



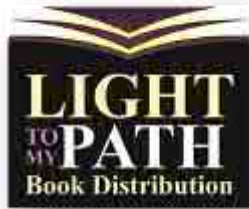
# DEUTERONOMY

A DEVOTIONAL LOOK AT HOW MOSES  
PREPARED HIS PEOPLE TO ENTER  
THE LAND OF PROMISE

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

# Deuteronomy

*A Devotional Look at How Moses Prepared  
His People to Enter the Land of Promise.*



F. Wayne Mac Leod

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## Deuteronomy

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Diane Mac Leod, Pat Schmidt

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# INTRODUCTION TO DEUTERONOMY

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*Author.*

There is little doubt that the author of the book of Deuteronomy is Moses. This is evident in the very first words of the book itself. We read in Deuteronomy 1:1:

These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the desert east of the Jordan—that is, in the Arabah—opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth and Dizahab.

Other references to Moses as the author can be found in Deuteronomy 29:1 and 31:1.

Deuteronomy 31:9 makes it clear that “this law” was written down by Moses and given to the priests and the sons of Levi to carry in the Ark of the Covenant.

So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel.

Passages from the book of Deuteronomy are quoted in the New Testament and attributed to Moses. The following chart gives three examples of this:

Who Spoke	NT Passage	Quoted from
Jesus	Matthew 19:7-8	Deut. 24:1-4
Peter	Acts 3:22	Deut. 18:15-19
Paul	Rom. 10:19	Deut. 32:21

There are also a number of Old Testament passages which refer to the “Book of the Law of Moses” or the “Law of Moses” (see Joshua 8:31; 2 Kings 14:6; 2 Chronicles 23:18; Daniel 9:11). All these references show us that the general understanding in both the Old and New Testament times was that Moses was the author of this book.

While Moses is the author of the book of Deuteronomy, it is likely that some portions were written by someone close to him. Chapter 34, for example, which describes the death of Moses, is clearly written about Moses and not by him. The language of this chapter shows us that Moses did not write about his own death. Someone who knew him recorded the events and added them to the account.

### *Background:*

Deuteronomy contains the words of Moses to the people of God who stood by the Jordan River ready to cross over to the land the Lord had promised their fathers. These people had come through the wilderness, conquered the land east of the Jordan and were ready now to possess the land east of the Jordan. Knowing that he would not cross the

river with them, Moses took the time, before he died, to encourage the people of God and instruct them in how they were to live in the land the Lord was giving them.

“Deuteronomy” literally means “second law.” The book gets its name from the fact that God’s law for His people is repeated as they prepare to enter the Promised Land.

Moses does three things in this book. First, he reminds Israel of what the Lord had done for them and His wonderful love for them as a people. Second, he instructs them on what God requires of them as they possess the land west of the Jordan. Finally, he tells them of the blessings that would be theirs through obedience as well as the curses that would fall on them if they walked away from their Lord.

#### *Importance of the Book for Today:*

Deuteronomy is important because of what it teaches us about the love of God toward His people. Moses reminded his people over and over that they were the object of God’s special affection and devotion. This was not because they were deserving of this attention. If anything, they were a complaining and rebellious people. God sets His affection on us despite our failures and sin. He chooses us and commits Himself to us because of love. While none of us deserve this, it would indeed be foolish to reject His love because we are unworthy of it.

God offered His people a land of their own because He loved them. God’s people were to possess that land and live in it as a holy people. Possessing what God offered would not be easy. There would be many enemies to fight if they were going to take the land God had given them. In a similar way, God has given each of us a “land” to possess. Deuteronomy shows us that there will be a battle



before us if we are to become all that God wants us to be. There will be enemies to defeat and obstacles to overcome but, all this is possible as we walk in obedience and faithfulness to His Word.

A key element of the book of Deuteronomy is the teaching that victory does not depend on human wisdom and strength. Victory is found in obedience to God and His Word. God blesses faithful obedience but disciplines and punishes rebellion. In an age that depends on science, politics and military might, we would do well to understand that the success of our nations and churches does not depend so much on human skill and administration as on simple obedience to the Word of God.

# 1

## TAKING POSSESSION

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Read Deuteronomy 1:1-46

As we begin the book of Deuteronomy, Moses speaks to the Israelites. They were on the eastern side of the Jordan River (verse 1) and had not yet entered the Promised Land. It was the first day of the eleventh month, forty years after they had left Egypt (verse 3). God had given them victory over the Sihon, king of the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan on the east side of the Jordan. Now they were preparing to cross the river into the land of Canaan.

As Moses speaks, he takes his people back in time to the region of Horeb at the foot of Mount Sinai (verse 6). It was at Mount Sinai that God gave His commandments to the Israelites. Here they learned what God expected of them and His requirements for their lives. Of particular concern to Moses, however, was the time when God told the people to break camp and advance into the territory of the Amorites. God promised to give this land to them. All they had to do was take possession of it (verses 7-8).

Notice that in the mind of God the victory was already accomplished. It was His will that the Israelites have the land of the Amorites. The property title had been signed by God and it now legally belonged to them. All that was required

was for them to enter and take possession of the land. Admittedly, this would not be easy. There were people living there who did not want to leave. These nations, however, had corrupted the land by their false religions and evil practices and it was God's intention that they be removed.

Notice from verse 9 that Moses felt the immensity of the task before him. Leading this nation and helping them settle in the land God had given them was a burden too heavy for him to carry alone. He proposed that the Israelites choose wise, understanding and respected men from their tribes who would be given responsibility to make decisions regarding the disputes that arose among them (verse 12).

We understand from this that if the people of God were to take possession of the land God had given them; they needed leaders to guide them into this victory. These leaders would be responsible before God to deal with any problems that arose as they moved forward. They would promote harmony and unity among the people so that they could focus on the task at hand.

Consider this for a moment. One of the great struggles of the body of Christ today is dealing with problems among its members. God has called us to possess a land currently held by Satan but we are so busy trying to deal with problems among ourselves that we cannot advance. As long as we are fighting each other, we will never be able to possess the territory God has given us. One of the great responsibilities of Christian leaders today is to encourage unity in the body of Christ so we can move forward. Moses understood that if the Israelites were going to possess the land God had given them, they would first need to deal with the divisions and disputes among themselves. For this reason, he sought the Lord about finding godly men who could help deal with the issues that arose among God's people.

The challenge of Moses to find leaders pleased the people (verse 14). This resulted in respected men being appointed and given authority over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens (verse 15). The context indicates that these men had different responsibilities. Some were to be military commanders. Others were to be judges to settle disputes.

Of particular concern were those who had been given the responsibility to judge disputes between brothers and sisters. Moses challenged these men to judge fairly and not to show favouritism. These judges were not to be afraid of what people might think. Any case that was too difficult was to be referred to Moses who would seek the Lord's decision (verses 16-17).

When their leaders were in place, the Lord commanded His people to leave Horeb and go toward the land of the Amorites, which meant passing through a "dreadful desert" (verse 19). The way to victory comes through struggle. Victory will not come without effort or pain. We will face the desert of discouragement or pass through the wilderness of rejection. There will be a cost to pay for victory but the joy of success will be worth it all.

In the region of Kadesh Barnea, in the hill country of the Amorites, Moses reassured his people of the promise of God to give them victory. He challenged them to take possession of the land God had already given them. He told them not to be afraid or discouraged because God was with them and would assure their possession of the land (verses 19-21).

As the people considered the challenge of Moses, they decided first to send spies into the land to bring a report about the route they were to take and the towns they would come

to on their way (verse 22). Initially, this idea seemed good to Moses and so he selected twelve men, one from each tribe, to spy out the land (verse 23). These men spied out the land and reported that while the land God was giving them was a good land (verse 25), it was also a land of powerful enemies and fortified cities. This struck fear in the hearts of the Israelites. The news that the people of the land were stronger than them caused them to lose heart. Their attention shifted from God's promise of victory to their own abilities. They did not see how they could defeat such an enemy. They were unwilling to take the risk of possessing the land. Their human thinking and fears stood in the way of victory.

Moses tried to encourage the people in the Lord. He told them that the Lord would go before them. He reminded them of how he had defeated the Egyptians and provided for their every need to that point (verses 29-30). Throughout the years of wandering in the desert, the Israelites had seen God do many miraculous things. They had seen His provision and His power. They had seen Him defeat their enemies. He had led them from one place to another by a fiery pillar and cloud. Surely this God would not abandon them now as they stood at the doorstep to the land He had promised.

Despite what they had seen and knew about God, the people of Israel could not find it in their heart to trust Him in the matter of taking possession of the land. That day they refused to go into the land, fearing for their lives. We can only imagine what an insult this would have been to the God who had cared so much for them and promised it to them.

How easy it is for us to fall into the same trap today. God has promised victory. From His perspective the victory is

already in place. All we have to do is to take possession and claim that victory. This will not be easy. There will be struggle and fighting but the victory is certain to all who persevere. What has God given you as your possession today? What has He called you to do? Are you standing at the doorstep of a great opportunity? Will you trust the Lord to do as He has promised? Will you risk everything and trust that promise? Will you face the enemy before you and in Christ's name overcome and possess the land?

God's people, in the days of Moses, refused to take the risk. They turned their backs on God and refused to enter the land. This angered the Lord. He swore that not one person over the age of twenty, except Caleb and Joshua would enter the land. How this ought to be a warning to us today. The people of God missed an opportunity to possess the land God had given them. They would live the rest of their lives wandering in the desert. There are opportunities that God presents to us today. These opportunities may never come again. God calls you today and says, "I will go before you and give you victory. This territory is already yours. I have signed the title over to you. All you have to do is possess it." What will be our response? Will we possess what He has given us or will we walk away saying, "it is just not possible" or "I'm not ready to make such a commitment"?

A whole generation missed out on possessing the land God had promised because of their unbelief. They wandered in the wilderness when they could have been enjoying the fruit of their own gardens. Is this true in our day?

Notice in verse 41 that when the people realized what they had done, they determined to change their ways. They took up their weapons and decided to take possession of the land, "thinking it would be easy to go up into the hill

country" (verse 41). God warned the people through Moses, however, that He would not be with them and they would be defeated (verse 42). As before, the people did not listen and went anyway. The Amorites came out against them and defeated them. Now, though they wept before the Lord, He paid no attention to them (verse 45).

There is something we need to understand here. At first glance it appeared that the Israelites repented of their sin of unbelief and determined to make things right. The context, however, indicates that this was not the case. When God told them not to go, they again rejected His words and did what they wanted. This does not demonstrate a repentant heart. It becomes quite clear that the people were only thinking about themselves. When faced with the option of dying in the wilderness, they determined that they preferred to go to the Promised Land. Their concern was not for God and how they had grieved Him. Had they been truly repentant and concerned for God, they would have listened to Him when Moses told them not to fight the Amorites. By ignoring God the second time, they proved that their concern was only for themselves. God would not bless this attitude. As long as God's people were seeking only their own interests, they would not be His servants. Those who possess the land must seek God, trust His purposes and walk in obedience.

For Consideration:

- What encouragement do you find in the fact that the Lord has already given us victory; all we need to do is possess what He has given to us?
- Will possessing what God has given be easy? What struggles have you faced trying to possess what God has given you?

- How important is it that we guard our relationships in the body of Christ? How can bad relationships hinder us from possessing what God has given?
- How can our human thinking stand in the way of receiving what God gives? How did it stand in the way for the Israelites in this chapter?
- How does the attempt of Israel in this chapter to conquer the land after rejecting God, demonstrate that they were not truly sorry for their sin? What does this teach us about true repentance?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for His victory. Ask Him for the strength you need to take possession of what He has given you today.
- Ask God to give you grace to persevere when things are difficult and do not make sense. Thank Him that He is the God of the impossible.
- Ask God to help you to be in a right relationship with Him and with His people so that nothing hinders your victory. Ask Him to reveal anything that stands between you and that victory.
- Are there opportunities you have missed? Ask God to forgive you for your lack of obedience and trust in Him. Ask Him to show you what His purpose is now.



## 2

# TOWARD THE PROMISED LAND

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Read Deuteronomy 2:1-37

In the last chapter we saw how the people of Israel had turned their backs on God and refused to enter the Promised Land. As a result, God led them into the desert where many of them would die. That generation had turned its back on God's purposes, but the promise of God would be renewed to the next generation. Deuteronomy 2:1 tells us that for a long time they made their way around the hill country of Seir. We get the impression from this verse that the people of God did not seem to have any purpose or direction from the Lord as they wandered around the hill country. There are times like this in our lives when God seems to be silent and we are not really sure what His purpose for our life really is.

In His time, the Lord broke through the silence and spoke to Moses. He told him to turn north and pass through the territory of the descendants of Esau in Seir. Notice, however, that though the descendants of Esau would be afraid of them, the Israelites were to be very careful not to provoke them to war. God would not give the Israelites any of

Esau's land. In fact, God required that the Israelites pay for all food and water they took from the land as they passed through (verse 6). Moses reminded his people that the Lord had watched over them all the time they were in the desert so they lacked nothing. They were to listen to Him now and obey His command to respect the people of Esau (verse 7). The Israelites obeyed the command of God and passed through the land of Seir without causing any problems for the inhabitants.

God had given the land of Seir to the descendants of Esau. This territory did not belong to Israel. What we see here is that we must be sensitive to the Lord and His leading. He gives some territory to us and some he keeps from us. What is important is that we walk in obedience.

God led His people through the land of Seir into the territory of Moab. Notice again from verse 9 that the Lord made it clear to His people that they were not to harass the Moabites or provoke them to war. The reason for this was that He had given this land to the descendants of Lot as their possession.

In verses 10-12 we learn that two people groups used to live in the land of Moab. The first group were known as the Emmites. They were a strong people and very numerous. Verse 10 tells us that they were known for their size (they were a very tall people). The other people group living in Moab was the Horites (verse 12). The descendants of Esau, however, drove them out of their land and took possession of it. A special note is made in verse 12 that God did this for Esau just as He had done for Israel when He gave them the Promised Land.

We see from this that the Lord God was working out His purposes for each nation. While Israel certainly did receive

special attention and blessing from God, His blessing was not limited to them. Esau too was experiencing the blessing of God even though he did not follow Him with all his heart. God's protection was over the land of Moab. He made it clear that the Israelites were to respect the inhabitants of the land and not provoke them to war. He would not give them this land.

God had a land for His people to possess, but they would have to wait for Him to reveal the time and the place. It is all too easy for us to become impatient. Sometimes in our enthusiasm, we rush ahead of God. We want to conquer everything in His name but this is not His plan. He had a very specific purpose and place for His people. Imagine standing before God and telling Him about all the victories we had won in His name only to hear Him say, "but that wasn't what I wanted you to do." How important it was for Israel to listen to God and walk in obedience.

From the territory of Moab, Israel crossed the Zered Valley (verse 13). Notice that they had been wandering in the wilderness thirty-eight years (verse 14). During that time an entire generation of fighting men had died. This was in fulfillment of the word of the Lord that not one of those who had rebelled against Him at Kadesh Barnea would enter the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 1:19-36).

In verse 16, God told His people to pass through the region of Moab into the land of the Ammonites. Notice again that the Israelites were not to provoke the Ammonites to war. God had given this land to the descendants of Lot and would not take it from them (verses 18). Verses 20-23 give us a brief history of the region of Ammon. The inhabitants of the land were called Rephaites or Zamzummites. They were a strong people and very numerous. They were also known as a very tall people. Though they were tall and

numerous, God drove them out and gave their land to the Ammonites just as He had done for the descendants of Esau who lived in the region of Seir.

What we need to see from this is that God was bringing His people through territories that had at one time been inhabited by people who were very numerous and known for their size and strength. In each case, the original inhabitants had been driven out by another nation who settled in their place. God was preparing His people for what He had in store for them. He was showing them that what He was asking them to do was not a new thing. He had given the Ammonites victory over the Rephaites. He had given the descendants of Esau victory over the Horites. Notice in verse 23 the mention of the Avvites who had been destroyed by the Caphtorites who settled in their land. All these nations had known victory over the original inhabitants of the land. If God could do this for these pagan nations, would He not also do it for His own people?

Passing through the territory of the Ammonites, God led His people to the land of the Amorites (verse 24). The king of the Amorites was Sihon who lived in the city of Heshbon. Notice in verse 24 that the Lord told His people that they were to take possession of the land of the Amorites. Sihon was to be engaged in battle. God would go before Israel and put terror and fear into the hearts of the nations. These nations would hear what God was doing and tremble before Israel (verse 25). There would be a clear demonstration of the power of God in their midst. When they walked with God and in obedience to His leading, His presence would be powerfully on them to give them victory. God empowers us to do what He calls us to do.

From verse 26 we discover that Moses sent messengers to Sihon offering peace and asking permission for his

people to pass through his land. He promised that they would stay on the main road and that they would buy all the food and water they needed from them. He made it clear that his goal was to take his people across the Jordan into the land the Lord had promised. It is unclear why Moses would offer peace to Sihon when the Lord clearly told him that he was to engage him in battle. What is clear, however, is the purpose of the Lord. King Sihon refused to let Israel pass through his land. God allowed Sihon's heart to be stubborn and hard so that he could deliver him into the hands of His people (verse 31). Notice from verse 32 that Sihon not only refused to allow Israel to pass through his territory but he also gathered his army and came out to meet Israel (verse 32).

As promised, God delivered Sihon over to Israel. They destroyed his entire army, took all his towns and destroyed men, women and children (verse 33-34). Israel also carried off a large quantity of livestock (verse 35).

As they moved through the land, Israel experienced the empowering of God. Not a single town was too strong for them. God gave them possession of the whole territory. Notice particularly in verse 37 that Israel was careful to remain faithful to the plan of God. They did not touch any land that belonged to the Ammonites, for God had not given it to them.

God had a purpose. He had a land for Israel to possess. God would empower His people to take possession of that land. He made it clear, however, that His power and authority were not to be used for their own purposes. They could not take whatever land they wanted. They needed to follow His leading. May God give us grace to know His empowering. Even more importantly, however, may He give us discernment to know His leading.

## For Consideration:

- Have you ever had a time in your life where you seemed to be wandering with no clear direction from the Lord? How do you think the people of God felt as they wandered around the hill country of Seir (Deuteronomy 2:1-2)?
- Does God have a specific purpose for your life? Is it possible to miss that purpose?
- Does God work in the lives of unbelievers? What does this passage teach us about His purposes for Seir and Ammon?
- How did God encourage His people by leading them through countries that had at one time been conquered? What lessons was He trying to communicate to His people?
- The power of God went before God's people as they walked in obedience to His purpose. Are you walking in God's purpose? Are you experiencing His power in that purpose for your life?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you a clear sense of His purpose for your life. Ask Him to teach you not to walk outside of that purpose.
- Thank the Lord that His power is available to us as we walk in His ways. Ask Him to reveal even more of His power in your life.

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for times you have not used His gifts in ways He has authorized. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you failed to walk in obedience to His leading.

### 3

## POSSESSING THE EASTERN SIDE OF THE JORDAN

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Read Deuteronomy 3:1-29

Moses continues to recount the story of Israel's conquests on the eastern side of the Jordan. In the last chapter we saw how God led His people through the land of Seir and Moab to the territory of King Sihon. Israel fought King Sihon and took his territory. Verse 1 tells us that from the land of the Amorites, Israel went along the road to Bashan.

When King Og of Bashan heard that Israel was approaching his territory, he came out to meet them with his army. Both armies met in the region of Edrei. At that time, the Lord spoke to Moses and told him not to be afraid of Og. God told Moses that He would hand this king over to Israel. They were to fight him and take his land (verse 2). While victory was assured by God, Israel would have to fight to obtain that victory. This is often how God works. We should not expect that our victories will come without struggle. God will often require that we do battle with the enemy. Some of our victories will come through great pain and perseverance. While the victory is ours, sometimes there will be a cost to pay to obtain that victory.



Verse 3 tells us that God was true to His word. Israel engaged Og in battle and the Lord gave them victory. They defeated him and left no survivors. Israel took control of all his territory, which included sixty fortified cities (verse 4). Notice from verse 5 that every one of those 60 cities had high walls, gates and bars. Israel also obtained a great number of unwallled cities. They completely destroyed these cities and their inhabitants leaving no survivors except the livestock they carried off as plunder (verse 7).

The power of God was evident in those days. No army could stand against Israel. They now possessed the territory of the Amorites and the kingdom of Bashan from the Arnon Gorge in the south to Mount Hermon in the north (verse 8), a territory that stretched up to 200 kilometres (125 miles) from north to south. God gave all this land to His people. There was no one left to fight for it or take it back from them. They had all been killed.

There is an interesting note in verse 11 about Og, king of Bashan. He was the last of the Rephaites. The Rephaites were giants. Verse 11 speaks about King Og's bed. It was made of iron and was 13 feet long (3.9 meters) and 6 feet (1.8 meters) wide. This was the king Israel defeated that day. He was powerful and strong but fell to the power of God in Israel. What giant are you facing today?

The victory God gave His people in those days was incredible. What is particularly striking is that these same people grumbled and complained against God all through the wilderness. They were not particularly a spiritual people. They had all the weakness that you and I have today. They were not strong in themselves. God took these weak, complaining and rebellious people and did a powerful work in them. Do you think that you have to be strong enough or spiritual enough for God to use? Take a look at Israel.

God's power worked through them, as unworthy as they were, to accomplish His purpose. The same God wants to work in us today. What does He want to accomplish in you? The victory He wants to give will require willingness on your part to step out and face the enemy. It will require an effort, but the result is guaranteed. Will you step out like Israel, as unworthy as you are, and see what God does?

Now that the land east of the Jordan had been conquered, it needed to be divided among the people of God. Moses gave the land to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh. Verses 12-17 describe how the land was divided among those three tribes. Manasseh would be located in the north in the region taken from Og, king of Bashan. Reuben and Gad were given the territory directly to the south which included part of the territory of Gilead down to the Arnon Gorge (verse 16). This land was given to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh on condition that their men cross over the Jordan to help their brothers take possession of the land the Lord had given them on the western side of the river. Only when all of Israel had taken possession of the land God had given them would Reuben, Gad and Manasseh be permitted to return to the eastern side of the Jordan and settle in it (verses 18-20).

How easy it is for us to be concerned only for ourselves. God had a piece of land for every tribe to possess, but they were to support each other in the conquest of that territory. They were not to be concerned for themselves alone. God expected that the strength of the entire nation be devoted to the conquest of each parcel of land. While individual tribes would possess and remain in their allotted territory, it was the obligation of everyone to see that each tribe obtained what God had given them. In a similar way, God has given us the obligation to care for each other. Our wisdom, time and gifts are to be devoted to the service of the whole

body of Christ. It is our obligation before God to help our brothers and sisters reach the potential He has for them.

In verse 21 Moses recounts how he spoke to Joshua, his successor, and challenged him to be strong in the ministry God had given him. He reminded Joshua that the Lord had given Israel victory over the inhabitants east of the Jordan and He would certainly fight for him when he took the people across the Jordan to possess the land to the west of the Jordan (verse 22).

