

Deuteronomy 5:1-5

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Moses exhorts the Israelites to obey God's commandments by reminding them of God's manifestation at Mount Horeb (Sinai) where He established a covenant relationship with them, to make them a nation that serves a priestly function if they would walk in obedience.

Having recounted Israel's past experiences from Mount Sinai to the plains of Moab (1:1—3:29) and having taught them to obey laws of God in order to remain in Canaan and be blessed (chapter 4), Moses now exhorts the Israelites to obey God's commandments by reminding them of God's manifestation at Mount Horeb (Sinai) where He established a covenant relationship with them. In so doing, *Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing."* The verb "to hear" (Shema) describes both the mental activity of hearing (listening) as well as its effects. In other words, listening or hearing is always followed by obeying what was said. The Bible equates listening with obeying and keeping God's commandments. As James said, "Prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" ([Jas. 1:22](#)).

Moses exhorted the Israelites to obey *the statutes and the ordinances which he was speaking* in their *hearing*. The words "statutes" and "ordinances" are both used to describe God's commandments (as in 4:1). However, each one has a distinct meaning. The term "statutes" ("ḥuqqîm" in Hebrew) refers to something prescribed by an authority. As such, it could be translated as "prescriptions," or "decrees." The second term ("mišpāṭîm") refers to legal procedures, or commands issued by a judge. Moses used these two terms together to emphasize the totality of God's authority and the importance of obeying the whole decree of God. Such an emphasis is made explicit in the next statement, *"that you may learn them and observe them carefully."*

In verse two, Moses identified *the statutes and the ordinances* he had in mind as the original covenant given *at Horeb* (Mount Sinai). He stated, *"The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb."* Thus, what Moses was about to speak to the Israelites was not something new. Rather, it was a restatement to this generation of what God had already agreed to with His people. Furthermore, the word "*covenant*" here does not refer to the Ten

Commandments alone but to the relationship that the LORD established with His people at Mount Horeb ([Exodus 19-20](#)). The patriarchs had a relationship with God and received promises from God. But this went beyond the relationship God had with them. For Moses said, “*The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with all those of us alive here today.*”

In [Genesis 17](#), God made a mutual agreement with Abraham to bless and multiply him if he walked blameless ([Genesis 17:1](#)). The Mosaic covenant made at Horeb followed the same mutual structure, where each party had obligations. But the Mosaic covenant makes a specific promise of blessing; it spells out what walking “blameless” looks like. The episode Moses refers to is recorded in [Exodus 19:5-6](#). There God told Moses to make this offer to His people:

“Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Although the previous promises made to Israel’s *fathers* pass to the people, this was a new offer. God made an agreement that if they would walk in obedience to His specific laws, not previously spelled out, then He would cause Israel to serve a priestly function to other nations. The *fathers* were promised their descendants would become a nation. Now this covenant is with that nation.

The nation Israel would intercede on behalf of other nations, serving a priestly function to them. Israel would demonstrate to other nations how to be blessed of God, by serving as an example how to live life constructively. Jesus said the Law could be summed up in two statements, to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves ([Matthew 22:37-40](#)). By following God’s laws, Israel would demonstrate the constructive benefit of living under the rule of law, rather than the power of a human tyrant. That is the essence of loving God. Israel would also demonstrate the power of mutual cooperation, being a nation of peoples who love their neighbors as themselves.

This was not a proposition made to the fathers. It was a covenant made “*with us, with all those of us alive here today.*” Further, it was a mutual agreement they had “signed,” saying in response to Moses’ proposition in [Exodus 19:7-8](#):

“So, Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. All the people answered

together and said, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do!' And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD."

God made this covenant thirty-eight years earlier, and doubtless there were people now listening to Moses who had not voiced their agreement to the mutual covenant of [Exodus 19](#). However, this agreement was still in force, as it was made with the nation. Moses's emphasis was on the nation Israel as an organic whole, not on individuals or a single generation. The "deal" was for the nation to walk in obedience to the law and in turn become a blessing to other nations through serving a priestly, intercessory function.

Moses then reminded the people of God's manifestation at Horeb. He said, "*The LORD spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire.*" The idiom "face to face" does not imply that the Israelites saw God in a physical form, because God is spirit ([Deuteronomy 4:12, 15, 33](#); [John 1:18](#)). Rather, the idiom means that God spoke without intermediation. This occurred directly following the "signing" of the mutual agreement. God had Moses set boundaries to prevent people from destruction from coming too close to His presence, and "Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God" ([Exodus 19:17](#)).

The people saw lightning and heard thunder, and "Then God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery'" ([Exodus 20:1-2](#)). God then proceeded to give the Ten Commandments. This was God's "new deal" for this generation. In Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people of this agreement. It is an encouragement in that they have not yet entered the land. The land remains to be conquered. By reiterating the promise that God will make them a priestly nation if they walk in obedience, it assures Israel that their military campaign to take the land will meet with success, if they continue to walk in obedience.

The Israelites "saw no form — only a voice" when God spoke to them "from the midst of the fire" ([Deuteronomy 4:12](#)). Thus, the Israelites heard God's voice *from the midst of the fire*. Nevertheless, because the Israelites were afraid when they saw that blazing fire, they asked Moses to act as their mediator so that he could report to them what the LORD said ([Exodus 19:16-17](#)). Moses stated, "*While I was standing between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain.*" It is the word of the LORD (the Ten Commandments) received at Mount Horeb (Sinai) that Moses is going to repeat to the new generation of Israelites in the following verses (vv. 6-21).

Biblical Text:

Then Moses summoned all Israel and said to them:

“Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully. 2 The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. 3 The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, *with* all those of us alive here today. 4 The Lord spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire, 5 *while* I was standing between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain. He said,