

See 3:39 and 4:3-4 for an expansion on the reference to Beth-peor (4:46). It is a stark reminder of how easy it is to fall into idolatry, and of the dreadful effects of doing so.

See 1:4 and 2:24-3:17 for an expansion on the reference to the victories over Sihon and Og (4:46-47). If they can be so successful in Transjordan, they should be confident in YHWH's victory when they cross the Jordan.

The more expanded introduction also mentions 'Aroer'(4:48, see 2:26, 3:12), the "Wadi Arnon"(4:48, see 2:36, 3:8), 'Sirion-Hermon' (4:48, see 3:9), 'the Arabah'(4:49, see 3:17), and 'Pisgah' (4:49, see 3:17, 27).

⁴⁴This is the law that Moses set before the Israelites. ⁴⁵These are the decrees and the statutes and edicts that Moses spoke to the Israelites when they had come out of Egypt, ⁴⁶beyond the Jordan in the valley opposite Beth-peor, in the land of King Sihon of the Amorites, who reigned at Heshbon, whom Moses and the Israelites defeated when they came out of Egypt. ⁴⁷They occupied his land and the land of King Og of Bashan, the two kings of the Amorites on the eastern side of the Jordan: ⁴⁸from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Wadi Arnon, as far as Mount Sirion (that is, Hermon), ⁴⁹together with all the Arabah on the east side of the Jordan as far as the Sea of the Arabah, under the slopes of Pisgah.

¹Moses convened all Israel, and said to them:

Hear, O Israel, the statutes and *edicts* that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently.

²YHWH our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. ³Not with our ancestors did YHWH make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today.

⁴YHWH spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the fire.

⁵(At that time I was standing between YHWH and you to declare to you the words of YHWH; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain.) And he said:

Moses' opening words are addressed to 'all Israel (5:1, see also 1:1). Verse one is also echoed in the expanded introduction: 'Israel, give heed to ('hear') the statutes and edicts that I am teaching you to observe'(Deuteronomy 4:1).

Verses two and three declare that what Moses has to say is addressed to every member of the people of Israel, in every generation, for all time. The adults have died who were present at Horeb when the covenant (b^orît, 5:2; see 4:13, 23, 31) was 'made'(k^arat, 'cut', see 4:23; it was engraved in stone). Moses is addressing their children, the oldest of whom were at Horeb. The covenant was made with Israel, and is to be renewed by every successive generation, as it was, for example, in the time of Josiah (see the Introduction, page 20-21):

The king went up to the house of YHWH, and with him went all the people of Judah, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, the prophets, and all the people, both small and great; he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the house of YHWH. The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before YHWH, to follow YHWH, keeping his commandments, his decrees, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. All the people joined in the covenant.

– 2Kings 23:2-3

The Deuteronomist is asserting to Josiah's contemporaries, and again to the people in Exile, that the covenant was made 'with all of us here alive today'(5:3). Every generation is to see itself as present on Horeb. The language in which the Horeb experience is described is echoed in 4:11. It is traditional (see Exodus 20:18-21).

In verses four and five the Deuteronomist is making a basic theological point. From God's side revelation is direct: 'face to face'(5:4). From our side, however, our experience of God is always mediated. This was stressed in the introduction where the people were reminded: 'you saw no form'(4:15). Even though Moses has a unique relationship with YHWH, and so can mediate between YHWH and the people (5:5), the same has to be said of him. On the one hand: 'YHWH used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend'(Exodus 33:11). On the other hand, YHWH told Moses: 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live'(Exodus 33:20).

The Deuteronomist is quoting word for word from the tradition (see Exodus 20:2). YHWH is addressing the people as a united community ('your' in verse six and throughout is in the *singular*), and each member of the community is to hear the words addressed to him/herself personally.

I am YHWH your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;

We are being addressed by the One who has liberated us from slavery, who has 'carried you, just as one carries a child, all the way that you travelled until you reached this place' (1:31; see Hosea 13:4). The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt, with no law to protect them, and no rights. God heard their cry and liberated them from oppression. He is about to spell out the demands of living a life that is truly free.

'I am YHWH' is how God addressed Abraham (Genesis 15:7) and Jacob (Genesis 28:13). We recall especially God's words to Moses (Exodus 6:2-8), where he assured Moses that he remembered his 'promise' (b^crît, 6:5). This section is about the 'promise' (b^crît, 5:2) – translated now as 'covenant' (5:2), for it goes beyond what God is promising to include how we are to respond in order to enjoy what God is offering.

I am YHWH your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

– Psalm 81:10

God wants to be in an especially intimate communion with us as 'his very own possession' (4:20). The liberating and the offering of communion is unconditional, but cannot be automatic, for God is love and respects our freedom. Only a response of love allows God's unconditional love to draw us into this extraordinarily intimate communion. God wants us to know what we need to do to respond to his love and to welcome the intimacy that he offers. God's answer to this need is the content of the law which is to follow.

This covenant law which governed the life of the people of ancient Israel was seen by them to be basic to their very existence as a people. They considered it to be a gift to them from God, the author of life itself and the one who formed them into a nation. They saw themselves as being privileged to have it and they delighted in it as in a treasured gift:

The law of YHWH is perfect, reviving the soul.
the decrees of YHWH are sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of YHWH are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of YHWH is clear, enlightening the eyes.

– Psalm 19:7-8

The Decalogue

Among the many laws that regulated every aspect of their communal and personal lives, the ‘Ten Words’(Decalogue) held a special place. They express in summary form the basic imperatives which the people were to follow in their relations to God and to each other. Jesus himself lived by them and referred to them, as do the authors of the New Testament. For Jews and Christians they remain, still today, a basic rule of life.

The fact that for the most part the two accounts of the ‘Ten Words’(Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21) are identical in wording is an indication of the care with which ancient traditions were handed down through the centuries. The fact that there are differences in the accounts shows that the authors knew that their God was a living God, and that they had to keep listening to his word and striving to penetrate to the full meaning of the way which God was inspiring them to live. One cannot over-estimate the importance of the words which hold the revelation. However, Israel placed its faith, not in the human words, but in God himself who was constantly present in their history, and who was constantly revealing his will to them in the events of their history and in the words of their prophets.

The basic laws protecting life, marriage and the right to whatever is needed to sustain these (Exodus 20:13-15; Deuteronomy 5:17-19) can be found in ancient Near East codes of law that pre-date Exodus. The code found in the Torah goes beyond them in that it is concerned with motivation and intention and not only actions (Exodus 20:16-17; Deuteronomy 5:20-21). But, more importantly, the laws regulating social behaviour are founded on a relationship with YHWH, the God of the Exodus. Social responsibilities flow from the covenant which God has made with his people. It is for this reason that the code begins with commandments which regulate our behaviour in relation to God.

The text is clear that there are ten words (see 4:13). It is not clear on how exactly the words are to be numbered. Since the time of Clement of Alexandria (died c.215AD) verses seven to ten have traditionally been considered to make up the first commandment. The conventional Jewish tradition is also to count these verses as one ‘word’, though they see them as the *second word* not the first. For Jews, the first word is the statement of faith contained in verse six. In this commentary we will follow both these conventions by keeping verses seven to ten together. We will number them as the first commandment. As we will see, this necessitates dividing verse twenty-one into two commandments: the ninth and the tenth.

The first commandment (5:7-10)

These verses, too, are quoted direct from the tradition (see Exodus 20:3-6). The importance of this commandment is indicated by its comparative length, by its position in the code, and by the fact that the Deuteronomists chose to focus on it so deliberately in their introduction (see 4:15-23). It is the relationship which the community has with God that ultimately determines the relationship which the members have with each other. Worship of false 'gods' is a form of slavery. YHWH has liberated them from more than physical slavery in Egypt.

We are not commanded to worship an abstract god. It is not a matter of managing to put the right name, 'YHWH', on any god we might choose to follow. When we worship, we are to worship the one who liberated the people of Israel from Egypt, and no other. If we worship the God who hates oppression, we will not be tempted to oppress each other; if we make our first and ultimate concern the worship of YHWH, we will listen to his word and obey his commands. It is this truth which is at the heart of the 'Ten Words'. The ultimate question is not: 'Do you or do you not believe in and worship God?' But rather: 'Who is the God in whom you believe and whom you worship?' The 'Ten Words' demand that it be YHWH: the God who hears the cry of the poor (a central concern of the Deuteronomic School).

This commandment goes on to warn against creating our own 'gods', only to be enslaved by them. 'Idols' (images in stone, clay or metal) are an obvious danger in a world where such images were rife. We make more subtle idols of our own will, our own desires. Even the words of the Bible or the words in which we are accustomed to express our faith in God can be an 'idol'. To speak of God as 'jealous' (5:9; see 4:24) is to say that there is no substitute for real love, and that the source of real love is YHWH and no other. God does not want a rival 'god' to enslave our hearts.

God assures us of his 'steadfast love' (*hesed*, covenant loyalty). We can be confident that God will never break the covenant. We are called to trust that God is with us, and to walk with God into our future knowing that God will be there with us and for us. We are called to 'listen' (*šāma*) to this God, to 'love' (*'ahab*) the One who has freed us and is carrying us (1:31), and to 'keep' (*šāmar*) his commandments (5:10) that spell out the path of freedom and life.

⁷you shall have no other gods before me. ⁸You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁹You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I YHWH your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, ¹⁰but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

The First Commandment

When the people of Israel asked: 'Who is God?', they were able to point to the Exodus. We who have come to know Jesus can point to him, and to that more catholic ('universal'), and more complete liberation which he effected by his compassionate love. Just as all their images of 'God' had to be checked against the experience of the Exodus, so all our images must be checked against Jesus: his prayer, his faith, his life given in carrying out his mission of love.