Moses pleaded with God to let him cross the Jordan to see the land He had promised His people but God refused to give him this privilege (verses 23-26). Numbers 20:7-12 tell the story of how Moses had disobeyed God by striking a rock at Meribah instead of speaking to it. Because he had publicly dishonoured God in this manner, Moses would not cross into the Promised Land. Though now Moses pleaded with God to change His mind, God would hear nothing of it (verse 26). While He did permit Moses a glimpse of the land from the top of Mount Pisgah, He would not be allowed to set foot on the soil God had promised to his fathers. Joshua would be the one to lead the people into the land (verses 26-28).

Our actions have consequences. The generation that left Egypt was asked to take possession of the land but they refused because they were afraid. This resulted in wandering for forty years in the desert until every fighting man had died. Moses refused to honour God by striking a rock instead of speaking to it. This resulted in his death in the wilderness as well. Sometimes when we fail to honour God and walk in obedience to His command, we forfeit what He desires to give us. There is a powerful warning here for us.

For Consideration:

- Does God promise that all our victories will come easily? What do we learn here about having to fight for those victories?
- What kind of man was Og? What do we learn about his physical appearance? What giants do you face in your life?
- What do we learn in this passage about our responsibility toward our brothers and sisters in Christ? What obligation do we have to help them to possess all that God has for them?
- What does this passage teach us about the consequences of sins? Can we sacrifice the victory God wants to give us by our sin and lack of faith?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you greater perseverance as you seek Him for the victory He has promised.
- Thank the Lord that He is willing to give victory to us, as unworthy as we are.
- Ask the Lord to show you how you can help a brother or sister reach the potential He has for them.
- Ask God to give you the faith and courage necessary so that you do not miss the victories He wants to give you in your life and ministry.

# 4

## A CALL TO OBEDIENCE

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Read Deuteronomy 4:1-43

The book of Deuteronomy records the last words of Moses to his people. Moses was a prophet like no other in Israel. His time in the presence of the Lord God qualified him to speak for the Lord to his people. He knew the heart of God and shared that heart with Israel. Moses also knew that his time on this earth was coming to an end. He would not cross the Jordan River with the people. This was his last opportunity to speak with them.

As we begin chapter 4, Moses challenges his people to listen to the laws and decrees he was going to teach them. Notice that the words he was giving them were not mere words. There was a blessing attached to these words. Moses challenged his people to follow these laws carefully so that they could live long in the land the Lord was giving them to possess. In the course of the last three chapters we have spoken much about possessing what God has given us. Here we discover that we can lose what we possess by disobedience to the Lord God and His Word. God can take from us what He has given to us if we prove unfaithful. By obedience to the Law of God, Israel would prolong their stay in the land the Lord had given them to possess. If they refused to walk in His ways, however, God

would take it from them. This is exactly what happened. Israel would be taken into captivity and lose everything because she turned her back on the Lord God and His ways.

Possessing what God has given us is one thing. Holding onto that possession is another. We might buy a home and take possession of it, but in order to prevent that home from falling into ruins we need to take care of it. Through Moses, the Lord reminds His people that if they wanted to remain in the land He had given them, they needed to walk faithfully in God's ways. They needed to respect the God who gave that land to them. They needed to honour Him in how they lived in the land He had given them to possess. If you were a landlord, would you allow a tenant to live in the home he was renting from you if he didn't follow your rules? Would you let him remain in your house if he was not taking care of it?

Notice in verse 2 how Moses commanded the people not to add or subtract anything from the laws the Lord had given them. The first temptation for the people of God was to disobey the Law of God. The second temptation was to modify the law to suit their needs and desires at that time. There are many ways we can add to or subtract from the Law of God. The Pharisees of the New Testament, for example, seemed to add to the Law of God. They added extra requirements and burdens (see Luke 11:46). Even in our day some churches seem to delight in rules, thinking that by adding requirements they are pleasing God. Paul addressed this matter in the church of Colossae when he said in Colossians 2:20-23:

(20) Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: (21) "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? (22) These are all

destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. (23) Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

It appears that this church was adding requirements and burdens to its members that were not from God. The problem with these man-made rules is that they are often confused with God's Word. I have met people who are unable to distinguish between what God requires and what is a man-made rule.

The other temptation with regard to the Law of God is to subtract from it. Have you ever heard people say, "That was for then but God does not expect that from us now"? Sometimes subtracting from the Law of God involves ignoring certain requirements of God. We are willing to follow God's requirements to a point but then we do as we please. Moses made it quite clear that holding onto the possession God had given Israel required that they walk faithfully with God in His requirements without adding to what He said or taking away from it. They were to take God's law as it was and live in obedience to it.

To underline the importance of what he was saying, Moses gives an example in verses 3-4. In these verses he reminds them of what happened at Baal Peor. We read about this in Numbers 25:1-9. There in Baal Peor, the men of Israel engaged in sexual immorality with the Moabite women and worshipped the pagan god Baal. God's anger rose up against them and He sent a plague to the camp. Twenty-four thousand Israelites died as a result of their disobedience. Moses gives this example to remind the

people that their God was a holy God who would not hesitate to judge them for their sin. If they were to remain in the land they were about to possess they would need to be a holy people committed to following the Lord their God in everything.

There was another reason why obedience to the Lord was important. In verses 5-7 Moses reminded his people that if they obeyed the Lord God and kept His commandments, they would show their wisdom and understanding to the nations around them. These nations would see that their God was near them and heard their prayers. They would see the greatness of their nation as it followed the righteous decrees of God. God's blessing would be on the nation that walked in His ways. His presence would be evident in their midst. Whole nations would marvel at the wonder of God and His relationship with His people. Israel's obedience to the laws of God would make her a powerful witness to God and His desire to enter a personal relationship with His people.

One of the tragedies of the body of Christ on this earth today is that it has not always been a good example of Christ and His relationship with us. Like Israel of old, the church of today has been guilty of walking in disobedience to the commands of God. The result is that instead of marvelling at the power and righteousness of God in our midst, the world mocks the church. What Israel chose to do with the law of God would affect how the nations saw them and how they saw God. If they walked in faithfulness to God, they would be a wonderful testimony to the nations around them. If they didn't, they would turn people away from their God. They were to obey the Law of God not only to hold onto their possession but also so that the world would see the wonder and glory of the God they served.



There is a third reason for walking in obedience to the Law of God. In verse 9 Moses told his people that they were to do so in order that their faith would be passed on to their children. What a tragedy it would be if the next generation did not know this wonderful God. In verses 10-14 Moses reminds the people about their God. They had stood before Him at Mount Sinai. They watched as the whole mountain filled with fire and black clouds. They heard the voice of God speaking, though they could not see Him. He gave them His commandments written on tablets of stone. He was a holy God who spoke to His people. He was their creator and their protector. He loved them and had chosen them to be His people. Imagine how it would have been if the parents who knew God and His protection had never shared this with their children. Imagine the children of these Israelites, not knowing the tender provision and desire of God for them, wandering away and serving false gods who cared nothing for them. By walking in the ways of the Lord and following His commands, the people of God were passing on to their children one of the most precious gifts a parent could ever give, a heritage of faith and a personal relationship with God.

In verse 15 Moses addresses a particular temptation for the people of God. Here He challenges them to turn from any other god or idol to serve the Lord God alone. He began by reminding his people that when the Lord God revealed Himself to them at Mount Sinai, He revealed Himself out of the fire. He did not appear to them in any form or shape. He did this in order that His people would never try to make an image or idol that looked like Him. God knew the temptation for His people to want to define and picture Him, but He was beyond anything their minds could understand or devise. The nations around them had gods they could see. The Lord God of Israel was bigger than these gods. He could not be defined or

represented by an idol or image in the shape of a man, woman, animal bird or fish. The stars, the sky, the moon and the sun were all His creation, but they were vastly inferior to Him. He was bigger than anything they could imagine, paint or make from wood, metal or stone. Any such representations would be insulting and misleading.

The God Israel served was a very personal God. He had brought them out of the furnace of Egypt to be His people. He was a God who could be offended and become angry. He was a jealous God who would not share His people with any idol or false god (verses 23-24). Moses reminded his people that if they or their children turned from the Lord God to worship idols or false gods, then His anger would burn against them (verse 25). God would punish them and scatter them among the nations away from His presence (verses 26-28).

Notice in verse 29 that God would not forget His people even in their rebellion. If in their rebellion they turned back to Him and sought Him with all their heart and soul, He would reveal Himself to them again. They would find Him again and He would restore them and their blessings. The Lord God was a merciful and forgiving God who would not forget His people, even in their wandering (verse 31).

God spoke to His people out of the fire (verse 33). He chose His people and claimed them for Himself. He stretched out His hand over His people and performed many great and awesome deeds. He gave them victory over their enemies. He set them free from the power of Egypt. There was no other God like Him among the nations. He blessed His people above all people on earth because He loved them (verse 37). He drove out nations before them (verse 38). No carved image could ever truly

represent this wonderful God. The God of Israel could not be compared to a stick of wood or a piece of gold.

Moses challenged his people to acknowledge that the Lord was God in heaven and on earth. He alone was God. To Him alone every knee would one day bow. He loved His people and chose them from all other nations to belong to Him and to be a witness to the world of His grace and tender mercy. This required that His people walk in thankful obedience. Moses pleaded with the people to keep the decrees and commands the Lord had given them, promising that if they were faithful to God, they would know His ongoing blessing in the land they were going to possess.

In verse 41-43 Moses set aside three towns on the eastern side of the Jordan River to be cities of refuge. This was in obedience to the command of the Lord in Numbers 35:9-15. These cities were set apart so that anyone who had unintentionally killed someone without malice could flee to one of these cities and find protection. This again was an indication of the wonderful mercy and grace of God, whose concern was for those who needed protection for unintentional sin. The three cities set apart were Bezer for the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth for the tribe of Gad and Golan for the tribe of Manasseh.

For Consideration:

- Is it possible for us to lose our possession? What role does obedience and faithfulness to God have in assuring that we keep the blessings God has given?

- What does it mean to add or subtract from the Law of God? How do we do this in our day?
- What role does obedience to God have in our witness to our neighbours and friends?
- What role does our obedience and faithfulness to the Lord God have in passing our faith on to the next generation?
- What do we learn in this passage about God? What are some of His characteristics? How do these characteristics separate Him from all other gods?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to walk in obedience and faithfulness to His Word.
- Ask the Lord to help you to separate the commands of His Word from the traditions and regulations of man.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be a more faithful witness to those around you and to your children so that they can see God and His power in you.
- What do we learn about God in this passage? Take a moment to praise Him for His goodness, holiness and delight in His people.

## 5

# GOD'S REQUIREMENTS FOR HIS PEOPLE

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Read Deuteronomy 4:44-5:33

To this point in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses has reminded the people of Israel of how God had taken them through the wilderness and brought them to the border of the land He had promised their ancestors. The focus now changes. Here in this next section of the book, he shows the people what God required of them in His law. If they were to possess and remain in the land God had given them, they needed to be a holy people walking in the ways of the Lord their God.

Notice that as Moses introduces the laws of God in Deuteronomy 4:45 he speaks of stipulations, decrees and laws (testimonies, statutes and judgements (KJV)). Each of these words has a slightly different meaning and shows us something about the Law of God.

The word “stipulations” in the New International Version is correctly translated in the King James Version by “testimonies.” One of the ways in which God communicated His law was through the testimonies and examples of real

people. We see many examples of people who walked in the law of God and the blessing they received from obedience. We also see examples of what happens when God's people wander from that law into disobedience. God communicates His law through the testimonies of real people and real situations.

The second word used to describe the law is the word "decrees" (statutes, KJV). The word seems to refer to the ordinances or tasks that God required of His people. Throughout the law we will see that God expected certain things from His people. They were to observe certain days and practices because they were His people. They had obligations as the people of God. Included in this were the feasts, celebrations and duties of God's people.

The final word used here is the word "law" (judgements, KJV). This word could be translated by the word "verdict" or "sentence." The idea here is that the law imposed a sentence on anyone who disobeyed. There was a penalty for anyone who chose to ignore this law.

Notice from verses 46-49 of chapter 4 that these laws were introduced in light of the victory God had given His people. He had brought them out of the land of Egypt (verse 45), gave them victory over Sihon, king of the Amorites (verse 46) and Og, king of Bashan (verse 47). All this land now belonged to them as their possession. God expected that as they settled in this land, they would live in accordance with His requirements. They were to walk in obedience to the Lord in the land He had given them. In response to what He had done for them, they were to fill the land with His praise and glory. They could do this by walking in His ways.

There on the eastern side of the Jordan, Moses reminded the people of the decrees and requirements of the Lord God. He challenged them not only to learn these requirements but also to walk in them. It is one thing to study the Word of God and know what it says but quite another to walk in its truth. We believe in a sovereign God who is in control of all circumstances of life but we still fail to trust him when things get difficult. We believe in a God who loves us and provides for our need but still wonder if He will really do what He says. Knowing about God and His requirements is not enough. God expects that we live out what we believe.

Moses reminded the people of how God had spoken to them in the fire on Mount Sinai. As those who had heard the words of God, the people had a special obligation to Him. They had no excuse for not following His law.

God revealed Himself as the God who had brought His people out of the bondage and slavery of Egypt (verse 6). He demonstrated to them that He was the only true God. He was greater than all the gods of Egypt. He demanded now that His people recognize Him as their God. They were to reject all other gods to serve Him alone (verse 7).

Having no other god meant that they were never to make an idol in any form for the purpose of bowing down to worship it. This is what the pagans did, but God's people had experienced the presence and reality of the true God. Their God loved them and set them free from the bondage of Egypt to give them a land of their own. He chose them from all the people of the world to be His people, to walk with Him and enjoy His presence. His love for them was such that He would not share them with anyone else. He was a jealous God who longed for their undivided love and attention.

Notice in verse 9 that God would punish those who turned their backs on Him to the third and fourth generation, but would show love to a thousand generations to those who kept His commandments. While it is true that the sins of one generation affect the next generation, we should not read too much into this statement. What the Lord seems to be doing here is comparing His love with His judgement. He tells His people clearly that there would be consequences for their disobedience but His love for them would be even greater. Though He would discipline them for their disobedience, He would not forget them. His discipline might last for 3 or 4 generations but His love would last far longer. This shows us the depth of His love for His people. No other god could love them this way. No other god longed for them like this.

From verse 11 we see that God expected that His people respect Him and His name. Love cannot flourish when there is no respect. We need to understand that the “name” of God is more than a word used to describe God. In Bible times, names represented the character of an individual. To have a good name was to be recognized for your character. When God asks His people not to misuse His name He is asking them to respect Him and His character.

As believers we represent the name of God wherever we go. We are the children of God and people are watching us, forming opinions about our God based on what they know about us. Do we represent God and His character well? Do people see His love, holiness, compassion and mercy through us as we live our daily lives in His name? God expected that His people represent Him faithfully as they served and lived to the glory of His name. Notice that the Lord would punish those who misrepresented His name in word or deed.



So that His people would not forget Him and His kindness toward them, God called for a day in every seven to be devoted to Him. On that day, they were not to go to work. This would be a “holy” day. That is, it would be a day set apart to remember the Lord God and His blessings. It was to be a day of spiritual refreshment and encouragement. It was a day when God’s people could again reconnect with God. Notice from verse 15 that the reason for observing the Sabbath was because God had brought His people out of Egypt with a mighty hand. The Sabbath was a day to remember the goodness of God and His relationship with His people. It was a day to reflect on His deliverance and victory.

This was a day when God’s people would be given time to consider the love of God for them in choosing them, freeing them from bondage and giving them their own land. God did not want them ever to forget the love He had for them. He wanted this to be fresh on their minds as they began each new week. Their God loved them and delighted in them. He provided for their every need and cared deeply for them.

God’s concern was not only that His people remember and delight in Him, but also that they live in harmony with each other as brothers and sisters. In verse 16-21 He shared His desire for them in their relationship with each other.

The first relationship God addresses is the relationship between child and parent. This is where it began for each of them. God expected His people to honour their parents. Notice that there was a blessing attached to honouring one’s parents. God told His people that if they honoured their fathers and mothers things would go well for them in the land the Lord was giving them. In other words, God would bless them and their land because they respected

their parents. This shows us the importance of the role of parent in the mind of God. The task of being a parent is an honoured position. It is a privilege that carries many important obligations. Parents are called on to raise a generation of children to know the Lord and walk in His ways. The role of parent is a role that must always be protected and honoured in our society.

In verses 17-21 the Lord addresses Israel's relationship with the broader society. In these verses He calls for respect for life, reputation and the property of others. He begins in verse 17 by reminding His people that the life of another human being was not theirs to take. God's people were always to remember that life was a precious gift of God that was to be respected. The murderer took it on himself to end the life of another person. In doing so he showed his disregard for God and the life He had given.

God commanded that His people also show respect for what belonged to someone else. This is quite clear from the commands in verse 18-19. Having a sexual relationship with someone else's husband or wife was one way of showing disrespect for what belonged to them (verse 18). Stealing a neighbour's property was another (verse 19). God expected that His people be content with what He had given them and rejoice with their neighbour in what He had given them. If they were to live in harmony with each other, they needed to accept God's provision for their lives. They were not to take what God had chosen to give to another.

God also commanded that His people deal with each other in honesty and justice (verse 20). They were not to give a false testimony against their neighbour. That might happen if someone wanted to hurt another person by accusing them of something they did not do. It might also happen if they were trying to protect a friend from the consequences

of a sin he or she had committed. Relationships were to be built on a balance of honesty, respect and justice.

Finally, the Lord speaks in verse 21 about coveting what belonged to one's neighbour. Two words are used here. When the Lord speaks of coveting a neighbour's wife the word used is "*khaw-mad*." The word has the sense of delighting in, desiring or lusting after. The second word used in the verse is the word "*av-vow*." This word is used to speak of a neighbour's house, land servants or animals. The word "*av-vow*" means to wish for or to be desirous of. We should note two important details here.

First, the use of two different words in this context set a man's wife apart from everything else that belongs to him. She is not classified with his belongings. The fact that God uses a separate word to describe coveting a neighbour's wife and coveting a neighbour's animals and servants shows us that she had a place of honour.

Second, notice that coveting, desiring, wishing for or lusting after something that is not ours is a sin of the heart and mind. What God is telling His people is that it is quite possible for them not to steal a neighbour's property or commit adultery with his wife but they could still be guilty of sinning in their heart and mind. God's desire was for a purity of thought and attitude. His people were to follow Him not only in their actions but also from their heart.

In conclusion, Moses reminded the people that these words were spoken in a loud voice by God before the whole assembly of Israel. On the day that God declared these commandments, His presence came over Mount Sinai in fire and smoke. He also wrote the words of these commandments on tablets of stone so that they would be remembered for generations to come (verse 22). On that

day, the leading men of the tribes of Israel marvelled at the fact that they could hear God and still live (verses 23-24). The presence of God was so powerful in those days that the people of God did not dare disobey Him. They committed themselves to follow everything the Lord God told them (verse 27). Verses 28-29 tells us that God heard what they said and was pleased, but He knew their hearts. He knew that they would not be able to fulfil those promises.

Moses challenged the people on that day to be careful to do what the Lord had commanded them. They were not to turn from His ways. If they walked faithfully with Him in the land the Lord was giving them, they would prosper and live long in that land. Their success and prosperity in it had nothing to do with their military strength or human efforts. It had everything to do with how they obeyed the Lord. Their prosperity as a nation depended entirely on God and His blessing. They could assure that blessing by walking faithfully with their Lord.

For Consideration:

- What is the difference between learning and following? Why is it important that we not just learn but that we also follow what we know to be true? Are there things you know about God but do not act on?
- What does it mean to respect God's name?
- How important is it that we have time set apart for God? How have you been doing that in your life?

- What do we learn in this passage about the importance of the role of parent? Do we honour the role of parents as we should?
- What do the commandments of God in this passage teach us about the importance of respecting the life and property of others?
- How important is the attitude of our heart? Is it possible to physically obey the commandment of God and still be sinning in our heart?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you not only to study the Word of God but also apply it to your everyday life. Ask Him to show you if you have failed in this.
- Ask God to help you to respect His name in your words and deeds so that people see His character shining through your life.
- Ask the Lord to help you to have the right attitude of heart. Pray that if there are any wrong attitudes toward friends or neighbours that God would change those attitudes.
- Ask the Lord to show you how you can live and walk with greater respect for those around you. Pray that the Lord would use this to win their hearts to Him.

# 6

## REMEMBERING HIS COMMANDMENTS

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Read Deuteronomy 6:1-25

Chapter 6 of Deuteronomy has some important things to tell us about the Law of God. It was not designed as an external obligation placed on God's people but something that was to be part of their lives, thoughts and attitudes. It was to be as natural to them as breathing, as delightful as the knowledge of their special relationship with God and as necessary to them as the beating of their hearts. Every thought would be filtered through the Law of God. Every action was to be governed by it. It was the language of their heart and the eyeglasses through which they saw all of life.

As God's people stood on the shore of the Jordan River ready to cross over into the land the Lord their God had promised them, Moses reminded them that they were to be obedient to the Laws of the Lord and live in the requirements of their God. They were to pass these laws and requirements on to their children. Notice in verses 2-3 the blessings attached to obedience.

There are two blessings here. The first blessing is a long life. That is to say, their lives would not be cut short nor would they die before their time. Their enemies would be kept at a distance and they would be spared from the judgement of God. The second part of this blessing has to do with enjoying their long lives. In other words, the peace and blessing of God would be on them because they walked in obedience to the Lord their God.

Verse 3 has two other blessings attached to obeying the Law of God. First, Moses promised that things would go well for them in the land. That is to say their land would produce crops. It would be a land “flowing with milk and honey.” Second, they would greatly increase in the land God had given them. God would bless them with many children and they would increase in number and prosperity in the land the Lord had given them.

Notice from these verses that their long life, the enjoyment of life, the productivity of their land and the health and blessing of their families had more to do with their relationship to God than it did with their technology, politics, medicine or military. Their success or failure in the land the Lord had given them was a spiritual matter.

How easy it is for us to feel that our success as a nation, society or local church depends on our human ability or careful planning. God is showing us here that obedience to God and His word will have more impact than anything else we could ever do. Imagine what a difference it would make if every businessman or woman, politician, or church leader was absolutely committed to loving God and walking in accordance with His Word. What difference would that make in our land? I am certainly not saying here that if we obey God everything will go well for us. What I am saying, however, is that there is blessing in obedience to

God and His Word. God's Word is good for our society and nation. It will bring greater health to our communities. It will restore broken relationships and mend broken hearts. It will guide us in the way we should go and bring greater harmony with our fellow man and with God. This is good for our society. Any society that turns its back on God's Word cannot expect to truly prosper. Many of the problems in our society have nothing to do with politics, medicine or science. They have everything to do with disobedience to the Word of God.

