

## Covenant Context of Decalogue

HN 3/04/05 pm

Reading: Deuteronomy 5, Hebrews 8

Study Text: Deuteronomy 5:2-6

Psalms: 8, 34:1-7, 34:8-13, 72:17-19

*I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage (5:6).* God in his grace and power brought these slaves, the descendants of Jacob, out of Egypt. He brought them to Mt Sinai in the wilderness. It was at this place that God came down and spoke to his chosen people. He came to make a covenant with them, with us, with us who are here today said Moses. The Lord made (literally cut) *a covenant with us at Horeb.*

### Cut a Covenant

God made a covenant with Noah after he saved him through the flood. He declared that there would never again be a flood to destroy all the earth (Genesis 9:11). He gave the rainbow as a sign of this covenant that he made not only with Noah but all mankind.

Then God made a covenant with Abraham after calling him to leave his family and go to *the land that I will show you* (Genesis 12:1). In that land God revealed himself to Abraham and made a covenant with him and his descendants (Genesis 15). The Lord promised to be his God, to give him the land of Canaan, and give him many descendants. Abraham was commanded to circumcise *every male child among you* as a sign of this covenant (Genesis 17). Anyone not circumcised would be cut off from his people as a covenant breaker.

At Horeb the Lord appeared again to make a covenant, this time with the descendants of Jacob. The promises made under the covenant with Abraham were about to be fulfilled – in a preliminary sense for the ultimate fulfilment would not be until Calvary. The Lord God again revealed himself and spoke to his people. He appeared to them in an awesome spectacle of dark cloud, thunder and fire on the mountain. He spoke words to them but they saw no form. God declared that he was the one who brought them out of bondage in Egypt. He was the God who set his love upon them, who chose them and brought them out with his *outstretched arm*. He gave them the Decalogue, the ten commands, which they must obey under the terms of that covenant.

This covenant, like the others, was instituted by God alone. The people had nothing to do with the terms of the covenant – it was not a negotiated covenant but a declared covenant. The Lord alone had saved them. He declared ‘I will be your God and you shall be my people’. He would continue to protect them and bless them while ever they walked in the fear of God and obeyed his commands.

### Made With Us

When the Lord made his covenant with Abraham it was not just with Abraham but with his descendants, for *an everlasting covenant* (Genesis 17:7). It was the same with this covenant made at Horeb. Many of the people assembled before Moses as he preached by the Jordan were only children, or not even born, 40 yrs before when God made this covenant at Horeb. Yet Moses stressed in vv.2

and 3 that the covenant was made with us. Just because they were not there did not mean they were not included in the covenant. It was *all of us who are alive* and here today. We are included in the covenant just as much as our fathers who were there in body at that time.

The Lord does not come to each generation to make a new covenant. As much as each generation wants to have its own revelation from God, this is not what God has ordained. The desire for things new and novel will be present in each generation – either because of rebellious hearts or because of sincere searching for truth. That truth will be found in the covenant the Lord made with our fathers.

Our fathers may well have rebelled against the Lord as did the fathers of these people listening to Moses, but that does not render the covenant the Lord made with them outdated. The covenant the Lord made at Horeb, like that made with Abraham was of continuing validity – circumcision continued on in the Mosaic covenant. Children were to be taught the terms of the covenant for they were included in the covenant even if they were not yet born when the covenant was made at Horeb.

As prophesied by Jeremiah (31:31f), the days did come when the Lord made a new covenant with Israel, a new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ. In this new covenant, this better covenant, there is forgiveness of sin, a cleansing of the *conscience from dead works* (Hebrews 9:14). This is the power of the blood of Jesus Christ. In this new covenant the law of God will be written on the hearts of the people and they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. They will have the power to overcome sin, the power to obey the commands of God.

The new covenant is the fulfilment of the old covenant. It is mediated by God himself- God the Son. We stand before Jesus who has declared this new covenant in his blood. We look back to the old covenant from this vantage point. Still it is that God declares I will be your God and you shall be my people. God does not relate to us under our terms. He does not relate to us on the basis of what we have done. He relates to us on the basis of what he has done for us in his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **Mediator**

*The Lord himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath – there is no other* (4:39). The Lord God is the Creator; he is sovereign ruler of all, the Almighty Lord of all. This transcendent God is the same God who came down to speak to his people out of the midst of the fire. He is the Lord who *talked with you face to face on the mountain* (5:4). This means that God spoke in a personal way, he spoke intimately with his people. The Lord spoke to Moses *face to face as a man speaks to a friend* (Exodus 33:11).

This is so amazing. God the ruler of the universe came down and spoke face to face with people like you and me. Imagine the President of USA or the Queen coming to your house for a personal visit. You would be amazed if such a person deigned to stoop so low. But Almighty God has done just that.

*O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth, you have set your glory above the heavens* (Psalm 8). His name is the name that is above every name. His name is that before which every knee shall bow – queen and president not withstanding. This is the God whom no man can see lest he die. This is the God who came down upon that mountain in a blazing fire such that the people trembled. The sight and the sound of his voice were so awesome, so fearsome that they cried out – *if we hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore we shall die* (5:25).

*What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you visit him (Psalm 8)?* This awesome God remembered these slaves, these nobodies as they wandered in the desert. He remembers weak and frail people like you and me. Jesus had compassion on helpless and hopeless human beings. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. He wanted them to hear the gospel, to believe in him and come into his eternal kingdom. My sheep hear my voice and they follow me he said.

As the people stood before the mountain, fearful of even the voice of the Lord, Moses stepped forward to be their mediator, to stand between them and the Lord. He stood to *declare to you the word of the Lord (5:5)*. They stood in reverent fear as the Lord spoke through his servant Moses.

Sin has separated us all from God. There is no way that we can approach God clothed in the filthy rags of sin. God is a holy God and cannot look upon sin. To even touch the mountain meant instant death for these people at Horeb (Exodus 19:12). Like them we need a mediator. We need one who speaks the words of God. Yet we also need one like us, one who understands our weakness, who can represent us before the Holy God.

Moses was a faithful mediator of the old covenant as we see in this text. But he was not without sin. He has reminded us three times already in this book that he would not be crossing over the Jordan for the Lord was angry with him. He would not continue as their mediator. He was about to die.

But in the new covenant we have a perfect mediator, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:24). He was made like us in every way yet was without sin. He can sympathise with our weakness (Hebrews 4:15). He is our perfect representative before the throne of God – and he lives forever to intercede for us. In him we have access to the throne of grace. Clothed in his righteousness we can come before the Holy God.

Jesus is himself the word of God – the word become flesh. He has revealed God as never before. He declared the new covenant in his own death upon the cross. He rose again from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God to intercede for us – to be our mediator for ever. Therefore *He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him since he always lives to intercede for them (Hebrews 7:25)*.

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