The God of the Exodus and the God and Father of Jesus cannot be represented in the fixed forms of cult images. God cannot be contained within even the inspired words of Sacred Scripture or the infallible expressions of dogma. God remains mysteriously transcendent, and so we must remain always open to the surprise of God's word: the way God chooses to reveal himself in history. Faithful to what he has done in the Exodus and in Jesus, and listening humbly and obediently to his word spoken within the community of the faithful, we must remain always ready to journey on into the mystery of divine communion. We are not allowed to limit our attention to what is obvious. We are not allowed to be content with religious routine. We may not control the divine or make it predictable. We must not worship anything less than the real, living God. That is the message of the first commandment.

Failure to obey the first commandment has bad effects on ourselves and on those whom our behaviour affects. What we do matters. We cannot pretend that it is otherwise. Neither does God pretend. For a theological exploration of the theme of divine 'wrath' or 'punishment' (5:9) see pages 40-42. How we see these will depend on whether or not we imagine God as controlling the world (see the treatment in the Introduction pages 28-30). While there are disturbing elements of communal guilt and communal responsibility in the scriptures, and while there is an understanding in some places that the source of infection must be eradicated to prevent it spreading even if this means that the innocent are caught up in the suffering, there is also an insistence on God's justice, and that only the guilty are punished (see Deuteronomy 24:16; 7:10). Nor does God inflict arbitrary evil on those who do not obey, as though 'divine punishment' were an extra added on to punish the sinner. 'Punishment' is the effect brought on by sin itself. God uses it to draw us to repentance, but if we are hard-hearted and obstinate in behaving unjustly, we cannot just wish away the evil results, and God, the truthful one, must judge things to be the way they are.

If we remain obstinate and refuse to learn from the effects of our sinful behaviour, and if we die unrepentant, Jesus himself speaks of the eternal punishment of hell. This is not something that God imposes on the sinner. It is, as defined by the Catholic Catechism, 'a state of definitive *self-exclusion* from communion with God and the blessed' (n.1033). At the same time, as the final words of the commandment make clear, divine initiative is always loving. Those who 'reject' (*śāna*, 'hate') God, that is to say, those who do not allow God's creating and redeeming love to be effective in their lives, will end up destroying themselves and hurting others. The hurt can carry on to our grandchildren and their children (see Ezekiel 18:2). However, there is no comparison between the effects of sin and the effects of love. The latter never end, but continue to radiate good 'to the thousandth generation', for love (faithfully carrying out God's will) enables entry into the world of the liberating love of YHWH.

The second commandment (5:11)

The second commandment is also taken straight from the tradition (see Exodus 20:7). It goes much further than ensuring that we refer to God in a polite way, or that we refrain from perjury, or from taking oaths in a trivial way, though it includes these (see Sirach 23:23:9-11; Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12). It applies to everything that we do in God's name. The person who claims to be speaking for God, but whose words do not come from God, is breaking this commandment. The person or institution that, in God's name, behaves in ways that are not consistent with the action of God in the Exodus or in Jesus, is breaking this commandment. Anyone who would attempt, however subtly, to confine God within the limits of human words or customs is breaking this commandment.

When we reflect on all the injustices that have been done in God's name, and on all the imperfect images of God that have been imposed on people in God's name, we begin to realise how radical this commandment is. We must be very careful when we call on God to support our teaching. Prophecy, theology, liturgy and prayer can be genuine and they can be false. They can be authentic expressions of genuine religious encounters with the living God, or they can be substitutes for such an encounter. The second commandment demands the utmost care of us when we speak or act in God's name.

¹¹You shall not make wrongful use of the name of YHWH your God, for YHWH will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

¹²Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as YHWH your God commanded you. ¹³Six days you shall labour and do all your work. ¹⁴But the seventh day is a sabbath to YHWH your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. ¹⁵Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and YHWH your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore YHWH your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

The third commandment (5:12-15)

The only two positive commandments, the third and fourth, take us to the heart of the family and provide a basic model for the way we should relate to God and to each other. The third commandment is addressed to those responsible for the household. The fourth commandment is addressed to adults and concerns the way we are to relate to our aged parents.

A lot is said about stopping work. The name ‘sabbath’ (šabbāt) is related to the verb ‘to stop’ (šābat). However, the perspective must not be missed: ceasing work is so that the day can be ‘kept holy’ (5:12; see Isaiah 58:13). The third commandment has powerful symbolic value. Positively there is the command to work: we have the obligation and the privilege of continuing God’s creative and redeeming work (5:13). There is, however, a danger that we will think that everything depends upon us. There is also the danger that the systems of authority that are basic to social organisation will appear absolute, and that those under authority will be treated as of lesser dignity than those who exercise authority.

The seventh day, therefore, stands as a symbol of our need for God and of our equality before God. This day is to be set aside so that everyone (‘you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns’) may ‘rest’, may have the space to attend to God. The Exodus decalogue speaks here of God’s resting, linking this command to the very purpose of creation (Genesis 2:1-3), which was to have this special covenant relationship with God. The Deuteronomist links it to God’s redemptive action in the Exodus, reminding the people that they were slaves once, thus reinforcing the call to justice.

It was particularly at the time of the Babylonian Exile that the Sabbath became an important element in Jewish self-identity. Unable to go to the temple, the exiles came together (this is the meaning of the word ‘synagogue’) on the Sabbath to remember and to pray. It was a day consecrated to God, and its observance was symbolic of the commitment of the people to keep their part of the covenant.

You shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you ... Whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people ... Therefore the Israelites shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant.

– Exodus 31:13,16

If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honourable; if you honour it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord.

– Isaiah 58:13-14

Even though some of the elements of this commandment were linked to the Christian Sunday, Gentile Christians were not expected to observe the details of this third commandment (see Colossians 2:16). Jesus is shown as putting the focus on love rather than on not working (see John 7:21-23; Mark 2:25-28). At the same time Christian communities continue to encourage us to examine the work we do ourselves and the work we expect of others to make sure that we are not enslaved or enslaving others by it. The Catholic Catechism, for example, has this to say (n. 2185):

The faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord’s Day, the carrying out of the works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body ... They should see to it that legitimate excuses do not lead to habits prejudicial to religion, family life and health.

The change in focus from the Sabbath to the Sunday is explained by Ignatius of Antioch (early second century):

We have seen how former adherents of the ancient customs have since attained to a new hope; so that they have given up keeping the Sabbath, and now order their lives by the Lord’s day instead, the day when life first dawned for us, thanks to him and his death. That death, though some deny it, is the very mystery which has moved us to become believers, and endure tribulation to prove ourselves pupils of Jesus Christ, our sole teacher.

– Letter to the Magnesians n.9

Fourth Commandment

¹⁶Honour your father and your mother, as YHWH your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that YHWH your God is giving you.

The fourth commandment (5:16)

In the fourth commandment our attention moves from ourselves as parents having authority to ourselves as children owing honour to our aged parents. To honour one's parents includes respect, care and affection. It is to acknowledge that the life we have is received as a gift. It is also to remember that the promises of God and the gift of the law come to us through our parents. To honour one's parents is to be ready to give them back in their need what they gave us in ours. The Book of Proverbs returns frequently to this theme. Besides giving an extended treatment of this topic in chapter three, Jesus Ben Sira writes:

With all your heart honour your father, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. Remember that it was of your parents you were born; how can you repay what they have given to you?

– Sirach 7:27-28

Tobit's admonition to his son reads:

My son, when I die, give me a proper burial. Honour your mother and do not abandon her all the days of her life. Do whatever pleases her, and do not grieve her in anything. Remember her, my son, because she faced many dangers for you while you were in her womb. And when she dies, bury her beside me in the same grave.

– Tobit 4:3-4

The values inculcated in the family by the third and fourth commandments provide the basis for all the positive values that are to inform human interaction. They direct us to recognise that in all we do we are instruments of God's creative and redemptive action, and that everything is a gift to be accepted with gratitude and shared in love. If we do this we will be God's instruments in bringing about the reign of God's love on earth.

The fifth, sixth and seventh commandments are expressed without comment. As with the other commandments in this summary text, no sanctions are mentioned. The decalogue expresses the essential conditions of the covenant. It will need to be followed up with specific legislation. The ‘you’ in each case is singular. These commands aim to protect a person’s right to life, to marriage and family, and to those simple basic possessions without which one cannot live or rear a family with security and dignity. These commands are directed to members of the covenant community of Israel. The word ‘neighbour’, for example, in 5:20 (rēa’) refers to a fellow Israelite.

Unlike the equivalent commands in Exodus 20:13-15 there is an ‘and’ (w^c) linking these three commands. As we indicate on the following page, this is not without significance.

In Genesis 9:6 we read:

Whoever sheds the blood of a human,
by a human shall that person’s blood be shed;
for in his own image God made humankind.

The command stated here is more restricted. The word translated ‘murder’ (20:13, rāṣaḥ) refers to intentional killing by use of force. It is never used in the Hebrew Bible for killing in battle or for killing in self-defence. As the commandment stands it is not directed against capital punishment, or killing an enemy in war, or suicide – though the principle does bear on these and related matters. What is forbidden is the illegal taking of the life of a member of the community of Israel, even in revenge for a crime committed by that person. A member of the covenant community of Israel is not to take the law into his own hands.

‘Committing adultery’ (nā’ap) is called the ‘great sin’ (Genesis 20:9; see Genesis 39:9).

The commandment against stealing (gānab) was not understood as protecting possessions unjustly acquired, or luxuries held in the face of deprivation and poverty. The prophets accuse the rich of stealing from the poor (Isaiah 5:1-17; Amos 4:1-3; 6:1-7; 8:4-8). Apart from this penetrating prophetic critique, these three basic laws are found in all the neighbouring peoples of the ancient Middle East, for no community can survive without them.

It is important to observe that all of these commandments are phrased negatively. They say what one is not to do, and thus act as a protection against injustice, tracing the outer parameters within which the community is to live its life.

¹⁷You shall not murder.