Moses reminded his people in verse 4 that the Lord their God was one. This was important for them to understand especially in light of the many gods that existed around them. By telling the people of Israel that God was one, Moses was telling them that there was no other expression of God. In our day we have those who would teach us that all gods are the same. These individuals believe that all religions lead to God. When Moses told the people that day that the Lord God was one, he was making it clear that there was no other expression of God. What was described to them in the Law of Moses was the God they needed to serve. There was no other way, there was no other God. All other gods were false. All other ways were false paths leading to destruction.

In verse 5 Moses challenged his people to love this one true God, described in the Law, with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their strength. When you devote all your heart, all your soul and all your strength to one God there is no room for anything else. He receives all our love and devotion. All other gods and temptations are cast aside.

Notice that Israel's response was to be one of love. They were not to serve the Lord out of obligation and duty. Their



relationship to God was not to that of a servant to a cruel master. God was not looking for heartless dedication to a set of rules. He longed for the love of His people. He wanted them to delight in Him. Obedience was to be the fruit of love and devotion to God not forced or out of obligation and fear. It was to be the natural expression of a loving heart toward God.

Verse 6 makes this quite clear when Moses told the people that the commandments he was teaching them were to be on their hearts. We open our hearts to those things we treasure most in life. Jesus makes this quite clear when he says in Matthew 6:21:

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

When Moses told his people that these commandments were to be on their hearts, he was telling them that they were not to be burdens or obligations but a delight. This would be evident in the impression they made on the lives of their children or in how they spoke about God's Word when they were at home or walking down the road with a friend. It would be seen in how they reflected on God's Law when they laid down at night to rest. The Word of God was to be on their hearts and thoughts each day. They were to stimulate each other to deeper obedience as they lovingly spoke and reflected together on God's Word.

Moses challenged the people to tie God's words on their hands and to bind them to their foreheads. They were to write them on the door frames of their houses and on their gates. Some Jews took these words literally and made up small boxes they could tie to their foreheads when they walked down the street. Moses, however, seems to be speaking symbolically here. By speaking of tying God's

words to their hands he was saying, "Let everything your hands do be in obedience to God's Law." By telling them that they were to tie God's word to their foreheads he was saying, "Let everything you see and think be in obedience to the words of God and His Law." By telling them to put God's word on the door frames of their houses he was telling them, "Let your life as a family be in obedience to the Law of God." In other words, let everything you do or say be filtered through the clear teaching of God's commandments. May your whole life be a life of loving obedience to God.

God wanted His people to be devoted to Him and His ways. Moses reminds them of what God would do for them in verses 10-11 if they walked in obedience to His law. God would give them a large land, filled with cities they did not build, houses filled with goods they had not purchased, wells they had not dug, vineyards and olive groves they had not planted. They would eat from the land and be fully satisfied. God asked in return that they remember and love Him. They were to serve Him alone, resisting all other gods (verses 13-14).

If they wanted to remain in the land they would need to remember their God. Remembering Him implied turning from all other gods and walking in obedience to His command. Notice that if they turned to other gods and chose to disobey the Lord their God, His anger would burn against them and He would destroy them. They were not to test God's patience with them as they had done in the wilderness (verse 16). God's love, devotion and patience with His people were great but it was not something they could take for granted. He would punish those who disrespected Him and His law. God's people were to keep His commandments (verse 17), and do right in the Lord's sight (verse 18). As long as they walked in obedience to Him,

God's blessing would be on them and they would enjoy the goodness of the land He was giving them (verse 18).

As their children grew up and began to ask them the meaning of the commandments and why they needed to follow those commandments, they were to remind them of how their ancestors had been held in bondage in the land of Egypt. They were to teach their children how the Lord God had set them free from their bondage in Egypt by miraculous deeds and brought them into the land He had promised their forefathers (verse 23). Notice that they were to remind their children that they were to obey God for two reasons.

First, they were to obey His commandments and fear the Lord so that they would prosper and be kept alive (verse 24). We have seen that the prosperity of the land of Canaan depended on the obedience of God's people to His Word. As long as God's people walked faithfully with Him, God's blessing would be on the land. If they turned away and sinned against Him they would drive His presence and blessing from them. Their sin could even result in their destruction as a people. The blessing of the land and their safety as a people depended on walking with God in obedience to His purpose.

The second reason for obedience to the commandments of the Lord is in verse 25. Obedience would be their righteousness (verse 25). The word righteousness refers to a right relationship with God. If they wanted to assure that they were in a right relationship with God they would need to walk in obedience to His commandments. To please God and know His favour, God's people needed to keep His commandments. This would not always be the case for Israel. There would be times when they would drive the blessing and the presence of the Lord from them by their

disobedience. Their rejection of God and His ways would lead to judgement.

We should not assume from this that our salvation depends on our obedience. The New Testament speaks of Christ alone as one who can guarantee us a right relationship with God. What we need to understand from this is that the quality of our lives may very well depend on how willing we are to walk in obedience to God and His Word. We cannot experience the fullness of God's purpose for our lives if we are living in sin and rebellion. God's Word is good for us and our society. Obedience to it assures deeper intimacy with God and closer fellowship with His people. It produces a healthier society, one that God delights to bless. God delights to reveal Himself to those who walk in loving devotion.

For Consideration:

- How important is the Word of God to you? How much do people see your delight to walk in obedience to that Word?
- How important is obedience to God's Word to the health of our society and nation?
- What is the difference between obedience out of love and obedience out of duty and obligation? What is the motivation for your obedience?
- Have you been able to pass your love for God and devotion to His Word on to your children?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you a greater delight in His Word and walking in obedience. Ask Him to remove any love for sin in your life.
- Ask God to restore obedience to your local fellowship and to your society.
- Ask God to help you to be more concerned about doing everything to the glory of the Lord God.
- Take a moment to ask that the Lord would give you grace to have an impact on the next generation. Ask Him to help you to pass on to that generation a love for God and His Word.

# 7

## DESTROY YOUR ENEMIES

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Read Deuteronomy 7:1-26

Deuteronomy 7 and passages like it are often difficult for us to understand. In this chapter we see the command of God concerning the pagan nations that lived in the land He was giving to His people.

Moses had promised that the Lord God would give seven nations into the hands of the people. In verse 1 Moses made it clear that all of these nations were larger and stronger than Israel. All of these nations would fall to Israel, however, because the Lord was with them. How easy it is for us to serve the Lord out of human wisdom and strength. We make our goals and work toward them. As Israel looked at the nations before them, they would not have humanly chosen to do battle with them. They could not have imagined that all of these nations would fall before them. God's purposes are different from ours. God's people were going to do the impossible. They were going to defeat not one nation, but seven nations much larger and stronger than themselves.

In verse 2 God told His people what they were to do with these nations. They were not to make any peace treaty with them. They were to show no mercy. They were to

destroy them “totally.” Because of Israel, seven nations would be completely destroyed and never rise again.

Israel was not to intermarry with the inhabitants of these nations, nor were they to give their daughters to their sons for marriage. The reason for this is that these unbelieving partners would turn their sons and daughters away from the Lord to serve other gods. This would stir up the anger of God against them and He would destroy them, though they were His chosen people (verse 4).

The pagan altars, sacred stones and any other religious articles were to be broken down, smashed or burned in the fire. The whole land was to be cleaned of anything belonging to another god. The nation was to be dedicated entirely to the glory of the God of Israel. There was to be no compromise. God demanded the full and undivided attention of His people.

God had chosen His people for Himself. They were different from all other people. They were a holy people. It is not that they could not sin. We see clearly that Israel was as capable of sin as any other nation. Their holiness was not because they were better than anyone else but because they had been chosen by God. He set this nation aside as a special people for His glory. He would work in them and reveal Himself to them. They became the object of His affection and His “treasured possession” (verse 6). This made them a holy people. Their holiness was because of God’s choice not because of their natural goodness.

God set His affection on this people for one reason alone. He loved them. They were not a large nation. In fact they were one of the smallest nations on the earth (verse 7). It was not that they were any better than the other nations. The same sinful human nature was in Israel as was in

every other nation on the earth. Were it not for God's attention, they would not have known God's ways and would have followed the ways of the sinful nations around them.

Their privileged position and favour with God was a result of God's choice alone. He chose to love them and set His affection on them. He chose to use them and bring His blessing to the world through them. He took them from their bondage and slavery in Egypt, and brought them through the wilderness to the border of the land He had promised to their fathers. He committed Himself to Israel. He made a covenant promise with the nation to be their God. He promised to be faithful to them, to protect and keep all who would love Him and follow His commandments (verses 8-9). Those who hated Him, however, would be destroyed (verse 10).

There is a powerful message in these verses. We see clearly that God is a God of justice and holiness. The nations who inhabited the land followed other gods. Even though they had never heard of the one true God, they were living in sin and rebellion against Him. Ignorance of right and wrong does not excuse us. Sin is sin whether we recognize it or not. All sin will separate us from God and place us under His wrath. As a holy God, He will judge all sin. This means that those who have never heard the wonderful message of the Gospel are lost in their sin and under the judgement of God. This is why it is important for us to go to all the nations and tell them about sin and the solution that comes in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

These passages show us something about God that we often struggle to understand. His wrath and judgement are very real. He did not hesitate to judge whole nations because of sin. We wrestle with how a God of love could ever send a person to hell, but here before us we meet a God



whose anger, jealousy and wrath is very real. He hates sin. He will not hesitate to destroy it and those who live in it. He will not compromise His holiness. He will not accept sin and rebellion. The most severe punishment is reserved for those who persist in their sin. He is a holy God of wrath and judgement.

Having said this, God is also a God of wonderful love and faithfulness. In His love He reached out to a single nation and set His attention on it. While the people were unclean and sinful, God provided a system of sacrifices to appease His wrath and temporarily satisfy His justice. By means of this continual shedding of blood as payment for sin, God entered a relationship with His sinful people. He poured out His love on them and devoted Himself to their good for His glory in the world.

In a similar way, we owe everything to the Lord God today. Each one of us was a sinner under the judgement of God. In love, God looked down on us. He set us aside to be His people. His desire is to bless and use us for His glory. To deal with the sin that separates us, God sent His Son to be the one-time sacrifice for all our sin. The wrath of God is appeased in Jesus and all the requirements of justice are met so we are free to enter His presence, free from sin and all its consequences. We are a holy people because God has chosen us, paid the price for our sin and devoted Himself to us. What a privilege and honour this is.

The privilege of being chosen by God to be a holy people comes with a cost. In verse 11 Moses reminded his people that as a holy people chosen by God, they were to be careful to follow His commands and laws. If they followed the laws of the Lord their God, then He would keep His covenant of love with them. He would bless them and make them fruitful in the land He had promised their fathers.

Their wives would bear many children, their land would produce great crops and their herds and flocks would multiply (verse 13). They would be blessed more than any other people on the earth (verse 14). The Lord would protect them from diseases and they would live in good health (verses 14-15).

All these blessings were conditional. In other words, this is what they could have if they walked in obedience to the Lord and His ways. If they did not do so, the Lord would not hesitate to remove His blessing from them. Moses reminded his people once again in verse 16 that they were to destroy the nations in the land the Lord was giving them so that these foreigners would not be a snare to them by enticing them to follow other gods. The health and blessing of their nation depended on their obedience to the Lord God and His ways.

In our day, we are looking for blessings as well. We long to see the Spirit of God move among us in powerful ways. We long to experience what we have read about in the pages of Scripture. We seek this blessing in many different ways. We seek it by prayer and fasting. We seek it through evangelism, programmes, community outreaches or preaching services. All these things are fine in themselves, but they will never bring the blessing of God if we are not living in obedience. God's blessing was promised to those who walked in obedience. We have all seen people crying out for God's blessing who are not willing to deal with the sin in their lives. We have heard preachers speaking powerfully from the pulpits of our land while secretly struggling with inner sins. God is looking for a people who will get serious about sin. He is looking for a people who will commit themselves, no matter the cost, to walking in obedience to His Word. The great secret to blessing in the

Christian life is not found in activities or programmes but in simple obedience.

Moses knew that obedience to the Lord's commands would not be easy for the people. They would come up against nations that were stronger than them. They would be forced to wonder how they could possibly drive out these nations and destroy them. Moses told his people, however, that they were not to give in to fear. They were instead to remember how the Lord had taken them out of the land of Egypt, defeating a nation much stronger than them. They were to remember how God performed great miraculous signs and wonders as He brought them out of Egypt and into the land He had promised them. They were to let their past experience with God guide them into their conquest of Canaan. Moses promised that what God had done for them in the past He would do again as they moved into the land He had promised them (verse 19).

Moses told the people in verse 20 that the Lord God would send the hornet among their enemies until every survivor had perished in the nations He had called them to conquer. We are not sure what this hornet represents. Obviously, God was going to be with them in the conquest of the land. As His people moved into a territory to conquer it, He would go with them, sweeping through that territory with His judgement and bringing total victory.

Israel would have no cause to fear, for the Lord God would be among them. He would drive the nations out before them little by little (verses 21-22). Notice two things in these verses.

First, God would be among His people as they moved into enemy territory. As they moved, God would be with them. But they needed to move. It was as if they brought God

with them in the battle and as they stepped out in faith His presence would strengthen them and give them victory. There is an incredible partnership here. God commands His people and takes up position in their ranks to empower them to fight. Everything now depends on the obedience of His people to His command. If they move forward, His presence will move with them and they will experience victory. If they don't move in obedience, the enemy remains, God's powerful presence in their midst is grieved and His people live in defeat. God will go with us into battle but we must obey His command and step out in faith.

Second, notice the nature of the victory God would give His people in verse 22. God would give them victory over these nations "little by little." God would not give His people victory all at once. There was a very practical reason for this. Israel was not large enough as a nation to take care of all the land the Lord was going to give them. If God destroyed all the nations at once, then wild animals would multiply around them (verse 22). By destroying the nations little by little, God was assuring that the land they inhabited would be cared for until they were ready to possess it. When it was time to possess the land, God would throw Israel's enemies into confusion and give them over into the hands of His people. No enemy would be able to stand against them.

The battle against sin is an ongoing battle. God gives us victories as we are able to handle them. As we mature in our walk with God, He will take us into new territory and give us greater victories. We will not have all our victories at once. The battle with sin and our progress toward holiness will last a lifetime. When we think we have had victory over something in our lives, God will take us deeper into that victory, giving us new insights into His purpose for our lives.

As God gave victory to His people, they were to burn the images to false gods. They were not to covet the silver or gold these people had. All these things would be a trap for them. With each new conquest there would be new temptations. No victory would come without its temptations. We can be sure that Satan will do his utmost to keep us from possessing the land God wants to give us. For some people it will be the temptation to become proud. For others it will be to think that they had obtained the victory in their own strength, thus turning from the Lord. For others it will be coveting gold and silver. As we move forward in our Christian walk we must always be aware of these temptations. We must deal with them. They must be “burned in the fire” and completely destroyed if we are going to have the full victory God desires for us. God’s people were to take no souvenirs of their battles. Nothing of the ungodly nations was to be brought into their homes. They were to detest every evil thing and destroy it, lest it be a temptation for them and their family. We would do well to follow their example.

#### For Consideration:

- Have you ever found yourself in an impossible situation? What encouragement do you find in this passage?
- How are we to deal with sin in our midst?
- What do we learn in this passage about the justice and wrath of God? Why is this not a popular doctrine?

- Where would you be today if the Lord had not chosen to work in you and draw you to Himself?
- What do we learn here about the secret to blessing in the Christian life?
- Does the Lord give us victory all at once? What victories has He given you? What victories do you still have to receive from Him?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is the God of the impossible and that He will give us victory over enemies stronger than ourselves.
- Ask the Lord to help you to deal with sin in your midst. Ask Him to help you not to compromise when it comes to sin.
- Take a moment to consider how God drew you to Himself. Consider His blessings in your life. Give Him thanks for those blessings.
- Ask God to help you to walk in greater obedience to His command and purpose for your life.
- Thank the Lord that He has not yet finished the work He is doing in your life. Open yourself up to Him to work in you, making you even more like Himself.

# 8

## IN PROSPERITY, REMEMBER GOD

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Read Deuteronomy 8:1-20

As we begin Deuteronomy 8, the Lord God reminds His people that their blessing in the land He was giving them would depend on their obedience to His commands. He tells them in verse 1 that they were to be careful to follow His commands “so that” they could live long and increase in the land He had promised their forefathers. The connection between obedience to God’s commands, long life and fruitfulness in the land is quite clear. If they wanted to continue to live in the blessings of God, they would need to make it their priority to walk faithfully with Him and in obedience to His ways.

### *God Wants to Bless*

God delights to bless those who walk faithfully with Him. It is His purpose that we experience the fullness of His life in us. He will enable us and protect us. He will provide for our needs and bring more blessing to us than we deserve or could ever imagine. This is what He wants to do. He wants to demonstrate His love and devotion to His children. It

should be the delight of His children to walk in His blessings and experience His presence.

The history of the church is filled with stories of those who have denied themselves or beaten themselves in an attempt to gain God's favour. Others are unwilling to receive what God so delights to give because they do not feel worthy of it. Not one of us is worthy of God's blessing on our lives. This is what God's grace is all about. He wants to bless those who are unworthy of His blessing. As unworthy as we are of that blessing, it should be our delight to receive all that God wants to give. We should step out boldly in His name, receiving all the strength He wants to give us in service. We should open our hearts and receive all the love He wants to pour into us. The first thing we need to see in this passage is that God wanted to bless His people. As they walked in obedience to His Word, God's blessing would naturally flow to them. God challenged them to live in such a way that He could continually bless and prosper them. This should be our attitude as well.

### *Remember What God Has Done*

Having reminded the people that they were to be living in such a way that His blessings could flow through them, God now challenges them in verse 2 to remember what He had done for them in the past. Notice that He calls His people to remember how He had led them through the desert for forty years. During that time He humbled and tested them to know what was in their heart. As they wandered through the wilderness for those forty years, the Lord provided for their every need. He allowed them to feel hunger, but He also fed them with manna. During those days in the wilderness their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet swell up from the amount of walking they did. God trained them and disciplined them as a father disciplines a son he



loves. As a loving father, the Lord took them step by step through the wilderness. He never left them. The picture that seems to come across in these verses is that of a loving and caring father raising his children. He stood with them, guided, protected, defended, trained and strengthened them every step of the way. No earthly father could ever have cared for them or loved them more.

It was God's desire that His people remember what He had done for them. When we look back over our lives, we see the hand of God, how He has blessed and equipped us. We see the times when our human strength was not enough and God came to equip us with His strength. We see the times we have failed, but God's forgiveness and healing restored us. We are reminded that all we have and have ever accomplished is a result of God's grace and favour on our lives. Our hearts are lifted up to Him as the source of these blessings.

### *Consider What God Promises to Do*

God not only asked His people to remember the blessings of the past but also to look forward to what He promised to do for them in the future. He was going to bring them into a land with streams and springs flowing in the valleys and hills (verse 7). He was giving them a land with wheat, barley, grape vines, fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey (verse 8). They would be able to mine iron and copper in the hills. They would not lack anything because the Lord would provide for everything they needed. The promise of God would go before them. Looking back they saw the provision and protection of God. Looking forward they saw the same. They could face the future with the certainty that the God who guided and blessed them in the wilderness would do the same for them in the future. As they faced the uncertainties of the future, they could be assured

that God would be with them blessing them and their families.

### *Praise Him*

What was to be the response of God's people to the blessings He had given them? When they had eaten and were satisfied they were to praise the Lord for His goodness toward them. That praise might come in the form of a thankful heart. It might come in the recognition of God as the source of this blessing. It might also come in the form of a gift given to Him in gratitude for His blessing. It would certainly come in the form of walking in obedience to His commands. Moses challenged His people to recognize God as the source of their blessings, giving Him praise and thanksgiving for what He had done.

### *Don't Let His Blessings Hide His Face*

How easy it is for us, in the midst of all the blessing, to forget God as the source of that blessing. Sometimes we delight in His blessings more than we do in God. What would happen when God's people's bellies were full and they were settled in their fine houses with lots of money and large herds and flocks? How easy it would be for them to become proud. They could walk down the street with their fancy clothes. People would recognize them as rich and prosperous. Attention would shift from God as the source of their blessings to His people and how much they had.

Soon there would be no thought of God or what He had done for them. They might even begin to say, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me" (verse 17). All they would see is that as they worked the land it produced wonderful crops. As they

cared for their herds and flocks they multiplied. How easy it would be for them to say, "If it weren't for my efforts, none of this would happen." Instead of recognizing God as the source of their blessing, they would feel that their hard work and skill produced the blessing.

Have you ever found yourself trusting your spiritual gifts, experience or natural talents instead of trusting God? Have you ever believed that the work of God depended on your capable administration and effort? Have you ever felt that your church had grown and become what it is today because of your faithfulness and hard work or because you prayed or witnessed? Where is God in all this thinking? How easy it is to shift the glory from God to ourselves and what we have done.

Moses reminded the people in verse 18 that it was God who gave the ability to produce wealth. In other words, everything we have comes as a result of what God has done. Yes, we may work, but all those efforts would be to no avail if it were not for God and His blessing on our lives. Our spiritual gifts accomplish nothing without God's blessing on them. Our hard work needs to be blessed by God if it is to produce fruit. He must touch everything we do if it is to be fruitful. We dare not take for ourselves glory that belongs to God. He alone deserves the credit for every blessing we experience.

### *If You Forget*

Moses concluded this chapter with a warning from the Lord. He reminded the people about the dangers of forgetting the Lord their God. He told them that if they forgot the Lord and followed other gods and worshipped them, then they would be destroyed as a people. As they conquered one nation after another, they were to remember that this

is what God would do to them if they turned from Him and His ways.

If God destroyed those who did not know Him, how much more severe would be the punishment for those who have experienced His blessing and turned their backs on Him? With the blessing of God on our lives comes a responsibility. God expects that those who know and experience His blessings will also walk with Him in faithfulness, obedience and gratitude.

For Consideration:

- What is the connection in this passage between the blessing of God and obedience to the commands of the Lord?
- What do we learn here about the desire of the Lord for us to live in such a way that He can continue to bless us?
- What has God done for you in the past?
- What are the promises of God for your future?
- What are some ways we can praise God for the blessings He has given us?
- Have you ever taken the credit for what God has done? Explain.
- What does this passage teach us about how much we owe God?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to open your heart more to Him and the blessings He wants to give.
- Take a moment to consider the goodness of God to you throughout your life. Thank Him for what He has done in your life.
- Consider God's promises for your future. Thank Him that you can face that future with confidence.
- Ask God to forgive you for the times when you took the credit for His enabling and blessing in your life. Thank Him that all you have and do is a result of His blessing and enabling.

