

**Deuteronomy 4: 1, 5-9**

*So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.*

*See, just as the Lord my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!' For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is whenever we call to him? And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?*

*But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children—*

**Matthew 5: 17-19**

*'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. 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.*

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You may remember that at the service to welcome Debbie our deputy lord lieutenant in church last September, we had a whole posse of lord lieutenants from the counties around. Very impressive, and they had to leave their swords - part of their uniform - outside

church! That is the law! Another such law is that MPs must not wear suits of armour in parliament.

Such laws may be out of date - but the principle behind them, the role of MPs and those who maintain law and order in our country, is **not** out of date.

The same was true of the Old Testament laws. Things that had applied when they were wanderers in the desert, with a tent for a worship centre, did not apply to the city of Jerusalem and its temple. Identifying the still relevant -and the purpose behind a law is very important.

The laws of the Old Testament were given in various stages through the history of the people of Israel. Of course, none were really written down systematically and recorded until perhaps the 7th century BC. The earliest were probably very ancient and appear in other middle eastern codes.

Perhaps the first to be accepted and learnt were The Laws of the Covenant which centre around those Moses brought to the tribes and include the ten commandments. Our first reading from Deuteronomy was written centuries afterwards, but reflects into Moses' words this wonderful and unique passage (in ancient Middle Eastern law) about the relationship between God and his people of which the laws are the binding of that right relationship, a closer bond than any others had with their gods.

The writer says *“What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?”*

The 7th century Deuteronomic code records many regulations relating to everyday life, some of which are civil and legal ones, influenced probably by their time in exile.

There is also a great section in Leviticus gathered, perhaps 200 years later, where the laws regarding worship, the temple and sacrifice are recorded and includes other types of law. It is called The Holiness Code.

Laws and their offshoots increased and became more and more complicated, until by Jesus' day we have such things as the tithing of the amounts of herbs you might put into a stew.

And to the Pharisees and teachers of the law these endless tiny subsections of the law had had become more important than the principles -perhaps thanksgiving for the food they had. That is what Jesus was referring to when he said he had not come to abolish the law and the prophets. (The law and the prophets was an overall name for the Scriptures.) His coming surpasses the pernicky regulations which made up so much of the Old Testament law, and which miss the principles on which they were made, God given authority on the best way to God and love our neighbour.

This passage from Matthew is at the beginning of the section we call the sermon on the Mount, and Jesus goes on to give examples of what he means to emphasise the meaning behind the law.

Jesus says anger is the first step towards having murder in your heart. He says, looking with lust at another is the like having adultery in your heart, as examples.

They may not be commandments we disobey, but there will be others and breaking any of his commandments, which are given to us to help us love God and one another, breaks Gods heart...

I learnt realised there are sins of **commission**, where we do things, we should not do (usually unkind or covetous thoughts or acts). Sins of **omission** where we do not do the things we ought (usually kind and generous things), and there are sins of **permission**, where we look the other way at things, we know are wrong in the world around us.

Each of us - with Gods help, can work through personal sins, breaking of his laws, but it is more difficult to stand up to the sins of the world, but we can all write to MPs, we can all give to charities trying to mitigate or right the injustices of the world. Perhaps Gary Lineker was trying to stand up for injustice?

And, above all, because we know “the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him”, that he has taken the sins of the world to himself, when Jesus died on the cross - and longs that the world might live in love - **we can know our prayers will make a difference.**

*[Janet Lawrence]*