¹⁸And you shall not commit adultery.

¹⁹And you shall not steal.

Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Commandments

As noted on page 70, to calculate ten commandments, the traditional Christian numbering requires the dividing of verse twenty-one into two commandments. For this reason some keep verse twenty-one as one and separate verses six and seven from verses eight to ten. In these final commandments we observe the remarkable moral perception that was part of Israel's identity in the ancient world: concern for intention as well as action.

²⁰***And you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.***

The eighth commandment (5:20)

In a society which depended greatly on the threat of capital punishment to maintain law and order, there is obviously a close connection between the eighth commandment (5:20) and the fifth commandment (5:17). It is wrong to unjustly take another person's life; it is also wrong to lie about others in court in such a way as to bring about their death. The law tried to defend the innocent against such false witness by requiring at least two witnesses in matters punishable by the death penalty (Deuteronomy 17:6).

The ninth and tenth commandments (5:21)

²¹***And you shall not covet your neighbour's wife.***

In a similar way the ninth and tenth commandments (5:21) are linked to the sixth (5:18) and seventh (5:19): seeking to win over another person's wife can easily lead to adultery; giving in to envy of another's possessions can easily lead to stealing (see Micah 2:1-4).

And you shall not desire your neighbour's house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

These final commandments move inward from the area of overt action to that of intention, recognising the importance of attitude, and of the heart. It is this movement that Jesus takes even further in his presentation of the Ten Commandments in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-48). He is quoted as saying: 'out of the heart come evil intentions' (Matthew 15:19).

Verses seventeen to twenty-one differ slightly from the wording of the fifth to the tenth commandments in the traditional formula (Exodus 20:13-17). The most interesting difference is that Deuteronomy links them all with an 'and' (w^e), highlighting the fact that they are not simply separate laws, but form a tightly interconnected unit. To break any of them is to put the others in jeopardy (see James 2:10-11). A classical example of this is David's breaking of the ninth commandment. He coveted his neighbour's wife. This led to adultery, then to lying, and then to murder (2Samuel 11). Coveting (hāmad) was also Eve's downfall (Genesis 3:6).

The Ten Commandments in the New Testament

The commandments that focus on God permeate the teaching of Jesus and the reflections upon him that make up the New Testament. He is quoted as citing the commandments about the way we relate to each other in his dialogue with the rich young man who wanted to know how to live a perfect life. Jesus replied:

You know the commandments: You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.

– Mark 10:19 (see Matthew 19:17-19; Luke 18:20)

Jesus is also quoted as declaring:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

– Matthew 5:17-19

Paul writes:

The commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet’; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’. Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

– Romans 13:9-10 (see Luke 18:20)

We know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful [1-2], for the unholy and profane [3], for those who kill their father or mother [4], for murderers [5], fornicators, sodomites [6], slave traders [7], liars, perjurers [8], and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

– 1Timothy 1:8-11

James picks up the point that the commandments form a unified whole:

Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For the one who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

– James 2:10-11

YHWH's commands now to be revealed

²²These words YHWH spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, and he added no more. He wrote them on two stone tablets, and gave them to me. ²³When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you approached me, all the leaders of your tribes and your elders; ²⁴and you said, "Look, YHWH our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the fire. Today we have seen that God may speak to someone and the person may still live. ²⁵So now why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of YHWH our God any longer, we shall die. ²⁶For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and remained alive? ²⁷Go near, you yourself, and hear all that YHWH our God will say. Then tell us everything that YHWH our God tells you, and we will listen and do it."
²⁸YHWH heard your words when you spoke to me, and YHWH said to me: "I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they are right in all that they have spoken. ²⁹If only they had such a heart as this, to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and with their children forever! ³⁰Go say to them, 'Return to your tents.' ³¹But you, stand here by me, and I will tell you all the commandments, the statutes and the edicts, that you shall teach them, so that they may do them in the land that I am giving them to possess."

These verses are here to explain why it is that Moses has waited all this time before sharing with the people 'the commandments' (5:30) that YHWH revealed to him 'at the mountain' (5:22, Horeb). This is the Deuteronomists' way of linking new legislation with the legislation that they received from the tradition..

According to the Deuteronomist, it was the decalogue and only the decalogue that was revealed to the people at Horeb. YHWH wrote 'these words' (5:22) on two stone tablets (see Exodus 31:18), and gave them to Moses. Moses has just been reminding them of this (5:1-21).

The experience at Horeb was so awesome that the people were afraid and could take no more (5:23-26). The leaders (*rō'š*, see 1:11,13) and the elders (*zāqēn*, mentioned here for the first time), asked Moses to mediate for them (5:27; compare Exodus 20:21). They undertook to 'listen and to do what YHWH instructed them through Moses (5:27; compare Exodus 24:7).

YHWH agreed (5:28) and so 'added no more' (5:22) at that time. He revealed the other commandments to Moses – the 'statutes and edicts' (5:31) that constitute the central section of Deuteronomy (chapters 12 to 25).

YHWH wishes they always had a heart to fear him (5:29; on 'fear', see 4:10, page 54). Jeremiah writes:

I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for all time, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them, never to draw back from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, so that they may not turn from me.

– Jeremiah 32:39-40

The Deuteronomist is using the word ‘commandment’(mišwâ, 6:1; see also 5:10, 29, 31; from šāwâ, to command, 5:32, 33) to cover the ‘statutes’(hōq) and ‘edicts’(mišpaṭ) that YHWH revealed to Moses and that Moses is about to teach the people before they cross into the ‘land flowing with milk and honey’(6:3). For the terms ‘statute’ and ‘edict’ see page 67.

On the meaning of ‘fear YHWH’(6:2) see 5:29, and the commentary on 4:10 (page 56).

‘Promise’ translates the Hebrew dābar (‘word’, ‘to speak’). It is God’s ‘word’ that is the cause of everything’s existence. When God speaks his word, what he says comes into being. The Deuteronomists regularly refer to YHWH’s promise, for it is the basis of their hope:

May YHWH, the God of your ancestors, increase you a thousand times more and bless you, as he has promised you!

– Deuteronomy 1:11

See, YHWH your God has given the land to you; go up, take possession, as YHWH, the God of your ancestors, has promised you; do not fear or be dismayed.

– Deuteronomy 1:21

³²You must therefore be careful to do as YHWH your God has commanded you; you shall not turn to the right or to the left. ³³You must follow exactly the path that YHWH your God has commanded you, so that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess.

^{6:1}Now this is the commandment – the statutes and the edicts – that YHWH your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, ²so that you and your children and your children’s children, may fear YHWH your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long.

³Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as YHWH, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

Exclusive allegiance to YHWH

**⁴Hear, O Israel:
YHWH is our God,
YHWH alone. ⁵You
shall love YHWH
your God with all
your heart, and
with all your soul,
and with all your
might.**

YHWH's basic command in that Israel 'hear' (6:4, šāma').

Israel, give heed to (šāma') the statutes and judgments that I am teaching you to observe.

– Deuteronomy 4:1

Assemble the people for me, and I will let them hear (šāma') my words, so that they may learn to fear me as long as they live on the earth, and may teach their children so.

– Deuteronomy 4:10

In your distress, when all these things have happened to you in time to come, you will return to YHWH your God and heed (šāma') him.

– Deuteronomy 4:30

Moses convened all Israel, and said to them: Hear (šāma'), O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently.

– Deuteronomy 5:1

Hear (šāma') therefore, O Israel, and observe his commandments diligently.

– Deuteronomy 6:3

The first truth that they must learn is that the God of Israel is YHWH and YHWH alone (6:4). The central call is for exclusive allegiance to YHWH. This is the content of the first commandment (5:7-10, pages 71-72). It is Israel's basic creed.

Their primary response to YHWH is to be one of 'love' ('āhab, see 5:10), for

He loved ('āhab) your ancestors, he chose their descendants after them. He brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power.

– Deuteronomy 4:37

The text goes on to describe how complete this love is to be, but first it is important to recognise that the basic meaning of 'love' in this context is loyal allegiance to the terms of a treaty (covenant) entered into by two parties. YHWH will never fail in faithfulness. He will always be near to them whenever they call (4:7). Israel is 'his very own possession' (4:20). He will never abandon them (4:31); he will never 'forget the covenant with your ancestors that he swore to them' (4:31). They in turn are to be faithful to their side of the covenant. This fidelity to the terms of a covenant, this 'love', is expected of parties between whom there is considerable enmity. Israel's 'love' is to be different. It is to be 'with all your heart (lēbāb), and with all your soul (nepeš), and with all your might' (me'ōd).

We are called to love God with all our ‘heart’(lēbab). lēbab is found 256 times in the Older Testament, as well as a further 853 times in the alternative spelling ‘lēb’. It refers to the depths of a person’s consciousness, including our thoughts (lēbab is often better translated as ‘mind’), our higher emotions (irrational feelings have a different word) and our decisions. This is clear from the Newer Testament. See Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27 where Jesus’ cites this as the first commandment and uses two words to cover the Hebrew lēbab: ‘kardia’(heart) and ‘dianoia’(mind).

In the Older Testament a connection is made between the ‘heart’ and the ‘spirit’(the communion we experience with God):

- ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me ...
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God,
you will not despise’(Psalm 51:10, 17)
- ‘The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit’(Psalm 34:18).

This is because the heart belongs to God who made it and knows it.

- ‘YHWH moulds every heart’(Psalm 33:15).
- ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God’(Psalm 51:10).
- ‘My child, give me your heart!’(Proverbs 23:26).
- ‘Human beings look to appearances, but YHWH sees the heart’(1 Samuel 16:7).
- ‘Like flowing water is his heart in the hands of the Lord, who turns it
wherever he pleases’(Proverbs 21:1).

We must go to the heart and follow it.