## 9

# NOT BY YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

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Read Deuteronomy 9:1-29

God had promised to give the land of Canaan to His people. The land they were going to possess was a land that belonged to a people who were much stronger than Israel. They lived in walled cities. Israel was going to face people like the Anakites who were known for their strength and size (verse 2). The reputation of the Anakites was such that the common saying of the day was, “who can stand up against the Anakites?” God’s people had great enemies to face. Humanly speaking there was no way they could defeat them. In verse 3, however, Moses reminded his people that the Lord God would go across the Jordan ahead of them like a devouring fire subduing them before His people. Moses promised that Israel would drive out these nations and destroy them quickly. The victory is not for the strong. It is for those who walk in obedience to the Lord God. He goes before those who are willing to follow, giving them victory over their enemies.

One of the great temptations for God’s people is to believe that when they have some victory from the Lord it must be

because of something in them. Maybe we preach a sermon that results in the salvation of a number of souls. Deep down inside we feel that it was because we were so faithful to the Lord that this took place. We congratulate ourselves and believe somehow that we are more spiritual than someone else because God has used us to accomplish something of great value. Sometimes we even measure the spirituality of an individual by their success in ministry. Deuteronomy 9 has much to say about this attitude. Moses knew that when God's people experienced victory over their enemies, the temptation would be to think that it was because they were so faithful to the Lord and so righteous. It is in our nature to want some of the glory for ourselves.

In verse 4 Moses made it quite clear that it was not because of the righteousness of Israel that God would give them victory. God would drive out the nations before them because He was judging these nations for their wickedness, not rewarding Israel for its righteousness. God did not give the land to His people because they deserved it. Moses describes the Israelites in verse 6 as a "stiff-necked" people. Have you ever had a sore neck? When you have a stiff neck it is almost impossible to turn your head. This is how God's people were. They were walking in sin and rebellion against God. God was calling out to them to change their ways, but they would not turn their faces toward Him. They continued stubbornly in their own way.

Moses, more than anyone else, knew the people of God. He had been their leader for forty years. In order to help them understand what he was saying, Moses reminded them of their rebellion against God during their time in the wilderness.

In verse 7 he reminded them of how they had provoked the Lord to anger from the day they left Egypt. When they were at Horeb, Moses went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone on which the commandments of God were written. As the people watched, the mountain filled with fire as God spoke with Moses for forty days (verses 9-10). Before the end of those forty days, despite the powerful manifestation of God in the fire, the Israelites had turned their backs on Him and made an idol in the form of a golden calf. This so angered the Lord that He wanted to destroy them as a people and make another nation through Moses (verses 13-14).

When Moses heard what God was going to do, he went down the mountain (while it was still ablaze with the glory of God). When he saw what the people were doing, he broke the tablets of stone the Lord had given in front of the people. This appears to be a symbolic act on the part of Moses and not just a display of anger. In his hands he had two tablets of stone carved by the finger of God on the mountain. There was nothing more precious than this. By breaking these precious stones, Moses was showing the people how they had despised God by bowing down to this idol.

In the days that followed, Moses lay on his face before God. For forty days and nights he did not eat food or drink water because of what the people had done. During that time he pleaded with the Lord for the people. Moses feared that the Lord would completely destroy the Israelites (something he told Moses he was ready to do). God was also angry with Aaron because he had received the gold from the people and cast it into the shape of the idol. According to verse 20, God was also going to destroy Aaron at that time. Moses cried out to God on their behalf. He ground the idol they had made into a fine powder and



dumped it into a stream so that it could never be worshipped again (verse 21). This incident at Horeb shows us that type of people God was going to use to conquer the land of Canaan. They were far from perfect. They had rebelled against Him. He wanted to destroy them.

In verse 22 Moses went on to remind the people of incidents in four other locations during their wilderness wandering. Three locations are mentioned in verse 22 (Taberah, Massah and Kibroth Hattaavah). We will briefly consider what happened in each of these locations.

Numbers 11:1-3 describe what happened in Taberah. The name literally means “burning.” The region was called Taberah because of what happened there. God’s people were complaining against Him and His purposes and so God judged them with fire. The fire of God’s judgement began in the outskirts of the camp. It was only when Moses prayed for the people that the fire stopped devouring the camp.

Massah also called Meribah (see Exodus 17:7). Massah means “testing,” Meribah means “quarrelling.” Exodus 17:1-7 tells us that when the Israelites arrived in this region they complained to Moses about not having any water. God told Moses to strike a certain rock and when he did it gushed forth enough water to provide for the entire nation and their animals. Massah was a place of grumbling against God’s ways. It was also a place where God’s people showed their lack of faith in God’s provision.

In Kibroth Hattaavah God’s people complained about having to eat manna every day. They longed for the food they had eaten in Egypt. In response to their cravings for meat, God sent quail into the camp. The people ate quail that night. As they were eating the quail the anger of God

burned against them and He sent a plague to devour them because of their grumbling (see Numbers 11:31-34). The word Kibroth Hattaavah means “graves of the craving.” It was called this because of how the Lord destroyed those who had grumbled against His provision.

The final example Moses gives in this chapter is the example of what took place in Kadesh Barnea (verse 23-24). It was here in this region that God told His people to go up and take possession of the land He had promised them. Instead, they sent out spies to look over the land. Those spies discouraged the people so that they refused to take possession of the land. Because of their rebellion, God made them wander forty years in the wilderness until everyone over twenty years old died without ever seeing the Promised Land. Moses makes it quite clear to the people in verse 23 that they did not trust the Lord. In fact, he told them that ever since he knew them they had been rebelling against the Lord God (verse 24).

Moses had to plead with the Lord God to save his people from their sins and rebellion. God had considered destroying the Israelites just as He was going to destroy the nations before them. It was only because Moses pleaded for the Lord to overlook the stubbornness and wickedness of His people that God relented and spared their lives (verses 26-29).

These were the people that God was going to use to conquer the land of Canaan. It was not because of their goodness and righteousness that God would give them victory. Their victory over stronger nations was an act of pure grace on God's part. He could have destroyed them but He didn't. They did not deserve God's victory. God gave them victory simply because He had chosen to love them. They owed everything to God and His grace.

What was true for Israel is also true for us today. We cannot claim any glory for ourselves. Every one of us has failed to measure up to God's standard. Like Israel, we know the sin of our own hearts. It is not because of us that the kingdom of God is advancing on this earth. But despite our shortcomings and failures, God is working. We have the wonderful privilege of being God's instruments, but we cannot claim any glory for ourselves. If anything, the fact that God can use us is a powerful demonstration of His grace and power. To Him be all the glory.

#### For Consideration:

- What are some of the ways we can try to take some of the credit for victories in our Christian life and ministry?
- How have you failed God in the past? What sins or attitudes do you still struggle with today?
- Do we have to be perfect for God to use us?
- Are fruitfulness and success in ministry a sign of a right relationship with God?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for thinking that you have been blessed because you deserved it.
- Ask God to forgive you for your ongoing shortcomings in your ministry and walk with Him.

- Thank the Lord for the way He has used you, despite your shortcomings, to accomplish the work of His kingdom.

# 10

## RESPONDING TO GOD'S BLESSINGS

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Read Deuteronomy 10:1-22

Chapter 10 begins with a short history of some important details in Israel's religious history. In chapter 9 Moses reminded the people of how he had broken the stone tablets containing the laws of God when he saw the people worshipping the golden calf. God told Moses to make two stone tablets like the ones he had broken and bring them up to Him on the mountain. He was also to make a wooden chest to contain these two stones. That chest would be known as the Ark of the Covenant. Notice that God would take the stone tablets Moses had carved and write on them the words of His law.

Moses obeyed the Lord and the Lord wrote His law on these two tablets. The Ten Commandments, as they would become known, would contain, in summary form, the requirements of God for His people. The words on these two tablets were written by God. They were kept in the Ark of the Covenant as a reminder to Israel of their obligation toward God. Notice also that not only did these tablets contain the writing of God, but they were given to Moses "out

of fire, on the day of the assembly" (verse 4). In other words, as the people gathered together that day, they saw the fire of God on the mountain. They saw Moses go up into that fire with the stone tablets and return with the written Word of God. There could be no doubt that the Lord had been present that day, and that the words on those tablets came from Him. God revealed His presence in an awesome way in the sight of all present so that they would know that it was He who had spoken through His written word.

One of the great blessings Israel had was the written Word of God contained on stone tablets. That written Word contained the purposes of God for His people. God delights to communicate His heart with His people. In our day he has given us an even greater revelation of Himself in the pages of Scripture. The Bible we have today has also been given to us by God in a miraculous way. It reveals God's purpose, encourages and strengthens us. Who among us has not been blessed by the pages of Scripture? Who among us has not been strengthened and instructed by the teaching of the Word of God? In the first five verses of chapter 10, Moses reminds his people of the tremendous gift they had in the tablets of stone, containing the written Word of God.

Notice another blessing God had given His people in verses 6-9. Mention is made of the death of Aaron in verse 6. God raised up Aaron's son Eleazar to succeed him as priest over the people of Israel. As priest, it was the responsibility of Eleazar to be God's representative before the people. Beyond this, however, God also set aside an entire tribe to minister to the spiritual needs of His people. The Levites were to stand before the Lord and "pronounce blessings in His name." God set these people aside to assure that His people maintained a good relationship with

Him and walked in the fullness of His purposes and blessings. They were to be shepherds to the people He loved, caring for them and ministering to them in their times of need. God set aside an entire tribe to assure that nothing would separate His people from Him and His blessings. These spiritual leaders were a second blessing from God to His people.

We see yet another blessing of God in verses 10-11. Here Moses reminded the people that even when they had sinned against Him, God had chosen to spare them. On one occasion, Moses spent forty days pleading with God for the lives of the people. God extended His mercy and forgiveness to them, despite their sin and rebellion. Not only did He demonstrate His patience with Israel but God also promised them the land He had promised their fathers. We see over and over again in the Old Testament that Israel did not deserve this mercy, but God's favour was on them and He blessed them. Verses 14-15 bring this point out even more when Moses reminded Israel that the heavens and the earth all belonged to the Lord. He created them all, yet He set His affection on the nation of Israel and set it above all other nations. Of all the nations on the earth this one nation would experience the grace and mercy of God. It would be the object of His affection and deep devotion.

Here was a nation that was given the written Word of God. God set aside an entire tribe to care for their spiritual needs and keep them in the place of blessing. He chose them above all nations on the earth to be the object of His special favour. Israel was a privileged nation. What was to be the response of God's people to these blessings? In verses 12-22 Moses offers some suggestions.

First, in light of their tremendous blessings from God, Israel was to fear the Lord (verse 12). To fear God, in this sense is to reverence Him or to have a healthy respect for Him and His name. The Lord had blessed them with great blessings. In response they were to reverence Him in what they did and what they said. There were to be careful about how they spoke of Him and how they acted as His children.

Second, God's people were to love their God (verse 12). That means that their devotion was to be to Him. Just as a husband devotes himself to his wife and sets his attention on her, so God's people were to devote themselves to the Lord God out of love for Him and His name.

Third, Moses challenged his people to serve the Lord with all their heart and soul (verse 12). This would become their great ambition in life. Notice that service was to come from their heart and soul. It was to be sincere. It was to be a delight for His people to do all they could to extend the kingdom of God out of gratitude to God for who He was and what He had done.

Fourth, God's people were to walk in His commands and decrees. In other words, they were to obey His law. Notice in verse 13 that this was for their own good. God's laws were intended to help and bless His people. In light of what God had done for them, His people were to devote themselves to following the purpose of God.

Fifth, they were to circumcise their hearts and no longer be stiff-necked. The connection between the circumcision of the heart and "stiff-necked" is important. A stiff neck makes it very difficult to turn our heads. God's people had a natural tendency to turn their back on God and go their own way. When God called them they did not turn their face to



him but continued on their evil path of rebellion. The same idea is conveyed by the phrase “circumcise your hearts.” The hearts of God’s people needed to become tender to God. In order for this to take place they needed to cut off sin and rebellion from their hearts so they could once again be sensitive to God. In light of what God had done for them, the people were to turn from their sin and evil ways and turn to Him. They were to listen to Him and open their hearts to His leading and guidance.

When God’s people’s hearts were circumcised and tender toward Him, things would change. Justice and honesty would prevail in the land. God’s people would no longer show favouritism in their judgements nor would they take bribes to pervert justice (verse 17). Widows, orphans and foreigners would be defended and provided for in their time of need (verses 18-19). When their hearts were tender toward God, they would have the same concern He had for the needy in their society. God’s blessing in their lives would overflow to those around them.

Sixth, verse 20 tells us that the response of God’s people toward His love was to “hold fast to Him.” That is to say, they were to offer themselves to Him for His service. He was to be their one true God. They were to take their oaths in His name because there was no other god for them. Even when things were difficult they were not to turn their backs on Him. They would trust Him, love Him, serve Him and be devoted to Him alone as their God.

Finally, in verse 21 the response of God’s people to His blessing in their lives was to be one of praise. As they recognized His great and awesome deeds, what other response could they have but praise? When their fathers went down into Egypt they were only seventy people. Now, years later, they were as “numerous as the stars in the sky”

(verse 22). All this was the result of the favour and provision of God. Their hearts were to overflow with worship and praise to God for these things. Their God was a glorious God who loved and blessed them beyond measure.

We see clearly from this that God's blessing requires a response. Our response to God is to be one of reverence, love, service, obedience, repentance and praise. The chapter gives us cause to examine our lives to see if this has been our response to the God who has loved and blessed us so richly.

For Consideration:

- How has the Word of God been a blessing to you?
- How does setting aside an entire tribe for the purpose of ministering to Israel's spiritual need show how much God desired to bless them? How have you been blessed by the spiritual leadership of your day?
- How has God demonstrated His mercy in your life?
- What should our response be to the blessings of God mentioned in the above questions? Re-examine what this chapter teaches us about how Israel needed to respond to God's blessing. Where have you fallen short?

## For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank God for the encouragement and strength He gives you in His Word.
- Pray for your spiritual leaders. Thank the Lord that He has given them to you for your good.
- Praise the Lord for the mercy He has shown you in your life. Thank Him for His forgiveness and provision throughout your life.
- Ask the Lord to help you to respond to Him out of reverence, love, service, obedience, repentance and praise. Ask Him to show you how you can grow in these areas.

# 11

## GERIZIM AND EBAL

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Read Deuteronomy 11:1-32

God's people were still on the east side of the Jordan River. They had not yet crossed into the land God had promised their fathers. Moses has been challenging them to walk with the Lord and seek His ways. Their blessing in the land the Lord was giving them depended on their obedience to the Lord God. It would be easy for Israel to obey only because they wanted the blessings of God. Moses reminded them, however, that this was not the kind of obedience the Lord desired.

As we begin chapter 11, Moses challenged his people to love the Lord and keep His requirements, decrees, laws and commandments. Notice the connection in this verse between loving God and keeping His commandments. The obedience that God required came from love. It was their love and devotion to God that motivated them to walk in obedience. They wanted to please Him not for anything they could get for themselves but because their hearts delighted in God and His ways.

There is another motive for obedience found in verses 2-7. Here in these verses Moses called his people to remember the Lord's great love and devotion toward them. They

had experienced many things as they wandered through the wilderness. God had disciplined and trained them as a father would his own son. They had seen the majesty of God as it descended on Mount Sinai. God demonstrated His mighty power when He struck down the entire nation of Egypt to set His people free. He had provided their every need for the forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

When Dathan and Abiram rebelled against Moses in Numbers 16, the Lord opened the ground and swallowed them and their families. God was jealous for the attention and devotion of His people and would let nothing stand between them. For forty years in the wilderness Israel had seen God's provision, His power and His jealous love for them. God was devoted to them as a nation. The people who stood by the banks of the Jordan River, ready to cross over and possess the land God had promised their fathers had experienced first-hand the presence and power of the Lord God for forty years.

God's faithfulness to Israel was another great motive for walking in obedience. He had never failed them as a people. He had set them free from their bondage. He had provided for their every need. He loved them and disciplined them as a father disciplined and loved his son. Gratefulness and thankfulness for what God had done was to be motivation for Israel's obedience. We need to see the rest of this chapter in the context of love and thankfulness. These were the only true motivations for obedience to God.

God's blessing would be on those who walked in faithfulness to His commands out of a heart of love and thankfulness. That blessing would be evident in many different ways. We see first from verse 8 that it would be evident in how God strengthened His people to take the land He was

giving them to possess. There is strength in obedience. God delights to empower those who walk in His way. Why would He strengthen those who had no interest in His purposes? If we want to know His enabling in our lives, the great secret is to walk in faithfulness and obedience to Him.

Another blessing for the people of God was long life in the land the Lord had given them (verse 9). If they wanted to remain in the land the Lord was giving them and experience the blessing of God in that land, they needed to walk in faithfulness and obedience to His purpose. Jesus told a story about a man who went away on a journey and left money with his servants to invest in his absence. When the master returned and discovered that one of his servants had not invested the money as he had asked, he took it from him and gave it to a servant who had been faithful (see Matthew 25:14-30). The unfaithful servant lost what he had because he disobeyed his master. If Israel wanted to remain in the land God had given her, she needed to keep the land pure and free from defilements. As the history of Israel unfolded, her disobedience to God literally drove her out of the land. God's people were driven into captivity and their land was destroyed. All this was because they had defiled the land by walking in disobedience to God and His commands.

What keeps God from taking away your spiritual gifts or your ministry? Have you been faithful with the blessings He has given you? As long as God's people walked in obedience, God's blessings and gifts would remain on them. If they were unfaithful, they risked losing everything. God was giving His people a land "flowing with milk and honey." This would be theirs as long as they continued to walk in obedience to God and His purposes.

In verse 13 the Lord God promised to send rain on the land if His people obeyed His commands. Notice that the command was to love the Lord and serve Him with all their heart and soul. Again the connection between loving and serving is important. God's people were to love and serve Him with all their heart and soul. This was to be their motivation. God was looking for obedience from the heart. They could obey Him on the outside just to have His blessings, but God was not looking at their actions only. He was looking also at their heart. His blessing would fall on those who loved and served with all their heart and soul. It was on these individuals that He would send His rain so that their crops would grow and produce abundantly. These people would drink new wine, gather grain from their fields, eat and be satisfied (verse 14).

It is important that we take a moment to consider verses 10-12 in the context of this blessing promised by God. Remember that as the people of Israel wandered through the desert they longed to return to the land of Egypt. In Egypt they had plenty to eat. They had their own homes and their herds. Egypt was one of the most prosperous nations on the earth but it did not serve the Lord God. How are we to understand what God is telling His people here if even the nations who did not serve God experienced physical and material blessings? Verses 10-12 give us a partial answer to this question. Listen to what the Lord told His people in these verses:

(10) The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. (11) But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. (12) It is a land the LORD your God cares

for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.

In these verses the Lord compares the riches of Egypt with the riches He was going to give His people in the land of Canaan. Notice what he told His people in verse 10 about the riches of the land of Egypt. In Egypt they planted their seed and irrigated it as in a vegetable garden. The land God was going to give them, however, drank water from heaven and God cared for it by watching over it from the beginning to the end of the season (11-12). The riches of Egypt were produced by human effort (they watered and planted the seeds themselves). The riches of Canaan were planted, watered and cared for by God. Let's take a moment to consider the difference between blessing made by human hands and the blessing of God.

All around us we see evidence of those who have, through human effort, wisdom and skill made a "good life" for themselves. Some of these individuals live in relative wealth and prosperity but they do not know God or follow His ways. Their wealth and prosperity is like that of Egypt. It was produced through human wisdom and effort. This human wealth and prosperity often defiles the land and results in pride, dissatisfaction and injustice. Greed, dishonesty, covetousness, and lust are the fruit of this kind of prosperity. Countless lives have testified to the barrenness and emptiness of wealth without meaning and purpose. This prosperity does not come from God.

There is another type of blessing. This blessing is not made with human hands or obtained by human wisdom. It is a blessing that comes from God to those who are unworthy but who walk in faithfulness to His commands. Those who know this blessing know that it is a gift from their heavenly Father. It is a blessing given in love to be



shared with others. It is a blessing that has God's touch. It speaks of a God who delights in His people and desires a deep relationship with them. Those who experience this blessing experience God, for He is its source. This is the type of blessing God wanted for His people. He gave Himself with these gifts and received their love and thankful gratitude in return. This blessing delighted the hearts of those who received it and brought hope and confidence in the trials of everyday life.

God blessed His people so that they would learn to love Him and turn from other gods. He wanted their full and undivided attention. His anger would burn against them if they bowed down to other gods. He would shut up the heavens so that it would not rain on their land. Their land would no longer produce crops and they would die. God demanded obedience and faithfulness. In Him they would know fullness and deep satisfaction. Apart from Him they would only know death and defeat. Their only hope was in their God. This is the same today. We may have all the riches our human efforts can produce but there is barrenness to those riches. They cannot truly satisfy the longings of our heart.

God called His people to remember these words. They were to fix them in their hearts and minds and symbolically bind them on their foreheads so that they would never forget them. They were to teach them to their children on every occasion. They were to write them on the door frames of their houses and their gates so that they would be constantly reminded of their obligation to God. In other words, they were to live every day in the knowledge of their obligation to walk faithfully with their God. These obligations were to be carefully passed on to the next generation so that they too would never forget the Lord God (verse 21).

Verse 22 again focuses on the importance of loving the Lord and walking in His ways. This is the third time in this passage that love for God is repeated. Again God was not looking for a heartless devotion to a set of rules. He was looking for a people who loved Him from the heart and held fast to Him in love.

Notice the result of loving and holding fast to the Lord in verse 23. God promised that He would drive out all the nations before them. These nations, though stronger than them, would fall to them. No one would be able to stand against them for the presence of God would be on them.

Notice also, in verse 24, that God would extend their territory from the desert to Lebanon and from the Euphrates River to the western sea. God had a land for His people to possess but they would only be able to possess it by obedience. If they obeyed, He would go before them and put terror in the hearts of their enemies. They would be feared because the presence of the Lord God was on them (verse 25). It is important to see that God had a land for Israel to possess. It was His desire that they possess this land completely. How easy it is for us to be content with possessing only part of what God has for us. Let us not be content until we know that we have possessed all that God has for us in our ministries and personal lives. Let us not rest until we have accomplished all of His purposes.

God set before His people that day a blessing and a curse. Israel had a decision to make. If they walked faithfully with God they would know His blessing. If they disobeyed and turned to other gods they would experience His curse (verses 26-28). Notice that God does not force them to walk in His ways. They have the freedom to choose. God is looking for people whose hearts are right before Him and whose desire is to serve and obey Him.

There were two mountains in the Promised Land called Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. They were geographically quite close to each other (Gerizim to the south and Ebal to the north). God told His people in verse 29 that when they arrived in the land He had promised them, half of the people were to stand on Mount Gerizim and the other half on Mount Ebal. Those who stood on Mount Gerizim were to proclaim the blessings of the Lord for obedience. Those who stood on Mount Ebal were to proclaim curses for disobedience. These two mountains standing beside each other were to be a permanent reminder to the people of Israel of the choice they were to make each day. They could choose to go the way of blessing or they could turn their backs on God and experience His curse. Notice from verse 32 that it was the desire of God that His people walk in His ways and experience blessing. He longed to bless but He would not hesitate to curse if they chose to walk away from Him.

