

## **A Moral Compass from Sinai**

### *Thought for the Day*

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Several of the festivals in the Jewish calendar were originally harvest festivals and times of pilgrimage, when Jews travelled from all over biblical Israel and the ancient middle east to bring offerings to the Temple in Jerusalem. These festivals marked the anniversaries of events described in the Bible, and – like Shavuot or Pentecost, which took place this weekend – are still observed. This is the traditional date of the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai, when Moses received the Ten Commandments engraved on tablets of stone.

Although the obligation to go on pilgrimage ended with the destruction of the ancient Temple by the Romans almost 2000 years ago, I used the festival as an excuse for a long weekend in Jerusalem. When I got back yesterday, I found Scotland engrossed in a whole diverse stew of media stories.

The Church of Scotland seems to be in turmoil, not so much about the ordination of one person, but about the underlying issue of biblical authority. The Outer Isles are up in arms about proposals that ferries should run seven days a week, breaking the local code of Sabbath observance. Debates continue in both Westminster and Holyrood about assisted suicide – what some would call murder. The unedifying revelations about MPs' expenses rumbles on, claiming ever more victims, as accusations of fraud – what some would call theft – grow louder, but fuelled by what many would also see as little more than the politics of envy. And of course, there is the usual sewer-load of revelations of the infidelities of self-styled celebrities.

Murder, theft, adultery, false gods, envy, family breakdown, even the sanctity of the Sabbath – do these not ring bells? It may be three-and-a-half thousand years since the revelation on Sinai, but who can deny the contemporary relevance of that code? Even if most of us don't consciously base all our thinking on the bible or the ten commandments, they are still the magnet that directs the moral compass of our thinking about all these issues.

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