- ‘Return to your heart, you sinners’(Isaiah 46:8).
- ‘Heed the counsel of your own heart,
for no one is more faithful to you than it is’(Sirach 37:13)
- ‘More than all else, keep watch over your heart,
since here are the wellsprings of life’(Proverbs 4:23).
- ‘May he grant you your heart’s desire’(Psalm 20:4).

Yet the heart on its own can be unwise, insincere and hypocritical

- ‘He who trusts his own heart is a fool’(Proverbs 28:26).
- ‘Do not listen to what the prophets are saying:
they are deluding you, retailing visions from their own hearts,
and not what comes from the mouth of the Lord’(Jeremiah 23:16).
- ‘A glaze applied to an earthen pot:
such are the smooth lips and wicked heart’(Proverbs 26:23).
- ‘Though they outwardly flattered him and used they tongues to lie to him, in their hearts
they were not true to him, they were unfaithful to his covenant’(Psalm 78:36-37).
- ‘This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me’(Isaiah 29:13).

It is essential, therefore, that we set our heart on God.

- ‘If you start searching once more for Yahweh your God, and if you seek him
with all your heart, you will find him’(Deuteronomy 4:29).
- ‘Fix your heart on Yahweh ... and serve him alone’(1 Samuel 7:4)

With all your heart, soul and strength

A hardened heart must be broken ('contrite'), an adulterated heart must be purified.

'Create in me a clean heart, O God ...

You will not scorn this crushed and broken heart'(Psalm 51:12, 16).

'If they repent with all their heart and soul ... (1 Kings 8:47-48)

God is close to the heart that looks to him

'YHWH is near to the broken-hearted'(Psalm 34:18).

'He sent me to bind up hearts that are broken'(Isaiah 61:1).

God promises a renewal of heart.

'Answer me, Lord, answer me, so that the people may know that you, YHWH, are God and that you are winning back their hearts'(1Kings 18:37).

'Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love YHWH your God with all your heart and soul, and so will live'(Deuteronomy 30:6).

'I shall plant my law ('Torah') within them, writing it on their hearts'(Jeremiah 31:33).

'I shall give them a heart to know that I am Yahweh. They will be my people and I shall be their God, for they will come back to me with all their heart'(Jeremiah 24:7).

'Until today, Yahweh has not given you a heart to understand'(Deuteronomy 29:3).

'I will give them a heart that will listen'(Baruch 2:31).

'I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God'(Ezekiel 11:19-20).

'Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?(Ezekiel 18:31).

'I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart, and put within you a new spirit. I will take out of your body the heart of stone, and I will give you a heart of flesh I shall put my spirit within you, and make you keep my laws'(Ezekiel 36:25-26).

'I run the way of your commandments, for you set my heart free'(Psalm 119:32).

'In the country of their exile they will take all this to heart, and acknowledge that I am YHWH, their God. I will give them a heart, and an attentive ear'(Baruch 2:30).

'God, create a clean heart in me, and put into me a new and constant spirit. Do not banish me from your presence, do not deprive me of your holy Spirit'(Psalm 51:10).

* * * * *

We are to love with all our 'soul'(6:5, *nepeš*). Hebrew does not speak in the dualistic terms that we have inherited that distinguish soul from body. The *nepeš* is the whole person with a special focus on our deepest longing (as in the English 'soul music'). We are to love God with all our strength, with all the means at our disposal, all our resources. These words are echoed in the assessment of King Josiah by the Deuteronomist (2Kings 23:25):

'Before him there was no king like him, who turned to YHWH with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him'(compare Sirach 49:3).

‘These words’(6:6; see 6:4-5) call on Israel to give exclusive allegiance to YHWH, and to be completely faithful to the covenant in their thoughts and emotions, in the decisions they make and in what they seek and long for, and to do so in every aspect of their life and with all their resources. They are to keep these words in their heart and have them on their lips. We think of the opening words of the Psalter:

Happy are those ... whose delight is in the law of YHWH, and on his law they meditate day and night.

– Psalm 1:1-2

We think, too, of the words spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

I, YHWH, will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

– Jeremiah 31:33

Again we hear the call to teach this creed to their children (6:7; see 4:9-10, 6:1-2), especially by the way they reflect upon it and live it in every place and at all times. The Priestly School expresses the same desire, though their focus is especially on the liturgy. In relation to the festival of Unleavened Bread, they write:

You shall tell your child on that day, ‘It is because of what YHWH did for me when I came out of Egypt.’

It shall serve for you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead, so that the teaching of YHWH may be on your lips; for with a strong hand YHWH brought you out of Egypt.

– Exodus 13:9

The imagery here in Deuteronomy is the same, though the focus is on daily life rather than on the liturgy. What God has done for them and how they are to respond to God’s love is to be ‘a sign on your hand’: it is to be demonstrated by their actions; and ‘an emblem on your forehead’: they are to keep it always before their eyes.

As a physical statement of the importance of following this instruction the practice arose of tying small containers (tôtâpôt, tefillin, phylacteries) on the arm and forehead with this and other especially significant texts inside, much as a Christian might wear a crucifix or a medal. Similarly on the doorpost (m^ezuzâ) of the house and on the gate of the city.

6Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

7Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. 8Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, 9and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Do not forget YHWH

¹⁰When YHWH your God has brought you into the land that he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—a land with fine, large cities that you did not build, ¹¹houses filled with all sorts of goods that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant—and when you have eaten your fill, ¹²take care that you do not forget YHWH, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of *slaves*.

¹³YHWH your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear.

¹⁴Do not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who are all around you, ¹⁵because YHWH your God, who is present with you, is a jealous God. The anger of YHWH your God would be kindled against you and he would destroy you from the face of the earth.

¹⁶Do not put YHWH your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.

Having stated the imperative of radical, exclusive allegiance, the Deuteronomist goes on to give a severe warning against disobedience, against failing to ‘hear’(6:4).

The land into which they are about to be taken by YHWH is described in traditional terms:

When YHWH has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your ancestors, and has given it to you ...

– Exodus 13:11

The danger is that they will enjoy the land and forget the one who is giving it to them, the one ‘who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery’(6:12). The warning takes us back to the first commandment (5:5-6). For a reflection on the meaning of ‘fear’ in relation to YHWH (6:13), see the commentary on 4:10 (page 56) and 5:29 (page 80). The verb ‘serve’(‘ābad, 6:13) is the root of the noun ‘slave’(‘ēbed, 6:12). The contrast is deliberate and stark. The lord they were serving was Egypt. Now it is YHWH. They are answerable to YHWH and to no one else. Jesus quoted this text to Satan when Satan tried to entice him to bow down and worship him (Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8).

YHWH is described as ‘jealous’(qannā’, 6:14; see 4:24, 5:9; also Exodus 34:14). He will not tolerate rivalry, for he will not allow any other ‘god’ to take from him the people he loves. For a reflection on the ‘anger of YHWH’ and on the related topic of divine punishment, see the commentary on 1:34 (pages 40-42).

They refer back to the scene at Massah (6:16; from the verb nāsâ, and so ‘the place of testing’, see Exodus 17:1-7). The people were dying of thirst and did not trust that YHWH would care for them. The psalms recall the scene:

He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a river.

– Psalm 105:41

He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground ... He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water.

– Psalm 107:33,35

They return to it as a warning not to put God to the test.

O that today you would listen to his voice!
Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

– Psalm 95:7-9 (quoted Hebrews 3:7-9)

He split rocks open in the wilderness, and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep.
He made streams come out of the rock, and caused waters to flow down like rivers.
Yet they ... tested God in their heart ...
Even though he struck the rock so that water gushed out and torrents overflowed.

– Psalm 78:15-20

The Isaiah School draws on this scene to encourage their contemporaries to dare the journey back through the desert to Judah:

I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys;
I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

– Isaiah 41:18

I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

– Isaiah 43:20-21

They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts;
he made water flow for them from the rock;
he split open the rock and the water gushed out.

– Isaiah 48:21

YHWH will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places,
and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of YHWH;
joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.

– Isaiah 51:3

Hence God's call:

Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters ...
I will make with you an everlasting covenant.

– Isaiah 55:1,3

Elsewhere in the scroll of Isaiah we read:

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

– Isaiah 12:3

YHWH will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places ...
and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

– Isaiah 58:11

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 in his encounter with Satan (Matthew 4:7; Luke 4:12). Only God can quench our deepest thirst, and Jesus' disciples saw him as 'the rock' from which God offers us the water of life. Paul writes:

Our ancestors all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.

– 1Corinthians 10:4

17You must diligently keep the commandments of YHWH your God, and his decrees, and his statutes that he has commanded you. 18Do what is right and good in the sight of YHWH, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may go in and occupy the good land that YHWH swore to your ancestors to give you, 19thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as YHWH has promised.

20When your children ask you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the edicts that YHWH our God has commanded you?" 21then you shall say to your children, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but YHWH brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. 22YHWH displayed before our eyes great and awesome signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household.

23He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors. 24Then YHWH commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear YHWH our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case. 25If we diligently observe this entire commandment before YHWH our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right."

For the terms 'decree' ('ēdūt) and 'statute' (hōq) see 4:45 (page 67). The Deuteronomist stresses once more the point that though the land is an unconditional gift from YHWH, they can enjoy it only if they welcome it from him, and this requires 'listening' (šāma') to his word and 'keeping' (šāmar) his commandments. It is no different in the Newer Testament. Did not Jesus say: 'If you love me you will keep my commandments' (John 14:15). The point is the same. Not to obey is to turn away from the source of grace, with the consequence of rejecting the gift.

See the Introduction (page 28) for a reflection on the assumption that their enemies are God's enemies (see also Exodus 23:27).

The topic of education of children is repeated (compare 6:7, page 85). Notice how the children speak of 'you' (6:20), in response to which the parents speak of 'we' (6:21). It is ever so. The children witness the faith of their parents. Even if they admire it, it is something that belongs to their parents. The parents seek to embrace their children in their faith, in the hope that they will make it their own and become part of the 'we'.