That same decision must be made today. God's blessing rests on those who walk faithfully with Him. He longs to pour out that blessing. He is also a God of wrath and justice, however, and those who turn from Him will indeed know His curse.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the motivation for obedience to God?
- What blessings are promised in this chapter for those who obey and walk faithfully with God? Are you experiencing those blessings in your life today?

- What is the difference between man-made prosperity and the blessing of God?
- What do we learn in this passage about the blessing of God on the one hand and His wrath on the other?

For Prayer:

- Why do you obey the Lord? What is your motivation? Ask the Lord to remind you of His love and devotion to you. Ask Him to fill your heart with love and gratitude for who He is and what He has done.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the blessings He has given you over this past year.
- Have you ever envied those who lived in an abundance of man-made wealth? Ask the Lord to help you to see this wealth for what it is. Ask Him instead to fill you with the blessing that comes from heaven and is watered and cared for by God Himself.
- Thank the Lord that He is a God of justice. Ask Him to help you to accept Him as both a God of both love and holiness. Ask Him to give you grace to turn from every sin. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have fallen short of His standard. Thank Him that there is forgiveness in the person of the Lord Jesus.

# 12

## WORSHIPPING GOD

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Read Deuteronomy 12:1-32

When the people of God crossed over into the land of Canaan, they would discover that the people there were a very religious people. They worshipped gods on the high mountains and hills as well as under spreading trees. There, in those places, Israel would find shrines and religious articles used to worship the false gods of these nations. Moses told the people in the opening verses of this chapter that when they discovered these shrines, they were to destroy them completely. The altars were to be broken down, the sacred stones smashed and the Asherah poles burned in the fire. Idols were to be cut down and the names of the gods they represented completely wiped out from the land (verses 2-3).

There appears to be two reasons why the Lord wanted these altars and stones to be removed from the land. First, they were an offence to Him as the Creator. These pagan nations did not recognize God as their Creator and they worshipped gods they themselves had created. This was an offence to God and defiled the land. Second, God knew that if His people allowed these idols to remain in the land there would always be a temptation for them. God wanted His people to worship Him alone. The blessing of the land

depended on the faithfulness of God's people to His commands. A sure way of bringing the curse of God on this land was to bow down to the gods of the nations they had driven out.

Notice from verses 5-6 that it was the purpose of God to set up a place where His people could go to worship Him. Having a central place for worship would guarantee that the Lord was worshipped as required by His law. God's people were to bring their burnt offerings, sacrifices, tithes and special gifts to that one place of worship, and there they would celebrate the goodness of their God. All pagan altars and shrines were to be destroyed. The worship of the God of Israel would be observed in one central location where it could be monitored by those who knew and understood the requirements of God's law. These measures would help to keep the faith of Israel pure.

For forty years the people of God had been wandering through the wilderness. The tabernacle of God went with them wherever they went. Things would change in the land God was giving them. As they conquered and settled in the land, the people of God would build their homes. They would be spread out over that land. God would choose a location "as a dwelling for his Name." There He would reveal His presence in a special way. He would be worshipped in that place as required by the law. It was to this special place that the people of Israel would bring their offerings, tithes, and special gifts (verse 11). It was in this place that they would come to worship the Lord (verse 12). Holy sacrifices were not to be made anywhere else. They could only be offered in the place the Lord had chosen (verse 13).

Not all animals slaughtered were for the worship of the Lord God. Many animals were slaughtered just for food.

God's people were free to slaughter these animals in their own towns (verse 15). They were free to slaughter and eat as much meat as they wanted (verse 20). The only requirements God set for this was that they pour the blood on the ground and not eat it. In the case of an animal slaughtered simply for food, anyone could eat it whether they were ceremonially clean or unclean. It was not an offering made to the Lord and did not require special treatment apart from letting the blood flow on the ground (verse 24).

By letting the blood of an animal slaughtered for food flow in the ground, God's people were recognizing that life belonged to the Lord. As life was in the blood, they were returning it back to God as the Creator. Verse 23 makes it quite clear that God's people were not to "eat the life with the meat." All life belonged to God and was to be returned to Him. A curse was on anyone who ate the blood of an animal (see verse 25).

While God's people were free to slaughter and eat their meat in their own homes, anything that had been consecrated to God was to be brought to the place He had chosen for the worship of His name (verse 26). The tithe of their grain, wine and oil, the firstborn of their herds and flocks or anything they had dedicated or vowed to the Lord was to be taken to the place God would set aside. These things were only to be eaten in the sanctuary set aside for this. A portion of their gifts was also given to the Lord, another to the Levites for their service and the remainder eaten in the presence of the Lord in the place of worship He had chosen (verses 18-19, 27). Their burnt offerings were only to be presented on the altar of the Lord at the place He had chosen for worship. The blood of these sacrifices was poured out beside the altar (verse 27). The blessing of God's people depended on their observing this

command and worshipping Him alone in the place He has set apart for that purpose (verse 28).

Moses concluded this chapter by challenging his people to follow the Lord God alone. They were going into a land filled with people who worshipped other gods. They were not only to drive these people out of the land but they were also to destroy everything to do with the worship of their gods so that they would not be tempted to worship them. To keep God's people from falling into this sin, God set up a central place of worship with leaders who were instructed in the laws of God. The worship of the God of Israel was to take place in this location. The sacrifices required by God were done in this place by the priests who had been called by God.

Verse 31 tells us that God hated the sacrifices of the nations of Canaan. They sacrificed to gods they had made themselves. They even burnt their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods. It was because of these things that the wrath of God had fallen on the nations who inhabited the land. They would be driven out, the land would be purified and given to Israel.

There are several things we need to understand from this chapter. First, God called His people to remove the temptations and set up a system that would help them avoid falling into sin. There are a variety of things that can be a temptation to us as believers today. There are times when we need to be very serious about removing those temptations from our lives. There are places we will need to avoid. There are situations from which we may need to remove ourselves. Notice, however, that God not only told His people to remove the temptation but to replace the temptation with something good and wholesome. He provided them with a central location where they could express their faith



in a way that was pleasing to Him. It is important that we remove the temptations in our lives, but removing temptations is not enough. We may not put ourselves in a place where we can be tempted but we can still struggle with this sin in our mind. God also expects that we replace the evil with something that will help us walk in the way of truth.

Notice secondly the importance of the larger community. God brought His people together so that they could watch out for each other. He ordained that all sacrifices take place in a central location under the supervision of the leadership He had ordained. In a similar way, we were never designed to live the Christian life in isolation but within the larger body of Christ. God has designed it so that we can watch out for each other and minister to each other as we walk in His ways.

Notice third that there was always the temptation for God's people to fall into the worship of other gods. We need to realize that while the gods of our day are not necessarily made of wood and stone, they are, nonetheless, a real temptation. We can worship our spiritual gifts, our doctrines or our traditions. I have been in places where the church building has taken the place of God. I have also been in churches where it appears that serving God became more important than God Himself. As the body of Christ today, the temptation still exists to fall into the sin of idolatry.

For Consideration:

- God was going to give His people a land filled with false gods and idols. What false gods and idols are in your society today?

- How did a central place of worship help protect God's people from falling into temptation?
- What temptations do you face in life? What does this passage have to teach you about dealing with these temptations?
- What do we learn here about the importance of the larger body of believers? How does this larger body help us deal with the temptations that come our way?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to speak to your society about the false gods it bows down to today.
- Ask God to protect you from the temptations all around you in your society. Ask Him to show you how you can keep yourself from falling into those temptations.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for brothers and sisters as well as spiritual leaders He has given to help you on your Christian walk.
- Ask the Lord to help you to have a greater desire and heart to worship Him.

# 13

## TEMPTATIONS FROM WITHIN

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Read Deuteronomy 13:1-18

Moses has been challenging the people to walk in the commands of the Lord God and to seek Him alone. He challenged them to destroy the things that could be a temptation to them in the land God had promised to them, things such as the pagan altars and places of worship. In the last chapter he told them that the Lord God would set up a central place for worship to safeguard them from falling into the ways of the nations around them and worshipping in a way not ordained by God.

Temptation to wander from the truth of God did not come only from outside. There would also be temptations from inside. Here in chapter 13 Moses speaks to Israel about the will of God regarding anyone in their own nation who would encourage them to turn away from worshipping the Lord God. Moses addresses three different sources of temptation in this chapter.

*False Prophets*

The first source of temptation within the nation was from false prophets. Not all prophets in Israel were from God. Some prophets came in their own name with their own ideas. Notice that these prophets had dreams and announced miraculous signs and wonders that came to pass (verses 1-2). If they were to be judged on the basis of their predictions they might be considered to be true prophets. Prophets were not to be judged only on the basis of their ability to predict or perform miraculous signs, however. Prophets also needed to be judged on the basis of the message they proclaimed.

In this case we have a prophet who called the people of God to follow other gods and worship them (verse 2). God's people were not to listen to this prophet, even though he backed up what he said with miraculous signs, because his message was clearly not from God. Any who did not preach the truth of God, even though they did many great signs and wonders, were to be rejected as false prophets.

In this case, the false prophet was to be put to death because he was misleading the people and preaching rebellion against the Lord God. Israel was to purge her land of such evil (verse 5). The truth of God was to be their guide. They were not to allow themselves to be deceived by those who could perform miraculous signs and predict the future. Signs and wonders often backed up the ministry of Jesus and the apostles in the Scripture, but the truth of God's Word must be our guide. Jesus tells us that there will be people who perform great signs and wonders in His name who did not belong to Him. We read in Matthew 7:22-23:

(22) Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' (23) Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Jesus describes a people in Matthew 7 who could prophesy, drive out demons and even do miracles in the name of Jesus. In the eyes of God, however, these individuals were "evildoers" who would be eternally separated from God. Israel was not to be deceived by these false prophets and their miracles. The command of God was clear. They were to love Him with all their heart and soul. They were to follow Him and revere Him alone. They were to serve Him and hold fast to Him (verses 3-4). Anyone who preached another message was a false prophet, an evildoer preaching a message of rebellion, and was to be shown no mercy, but purged from the land.

### *Family Members*

Another source of temptation might come from close family members. Notice from verse 6 that this type of temptation was not public like that of the false prophet. The words of this family member were spoken in secret. The message, however, was the same as that of the false prophet, "Let us go and worship other gods." Even though this message came from someone they loved dearly, God's people were not to show them pity nor were they to protect them (verse 8). The individual who secretly enticed another to turn from God was to be put to death by stoning. Notice from verse 9 that the hand of the person who heard these words, was to be the first to cast the stone. It would not be easy to cast the first stone at a dearly loved husband, wife or child, but God would not tolerate anyone who sought to turn His

people from Him. This evil was to be removed for the good of the entire community.

Jesus would repeat this command in other words in Matthew 10:37 when He said:

“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

Love for God was to be greater than love for even the dearest family member. God's people were not to allow their love for family or anything else stand in the way of their relationship with God. He was to be first in their heart. They were to walk away from the family member closest to them if that person sought to turn them from God.

### *Fellow Israelites*

Sometimes the temptation would come from members of their own community. For example they might hear about some wicked men in one of their towns who had been successful in leading a whole town astray by calling them to worship other gods (verse 13). If this was discovered then they were to inquire about this. Notice the words used in verse 14. They were to inquire, probe and investigate thoroughly. In other words, they were not to listen to a rumour about someone, they were to make sure they had investigated the matter and were absolutely certain of the facts. All too often, we hear something about another person and judge them without speaking to them and discovering the truth about the situation. God makes it clear in verse 14 that His people were to be sure of their facts before proceeding to the next step.

If, after careful investigation, they discovered that what they had heard was true, the entire town was to be destroyed. They were to leave no survivors, nor were they to leave any livestock (verse 15). They were to gather up all the plunder and put it in the public square of the town where they were to burn it. The town was never to be rebuilt (verse 16). God's people were to take nothing from that town. If they did, the anger of the Lord would fall on them as well. If they followed His commands in this regard, however, the blessing of God would continue on them as a nation (verses 17-18).

God has some very important things to say to His people in this chapter. Sin was to be taken very seriously. God warned them that there would be many temptations ahead. Those temptations would not only come from the nations around them but also from within. False prophets would rise up in their midst. Members of their own families would be a temptation to them. Whole towns would turn their backs on the Lord and they would be forced to take a stand against their own brothers and sisters. A great spiritual battle was raging. God's people needed to be always on guard.

God was to be central in their thoughts and attitudes. He was to be more important to them than anything else in life. Their hearts were to be devoted to Him alone. Nothing was to stand between them and their relationship with Him.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this passage about the importance of the Word of God in judging whether a prophet is true or false?

- What is the place of signs and wonders? How can signs and wonders lead us into error?
- Can a person who does not belong to the Lord Jesus perform signs and wonders in His name?
- God's people were to place Him above family members or anything else in their lives. Are there things in your life that you treasure more than the Lord God?
- What are the sources of temptation in your life?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His Word which guides us into truth.
- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to the sources of temptation in your life.
- Ask the Lord to help you to love Him more than anyone or anything else.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be faithful to Him and His truth. Pray that He would give you a deeper love and devotion to Him alone.



# 14

## HOLINESS IN EATING AND GIVING

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Read Deuteronomy 14:1-29

Israel had been chosen by God to be His people. There was to be a clear distinction between the practices of the people of God and those of the nations around them. Israel was to avoid anything that might associate them with the evil ways of the nations. We have an example of this in verses 1-2.

One of the practices of the nations around Israel was for worshippers to cut themselves in an attempt to gain the attention of the gods. We have an example of this in 1 Kings 18:27-28. Moses made it quite clear to his people that they were not to imitate the nations in this way. This was not the kind of God they served. He was a God of grace who heard them when cried to Him. They did not need to afflict themselves with pain in order for Him to hear their cries. They only needed to turn their hearts toward Him.

Notice also the practice of shaving the front of the head for the dead in verse 1. Reference is made to this practice in

Isaiah 15:2 and Jeremiah 16:6. It appears from the context, that there was much more involved in this practice than mourning the loss of a loved one. There was also a spiritual significance connected with this practice. God wanted His people to separate themselves from this practice so it would not be confused with the pagan customs of the nations around them.

How easy it is for us to draw our practices from the culture around us. Some churches have chosen to look as much like the world as possible, believing that by this means they can reach people from Christ. The problem is that sometimes the line between what is godly and what is ungodly becomes quite blurred. While it is of great concern that we avoid legalism, we also need to be a people of clear principles and moral character. The message we preach should never be compromised or distorted in any way. God wants our character and our message to be clear. Anything that hides that message needs to be rejected.

In verses 3-21 Moses showed the people that the holiness God required affected every aspect of their lives. Here in these verses Moses explained to Israel the purpose of God with regard to what His people ate. He lists the types of animals God permitted them to eat and those that were forbidden. It is clear that some of the unclean animals mentioned here would carry diseases that could make God's people sick. In other cases, it is possible that the animals concerned were worshipped or considered sacred by the nations around them. In this case, God wanted His people to avoid these animals so that they would not be tempted to follow the ways of the nations. The following chart summarizes the requirements of God in regards to what His people could or could not eat.

	General Principle	Eat	Avoid
Animal	<p>"You may eat any animal that has a split hoof divided in two and that chews the cud." (verse 6)</p> <p>Do not eat anything you find already dead (verse 21)</p>	Ox, sheep, goat, deer, gazelle, roe deer, wild goat, ibex, antelope, mountain sheep (vs. 5)	Camel, rabbit, cooney, pig (verse 7-8).
Fish	"You may eat any that has fins and scales." (verse 9)		
Birds	"You may eat any clean bird." (verse 11)		Eagle, vulture, black vulture, red kite, black kite, any kind of falcon, any kind of raven, horned owl, screech owl, the gull, any kind of hawk, little owl, great owl, white owl, desert owl, osprey, cormorant, stork, any kind of heron, hoopoe, bat.
Insects	"All flying insects that swarm are unclean to you; do not eat them. Any winged creature that is clean you may eat" (verses 19-20)		

Notice in verse 21 that while Israel was free to sell food that was unclean to foreigners, they were not free to eat this food themselves. This shows us that God had a

special standard for those who belonged to Him. With our privilege comes an obligation. Those who serve the Lord are expected to live a life of holiness and will be held accountable to God in a special way.

Notice in verse 21 that Israel was not to cook a young goat in its mother's milk. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown make the following comment about this law:

A prohibition against imitating the superstitious rites of the idolaters in Egypt, who, at the end of their harvest, seethed a kid in its mother's milk and sprinkled the broth as a magical charm on their gardens and fields, to render them more productive the following season.<sup>1</sup>

Again we see that this pagan practice of the nations around Israel was to be avoided. They were not to trust in pagan rituals to guarantee a harvest. God alone was their provider. He would care for them and provide for their needs. They were not to trust other gods for their provisions.

In the remainder of chapter 14 Moses explains to Israel what God's requirements were concerning the tithe. Notice first, in verse 22 that every year Israel was to set aside a tenth of all that their fields produced. This portion belonged to the Lord.

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1 Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Laridian Electronic Publishing, 1871 (notes on Exodus 23:19).

Verse 23 explains what was to happen with this yearly tithe. The family would bring the tithe to the Lord at the central place of worship. There in the presence of the Lord they would eat a meal made from the tithe of their crops. This was done in celebration of the Lord's goodness. We understand from verse 27 that this tithe was also shared with the Levites.

It was not always practical to bring the whole tithe of their crops to the central place of worship. Sometimes people lived a long distance away from the temple and their tithe was too large to carry. In this case, provision was made for these individuals to exchange their tithe for silver. They would then take this silver to the central place of worship and purchase whatever they wanted with it when they arrived. A meal was then prepared from the goods purchased and eaten in the presence of the Lord to celebrate His goodness (verses 24-26).

Every three years the tithe of all that year's produce was to be brought to a storage facility where it would be kept to be used by the Levites, foreigners, fatherless and widows. God's concern was for the poor and needy as well as for the spiritual leaders.

The tithe had at least three purposes. First, as a reminder of God's goodness, it was used to celebrate what He had done for them each year. Second, it provided for the needs of God's servants, the priests so they could continue their work. Third, it was used to meet the practical needs of the poor and needy in the community.

God required that His people separate themselves from the practices of the pagan nations around them. They were not to imitate their ways or follow their practices. Instead they were to walk in the ways the Lord their God

commanded. Holiness affected every part of life. Holiness was seen in how they lived, how they ate and what they did with the wealth the Lord their God had given them. True holiness was demonstrated in how they worshipped and remembered God as their provider, how they cared for His servants and how they ministered to the needy people in their midst. May our lives reflect this kind of holiness today.

#### For Consideration:

- How much of a temptation is it for us as believers to draw our customs and practices from the world and not from the Lord God and His Word?
- How are we to be different as believers? What distinguishes us as believers from the rest of the world?
- What was the purpose of the tithe? How have you been using your resources for the Lord?
- How do you celebrate and remember the goodness of the Lord?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you if there are any practices in your life that do not please Him.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be better testimony in the world to what it means to be a child of God?

Ask God to help you to have a holiness that affects all of your life.

- Ask the Lord to show you how you can use your money, efforts and time for the cause of His kingdom and the ministry to the poor in your community.
- Take a moment to consider the goodness of the Lord in your life. Thank Him for His goodness.

# 15

## CANCELLING AND PAYING DEBTS

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Deuteronomy 15:1-23

One of the unique things about the Law of God was that it made provision for the needy and set safeguards in place so that the rich could not continue to get richer at the expense of the poor. We saw in the last chapter that every three years the people of Israel were to bring their tithes to a central location in their town so that the Levites and the poor could have food to eat. Here in chapter 15 we read about the law requiring the cancelling of debts every seven years.

In Israel, as in many other countries, there were individuals who had to borrow money for a variety of reasons. While it was expected that every individual who borrowed money would do his or her utmost to pay that money back, the law of God demanded that every seven years all debts be cancelled. The seventh year was known as the Sabbatical or Sabbath Year (see Leviticus 25 for more details). No crops were to be planted on the Sabbath Year. The land was given rest for the whole year. It was on this Sabbath Year that all debts were to be cancelled. God's people were



required, on that year, to trust Him as the source of all their need.

Notice from verse 3 that this law applied only to Israelites. Payment of a debt could be required from a foreigner but all debts owed by a fellow Israelite were to be cancelled every seven years.

The law concerning the cancelling of debts would have been a tremendous blessing to the needy in the land. It assured that no one would get in so much debt that they could never pay back all they owed. Every seven years the financial burden was relieved and the individual was able to start over again. It also kept wealthy Israelites from gaining more power over their brothers and sisters. The purpose of this law was to remind God's people of their obligation toward each other. Under no circumstance was one Israelite to oppress or take advantage of another. They were to be concerned for each other's welfare.

We can only imagine the concern God's people would have on the Sabbath Year. They were not permitted to plant their fields and were required to cancel all debts owed to them by fellow Israelites. I am sure many Israelites wondered how they were going to survive that year. How would they provide for the needs of their families? God promised, in verses 4-6, that His hand would be on them if they obeyed. He told them that He would bless them so that there would be no poor among them (verse 4). They would lend to many nations but would borrow from none. The provision of God would be sufficient for all their needs (verse 6).

The temptation for the Israelite, knowing that debts were to be cancelled on the seventh year, was to refuse to loan money to a brother or sister for fear that he would not get

it back. God warns His people in verse 7 that they were not to be “tight-fisted” (verse 7) toward their brother. In other words, they were to open their hands to give freely to anyone who had need.

Notice particularly in verse 9 how God knew that some of His people would be tempted to refuse to give a loan to a brother or sister because the seventh year was near. God warns them against that sort of thinking. They were to loan to those in need even if it meant that they would never get their money back. Verse 9 makes it clear that refusing to loan money to a brother in a legitimate need when they had the ability to do so was a sin. The Lord would be their reward if their brother or sister did not pay back their loan. He would reward the generosity and kindness of heart.

God’s people were to do their utmost to pay the debts they owed. An Israelite could sell himself to another Israelite to pay off a debt. Every seventh year, however, those who had sold themselves were to be released and their debt forgiven (verse 12). Israelites were not to be kept as servants for more than six years. There was one exception to this rule. An Israelite could freely choose to stay with a master because he loved him and was well off with him. Perhaps his master could provide him and his family with a better life than he could have on his own. In this case, the master would take an awl and push it through the ear lobe of the servant as sign of his willingness to remain in his household. At that point, the individual would remain forever with his Israelite master (verses 16-17).