They are to tell their children the story of how YHWH redeemed them from slavery in Egypt, including the plagues that demonstrated how the mightiest ruler of the world was powerless to resist YHWH's determination to free his people. The Deuteronomist refers to these plagues as 'awesome signs and wonders' (6:22; see 4:32; see also Exodus 7:3; Psalm 78:43; Psalm 105:27; Psalm 135:9; Jeremiah 32:20-21; Nehemiah 9:10).

They are also to teach their children about the gift of the land (6:23), and the gift of the commandments (6:24). Verse twenty-five introduces the important concept of 'right' (šēdāqâ). In the Hebrew text it is the word that begins the sentence. Being in a right relationship with God (which is the basis of being in the right relationship with others and with ourselves) is entirely dependent on observing 'this entire commandment'.

By listing ‘seven’ nations the Deuteronomist is employing a symbolic number to indicate fullness. The Israelites are to have no dealings with any of the inhabitants. Following Egyptian practice the indigenous inhabitants are referred to as ‘Canaanites’ (7:1, see also 1:7). The Deuteronomist refers to the inhabitants of the hill country as ‘Amorites’ (7:1; see also 1:7, 19, 20, 27, 44). He uses the same word for the inhabitants of Transjordan (see 1:4; 2:24; 3:2, 8; 4:46, 47). ‘Amorite’ means ‘westerner’, and was a term in general use in the ancient Near East for the people to the west of Mesopotamia. With the complete breakdown of law and order in the late Bronze Age (thirteenth century BC), the Amorites seem to have migrated south and taken control of various parts of Canaan and Transjordan.

The other ethnic groups seem to have migrated into Canaan at about the same time. Weinfeld writes (Volume 1, 363):

The Hittites constituted an empire in Anatolia [central Turkey] and Syria in the fifteenth and fourteenth century B.C.E. After the collapse of the Hittite Empire at the end of the thirteenth century, when the ‘sea peoples’ attacked the Anatolian and Syrian coast, there came down to Palestine hosts of refugees and immigrants consisting of various ethnic groups including Hittites, Jebusites, Hivites and Gergashites, who settled in the densely populated areas in the hill country. They seized power in the few existing cities in the mountains such as Shechem, Gibeon, and Hebron.

The three main ethnic groups are reflected in Ezekiel:

Thus says the Lord YHWH to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite.

– Ezekiel 16:3

The Jebusites controlled Jerusalem till David captured the city and made it the capital of the United Kingdom (see 2 Samuel 5:6-10).

The people are commanded in YHWH’s name to ‘utterly destroy’ (ḥāram) all the inhabitants. See the commentary on 2:34 (page 48). Writing in a different situation some six hundred years later, this is the Deuteronomists’ way of underlining the absolute necessity of not allowing any compromise in the people’s religious values. Their survival as a people is at stake. In light of the aggression by Assyria and Babylon at the time of writing, and with the memory of the accommodation that went on under Manasseh, the Deuteronomists are using desperate language to confront a desperate situation. Local groups found Yahwism attractive. Historical investigation does not support the idea that they were wiped out and replaced by invading Israelites.

¹When YHWH your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you – the Hittites, the Gergashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you –

²and when YHWH your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them.

Uncompromising

²Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy.

³Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, ⁴for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods.

Then the anger of YHWH would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.

⁵But this is how you must deal with them: break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire.

The Deuteronomists are appealing to their contemporaries to eliminate from their life the contaminating influence of Assyria and the other neighbouring countries. They present their ancestors as being commanded to have no dealings with the other nations except to utterly destroy them and all vestiges of their pagan cult for reasons clearly stated in verse four. To behave in any other way would lead to their children turning away from following YHWH. They would lose their special identity and be quickly 'destroyed'. As usual this is put down to punishment inflicted by an angry God (see the reflection on pages 40-42).

There are close parallels between the language of 7:1-5 and that in Exodus 23:20-33 in which YHWH, having declared 'I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes' (23:22), goes on to list the peoples whom they will encounter. YHWH promises to 'blot them out' (23:23). The text continues:

You shall not bow down to their gods, or worship them, or follow their practices, but you shall utterly demolish them and break their pillars in pieces ... You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. They shall not live in your land, or they will make you sin against me; for if you worship their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.

Exodus 23:24, 32-33 (see Exodus 34:11-16)

Verse six offers Israel a profound and beautiful description of what makes it special.

- ‘You are a people holy (qādōš) to YHWH your God.’

Holiness is a quality that pertains only to God. It speaks of God’s utter transcendence. Israel is ‘holy’, not because of some quality that it has in itself, but because the Holy One has ‘chosen you to be his people’, and is present among them. Every element of their life as a people is to demonstrate their consecration to YHWH.

You shall be for me a holy nation.

– Exodus 19:6

All the congregation are holy, everyone of them, and YHWH is among them.

– Numbers 16:3

You shall be holy, for I YHWH your God am holy.

– Leviticus 19:2

- ‘chosen (bāḥar) to be his people.’

Because he loved your ancestors, he chose their descendants after them.

– Deuteronomy 4:37

- ‘his treasured possession (s^egullâ).’

This expression of special intimacy and communion is a favourite of the Deuteronomist:

It is you YHWH has chosen out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

– Deuteronomy 14:2

Today YHWH has obtained your agreement: to be his treasured people, as he promised you.

– Deuteronomy 26:18

It is found elsewhere:

They shall be mine, says YHWH of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act.

– Malachi 3:17

YHWH has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel as his own treasured possession.

– Psalm 135:4

The classical text is in Exodus:

If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples.

– Exodus 19:5

‘For you are a people holy to YHWH your God; YHWH your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.’

7It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that YHWH set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8It was because YHWH loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that YHWH has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9Know therefore that YHWH your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, 10and who repays in their own person those who reject him. He does not delay but repays in their own person those who reject him.

In 21:11 the Deuteronomist will speak of a man setting his heart (ḥāšaq; 7:7) on a beautiful woman, desiring her as his wife. He will use the same expression in regard to YHWH's longing for communion in love with Israel's ancestors (see 10:15). It adds another image to the one's already used to speak of YHWH's special love for Israel:

In the wilderness you saw how YHWH your God carried you, just as one carries a child.

– Deuteronomy 1:31

Because he loved (ʿāhab) your ancestors, he chose their descendants after them.

– Deuteronomy 4:37

Did the early members of the Deuteronomic School pick up this tender language from Hosea?

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son ... It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took him up in my arms; but he did not know that I healed him. I led him with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to him like one who lifts an infant to his cheek. I bent down to him and fed him.

– Hosea 11:1-4

Verse eight repeats a theme already stated:

YHWH brought us out from Egypt in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors.

– Deuteronomy 6:23.

The word 'redeem' (pāda'; 7:8) is used for the first time. Only YHWH can redeem Israel because Israel is his exclusive possession. In verses nine to ten we have an important re-statement of the traditional credal formula of the first commandment (see 5:9-10). The Deuteronomists reverse the order, speaking first of YHWH's blessing of those who 'love' (ʿāhab) him. We have seen that 'love' has the primary meaning of being faithful to the terms of the covenant. To 'love' is to 'keep his commandments'. The opposite to love is 'hate' (šāna', translated here 'reject'). To 'hate' is to not abide by the terms of the covenant. Here the Deuteronomist alters the text. The first commandment speaks of YHWH 'punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation' (5:9). The Deuteronomist speaks only of YHWH punishing the person responsible for rejecting him.

Verse twelve opens with the important word ‘if’. This echoes another important ‘if’:

If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples.

– Exodus 19:5

God’s gifts are offered unconditionally. They are received, however, conditionally, for God is love and does not force his gifts upon us. We are necessarily free to welcome or reject them, and God respects our choice.

Just as 7:1-5 is paralleled in Exodus 23:24, 32-33; see page 90), so this list of blessings is paralleled in Exodus 23:25-27.

You shall worship YHWH your God, and I will bless your bread and your water; and I will take sickness away from among you. No one shall miscarry or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. I will send my terror in front of you, and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you.

Compare also:

If you will listen carefully to the voice of YHWH your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am YHWH who heals you.

– Exodus 15:26

Verses seventeen to nineteen have the ring of a typical oration encouraging the troops before they have to engage in battle. We are reminded of the earlier text (4:34):

Has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power, as YHWH your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?

¹¹Therefore, observe diligently the commandment—the statutes, and the edicts—that I am commanding you today.

¹²If you heed these edicts, by diligently observing them, YHWH your God will maintain with you the covenant loyalty that he swore to your ancestors; ¹³he will love you, bless you, and multiply you; he will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock, in the land that he swore to your ancestors to give you. ¹⁴You shall be the most blessed of peoples, with neither sterility nor barrenness among you or your livestock.

¹⁵YHWH will turn away from you every illness; all the dread diseases of Egypt that you experienced, he will not inflict on you, but he will lay them on all who hate you.

¹⁶You shall devour all the peoples that YHWH your God is giving over to you, showing them no pity; you shall not serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.

¹⁷If you say to yourself, “These nations are more numerous than I; how can I dispossess them?”

¹⁸do not be afraid of them. Just remember what YHWH your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, ¹⁹the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs and wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which YHWH your God brought you out. YHWH your God will do the same to all the peoples of whom you are afraid.

Images must be destroyed

²⁰Moreover, YHWH your God will send the pestilence against them, until even the survivors and the fugitives are destroyed.

²¹Have no dread of them, for YHWH your God, who is present with you, is a great and awesome God.

²²YHWH your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to make a quick end of them, otherwise the wild animals would become too numerous for you. ²³But YHWH your God will give them over to you, and throw them into great panic, until they are destroyed. ²⁴He will hand their kings over to you and you shall blot out their name from under heaven; no one will be able to stand against you, until you have destroyed them. ²⁵The images of their gods you shall burn with fire. Do not covet the silver or the gold that is on them and take it for yourself, because you could be ensnared by it; for it is abhorrent to YHWH your God. ²⁶Do not bring an abhorrent thing into your house, or you will be set apart for destruction like it. You must utterly detest and abhor it, for it is set apart for destruction.