When an Israelite servant was released from his master’s service on the seventh year, God required that the master not send him away empty-handed. Imagine a man who had become so poor he had to sell himself to pay off a debt. Leaving his master now after six years he would

have nothing. While his debt may be paid, he still would have nothing to eat and he risked falling into the same situation again. God required that every master who sent away an Israelite servant supply them with sheep from their flock, grain from their threshing floor, and wine. The master was to give in accordance with the Lord's blessing on his life (verses 13-14). This way, leaving his master's service, the servant would have food, seed to sow, wine to drink and sheep to raise. This would give him a new start.

Notice in verse 18 the importance of the attitude of the heart in all this. God told His people that they were not to consider it a hardship to set their servant free on the seventh year. If anything, they had profited from this servant. They profited in two ways.

First, their Israelite servant was worth twice as much as a hired hand. If they had hired a servant, they would have to pay him out of their own pocket. The Israelite who sold himself blessed his master by paying back what was owed, and serving his master freely.

Notice the second way in which the master profited from this Israelite servant. By releasing this servant on the seventh year and sending him off with provisions, the master would be blessed by the Lord (verse 18). God's favour would be on the master because he treated his Israelite servant with respect and dignity and because he obeyed His commandment regarding the Sabbath Year.

It is never easy to release something to the Lord. Even as I write my mind is on the grief of some friends who recently lost their young son to a tragic traffic accident. The pain of releasing a loved one is never easy. In these times our focus is on our loss not in the blessings we received from God through those we have lost. When we look back at

the years spent with a loved one we realize how blessed we have been. When we consider the fact that the blessing of God falls on those who willingly release what He commands, we have courage and strength to face tomorrow.

In verses 19-23 the Lord reminds His people of their obligation to give Him the firstborn of their herd and flocks. These animals were set apart for God. The first born of their oxen were not to be put to work. The firstborn of their sheep were not to be sheared. These animals were to be set apart for the Lord. Each year they were to take them to the central place of worship where they would be sacrificed (verses 19-20). A portion would be given to the Lord, another to the priests and the remainder would be eaten in celebration of the Lord's goodness and faithfulness.

If the firstborn had a defect of any kind, it could not be sacrificed in the presence of the Lord (verse 21). These firstborn animals were still to be set apart and eaten but they were not sacrificed to the Lord at the central place of worship (verse 21). The only requirement was that the blood be spilled on the ground (verse 23).

For Consideration:

- What does this chapter teach us about the concern of God for the poor and needy?
- How did the cancelling of debts safeguard against abuses in the society? What would have happened if debts were not cancelled every seven years?

- Does someone have a debt to you that you need to release? Explain.
- How did the releasing of debts give the poor a fresh start in life? How was this good for the Israelite society?
- How important was the attitude of the heart in releasing of debt? What was the promise of God for those who freely and willingly released their debtors from their obligations?
- How would the Sabbath Year teach God's people to rely on Him and see Him as the source of all things? How easy is it to forget that God is the source of all things?

For Prayer:

- Are there needy people in your community? Ask the Lord to show you what you can do to help them.
- Ask the Lord to give you a more generous heart?
- Have you ever had to release something to the Lord? Take a moment to thank the Lord for the blessing He gave you though what you had to release to Him. Thank Him that He has been faithful to you.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for times you have held too tightly to your possessions.

# 16

## THREE YEARLY CELEBRATIONS

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Read Deuteronomy 16:1- 17

It was important that God's people remember His goodness to them. How easy it would be for them in the new land of plenty to forget where they had come from and what God had done to bring them to that place. To help them remember these things, the Lord established three celebrations and commanded that they be observed without fail each year.

### *Passover*

The first of these yearly celebrations was the Passover. It was to be observed on the month of Abib (mid-March to mid-April). Notice in verse 1 that the reason for this celebration was because it was during that month that the Lord God brought Israel out of bondage in the land of Egypt.

Moses does not go into great detail here about the various requirements for these yearly celebrations. His purpose is simply to remind his people of their obligations. During the Passover God's people were to sacrifice an animal from

their flock or herd at the central place of worship (tabernacle or temple). During the seven day celebration they were not to eat bread with yeast. This was in remembrance of the fact that when they left Egypt they had to do so in such a hurry that they had no time to wait for their bread to rise (verse 3). There was no great battle or slave revolt at that time. God's people were involved in their daily routine when God moved in power and set them free.

During the celebration of the Passover, God's people were to enjoy the goodness of God by feasting on the sacrifice they had set apart for that day. The animal to be sacrificed was brought to the Lord at the tabernacle or temple. It was not to be sacrificed in their towns (verse 5-6). A portion of the animal was devoted to the Lord and burned on the altar, another portion assigned to the priests and the final portion returned to the person sacrificing it. This portion was to be roasted and eaten in the presence of the Lord before returning to their homes (verse 7). Because it was a holy sacrifice to the Lord, nothing was left over until the morning (verse 4).

The Passover ended on the seventh day with an assembly of God's people. For the six days leading up to that assembly, God's people would eat unleavened bread. The seventh day was a holy day. On this day Israel rested from her work and took time to celebrate and remember God's goodness in setting them free from the bondage of Egypt.

### *Feast of Weeks*

The second celebration of the year was the Feast of Weeks. This would become known as Pentecost. It was celebrated seven weeks or fifty days after they had put their "sickle to the standing grain" (verse 9). The grain referred to here is generally considered to be the barley

harvest which was the first of the grains to mature and be ready to harvest. Pentecost began fifty days after the beginning of this harvest.

Pentecost was celebrated by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the Lord had given that year (verse 10). Notice two things about this celebration of Pentecost. First, it was to be a time of rejoicing before the Lord (verse 11). Pentecost celebrated the goodness of the Lord in the harvest. It was to be characterised by rejoicing and celebration. Second, the blessing was to be shared with their sons and daughters but also the Levites, foreigners, orphans and widows who lived among them (verse 11). The goodness of God was not to be kept for themselves. It was to be shared with others as an expression of God's generosity. God's people were to remember how they had suffered as slaves in Egypt and open their hands to those in need around them. Pentecost was a time of rejoicing in and sharing the blessing of God in the harvest.

### *The Feast of Tabernacles*

The final yearly celebration mentioned in this chapter is the Feast of Tabernacles. This was celebrated for seven days after the Israelites had gathered the produce from their threshing floors and winepresses. The harvest was over, the grain was threshed and the grapes pressed and squeezed for wine (verse 13).

While Moses does not go into detail about this celebration, we learn from Leviticus 23:33-43 that the Israelites were to live in small booths for the seven days of the feast. This was in commemoration of the fact that their ancestors had lived in tents as they wandered through the wilderness. Notice from verse 14 that God's people were commanded to be joyful during this celebration. The contrast of living in



a small booth and the joyous feasting that took place during those days is quite interesting. God's people were to remember what their parents had suffered but at the same time rejoice in what God had done for them.

Notice from verse 15 that the celebration not only looked back at God's blessings for that year but also to the assurance of God's ongoing blessings in the future. The promise was that God would bless all their harvests and the work of their hands so their joy would be complete. They celebrated God for His goodness in the past, and also for blessings yet to come.

The section concludes with a summary of the first fifteen verses. God expected all the men of Israel to make a journey three times a year to the temple where they would celebrate these three important festivals. As they came, each man was to bring his gift to the Lord. These gifts were to be in proportion to His blessing on their lives. This was not a tithe, but a freewill offering to the Lord in gratitude for His goodness.

Three things seem to characterize these great feasts. First, they were joyous. The words, "rejoice," or "be joyful" are repeated three times in these verses (see verses 11, 14, 15). This is important and shows us that the festivals were to be celebrations of joy. God wanted His people to experience joy in Him and in His provision.

The second characteristic of these feasts was that they were feasts designed to help God's people remember where they had come from and what God had done for them. These yearly celebrations reminded Israel of its roots in the bondage of Egypt and how God had taken them from bondage into the blessing of the Promised Land. God did not want His people to forget their roots. It

was in remembering their past that they could better understand the grace of God in their lives as a nation.

Finally, the feasts were characterized by sharing. The sacrifices and gifts they brought were shared with the priests and Levites. They were also shared with the poor, the foreigner, the widow and the orphan. God blessed so that His people could bless others. These feasts were a reminder to the people of God of their social and spiritual obligation to care for those in their midst who had not experienced the blessings they had experienced.

For Consideration:

- How do you celebrate the goodness of God in your life?
- What joy has God brought you through the blessings you have received from His hand?
- Take a moment to reflect on what God has done for you. What blessings has He given? How has He been faithful to you?
- How have you been sharing the goodness of God with others? How would God have you to share more?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to reflect and praise the Lord for the good things He has given you.
- Ask the Lord to open your eyes more fully to see His blessings.
- Ask the Lord to show you particularly how you can share your blessings and gifts with others.

# 17

## JUDGES AND KINGS

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Read Deuteronomy 16:18-17:20

Moses has been speaking to the people, preparing them to enter the Promised Land. He knew that there would be many changes for the people in the land God had promised them. There would also be many temptations. As we begin this next section of Deuteronomy, Moses speaks about leaders and their specific obligations. Here in chapters 16-17 he speaks about judges and kings.

### *Judges*

Notice in Deuteronomy 16:18 that Moses told the people that when they arrived in the land the Lord was giving them, they were to appoint judges and officials for each tribe, in every town the Lord gave them. These judges were to be available to deal with any problem that arose between them. In Deuteronomy 16:18-20 Moses provided some guidelines for these judges to live by.

First, the judges were to judge fairly (verse 18). The idea here seems to be that they would judge in a way that was godly and righteous. They were not to allow their own sinful attitudes to get in the way. They were God's

representatives and so they needed to make decisions according to God's purpose.

Second, judges were not to pervert justice (verse 19). That is to say, they were not to turn things to suit their own prejudices. They were not to let their own feelings or preferences stand in the way of doing what was right. They were to do what was right no matter the cost. This would not always be easy, but God held them responsible before Him to make judgements that would be in accordance with His will.

Third, those appointed as judges were not to show partiality. An enemy would be shown the same respect as a family member. The poor person was guaranteed a fair judgement. No one would receive special treatment.

Fourth, judges were never to accept bribes. A bribe would blind their eyes and twist their words. In other words, if someone gave them money to make a certain judgement they would likely close their eyes to the truth in favour of the person offering them the bribe. Their judgement would not be based on truth and righteousness, but on how they could help the person who bribed them avoid a just sentence. A bribe would keep them from making the right decision.

Finally, Moses challenges all judges to follow justice alone. They were not to let anything stand in the way of doing what was right. Notice in verse 20 how important the role of judge was in Israel. These judges were to follow the way of justice alone so that they could possess the land the Lord their God was giving them. In other words, if the people of Israel wanted to remain in the land the Lord was giving them, they needed to walk in God's ways. They needed to follow the path of justice and righteousness. The judges

in the land had an important role to play. Through their wise and impartial judgements, the people of God would remain in the land and enjoy the blessings of God.

Moses reminds the people in Deuteronomy 16:21-17:1 of two very important principles they were to follow when they entered the land the Lord was giving them. Those who judged God's people were to take these matters very seriously.

First, God's people were not to set up any wooden Asherah poles beside the altar of the Lord or erect a sacred stone (16:21). The pagan Asherah pole was a symbol of the Canaanite goddess Asherah. Tyndale Bible Dictionary has this to say about the Canaanite goddesses:

Ironically, the goddesses were considered sacred prostitutes and as such were called the "holy ones." Idols representing the goddesses were often nude and sometimes had exaggerated sexual features.

2

The god Baal was represented by a stone pillar. He was a fertility god and the sexual relationship between Baal and the goddesses was believed to guarantee a good harvest, according to the Canaanites.

When Moses told his people that they were not to set up an Asherah pole or a stone pillar beside the altar of God, he was making it clear that they were not to combine their

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2 Comfort, Philip W., Elwell, Walter A., (ed.) "Canaanite Deities and Religion," Tyndale Bible Dictionary, Cedar Rapids: Laridian Electronic Publishing. 2001

faith in God with the faith of the people of the land God was giving them. Moses knew that the Israelites would be tempted to compromise their faith. The judges and priests of Israel were to assure that no person compromised their faith by incorporating the evil practices of the nations around them into their worship. God alone was to be worshipped in the land.

The second temptation Israel would face is found in Deuteronomy 17:1. Here Moses told them that they were not to sacrifice to the Lord any ox or sheep that had a defect or flaw in it. In other words, they were to give the Lord the best they had. How easy it is for us to become so busy in other things that the Lord takes last place. Other issues crowd in and we become slack in our obligations and worship of God. The judges and priests of Israel were to maintain a high standard when it came to the worship and honour of the Lord God. There could be no compromising when it came to God. He deserved the best and they were to be assured that the Lord's people were giving Him what He deserved.

In Deuteronomy 17:2-5 Moses gives an example of an Israelite who was found guilty of bowing down to other gods. In this case, when the matter was brought to the attention of the judges, they were to take it very seriously. Notice in verse 4 that the matter was to be investigated "thoroughly." In fact, the matter had to be verified by two or three witnesses before it could be pursued (verse 6). If the individual had bowed down to other gods and it was witnessed by two or three people, then the individual was to be taken to the city gate and stoned to death (verse 5). Notice that it was the witnesses who were to be the first to put this person to death. This was also a test of the witnesses. They were called to stand behind what they had spoken against this individual. If they had lied, his or her death

would be on their hands. If they had told the truth they would rid the nation of a terrible evil.

Some cases would be too difficult for a local town judge to deal with. In this event, the case was referred to a higher court. These cases would be brought to the central place of worship (tabernacle or temple) where they would be presented to the priests, Levites and the judges for a decision (verses 8-9). The decision of these priests and judges would be final. God's people were to listen to them and submit to their judgments (verses 10-11). Anyone who showed contempt for a priest or judge who ministered before the Lord was to be put to death (verse 12). They were God's representatives and served His purposes in their midst. As God's servants, they were to be held in high regard.

### *Kings*

Moses looks forward prophetically to a time when Israel would ask for a king like the other nations around them. To that point, Israel had no king but God. He led, protected and provided for their every need. The day would come, however, when Israel, dissatisfied with God as king, would choose an earthly king. The Lord revealed this to Moses. In verses 14-20 Moses outlines the qualifications of such a king.

Notice first that the king they appointed over them was to be one that the Lord God had chosen (verse 15). In our day our leaders are often chosen by the will of the people. This was not the case for Israel. The king who ruled over them was to have a clear sense of God's call on his life. Because he was chosen by God, he was also accountable to God.



Second, the king was to be an Israelite. No foreigner was to rule over them in Israel. The reason for this seems to be that as an Israelite, the king would be subject to the Lord God and His laws. A foreign king would not serve the God of their fathers nor walk in His ways.

Third, the king was not to acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make his people return to Egypt to get more (verse 16). Acquiring horses was a way of building up military strength. It would also lead to increased trade with the nation that had held them as slaves. Egypt was known for its horses and a king set on acquiring horses would naturally be sending his representatives to Egypt to purchase them. This relationship with Egypt would bring other temptations for God's people. With the horses would come the temptation to follow their gods. It would also lead to pride on the part of the king as he measured his value, status and importance by the size of his army and the number of horses he had obtained. This was not how God measured success. The king was to focus on serving God and walking in His ways. He was not to focus on building a name for himself at the expense of his people. His trust and confidence was not to be in the number of horses he had obtained but in the Lord God.

Third, the king was not to take many wives (verse 17). The reason for this is quite clear in verse 17. A king who took many wives would have his heart led astray. In the event that his wives were foreigners, it is quite clear that the temptation would be to please them and follow their pagan gods. His wives would not necessarily all be foreign, however. He might have many Israelite wives. The more wives he had, whether they be foreign or Israelites, the more time he would have to spend caring for them and meeting their needs. The king of Israel was not to be self-absorbed. His focus was not to accumulate a great harem, but to serve

the Lord God. His heart was to be for the glory of God and the good of His people. Such a king would not have the time necessary for many wives. Consider the conflict there would be at his home with all these wives demanding his attention. These many wives would only distract the king from the call of God on his life.

Fourth, Moses told the people that their king was not to accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. We often think about wealth and riches when we think about a king. Often kings would accumulate great amounts of wealth and live in luxury while the people around them had very little. With wealth comes power and pride. This can lead to injustice and corruption. God does not call us into service to make us wealthy. In fact, wealth will often distract us from our call. It will also blind us to the needs of those around us. The king of Israel was to be a humble servant whose heart was not set on accumulating wealth but to do the will of the Lord God.

Finally, the king was to have a copy of the Law of God. He was to read the law all the days of his life (verses 18-19). The regular reading of the law would accomplish three things in the king's life. First, it would teach him how to revere, respect and honour the Lord God by teaching him who God was and what He had done. Second, it would show him how he was to walk in a way that was pleasing to God. Third, it would remind him that he was not above the law as king, and had an obligation, like every other Israelite, to walk in the ways of the Lord his God (verse 20). Only when he understood these things would the Lord give him the privilege of reigning a long time over His kingdom. The assumption here is that God would take away his position if he did not walk in a way that was worthy of that position.

## For Consideration:

- What was the responsibility of the judge in Israel? What kind of judges was God looking for in that day?
- What was the importance of the judge's role? How would society suffer if the judge did not exercise his role with fairness and justice?
- Moses makes it quite clear to the people that they were to worship God alone and give Him the best they had. Has this been true in your life?
- How was Israel's king to be different from the kings of the nations around them? How are Christian leaders to be different from non-Christian leaders?
- What was the role of the Law of God in the life of the king? How would that law affect his life?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you anything in your life that would distract you from your calling.
- Ask God to give you a deeper commitment to serve Him alone and to give Him the very best you have.
- Ask God to help you to be the leader He wants you to be. Ask Him to guide you by His Word and not by what the world around you does.
- Ask God to help you to be more faithful in reading and studying His Word.

# 18

## PRIESTS, LEVITES AND PROPHETS

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Read Deuteronomy 18:1-22

As we begin chapter 18, Moses shifts his attention to the priests and prophets of Israel. Notice in verse 1 the distinction made between the priests who were Levites and the ordinary Levites. The tribe of Levi had been set apart by God to serve the spiritual needs of Israel. While the whole tribe had been set apart for God and His service, not all of them were priests. The descendants of Aaron were given the responsibility to serve as priests. The rest of the Levites ministered under them as temple servants carrying out a variety of responsibilities in the worship and service of God.

The priests and Levites did not receive an inheritance of land as the other tribes in Israel did. This meant that they were dependant on those who could raise crops and animals for food. In fact, verse 1 tells us that they were to live on the offerings made to God. In other words, a portion of every offering brought to the Lord belonged to them. They

would not have to spend time raising crops. Their focus would be on ministering to the people. The inheritance of the Levites and priests was the privilege of being God's chosen representatives (verse 2).

In verse 3 Moses told his people that the shoulder, the cheeks (jowls, NIV), and the inner parts of a bull or sheep that was sacrificed was to be given to the priests for food. The Israelites were also to bring the first fruits of their grain, new wine, oil and wool from their sheep to the Levites and priests. This would be their portion for the service they offered to God's people.

If a Levite sold his possessions and moved to another town to serve the Lord, he was to share equally in the blessings brought by the Lord's people. We can imagine that even though the Levites and priests were servants of God they were as human as the rest of Israelite society. If another Levite came to join them, this would mean one more family to feed. If everything was shared equally, each person would receive less. Add to this the fact that this particular Levite had just sold his family possessions to devote himself to the service of the temple (verse 8). He likely had more money than the rest of the Levites. They now had to share equally with this new Levite. Human nature being what it is, this was fertile ground for jealousy and bitterness. Even though this newcomer had more money than anyone else, he was to be an equal partner because of the service he rendered for the people of God.

These priests were ordinary individuals like us. They wrestled with jealousy and envy. God knew they were imperfect. He chose them still and expected that they learn to walk in obedience to His purpose without showing any favouritism or jealousy.

There was another recognized group of religious leaders in Israel, the prophets. Unlike the priests and Levites, they did not belong to any particular tribe. They were not involved in the regular routine that took place at the temple, but they were still essential to the work God was doing.

In the case of the Levites and priests, their routines and rituals were clearly laid out by God in the law. Such was not the case for the prophets. Their responsibility was to speak the word of the Lord to His people. The problem for Israel was to discern whether a prophet spoke the truth or not. While true prophets were a very important part of Israel's spiritual life, false prophets could quickly mislead them.

In verses 9-13 Moses begins his comment about prophets with a word about the purpose of God for Israel's spiritual life. Moses reminds the people that when they entered the land the Lord was giving them, they were not to imitate what the nations around them were doing. These nations had their prophets as well. These prophets, however, did not consult the Lord. When they arrived in the land of Canaan they would find men and women who sacrificed their children in the fire, practised divination and sorcery and consulted evil spirits for advice and guidance. Others interpreted omens, practised witchcraft, cast spells and consulted the dead. These individuals spoke to the people and told them the will of the gods but they were false prophets. Moses made it quite clear that anyone who practised these things was detestable to the Lord. God's people were not to listen to these false prophets. The word of a true prophet came from the Lord God alone. No true prophet would listen to evil spirits, omens or the dead. If Israel wanted to know if a prophet was from the Lord they needed to consider the source of the prophet's message.

Notice in verse 15 that the true prophet God would raise up would be like Moses, from among their own brothers. Notice two points in this statement.

First, the prophets that God would raise up would be like Moses. What was Moses like? For forty years, Moses led the people of God. He walked among them and ministered to them in their need. He had been a faithful and hardworking servant of God who proved that he was true by what he said and how he lived. God's people could know a true prophet by his character and faithfulness.

Second, the prophets God would raise up for Israel would be from among their own people. In other words, they would be believers and followers of the God of Israel. God's people were not to listen to foreigners claiming to be true prophets. How could someone claim to be a true prophet of God if they did not know the Lord God and follow Him?

Moses reminded the people in verse 16 of the necessity of the prophetic ministry. When God gave them His commandments, their fathers stood at the foot of Mount Sinai in the region of Horeb. As God spoke they saw His glory, and they were terrified (see Exodus 20:18-19). That day they cried out in fear to Moses saying: "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die" (verse 16).

God heard their cry and chose to raise up people from their midst who would speak on His behalf. God would give them His words and they would speak those words to His people (verse 18). This would be the role of the true prophet. Prophets were to speak the words God gave them to the people of Israel. Because they were God's spokesmen, God expected that His people listen to what

they said. God would hold prophets accountable for the words they spoke (verse 19).

It was a serious matter to speak on the Lord's behalf. We can imagine that there were individuals who wanted to have the honour of being God's spokesman and have this place of honour in the society. God warned His people, however, that anyone who presumed to speak in God's name a word that he had not received from the Lord was to be punished by death. The same was true for the one who spoke in the name of another god (verse 20).

Notice that God does not make a distinction between someone who brought a word to His people from false gods and the one who spoke a word from his own heart that did not come from God. Both spoke lies in the name of the Lord and were to be put to death. This would certainly give those, who aspired to be prophets, cause to think.