Here we have yet another link with Exodus 23:

I will send the pestilence in front of you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you.

– Exodus 23:28

The ultimate reason why they should have no fear of their enemies is that ‘YHWH your God is present with you’ (7:21; see 6:15).

Verse twenty-two attempts to answer the question: If YHWH is so ‘great and awesome’ and if YHWH is the one who is going to ‘clear away these nations’, why did it happen ‘little by little’? Once again there is a parallel with Exodus 23:

I will not drive them out from before you in one year, or the land would become desolate and the wild animals would multiply against you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land.

– Exodus 23:29-30

Verse twenty-three has its parallel too:

I will send my terror in front of you, and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you.

– Exodus 23:27

The command about destroying images is repeated (see 7:5). In verse twenty-six ‘set aside for destruction’ translates the Hebrew *herem*. This is the fourth time this notion has appeared in Deuteronomy (see 2:34, 3:6; 7:2, and the commentary on 2:34, page 48). Up to now it has been applied to Israel’s enemies. If Israel commits idolatry, Israel too will come under the ‘curse’.

The Septuagint translates *herem* (7:26) as *anathēma*, from the verb *tithēmi* (‘to hold’) with the prefix *ana* (‘up’). The object that is ‘set apart for destruction’ is lifted up away from the community and handed over to God for punishment. Paul uses the term five times (Galatians 1:8, 9; 1Corinthians 12:3, 16:22; Romans 9:3), where it is translated ‘accursed’ – in other words removed from the protection of the divine blessing. It is a term that was used regularly in this sense in church councils to ‘anathematise’ heretics.

These and the following verses pick up the ideas and terminology of 6:10-19, which are also about diligently keeping the commandments (8:1; see 6:17), and taking care not to forget YHWH (6:12), when YHWH your God has brought you into ‘the land that he swore to your ancestors’ (8:1; see 6:10). In relation to the journey in the wilderness, the earlier passage spoke only of how they ‘tested YHWH at Massah’ (6:16). Here the focus is on how YHWH tested them (8:2).

The key lesson of the ‘forty years in the wilderness’ (8:2; see 2:7) is underlined. It was a hard time in which they learned the hard lesson that they are not self-sufficient. They also learned that they could rely on YHWH to care for them. They knew hunger, but YHWH fed them with manna (Exodus 16). He ‘prepared a table for them in the presence of their enemies’ (Psalm 23:5). Not only did YHWH teach them that he would meet their physical needs. He taught them also that they had a more profound hunger, and it was to hear ‘the words that come from the mouth of YHWH’ – words of love (see 7:6-7), and words that guided them ‘along the right path’ (Psalm 23:3), the path that took them out of slavery and to the land that they are about to enter.

Like Israel, Jesus experienced hunger in the wilderness. He cited this text (Matthew 4:4). We must not miss the word ‘every’. We are to be attentive to ‘every word’, not just the words we expect, the words that bring comfort, the words to which we are accustomed. Isaiah reflects of YHWH’s word:

I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, YHWH, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.

– Isaiah 45:3

The former things I declared long ago, they went out from my mouth and I made them known; then suddenly I did them and they came to pass.

– Isaiah 48:3

My word that goes out from my mouth shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

– Isaiah 55:11

¹This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, so that you may live and increase, and go in and occupy the land that YHWH promised on oath to your ancestors.

²Remember the long way that YHWH your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order that you would know affliction, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. ³He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of YHWH.

⁴The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years.

Do not forget

⁵Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so YHWH your God disciplines you. ⁶Therefore keep the commandments of YHWH your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him.

⁷For YHWH your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, ⁸a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, ⁹a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. ¹⁰You shall eat your fill and bless YHWH your God for the good land that he has given you.

¹¹Take care that you do not forget YHWH your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his *edicts*, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. ¹²When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, ¹³and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴then do not exalt yourself, forgetting YHWH your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, ¹⁵who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, ¹⁶and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to *make you know affliction* and to test you, and in the end to do you good.

As they look back over the long hard journey they are to look upon the difficulties as a discipline by which YHWH, like a parent, was teaching them the basic lesson that they were to take to heart: we are not self-sufficient; only YHWH can meet our needs.

Now that the journey is over, they are about to enter the Promised Land, described here in glowing terms. Herein lies a danger. When things are going well it is easy for us to forget the hard times and the lessons we learnt, and to slip back into self-reliance, forgetting our dependence on God. There is a danger that in times of prosperity we will 'exalt ourselves' (8:14). In the words of the prophet Hosea:

When I fed them, they were satisfied; they were satisfied, and their heart was proud; therefore they forgot me.

– Hosea 13:6

YHWH brought them out of 'the house of slavery' (8:14). There is a slavery they must fear that is more profound than that which they experienced in Egypt. It is the slavery of relying on themselves and 'forgetting YHWH your God' (8:11, 14).

Verses fifteen to sixteen return to their memories of the wilderness (8:2-4); recalling once again the gift of the manna (8:16; see 8:3), but also the gift of water from the rock to quench their thirst (see Exodus 17:1-7). There is a reference also to the 'poisonous snakes' (*naḥāš šārap*; see Numbers 21:6).

YHWH's testing is always 'to do you good' (8:16). But we must remember in the light what we learned in the dark, lest we forget.

Apart from the similarity in language between verse nineteen and Jeremiah 25:6, we are reminded of the tragic words spoken by Jeremiah in the years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile:

I thought how I would set you among my children, and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful heritage of all the nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me. Instead, as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so you have been faithless to me, O house of Israel, says YHWH..

– Jeremiah 3:19-20

The exile is very much in the minds of the Deuteronomists. The tragedy of the events of the opening years of the sixth century are captured by Jeremiah:

Thus says YHWH: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.

– Jeremiah 31:15

The picture comes to mind of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. He was offering ‘things that make for peace’ (Luke 19:42), but they would not listen and he saw them hurtling to their own destruction:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

– Luke 13:34

¹⁷Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.” ¹⁸But remember YHWH your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. ¹⁹If you do forget YHWH your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. ²⁰Like the nations that YHWH is destroying before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of YHWH your God.

Success is not based on innocence

¹Hear, O Israel! You are about to cross the Jordan today, to go in and dispossess nations larger and mightier than you, great cities, fortified to the heavens, ²a strong and tall people, the offspring of the Anakim, whom you know. You have heard it said of them, "Who can stand up to the Anakim?"

³Know then today that YHWH your God is the one who crosses over before you as a devouring fire; he will defeat them and subdue them before you, so that you may dispossess and destroy them quickly, as YHWH has promised you.

⁴When YHWH your God thrusts them out before you, do not say to yourself, "It is because of my righteousness that YHWH has brought me in to occupy this land"; it is rather because of the wickedness of these nations that YHWH is dispossessing them before you. ⁵It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you are going in to occupy their land; but because of the wickedness of these nations YHWH your God is dispossessing them before you, in order to fulfill the promise that YHWH made on oath to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Though stories about the Exodus, the wilderness journey and the entry of the escaped slaves with their special understanding of God, would have been told and retold over the generations, it was all far too long ago for the Deuteronomists to attempt to establish the historical facts. Their interest is in their contemporaries and they tell the story of their distant ancestors in such a way as to present them as facing situations then like the situations the people were facing at the time of writing.

We will grasp the essential thrust of this section best if we place ourselves among the exiles of Babylon who are about to re-enter Judah. They will have major challenges to face. How can they learn from history? The legends told of a giant race that dwelt in Canaan, the Anakim. It was fear of them that led to the failure to trust YHWH at Kardesh-barnea (1:28), a failure that resulted in the long hard years wandering in the wilderness. The fear of the unknown is still there as the exiles prepare to return home. They are reminded that the success of their ancestors was not because of their superior strength (see also 7:7; 8:17). It was YHWH who won their victories for them (9:3).

They are too aware of their past sinfulness to think that their success will be 'because of your righteousness'(9:4). This is the key theme that the Deuteronomists will now develop. But first they want to establish the righteousness of God. God's dispossessing of the local inhabitants is not an arbitrary decision. It is because of their 'wickedness'(9:4, 5). We find this idea touched on in Genesis 15:16 and Leviticus 18:20. The implication is that, if after they have entered the land the Israelites are wicked, they too can expect to be dispossessed.

YHWH is giving the land to the Israelites not because they, unlike the local inhabitants, are innocent. We are about to see a very different picture. No, it is in order to fulfill the promise that YHWH made on oath to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob'(9:5; see 6:23; 7:8; 8:1). It is a sheer gift of love.

Moses reminds the people how YHWH gave him the ‘two stone tablets’ on which YHWH himself had written the decalogue (9:9-10; see 5:22 and Exodus 31:18) - ‘the words that YHWH had spoken to you at the mountain out of the fire on the day of the assembly’ (9:10).

Via the story of the golden calf, retold from the tradition (see Exodus 32), the Deuteronomists remind their readers of their past sins. As in the traditional story YHWH tells Moses that ‘your people’ have ‘cast an image for themselves’ (9:12), and he threatens to destroy them and to begin again, creating through Moses another and mightier nation (9:14; see Exodus 32:10).

Whatever the Exodus generation may or may not have done, the prophets blamed the collapse of Israel and the massive deportation of its inhabitants upon the worship of the calf at Bethel (see 1Kings 12:28 – 13:10; 14:15-16; 2Kings 17:16; Hosea 8:5-6; 10:5; 13:2). Likewise, the collapse of Judah a century later was blamed on the idolatry that went on during the long years of Manasseh’s reign. Even the reforms of Josiah, encouraged by the Deuteronomic School, were short-lived, as is lamented by Jeremiah.

It is essential that the exiles in Babylon remember their past sins. It is also essential that they remember that sin did not prevent YHWH from giving their ancestors the land. He will do the same for the exiles, but they must remember their sins and learn from them lest they repeat them on their return to Judah and have to suffer the consequences yet again.

The lesson here, as throughout Deuteronomy, is for ‘us, who are all of us here alive today’ (5:3). Each generation has to ask: What are the false gods that we are worshipping, that block us from listening to YHWH, our God?

⁶Know, then, that YHWH your God is not giving you this good land to occupy because of your righteousness; for you are a stubborn people.

⁷Remember and do not forget how you provoked YHWH your God to wrath in the wilderness; you have been rebellious against YHWH from the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place.

⁸Even at Horeb you provoked YHWH to wrath, and YHWH was so angry with you that he was ready to destroy you. ⁹When I went up the mountain to receive the stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant that YHWH made with you, I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water. ¹⁰And YHWH gave me the two stone tablets written with the finger of God; on them were all the words that YHWH had spoken to you at the mountain out of the fire on the day of the assembly. ¹¹At the end of forty days and forty nights YHWH gave me the two stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant. ¹²Then YHWH said to me, “Get up, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you have brought from Egypt have acted corruptly. They have been quick to turn from the way that I commanded them; they have cast an image for themselves.” ¹³Furthermore YHWH said to me, “I have seen that this people is indeed a stubborn people. ¹⁴Let me alone that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and more numerous than they.”

¹⁵So I turned and went down from the mountain, while the mountain was ablaze; the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands.

¹⁶Then I saw that you had indeed sinned against YHWH your God, by casting for yourselves an image of a calf; you had been quick to turn from the way that YHWH had commanded you. ¹⁷So I took hold of the two tablets and flung them from my two hands, smashing them before your eyes.

¹⁸Then I lay prostrate before YHWH as before, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin you had committed, provoking YHWH by doing what was evil in his sight.

¹⁹For I was afraid that the anger that YHWH bore against you was so fierce that he would destroy you. But YHWH listened to me that time also. ²⁰YHWH was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him, but I interceded also on behalf of Aaron at that same time. ²¹Then I took the sinful thing you had made, the calf, and burned it with fire and crushed it, grinding it thoroughly, until it was reduced to dust; and I threw the dust of it into the stream that runs down the mountain.

²²At Taberah also, and at Massah, and at Kibroth-hattaavah, you provoked YHWH to wrath. ²³And when YHWH sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, "Go up and occupy the land that I have given you," you rebelled against the command of YHWH your God, neither trusting him nor obeying him. ²⁴You have been rebellious against YHWH as long as he has known you.

The smashing of the tablets dramatically demonstrates that the people's sin (9:18, *ḥaṭā't*, used here for the first time) has shattered the covenant. The text goes on to show what has to be done if the covenant is to be renewed. Moses prostrates himself before YHWH 'forty days and forty nights' in prayer and fasting (9:18).

Moses also demonstrates what we must do with the idols we make (compare Exodus 32:20). The description of Moses' action here is modelled on that of king Josiah in his ridding the country of its idols:

Josiah brought out the image of Asherah from the house of YHWH, outside Jerusalem, to the Wadi Kidron, burned it at the Wadi Kidron, beat it to dust and threw the dust of it upon the graves of the common people.

– 2Kings 23:6

Moreover, the altar at Bethel, the high place erected by Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin—he pulled down that altar along with the high place. He burned the high place, crushing it to dust; he also burned the sacred pole.

– 2Kings 23:15

Their infidelity at Horeb started a pattern that continued: at Taberah (9:22; see Numbers 11:1-3); at Massah (already referred to in 6:16); at Kibroth-hattaavah (see Numbers 11:4-34); and at Kadesh-barnea (already described in 1:19-32). Their history was filled with examples of their failure to trust YHWH or to obey him: 'You have been rebellious against YHWH as long as he has known you'(9:24).

Their only hope lies in YHWH's fidelity, but is there some way of breaking the cycle? Must they go on sinning and suffering the inevitable consequences?

Moses models the response that must follow upon sin. We must acknowledge our sin (9:27) and engage in earnest prayer: prayer of pleading, such as we see Moses doing here; but even more fundamentally, prayer of ‘remembering’, of listening to ‘every word that comes from the mouth of YHWH’(8:3). Hence the repeated command: ‘Hear, O Israel’(5:1; 6:3, 4; 9:1).

Only by remembering that we are YHWH’s ‘very own possession’(naḥ^alâ, 9:26; see 4:20), and that YHWH in his great love has redeemed (pādâ, 9:26; see 7:8) us from slavery, will we dare to seek forgiveness. Only when we remember the promises that God has made to our ancestors (9:27), can we dare to hope that we might share in the fruits of their faith. We must remember, too, that God has given us a mission to reveal God’s true nature and true power to the world (9:28). We must take up this mission with renewed energy as we renew our faith in YHWH, and remind ourselves that we are ‘the people of your very own possession, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm’(9:29).

These verses are presented as Moses reminding God of these truths. Of course, it is we who have to remember. It is we who must, in genuine humility and profound trust, open our sinful hearts to the forgiving and generous love of a faithful God.

²⁵Throughout the forty days and forty nights that I lay prostrate before YHWH when YHWH intended to destroy you, ²⁶I prayed to YHWH and said, “Lord YHWH, do not destroy the people who are your very own possession, whom you redeemed in your greatness, whom you brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ²⁷Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; pay no attention to the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin, ²⁸otherwise the land from which you have brought us might say, ‘Because YHWH was not able to bring them into the land that he promised them, and because he hated them, he has brought them out to let them die in the wilderness.’ ²⁹For they are the people of your very own possession, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm.”

¹At that time YHWH said to me, “Carve out two tablets of stone like the former ones, and come up to me on the mountain, and make an ark of wood. ²I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you smashed, and you shall put them in the ark.” ³So I made an ark of acacia wood, cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and went up the mountain with the two tablets in my hand. ⁴Then he wrote on the tablets the same words as before, the ten commandments that YHWH had spoken to you on the mountain out of the fire on the day of the assembly; and YHWH gave them to me. ⁵So I turned and came down from the mountain, and put the tablets in the ark that I had made; and there they are, as YHWH commanded me.

⁶(The Israelites journeyed from Beeroth Bene-jaakan to Moserah. There Aaron died, and there he was buried; his son Eleazar succeeded him as priest. ⁷From there they journeyed to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah to Jotbathah, a land with flowing streams. ⁸At that time YHWH set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of YHWH, to stand before YHWH to minister to him, and to bless in his name, to this day. ⁹Therefore Levi has no allotment or inheritance with his kindred; YHWH is his inheritance, as YHWH your God promised him.) ¹⁰I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights, as I had done the first time. And once again YHWH listened to me. YHWH was unwilling to destroy you. ¹¹YHWH said to me, “Get up, go on your journey at the head of the people, that they may go in and occupy the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them.”

God hears Moses' prayer and renews the covenant exactly as it was before (see Exodus 34:1-4). The Deuteronomists have in mind the renewal promised by Jeremiah, the renewal that awaits the returning exiles:

The days are surely coming, says YHWH, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says YHWH. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says YHWH: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people ... for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

— Jeremiah 31:31-34

The Deuteronomists include here YHWH's instructions concerning the ark (10:2-3). They also tell the story of Aaron's death (compare Numbers 33:30-34), which provides the setting for their statement concerning the Levites. It was their fidelity at Horeb that caused YHWH to set them aside as special to him (see Exodus 32:25-29). The Deuteronomists do not agree with the distinction which the Priestly School makes between the priests and the Levites. For them it is the Levites who carry on the special intercessory role of Moses: 'they stand before YHWH to minister to him, and to bless in his name, to this day'(10:8).

Each generation is to remember that, whatever sins have been committed in the past 'YHWH was unwilling to destroy you'(10:10).

There is little in this concluding section (10:12–11:32) of the Introduction that we have not already heard. It is a magnificent call to embrace fully and from the heart the covenant with YHWH. We must learn from past sin and be determined not to repeat it, but a sinful past need not prevent us from fully embracing the Torah, for as we have seen YHWH is ‘unwilling to destroy’ (10:10). He is calling us to enter and take possession of the land that he is giving to us. Let us follow him and enter.

Verse 12 asks the same question as the prophet Micah, and the answer is substantially the same:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does YHWH require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

– Micah 6:8

Micah’s statement is addressed to the human race. Deuteronomy’s focus is Israel. As we have heard again and again, we are to

- fear YHWH – to be attentive to the presence of the sacred in our midst (see 4:10, page 54, and 5:29, page 78; 6:13).
- walk in *all* his ways – to obey ‘the entire commandment’ (6:25, 8:1, 11:8, 22).
- to love YHWH – to be faithful to the covenant (6:5; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1).
- to serve (‘ābad) YHWH (6:13), our lord, with all our heart and soul (4:29; 6:5). The worship we offer is to come from a heart that responds with gratitude and praise to the wonder that is YHWH, the one for alone can satisfy our most profound longings.
- keep his commandments and decrees – the content of this whole book: the decalogue already given at Horeb and the decrees Moses is about to give them.

If the motive offered in verses fourteen and fifteen does not persuade us to do this, nothing will. The great God, the lord of all creation and history, has ‘set his heart in love’ (ḥāšaq, see 7:7) on us, and ‘chosen’ (see 4:37; 7:6, 7) us out of all the peoples of the earth.

¹²So now, O Israel, what does YHWH your God require of you? Only to fear YHWH your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your soul,¹³ and to keep the commandments of YHWH your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being.¹⁴ Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to YHWH your God, the earth with all that is in it,¹⁵ yet YHWH set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today.

¹⁶Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer.

¹⁷For YHWH your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, ¹⁸who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing.