As we have seen, God's people were to examine the character of the prophet and his message to see if he came from the Lord. There were cases, however, when a trusted brother or sister might speak a "word from the Lord." How could God's people be sure that this word was from God and not just a word spoken from human understanding? Moses told them to wait and see what happened. If a word was from God, it would come to pass. If it did not come to pass, it was clear that it did not come from the Lord. That prophet was to be punished. God's people were not to be afraid to put such a prophet to death (verse 22).

We see from this the seriousness of speaking a word "from the Lord." Those who claimed to speak a word from the Lord needed to be ready to place their lives on the line. If



they were wrong, they risked losing their lives for misrepresenting the Lord. This was not a ministry to take lightly.

The ministry of prophets was an important one and one that needed always to be examined. There were false prophets who spoke in the name of other gods or drew their prophecies from demonic origins. There were others who wanted a name for themselves and spoke from their own heart but did not speak from the Lord. Then there were those who were compelled of the Lord to speak. Sometimes they did not even want to speak but they could not keep what God had given them to themselves. Israel was to listen to this last group as if God was speaking through them.

For Consideration:

- What was the difference between the role of the prophet and the priest?
- How could the priests and Levites be tempted to jealousy and envy? Does this temptation exist today among Christian leaders?
- How were the priests and Levites supported in their ministry? How important is it that believers stand behind their spiritual leaders financially? Is there any other way besides finances that your spiritual leaders can be supported?
- List three ways Israel could discern if a prophet was truly from God? How do these principles apply today?

- What were the temptations for the prophet?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the various kinds of leaders He has given to His people today. Thank Him that their roles are quite varied.
- Ask the Lord to show you how you can support your spiritual leaders.
- Ask the Lord to raise up more men and women who can speak the word of the Lord clearly to our society. Ask God to give them greater boldness to speak His truth.
- Take a moment to pray for the spiritual leaders in your community. Ask God to protect them from pride, falsehood, envy and jealousy. Ask Him to give them grace to speak the truth in love.

# 19

## MURDER AND THEFT

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Read Deuteronomy 19:1-21

God's people were a holy people. Their holiness was not a result of their good life but God's setting them apart to be His chosen people. Because they had been set aside by God they were required to live a life of obedience. We see clearly in the history of the people of Israel that they often fell short of God's standard. Not every sin was intentional. Sometimes things happened in life that made a person guilty of a crime they had no intention of committing. God made provision for this in His law.

As we begin chapter 19, Moses told the people that when they entered the land the Lord was giving them they were to set aside three cities in the land. These cities were to be easily accessible by roads. The purpose of these cities was to shelter anyone who had killed another person unintentionally (verses 1-3).

Notice in verse 4 that anyone who had killed his neighbour unintentionally, without malice or premeditation was allowed to flee to these cities for protection. We have an example in verse 5 of a man cutting wood in the forest. As he swung his axe the head flew off, hit his neighbour and killed him. The man had no intention of killing his

neighbour but now he lay dead on the forest floor as a result of something he had done. In this situation, the family of the man who died might feel obligated to avenge the blood of their dead relative. They might come after him and kill him for what he had done, even though it was unintentional.

The cities of refuge were to be easily accessible so that the person guilty of killing another could flee to them for protection from the family seeking revenge. While his actions were unintentional, they may have stirred up the wrath of the family against him. There in that city of refuge he would be protected by law from the vengeance of the grieving family. The cities also protected the grieving families. In their anger it was quite possible that they might do something they would regret, bringing guilt on the nation.

In order to deal with the accidental death of the loved one, the two parties needed to be separated. Imagine the temptation of the family if the man who had killed their son, father or husband was living next door to them. This would be more than many could handle. In order to promote peace and greater harmony the two parties were to be separated.

Notice also that while the man living in the city of refuge never intended to kill his neighbour there was a cost to pay for his actions. He had to flee from his city and the people he knew and set up a new life under the protection of his new city. This was the cost of peace. Our actions, whether intended or not, may radically change the whole course of our lives.

In verses 8-10 Moses told the people that as their territory expanded, they were to add three more cities so that innocent blood would not be shed in their land. The innocent

were to be protected from the avengers of blood so that the whole land would not fall under the judgement of God.

While the innocent were to be protected from the avengers of blood, the law of God stated that those who were guilty of premeditated murder (killing a man intentionally) were never to be protected. If a man who intentionally killed his neighbour fled to a city of refuge the elders of the city were to bring him back. He was to be handed over to the avenger of blood to be killed. He was not to be shown pity. He was to die so that the land would be free from guilt and that the blessing of God could return (verse 13).

Verse 14 speaks of another type of crime in Israel. In this verse we have a law about moving a boundary stone belonging to a neighbour. The idea is that an individual, wanting to expand his own territory moves a stone marker and takes his neighbours land. By taking what did not belong to him this individual was guilty before God. Each person was to be content with what God had given.

Before an individual could be accused of a crime, the guilt of that individual needed to be established by more than one witness. The law required two or three witnesses before accusing someone of a serious offence (verse 15). This was to protect the accused from false witnesses.

If the truthfulness of the witnesses was questioned, they were to appear "in the presence of the Lord before the priests and judges" (verse 17). The priests and judges would thoroughly investigate the matter and if the witness were lying, they would be accused of being false witnesses. In this case, the judges would do to them what they wanted to do to their brother by bearing a false witness against him. If the crime they were trying to have their brother accused of required death, then the judges would

sentence the false witness to death. If it required losing an eye, then they would be sentenced to lose an eye. This would set an example for Israel so that they spoke the truth about their brothers and sisters.

We don't have to stand before a court of law to be a false witness with intent to harm a brother or sister. There are many ways we can destroy a brother or sisters reputation. Rumours and gossip can easily be spread and lead others to believe something about a brother or sister that is not true. How careful we need to be in what we say about a brother or sister lest we become guilty before God of being a false witness.

God's people were a people set apart by God. This did not mean that they were perfect. In fact they were far from perfect. Among the people of God were those who sought revenge and desired to kill their brother for something he had done. There were others who secretly moved boundary stones, stealing land that belonged to their neighbour. Still others were willing to testify falsely against a brother or sister and have them suffer for a crime they had not committed. God knew all these things would happen and made provision for them in His law.

The chapter speaks powerfully to the grace of God. We see a holy God making provision for a sinful people to live under His blessing. He could have destroyed them but He chose them and loved them with all their faults and failures. How thankful we need to be that the Lord God is still willing to work with us in our shortcomings as well.

## For Consideration:

- God was giving the land of Canaan to a people who struggled with sin. In fact He set up His law to punish those who would turn from His purposes. What does this teach us about God's holiness? What does this teach us about His grace?
- How did the city of refuge protect the innocent?
- How did separating the offended party from the one who had caused the offence preserve peace? Can we expect to resolve all our differences with brothers and sisters?
- While the man who accidentally killed his brother was innocent of any crime, there was still a cost to pay for his actions. How do our actions, intentional or unintentional, change the course of our lives?
- Can those who gossip and spread rumours be guilty of being false witnesses?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is a God of holiness and grace. Thank Him that He deals with sin but still loves the sinner.
- Do you have a strained relationship with a brother or sister? Ask the Lord to show you what you can do so that you are not being daily tempted to bitterness, anger, revenge or lust.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for spreading false reports or gossip about a brother or sister.

- Have there been things that have changed in your life because of sinful actions or bad decisions? Ask God to help you to make the most of your situation. Ask Him to help you to live in this new situation for His glory.



## GOING TO WAR

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Read Deuteronomy 20:1-20

The people of God were going to have to fight to obtain the land the Lord was giving them. There would be many battles in their conquest of the land of Canaan. In a similar way, there are many victories the Lord wants to give His people today, but those victories will not all come easily. There will be times when we will have to stand face to face with the enemy. Anyone who wants to know the taste of victory in the Christian life must first be prepared for battle.

In Deuteronomy 20, Moses has a few words to say to the people about the battles they would face in their conquest of the land God had promised them. He begins in verse 1 with a word of encouragement. Moses knew that the enemy facing them was larger and better equipped than Israel's army. Seeing the chariots and the number of soldiers before them would be quite discouraging for Israel. From a human perspective, they had no hope of conquering these large, well trained forces. Moses told his people that, while the enemy would be greater in number, they were not to be afraid because the Lord God would be with them.

God was bringing His people against forces they could not possibly defeat in human strength. No human wisdom

would have permitted Israel to stand against such odds. The first obstacle God's people would have to face was their own fear. Moses told them that the way to do this was to remember that the Lord had promised them this land and would be with them as they fought to possess it. This required faith in God presence, protection and provision to accomplish His purpose.

Fear can be a greater enemy than the enemy before us. Fear will keep us from even attempting to do battle. The confidence of God's people was not in their own ability but in the promise of God to be with them as they walked in obedience to His leading. God would fight for them. They would obtain the victory, not because they were stronger but because the Lord was on their side.

As they prepared to go into battle, the priest was to stand before them and remind them that God was on their side. He was to challenge them to put their confidence in the Lord their God and not to be afraid. God would fight for them and give them the victory (verses 2-3).

After the priest had encouraged the soldiers to be confident in the Lord, the army officers were then to address them. These officers were to call out two groups of soldiers. First, they called out the following people:

- Those who had built a home and not dedicated it
- Those who had planted a vineyard and had never tasted its fruit
- Those who were engaged to be married

Victory over the enemy did not mean that there would be no casualties in the battle. Some of the soldiers going into battle would die. Before risking their lives on the battle field, however, it was the will of God that they be able to experience some of the joys of living in the land He had promised. They were to enjoy their home, taste the fruit of their land, know the love of a wife and have an heir to carry on their name. The men who fell into this category were to be given the opportunity to enjoy the goodness of God before sacrificing their lives on the battle field.

The second group that was called out of the battle line were those who were afraid or fainthearted (verse 8). These individuals were to return to their homes so that they would not afflict their brothers with the same fear. Only those who were ready to face the enemy with confidence in the Lord were to go into battle. The battle was not for the fainthearted. The enemy was strong and powerful. God's warriors needed to be confident in Him if they were going to know victory.

Not every soldier in the army was ready to fight. Some needed to grow more in their confidence in the Lord. Others needed to stay at home and enjoy the goodness of the Lord. We see the incredible tenderness of God in these things.

In verses 10-20 Moses gave the commanders of the Israelite army guidelines to follow as they went into battle. Verses 10-15 speak about conquering cities that were outside of Israel's boundary (the land He had given to them to possess). If they marched up against a city that was outside the boundaries of Israel, they were to make an offer of peace to the inhabitants (verse 10). If they accepted their offer of peace and opened the gate of the city to them, they would be subject to forced labour and would work as

Israel's slaves (verse 11). If they refused the offer of peace, Israel was to engage them in battle. In this case, they would attack, kill all the men (verse 13) and take the women, children, livestock and everything in the city as plunder (verse 14).

If they went to war against the inhabitants of the land God had promised their fathers as an inheritance (within the boundary of Israel), they were to destroy them completely without making any offer of peace. The reason for this was so that God's people would not be tempted to follow the evil practices of these nations. The land the Lord was giving them was to be pure and undefiled by the worship of other gods (verses 16-18).

The final principle Moses gives to the military commanders is found in verses 19-20. When they laid siege to a city and fought against it, they were not to cut down the fruit trees. They were free to cut down other trees to build siege works to conquer the city but the fruit trees were to remain untouched. These trees were a source of food for Israel but also for the generations to come and were not to be destroyed.

It is interesting to note here that while Israel was to kill all the men of the city, they were to respect the fruit trees. The difference seems to be in the evilness of the heart of man. The men of the city had turned their backs on God and were following other gods. They were under the judgement of God. The fruit trees, on the other hand, were a source of blessing for God's people.

We see from this chapter the contrast between the holiness of God and His wonderful compassion. This is not always easy to understand. Under the judgement of God, whole cities were destroyed, men and women were killed

or brought under forced labour. At the same time, we see God's command to excuse some of the soldiers from the battle so that they could go home and experience His blessing. The tension between God's holiness and compassion is one we will need to live with all of our lives. How can a compassionate God allow the destruction of whole cities with their inhabitants? This is not an easy question to answer. There are some things about God we will never be able to resolve in our simple minds. One thing is certain, however. Our God is a holy God who will judge sin and evil. He is also a compassionate God who richly blesses, protects and strengthens those who love Him and walk in His ways.

#### For Consideration:

- Have you ever faced an obstacle that seemed too big for you to overcome? What encouragement does this chapter bring to you today?
- How does fear hinder the work of God in our lives? What are your fears today?
- What does this chapter teach us about the desire of the Lord God that His people experience His wonderful blessing in their lives?
- God required that His people destroy all the inhabitants in the land He was giving them so that nothing remained that would be a temptation for His people. What temptations do you have in your life? How can you remove these temptations?

- What does this chapter teach us about the holiness of God? What does it teach us about the compassion of God?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you greater courage to face the obstacles that stand in the way of accomplishing His purposes for your life. Thank Him that with Him at your side, all things are possible.
- Ask the Lord to set you free from fear. Ask Him to replace that fear with confidence and trust in His strength and enabling.
- Thank the Lord that He is a God of holiness and compassion.
- Ask the Lord to remove the temptations you have in your life so you can walk in unhindered obedience to Him and His purposes.

# 21

## LAW S REGARDING

## MURDER AND FAMILY LIFE

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Read Deuteronomy 21:1-23

In this next section of Deuteronomy, Moses gives a series of laws regarding Israel's obligations and social responsibilities. There does not seem to be any order to these laws. The laws in chapter 21 can be divided into two categories, those pertaining to murder and those pertaining to family life.

### MURDER (21:1-9; 22-23)

While it was clearly understood that intentional murder was punishable by death (see Exodus 19:11-13), Moses presents a situation in verses 1-9 where the body of a man was found. Notice in verse 1 that the man had been "slain." That is to say, upon examination of the body, there was evidence that the individual had been murdered. What was Israel to do when there was no witness to a murder and the murderer could not be discovered? Moses shows his people what God required in verses 2-9.

First, the elders and judges of the people were to measure the distance from the body to the neighbouring towns (verse 2). The assumption may have been that the murderer was hiding in the town closest to the body.

Second, the elders in the town nearest to the body were to take a heifer that had never worked in the field or worn a yoke and lead her to a flowing stream in a valley that had never been ploughed or planted. There in the valley they were to break the heifer's neck (verses 3-4).

The location where this sacrifice was to take place is quite interesting. This land was not to be ploughed and it was to have a flowing stream. This was likely a remote area where no one was living. Often the corpses of dead animals were brought outside the city so they would not defile the city itself. This is what is happening here. Because this was a sacrifice for a serious crime, the heifer was taken outside the city where no one lived. The fact that the sacrifice took place by a flowing stream is also significant. The blood from the sacrifice made that day would be taken by that stream and removed from the land. It was a symbol of what the Lord was going to do. He was going to remove the guilt from their land.

When the heifer had been killed, the elders of the town would approach and wash their hands over the heifer's corpse in the presence of the Levites and priests. As they washed their hands they were to say:

"Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. Accept this atonement for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, O LORD, and do not hold your people guilty of the blood of an innocent man" (verse 7).



The murder of this individual contaminated the land. Even though the individual who had committed the crime was not found, the sin still needed to be addressed. Only by the sacrifice of the heifer could the guilt be removed. All sin needed to be addressed. God's people could not simply say, "We didn't do it, it has nothing to do with us." The sin had been committed in their land and was a stain on it. Imagine that you had some friends over for a meal at your home. During the course of the meal one of your friends spills something on the floor. Will you say, "I didn't spill it so I'm not going to clean it up?" Will you leave the mess on the floor simply because you didn't make it? All messes need to be cleaned up. Sometimes the concern is not so much about who made the mess as much as it is to get it cleaned up. This is how it was in Israel. When the body of a man was found murdered the sin needed to be addressed. Ultimately the guilty person was to be found and punished. Whether or not the murderer was found, the guilty stain it left on the land needed to be addressed. The blood of the heifer would remove the guilt so that God's people could continue to live under His blessing.

Verses 22-23 speak of an individual who had been found guilty of committing a crime worthy of death. Anyone committing such a crime was put to death and his body hung on a tree for all to see. The law of God stated that the body was to be removed from the tree before evening and buried. The person who had committed the crime was under the curse of God. His body was a curse on the land. It was not to remain in the land but be removed and buried as soon as possible so the Lord's blessing could be restored.

We see from this that there were things that would curse the land and remove the blessings of God from it. God's people needed to be aware of this and do all they could to keep the inheritance God had given them pure and

undefiled from sin. We are left to wonder how much of our land is under the curse of God because of sin and evil that has never been addressed.

#### FAMILY LIFE (21:10-21)

The second set of laws in Deuteronomy 21 relate to family life. In verses 10-21 Moses addresses three particular areas of family life.

##### *Foreign Wives*

In verses 10-11 Moses discusses what was to happen if Israel went to war with their enemies and after taking them captive they were attracted to some of the foreign women. It is clear from verse 11 that Israelite men were free to take these women as wives. Before this happened, however, several things needed to take place. The woman was to shave her head, trim her nails, and remove the clothes she was wearing when she was captured. In doing this, she was not only expressing her grief but also cutting herself off from everything she had in her homeland. In reality she is turning her back on her own land and embracing Israel as her new home and the Lord God as her new God. She was to be given a full month to mourn her father and mother. Only after this could she marry into Israel.

Notice that the man was free to divorce this woman on the basis that she no longer pleased him (verse 14). It is unclear what this would include. Her status as a free woman with rights in the nation could not be removed, however. She was never to be sold nor was she to be treated as a slave. She was to be treated as a fellow Israelite and free to come and go as she pleased.

*Two Wives and a Firstborn Son*

In verses 15-17 we have the case of a man who had two wives but loved one and not the other. Both wives give him a son. The firstborn son was born to the wife he did not love. The temptation for this husband would be to give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loved instead of the actual firstborn. Moses told Israel, however, that they were not to show this sort of favouritism. The husband was to give the double portion of all his belongings to the actual firstborn. He was not to allow his feelings to get in the way of doing what was right.

*A Rebellious Son*

The final law of chapter 21 relates to a stubborn or rebellious son who would not obey or listen to his parents when they disciplined him. Notice here that the parents were doing their part. They were seeking to train their child in the ways of righteousness but this child was not listening. There is no guarantee that our children will always listen to us. Just because we train them right and teach them the truth does not mean that they will follow that truth.

In this case, we have a son who chooses to rebel against his father and mother. If the parent's efforts did not produce fruit in the life of this son, they were to bring him to the elders at the gate of the town. They were to tell the elders about their son:

They shall say to the elders, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard" (verse 20).

The men of the town were then to take up stones and put this son to death. The parents were not to allow this rebellious son to live. They were to be willing to put him to death so that his evil did not affect the rest of the land.

There are two important details that we learn from this passage. First, we need to see that there were things that could corrupt the land and bring the curse of God on it. Whether this was the result of a murder, the body of a murderer hanging in a tree or a rebellious son, these matters needed to be addressed if God's people wanted to continue to live under His blessing.

The second clear teaching we see is that God's people were not to allow their feelings to stand in the way of doing what was right. A man who married a foreign wife who no longer pleased him was to respect her and resist any temptation to treat her harshly. A man who loved one wife more than another was not to allow his feelings to keep him from giving a double portion to the firstborn son of the wife he no longer loved. Parents who could no longer control their rebellious son were to hand him over to the elders to receive his punishment. They were to allow him to be stoned so that the blessing of God would not be hindered in the society as a whole. God expected His people to do what was right. Sometimes that would cost them dearly.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn from this about the curse of God on the land? Is it possible that the curse of God is on our land today? What is the cause of this?

- What do we learn in this passage about the willingness of God to forgive and restore His blessing when we deal with our sins?
- What does this passage teach us about the cost of doing what is right?
- How serious do we need to be when it comes to sin in our society? What is the danger of not dealing with sin? Can we ignore sin simply because we did not commit it ourselves?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to remove His curse from your land because of the stain of sin and evil.
- Ask the Lord to examine your life to see if you need to address any sin or rebellion. Ask Him to give you strength to overcome so that His blessing may be restored.
- Ask God to give you courage to do what is right no matter the cost.

## 22

# **L A W S   R E G A R D I N G   R E S P E C T F O R   L I F E   A N D   P R O P E R T Y**

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Read Deuteronomy 22:1-12

God expected that His people respect each other and His purposes for their lives. In the first 12 verses of Deuteronomy 22 Moses gives a series of laws regarding respect for life, God's purposes and the property of another.

### *Respect for a Brother's Property (verses 1-4)*

In verse 1 we have the case of someone whose ox or sheep strayed from his property and wandered away. If a fellow Israelite saw this sheep or ox he was to take it back to its rightful owner lest the animal be harmed.

In the event that the person who found the sheep or ox did not know who the owner of the animal was, he was to take it home and keep it safe and feed until the owner came looking for it. He was then to return it to its rightful owner.

If someone's donkey or ox fell on the road, God's people were not to ignore it. They were to help it back on its feet.

They were to respect the property of another as if it was their own and do whatever they could to assure its safety.

This principle applied to finding anything belonging to someone else. Verse 3 makes it quite clear that God's people were to make it their responsibility to protect what their brother had lost. To refuse to care for something a brother had lost was to sin against God.

God expected His people to care for each other. It was their social obligation to respect what belonged to their brother or sister and watch out for his or her well-being.

### *Respecting Differences between the Sexes*

Notice in verse 5 that a woman was not to wear man's clothing, nor was a man to wear woman's clothing. There have been a variety of opinions on how to interpret this verse. The Canaanites worshipped Astarte the female goddess. It may be that part of the worship of this female goddess was for men to dress in women's clothes and women to dress in men's clothes. If this is the case, then God is forbidding this practice to separate His people from the false religions of the day.

We need also, however, to understand that from the beginning God created us as male and female. While we are equal before God, there are also differences between the sexes. God designed it that way. It is the purpose of God that those distinctions be maintained. The law is not simply about wearing certain clothing but about the attitude that goes with wearing the clothes of the opposite sex. It implies a discontentment with one's God-given gender. If our society is to be healthy it needs to maintain a clear distinction between the sexes. Each sex has an important role to play in the accomplishing of God's overall purpose.

*Respecting Nature (verses 6-7, 9-10)*

God's people were also to respect nature. In verse 6 we have the case of an Israelite who came across a bird's nest with a mother either sitting on the eggs or with her young under her wings. The law of God forbade taking the mother for food. The Israelite could take the eggs or the young but the mother was to go free. The reason for this was quite simple. If the Israelite took the mother, then the young would have no one to take care of them and they would die. This would be a senseless loss of life.

Notice from verse 7 that there was a blessing attached to keeping this law. Verse 7 tells us that it would go well with Israel and they would live a long life. In other words, this was something God took seriously. Their disrespect for nature would remove His blessing from their lives.