¹⁹You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

The origins of the practice of circumcision are obscure. It may have originally been a rite of passage to manhood. It may also have been a magic ritual to fend off evil spirits that threatened to make a man impotent. It was practiced in Egypt and among Semitic peoples, but not by the Philistines, the Assyrians or the Babylonians. It seems to have become important as an identifying sign only at the time of the exile, when the people of Judah were deprived of other identifying signs (king, temple, cult). It set them apart from the Babylonians in whose land they were exiled.

As a religious sign it is clearly related to the handing on of life, and so to the ‘blessing’. It became a sign of the trust that God would, indeed, ensure a great offspring to Abraham (see Genesis 17:10), and so to Israel. In the very act of sexual intercourse, man and woman are reminded that the life offered and received is filled with promise.

The Deuteronomists share with Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 4:4) the conviction that this sign of their commitment to the covenant must affect their heart. Moreover – and here we come to what is the core of the ethical behaviour required of Israel – they are to share in God’s justice. God cannot be ‘bought’ by the rich and powerful (10:17). Neither should they (see 1:16-17). Furthermore, YHWH shows his justice by his care for those who are most vulnerable: the orphan, the widow, and the stranger who lacks the support of his own kin. This goes back to the oldest legal code in Israel, the so-called ‘Covenant Code’.

You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan.

– Exodus 22:21-22 (also 23:9)

The Priestly School goes further, as does the Deuteronomic School here:

You shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am YHWH your God.

– Leviticus 19:34

For Jeremiah, caring for the poor is *the* sign of truly knowing YHWH. Referring to King Josiah, he states:

He judged the cause of the poor and needy ...
Is not this to know me? says YHWH.

– Jeremiah 22:16 (see Psalm 146:7-9)

Once again (see 10:12), we are told to ‘fear’ YHWH and to ‘worship’ (‘ābad, ‘serve’) him alone (10:20). The Deuteronomist adds:

- to him you shall hold fast (dābaq, see 4:4). The closeness of the bond uniting them with God is picked up in the statement in Genesis: ‘a man leaves his father and his mother and *clings* (dābaq) to his wife, and they become one flesh’ (Genesis 2:24).
- by his name you shall swear (šāba‘; see 6:13). We can rely on the truth of YHWH’s word because it is spoken by him. YHWH and our relationship with him is to be the only guarantee of the truth of our word.

The reasons given for relying exclusively on YHWH are that we can boast of his total reliability. Jeremiah writes:

Thus says YHWH: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am YHWH; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says YHWH.

– Jeremiah 9:23-24

As we read earlier:

Has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power, as YHWH your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?

– Deuteronomy 4:34

Seventy of them went down to Egypt (10:22; see Exodus 1:5; Genesis 46:26). Now, as they are about to enter the Promised Land, they are ‘as numerous as the stars in heaven’ (10:22; see 1:10). This is the blessing promised by YHWH to Abraham (see Genesis 15:5; 22:17), to Isaac (Genesis 26:4), and to Jacob (Exodus 32:13).

²⁰You shall fear YHWH your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. ²¹He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen. ²²Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now YHWH your God has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven.

¹You shall love YHWH your God, therefore, and keep his charge, his decrees, his *edicts*, and his commandments always. ²Remember today that it was not your children (who have not known or seen the discipline of YHWH your God), but it is you who must acknowledge his greatness, his mighty hand and his outstretched arm, ³his signs and his deeds that he did in Egypt to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and to all his land; ⁴what he did to the Egyptian army, to their horses and chariots, how he made the water of the Red Sea flow over them as they pursued you, so that YHWH has destroyed them to this day; ⁵what he did to you in the wilderness, until you came to this place; ⁶and what he did to Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab son of Reuben, how in the midst of all Israel the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, along with their households, their tents, and every living being in their company; ⁷for it is your own eyes that have seen every great deed that YHWH did.

⁸Keep, then, this entire commandment that I am commanding you today, so that you may have strength to go in and occupy the land that you are crossing over to occupy, ⁹and so that you may live long in the land that YHWH swore to your ancestors to give them and to their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey.

To the regular words 'decrees', 'edicts', 'commandments', the Deuteronomists add 'charge' (*mišmarāt*), that is, all the things that God has told them to 'observe' (*šamar*). To motivate the people to this complete obedience, Moses reminds them of their experiences of YHWH's power. Earlier Moses had said:

Not with our ancestors did YHWH make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today.

– Deuteronomy 5:3

Here he says:

Remember today that it was not your children ... but it is you who must acknowledge his greatness.

– Deuteronomy 11:2

The point being made is the same. Each generation has to remember and to own Israel's faith for itself.

They are to remember the 'signs and deeds' – the plagues suffered by Egypt at God's hand (see Exodus 7:14 – 11:10), the miracle at the Red Sea (see Exodus 15), as well as 'what he did to you in the wilderness, until you came to this place' (11:5).

The memory also holds a warning. YHWH is not only powerful against Israel's enemies. He will not countenance disobedience in Israel – witness the terrible punishment meted out to Dathan and Abiram (see Numbers 16).

Remembering YHWH's power should motivate them to 'keep this entire commandment' (11:8). This is a necessary condition for their 'living long in the land' (11:9).

Another motivation is the attraction of the land itself (10:10-12; see 6:10-11; 8:7-9), especially the fact that ‘the eyes of YHWH your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year’ (11:12). We are reminded of the words of the psalm:

Truly the eye of YHWH is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love.

– Psalm 33:18

Verses thirteen to seventeen remind us that receiving YHWH’s blessing is dependent on obedience. A surface reading makes it appear that YHWH will send rain if we obey, and withhold it if we do not; in other words YHWH’s offer of grace is conditional upon our obedience. This is how the Deuteronomists understood it, for they shared the assumption of their contemporaries that YHWH controls whatever happens in this world (see Introduction pages 28-30).

We have come to see that God’s offer of love is unconditional. Because God is love the offer respects our freedom; grace is not forced upon us. Therefore, while God’s offer is unconditional, our receiving the blessing is conditional. To obey is to open ourselves to welcome God’s blessing; to disobey is to close ourselves in, so that the blessing is not received.

An adjustment must also be made in regard to God’s so-called ‘anger’ and ‘punishment’ (see the reflection on pages 40-42). It is we who bring upon ourselves the effects of our rejection of grace.

However we approach the mystery of the relationship between divine providence and human freedom, the key point made by the Deuteronomists stands: if we do not obey we will ‘perish quickly off the good land that YHWH is giving’ us (11:17).

¹⁰For the land that you are about to enter to occupy is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sow your seed and irrigate by foot like a vegetable garden. ¹¹But the land that you are crossing over to occupy is a land of hills and valleys, watered by rain from the sky, ¹²a land that YHWH your God looks after. The eyes of YHWH your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

¹³If you will only heed his every commandment that I am commanding you today – loving YHWH your God, and serving him with all your heart and with all your soul – ¹⁴then he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil; ¹⁵and he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you will eat your fill.

¹⁶Take care, or you will be seduced into turning away, serving other gods and worshiping them, ¹⁷for then the anger of YHWH will be kindled against you and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain and the land will yield no fruit; then you will perish quickly off the good land that YHWH is giving you.

The necessity of obedience

¹⁸You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. ¹⁹Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ²⁰Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, ²¹so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that YHWH swore to your ancestors to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth. ²²If you will diligently observe this entire commandment that I am commanding you, loving YHWH your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him, ²³then YHWH will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and mightier than yourselves. ²⁴Every place on which you set foot shall be yours; your territory shall extend from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the river Euphrates, to the Western Sea. ²⁵No one will be able to stand against you; YHWH your God will put the fear and dread of you on all the land on which you set foot, as he promised you.

In verses eighteen to twenty, the Deuteronomists repeat the exhortation already given in 6:6-9. Here the exhortation is linked with their enjoying 'the land' (11:21).

Verse twenty-two repeats 11:8, and verse twenty-three repeats YHWH's promise to drive out the nations living in Canaan (see Deuteronomy 4:38; 7:1, 22; 8:20; Exodus 34:11, 24).

The Promised Land is imagined as comprising all of Syria and Palestine (see 1:7).

This passage brings this Part to a close. It is a summons to make a decision. The choice is ours. If we choose to ‘obey the commandments of YHWH your God that I am commanding you today’ (11:27), we will experience YHWH’s blessing (b^erākâ). If we do not we will not experience the blessing (this is the meaning of ‘curse’, qelâlâ; see Genesis 27:12). It is the first time either of these words has appeared in Deuteronomy.

Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal (11:29) are in the vicinity of Shechem. If one faces east, Mount Gerizim is on one’s right (hence associated with blessing), and Mount Ebal is on one’s left (hence associated with curse).

The western road (11:30) crosses the Jordan at the ford of Adam (see Joshua 3:16), goes through the Jordan valley (the Arabah), then up the Wadi Far‘ah to Tirzah and on to Shechem. Gilgal is near Jericho. The Israelites established their first encampment there after crossing the Jordan River (see Joshua 4:19). Moreh is near Shechem. Abraham set up an altar there to YHWH when he first entered Canaan (see Genesis 12:6).

The final words prepare us for the central section of Deuteronomy: the list of the ‘statutes’ and ‘edicts’ that have been continually referred to in the introductory chapters, and that Moses ‘is setting before you today’ (11:32).

²⁶See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: ²⁷the blessing, if you obey the commandments of YHWH your God that I am commanding you today; ²⁸and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of YHWH your God, but turn from the way that I am commanding you today, to follow other gods that you have not known.

²⁹When YHWH your God has brought you into the land that you are entering to occupy, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. ³⁰As you know, they are beyond the Jordan, some distance to the west, in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, beside the oak of Moreh.

³¹When you cross the Jordan to go in to occupy the land that YHWH your God is giving you, and when you occupy it and live in it, ³²you must diligently observe all the statutes and edicts that I am setting before you today.