The same principle applied to work animals. In verse 10 we have a law against using an ox and a donkey yoked together to plough a field. Imagine what would happen in this case. The ox is a strong and hardworking animal; the donkey can be stubborn at times. These two animals worked differently. The ox would be hindered by the donkey and the donkey would be tired out by the ox's ability to work. This combination was unnatural and would be a burden on both animals. God expected His people to respect the natural differences between these animals and not put them through an unnecessary burden.

Finally, the laws of God regarding respect for nature applied also to plants and crops. Israel was not to plant two kinds of seed in their vineyard. The idea here seems to be to maintain the health of the seeds they were planting. The cross pollination of different species would produce inferior seeds and defile what God had given them.



*Respect for Life (verse 8)*

It is quite clear from the laws of the Old Testament about murder and accidental death that God expected His people to respect the life of their fellow human being. Verse 8 takes this further by commanding the Israelites to make a wall around their roof so that no one would fall from it. In other words, precautions were to be taken to assure the safety of those who lived in their homes or came to visit.

*Respect in how Israel Dressed (verses 11-12)*

Finally, in verses 11-12 God calls His people to be respectful in how they dressed. Moses gives two requirements in these verses. Notice in verse 11 that God's people were not to wear clothes of wool and linen woven together. It is important that we understand this verse in light of God's commandment regarding the priestly garments in Exodus 28:2-5:

(2) Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron, to give him dignity and honour. (3) Tell all the skilled men to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so he may serve me as priest. (4) These are the garments they are to make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban and a sash. They are to make these sacred garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, so they may serve me as priests. (5) Have them use gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen.

Notice particularly what Exodus 28:5 says:

## Laws Regarding Respect for Life and Property 157

Have them use gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen.

The garments of the priests were to be made from yarn (wool) and linen. This helps us understand what the Lord was telling His people in this passage. They were to respect the priests by not wearing anything that was made of wool and linen woven together. This was the kind of garments worn by the priest and no one else was to wear this kind of material. It was by this means that they showed their respect for those whom God had put in authority over them.

The second law regarding dress is found in verse 12. Here God required that His people make tassels on the four corners of their cloak. According to Numbers 15:37-39, there was a special reason for this.

(37) The LORD said to Moses, (38) "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. (39) You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the LORD, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes.

The tassels on their cloaks were to remind them to obey the Lord God and His commandments. Wherever they went with their cloak, they carried with them a reminder of their obligation to God in those tassels. Their cloak with its tassels was a reminder of their obligation to respect the laws of God and His purposes for their lives.

## For Consideration:

- What does this chapter teach us about our obligation to watch out for each other within the body of Christ? Is this happening in your assembly?
- How do we honour God by respecting the differences between the sexes? How do our families and society suffer when we do not respect the differences between males and females?
- How does our respect for nature show our appreciation for the Creator?
- How did the way Israel dressed demonstrate their respect for their leaders and the law of their God?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be more sensitive to the needs of your brothers and sisters. Ask Him to show you practical ways you can demonstrate that you are concerned for them.
- Ask God to show you if there is any way you have been disrespecting the earth He has given us. Ask Him to help you to show your appreciation to Him more fully by caring for what He has given.
- Thank the Lord for who He has made you to be. Ask Him to help you to walk in harmony with His purpose for your life.

## 23

# LAWS GOVERNING SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

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Read Deuteronomy 22:13-30

The law of God touched every area of Israel's life. Here in the final section of chapter 22 Moses reveals the purpose of God for Israel's sexual lives.

### *Sexual Relationships Prior to Marriage (verses 13-21)*

As we begin in verse 13 we have the case of a man who takes a new wife, consummates the marriage by sleeping with her, but finds that he doesn't like her. The passage indicates that the reason was that he did not find proof of her virginity.

In the event of such an accusation, the girl's father and mother were to bring proof of her virginity to the elders at the city gate (verse 15). We discover from verse 17 that this proof came in the form of a cloth. It is generally assumed that a cloth was placed on the bed of the couple during their first night together. If the woman was a virgin her hymen would be broken and produce blood on the

cloth. This cloth was then taken by the parents as a guarantee of her virginity on the night of the wedding.

If this proof could be produced by the parents, the man was found guilty of slandering his wife and giving her a bad name in the community. He would be fined one hundred shekels of silver (1 kilogram or 2½ pounds). This money would be given to the girl's father. The man was to remain with his wife and could never divorce her as long as he lived. This meant that he was to care for her and provide for her needs for the rest of his life.

If there was no proof of the woman's virginity, the woman was found guilty. In this case, she was brought to the door of her father's house and the men of the city would stone her to death at his door. This would obviously bring shame on the family as they had allowed their young daughter to sin by engaging in sexual activity before marriage. This evil needed to be addressed and purged from their society (verse 21). It is quite clear from these verses that the Lord's purpose was that sexual activity be reserved for marriage.

### *Adultery (verse 22)*

The first law we examined showed that God wanted sexual relationships to be reserved for marriage. Now in verse 22 he shows us that sexual relationships were also to be reserved for marriage partner alone. If a man was found sleeping with another man's wife both the man and the woman were to be put to death. Sexual unfaithfulness to one's marriage partner was a serious offence punishable by death. Such an evil needed to be purged from the land.

*Sexual Relations with an Engaged Woman (verses 23-24)*

If the woman a man had sexual relations with was engaged to be married and the act took place inside the limits of a town, both the man and the woman were to be taken to the gate of the town and stoned to death. The man was stoned to death for violating the woman. The woman was stoned to death for consenting. This was assumed because she did not cry out for help. The idea is that, in a town, if the woman screamed for help, someone would have heard and come to her aid. The fact that she did not scream shows that she was a willing partner. She was guilty of unfaithfulness to her husband to be. For this crime, both she and her partner would die.

*Rape (verse 25-29)*

The next sexual sin to be addressed was the sin of rape. Verses 25-29 describe two situations. The first, in verses 25-27 is the case of a woman who was engaged to be married. Verse 25 describes a situation where a man meets a young girl engaged to be married in the country and rapes her. In this case, only the man was to die. Notice in verse 26 that the girl did not commit any sin deserving death. The assumption is that she would have screamed for help but there was no one to help her. She was not a willing partner. She did not consent to have a sexual relation with this man and was therefore not guilty of any crime. She had been violated by the man and would certainly suffer emotionally as a result of this horrible deed but she was innocent and before God had done nothing wrong.

How important it is for us to understand this truth in our day. There are women today who have been raped and go through life feeling guilty before God. God sees their heart

and knows their innocence. He does not condemn them for what has been done to them.

The second situation involves a young woman who was not engaged to be married. When the rape was discovered, the man was to pay the girl's father fifty shekels of silver (0.6 kilograms or 1 ¼ pounds) as a fine. He was then to marry the girl and take care of her for the rest of his life (verse 29). It should be noted here, however, that there would be times when the man who raped the young woman was not a fit partner for her. Exodus 22:16-17 tells us that, in this case, the father could refuse to give his daughter to such a man. If this were the case, the man would still pay the fine but the young girl would not be given to him as his wife.

(16) "If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife. (17) If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must still pay the bride-price for virgins. (Exodus 22:16-17)

The law was not intended to punish the young girl who was innocent in the matter but to provide for her future. The fact that the father could refuse to give her to the person who raped her also protected her from having to marry an abusive or hateful husband.

### *Forbidden Sexual Relationships (verse 30)*

While there are many forbidden sexual relationships in the Law of God, only one of them is addressed here in this chapter. Verse 30 tells us that a man was not to marry his father's wife. To do this would be to dishonour his father's

bed and show disrespect for his father. It is important that we understand two things here.

First, in those days men often had many wives. A father's wife was not necessarily a mother. The passage is not necessarily speaking of sexual relationships between a mother and son, although this was also strictly forbidden (see Leviticus 18:7). It may be that the man was simply attracted to one of his father's many wives and upon the death of his father decided to marry her.

Second, it should also be noted that because men had many wives, it was not inconceivable that some of them would have been the age of his children. It would be quite possible to see a relationship develop between the father's young wife and his oldest son. This kind of relationship was forbidden by the law of God. To marry a father's wife showed disrespect to the father. We can also imagine the kind of problems it would create in the family unit when a man married the mother of his brothers. For the sake of harmony and respect for the father, such unions were forbidden, as were any sexual relationships between members of the same family.

For Consideration:

- What does the Law of God state about sexual relations outside of marriage? What was the punishment for such a sin? What does this tell us about the seriousness of sexual relations outside of marriage? How seriously does your society take these sins today?



- Was a woman who was raped (without her consent) guilty before the Lord?
- What problems would arise with a son marrying his father's wife? What was God protecting by giving this law?

#### For Prayer:

- If you are not married, ask the Lord to help you to be faithful to His purpose for your sexual life. Ask Him to give you victory over the temptations you feel?
- Ask the Lord to help you to be faithful to your partner. Ask Him to help you and your partner enjoy your sexual lives together so that you are not tempted to look elsewhere.
- Do you know of a woman who has been raped? Ask the Lord to free her from guilt and show her His acceptance and understanding.
- Ask the Lord to minister to your friends and loved ones who have fallen into sexual sins. Ask Him to give them victory and healing so they can walk in His purpose for their lives.

## UNCLEANNES AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

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Read Deuteronomy 23:1-25

Deuteronomy 23 contains a number of laws related to uncleanness and Israel's social responsibility. The chapter begins with a word about individuals who were forbidden from Israel's religious assemblies.

### *Exclusions from the Assembly of God's People*

There were a number of religious assemblies over the course of the year. Annual religious feasts and festivals were an important part of Israel's religious life. God expected that the entire nation be part of these celebrations, however, there were some exceptions.

Verse 1 tells us that any man who had been emasculated (castrated) by crushing or cutting of the testicles was not permitted to assemble with God's people on the religious festivals and feasts. Some commentators see a reference here to a pagan practice of the Canaanites who were involved in shrine prostitution and engaged in many sexual practices to assure the harvest. If this is the case, this

individual bore on his body the mark of such evil practices and was not permitted to enter the presence of the Lord.

We also need to understand, however, that this individual was blemished in his body. Leviticus 21:17-21 makes it quite clear that any priest who had a defect was disqualified from service to the Lord:

(17) "Say to Aaron: 'For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. (18) No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; (19) no man with a crippled foot or hand, (20) or who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles. (21) No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the offerings made to the LORD by fire. He has a defect; he must not come near to offer the food of his God.

The Lord required at this time that all who entered His presence be pure and undefiled. Even physical deformities could keep a person from God's presence and enjoying full fellowship with Him. How thankful we need to be in our day that the death of the Lord Jesus has covered our sins and deformities so that we can enter with boldness into His presence.

A second group forbidden at the religious assemblies of Israel was those who were born as a result of a forbidden marriage (verse 2). The marriages concerned here were likely the marriages between an Israelite and a foreigner. Israel was not to marry the Canaanites or give their children in marriage to them. The concern was that these

foreigners would tempt God's people to turn from their God. Notice that it wasn't just the children of this forbidden union but their offspring down to ten generations who were forbidden from the assembly of God's people. The sins of these parents would affect ten generations of children and keep them from full fellowship with the Lord. This shows us how serious it was to God that His people maintain the purity of faith in their family unit.

Verses 3-6 shows us that the third group excluded from the religious assemblies of God's people were those who were descendants of the Ammonites or Moabites. For ten generations, anyone with Ammonite or Moabite blood was not permitted to assemble with God's people in their religious assemblies (verse 3). The reason for this was because of how these nations had treated the Israelites when they left Egypt. Not only did they refuse to provide the Israelites with bread and water for their journey but they hired Balaam to pronounce a curse on them (see Numbers 22-24). The law of God stated that Israel was never to seek a treaty of friendship with these people as long as they lived.

God's judgement of the Ammonites and the Moabites was final. Their desire to curse God's people brought on them the curse of God and separated them forever from His people. We see the reality of God's judgement here. It is only because of His patience and grace that I am offered forgiveness from my rebellion. It is interesting to note that Ruth was a Moabite (see Ruth 1:3-4) and listed among the ancestors of the Lord Jesus. This shows us that God's grace and forgiveness would eventually extend to the Moabites and He would use them to bring His salvation through the Lord Jesus to the entire world.

The next group forbidden in the assembly of God's people were the Edomites. The Edomites were descendants of Esau. Esau sought to kill his brother Jacob because he had stolen his birth right and his blessing. Throughout their history as a nation, the Edomites hated the people of God, considering that her blessing really belonged to them. Only after three generations had passed could the descendant of an Edomite be given the privilege of assembling with God's people (verse 8).

Again we see how the curse of God was on certain nations because of their sin. It is interesting to note that the curse would be broken after a certain number of generations. There are those who believe that we are answerable to God for the sins of our fathers. They teach that if there is sin in my ancestry I cannot advance in my spiritual walk. While there are certainly times when we do need to address the sins of former generations, it is interesting to note that even in Old Testament times generational curses were only transferred for ten generations for serious offences and for three generations for lesser offences. These curses would not continue forever.

There is one final exclusion from the assembly of God's people. Verse 17 speaks about men and women who became shrine prostitutes. This was the practice of the Canaanite religion of the time. God forbade this practice. Note that the earnings of a female or male prostitute were never to enter the house of the Lord (verse 18). This shows us something important.

The money obtained from pagan practices was unclean before God. It was not acceptable. The prostitute could not ease her conscience by saying, "I'm giving what I earn to God." God would not accept her money because of how she had earned it. Anything offered to the Lord needed to

be unblemished. God's people needed not only to have clean heart when they came into His presence but everything they brought to Him was to be clean and honourable.

### *Uncleanness*

Verses 9-14 deals with a variety of laws related to cleanliness. It should be noted that cleanliness was not simply a matter of hygiene and healthy living. The holiness of God was offended by the uncleanness that was part of the body's natural processes.

In verses 9-11 we have an example of a soldier who was in an army camp. It may be that he had been a long time away from his wife and had not had any sexual relations for some time. If during the course of his sleep he found that he had an emission of semen, he was to go outside the camp and remain there for the day. He was to wash himself and only at sunset could he be considered clean and return to his position (verse 11). This emission of semen would make him unclean and as a result hinder the work of God in the camp. Only those who were ceremonially clean were to stay in the camp and fight with God's people. How important it is that we deal with anything that hinders God's blessing in our midst. While such restrictions are not required in the New Testament, it does show us that even simple things in our lives can hinder the full blessing of God.

Another matter that needed to be addressed in the camp of Israel was where to relieve oneself. Israel was to designate a place outside their camp that individuals could use as a toilet. They were to have a shovel with them in the camp that they could use to dig a hole and relieve themselves. When they finished they were to cover the hole. Notice in verse 14 that this was a spiritual obligation for

Israel. The Lord God moved in their midst to protect them and deliver them from their enemies. Their camp was to be holy. God was not to see anything “indecent” in their midst, lest He turned away from them.

God is interested in our living conditions. He is concerned about those who are living in unhealthy and unhygienic conditions. Surely it is our spiritual obligation also to do what we can to minister to those living in these conditions so they can experience greater health and wholeness.

### *Social Responsibilities*

The chapter concludes with a series of laws relating to social responsibility and obligations. Verses 15-16 speak about an escaped slave. Notice that the slave has taken refuge with an Israelite. The fact that he “takes refuge” shows us that he has been oppressed and mistreated. In this case, the Israelite was not to give him back to his master. His master would likely punish the slave and treat him cruelly. Instead, the slave was to be protected and set free to go wherever he pleased. This law provided a way of escape for the slave who was mistreated.

If a fellow Israelite was forced to borrow money from his brother, no interest was to be charged on the money. It was possible to charge a foreigner interest but money loaned to an Israelite was to be interest free. Israel had an obligation toward their brothers and sisters to care for them and provide for them in their needs. Everything they had came from God and they were to share it freely with their brothers and sisters. The blessing of God on their land depended on how they used what He had given them to support their brother or sister in need (verse 20).

If an Israelite made a vow to the Lord, he or she was not to hesitate to pay what they promised. In other words, they were not to keep putting it off lest they be guilty of sinning against the Lord. They would not sin by refusing to make a vow to the Lord but if they did make a vow they were to do everything in their power to accomplish that vow as soon as possible (verses 21-23).

Finally, notice in verses 24-25 that an Israelite was free to enter their neighbour's vineyard and eat all the grapes he wanted. He could do the same with his grain field. Take, for example, a man who was travelling from one place to another. He became tired and hungry. As he passed by a vineyard, he was free to pick grapes to eat and refresh himself. The law stated, however, that he was not to put any of those grapes in a basket. He was not allowed to take a sickle with him into the field to cut the grain. In other words, he was allowed to help himself to what he needed to refresh his hunger but he was not to take more than he could comfortably eat.

Again we see that it was Israel's obligation to provide for each other in times of need. What God had given them was to provide for the needs of their family but they were also to have an attitude of generosity toward anyone in need. While the Israelites were to be generous, God also expected that no one take advantage of his brother or sister's generosity.



## For Consideration:

- How did physical deformities keep God's people from full fellowship with Him in the Old Testament? Do these deformities separate us from God today?
- Do we have to answer for the sins of our fathers and mothers?
- What does this chapter teach us about how God is concerned about our physical living conditions? How important is it for us as believers to minister to those who are living in unhealthy living conditions?
- What does this chapter teach us about our obligation toward our brother and sister in need?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that our physical deformities no longer need to separate us from full fellowship with Him.
- Thank the Lord that He does not hold us accountable forever for the sins of our ancestors. Thank Him for His forgiveness.
- Ask God to show you the needs of your brothers and sisters around you. Ask Him to show you how you can minister to those needs.

## 25

# MARRIAGES, PLEDGES AND FOREIGNERS

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Read Deuteronomy 24:1-22

Deuteronomy 24 contains a series of laws on various subjects. The first set of laws relates to marriage.

### *Marriage and Divorce (verse 1-5)*

Notice in verse 1 that we have a case of a man who married a woman but divorced her because he discovered something indecent in her. There is no explanation of the word “indecent.” It appears that men were divorcing their wives for a number of reasons in those days. Each defined “indecent” in a different way. We need to interpret this verse in light of what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 19:8:

Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.

Jesus told His listeners in Matthew 19:8 that Moses permitted divorce because it was the compassionate thing to

do in a world filled with sin and evil but it was not God's original purpose.

What we have here is the case of a man who divorced his wife (something God did not intend, but it happened nonetheless). She then married another man. Imagine that this second husband died or that he also dislikes the woman and divorced her. In this case, the first husband could not return to his former wife. No reason is given, except that this would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord and bring sin on the land (verse 4).

We can only speculate as to why a man could not return to a former wife who had married another man. It may have been that the act of divorcing and remarrying depreciated marriage. Here is a man who sends his wife away because she displeased him. He was unwilling to remain with her and provide for her. He showed no commitment to her. The act of divorcing her was a public humiliation to the woman. Why would she even want to return to a man who only cast her aside because he didn't like her? The law protected a former wife from a husband who was not truly committed to her.

Beyond this, however, is the fact that this woman had married another man. Verse 4 tells us that she had been "defiled" by her marriage to this other man. It is true that her first husband had divorced his wife. By divorcing her he was showing her that he was no longer committed to her (something that grieved the heart of God). The wife, on the other hand, by marrying another man, was saying the same thing. She was withdrawing her commitment and faithfulness from her first husband and giving it to another man (again something that grieved the heart of God).

By refusing to give these partners the opportunity to ever get together again, the Lord was showing them the seriousness of divorce. They could not throw each other away one moment and then take each other back the next. Their vows to each other were to be taken seriously. If they wilfully broke those vows they were forfeiting all rights to return to each other again. If they did, they would bring sin on the land the Lord their God was giving the nation of Israel.

Remember that divorce was not God's plan from the beginning (Matthew 19:8). He intended that men and women work out their problems and live with each other's imperfections. Despite the will of God, however, divorce took place in Israel and God made provision for it out of compassion and mercy for those concerned.

A second law regarding marriage can be found in verse 5. Here God's law stated that if a man was recently married he was not to be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. He was to stay at home and spend the time with his wife. That first year was to be a year of getting to know each other and possibly even having children to carry on the family name. It would be a shame for a man to die in battle without having an heir. It would also be a shame in that culture for a wife not to have a child to carry on her husband's name.

#### *Pledges and Security (verses 6; 10-13)*

The second set of laws in Deuteronomy 24 relate to pledges and securities. Pledges and securities were taken for debts and loans. These objects were given to the one to whom an Israelite owed a debt and were intended to guarantee that they would pay back what they owed. While it was clearly the obligation of the one who owed

something to pay it back, in these verses, the Lord addresses those who were taking pledges and securities.

Notice in verse 6 that a man could not take a pair of millstones as a security for a debt. The reason for this was because these millstones were a source of livelihood for the individual concerned. How could a man pay his debt if the only way he had to make money was taken from him? The only reason the person loaning money would take away a source of income was to keep his debtor in debt and to take advantage of him in this condition. This was oppressive and forbidden by the law of God.

We have a similar case in verses 10-13. Here we read that if an Israelite made a loan to another Israelite, he was not to go into his house to get a pledge or security. He was to remain outside and let the individual bring that pledge to him. The attitude is of importance here. The person offering the loan was not to be oppressive or cruel. He was not to go into his neighbour's house and take by force a guarantee of repayment. He was to respect his neighbour and let him bring it to him.

Notice also that if the man offering his pledge needed the object pledged, it was to be returned to him when he needed it. For example, if a man gave his cloak, it was to be returned to him at night in order that he would have something with which to cover himself so he didn't get cold. The person receiving a pledge or security for a loan was to be governed by compassion for the person who owed him.

*Respect for Those Living in their Midst (verses 7-9; 14-23)*

The third set of laws in Deuteronomy 24, relate to respect for those who were living among them. Respect for each other was to be shown in various ways.

Verse 7 speaks to an individual who was caught kidnapping one of his brothers. Notice the purpose of kidnapping this brother. He was either treated as a slave or sold. In either case, this brother was being mistreated and abused. His freedom was stripped from him so that someone else could benefit. This showed great disrespect for the life of a brother or sister. Anyone caught kidnapping for such purposes was to be killed. The evil was to be purged from their midst.

Another way of showing respect for a brother or sister was to take contagious diseases seriously. In verses 8-9 we have an example of an individual who discovered he had leprosy. In this case, the individual was to go to the priest and follow his instructions exactly. This usually involved being separated from the rest of the community until the leprosy was healed. There were no exceptions to this law. Even Miriam, the sister of Moses, when she had leprosy was forced into isolation until the disease was cured and she had been purified (see Numbers 12:10-15).

The reason for this isolation was to protect the whole community from disease. It would certainly not be easy for an individual to separate himself or herself from their family for as long as they had leprosy or any other contagious disease. They were to consider the good of the society as a whole here and submit to this isolation.

In Israelite society the rich and the poor lived side by side. Foreigners who had moved from other lands also lived in

their midst. It would be quite easy for the rich to look down on these individuals. The law of God required, however, that the rich respect the foreigner and the poor living among them. They were not to take advantage of them (verse 14). If any of them worked for them, they were to pay them their wages at the end of the day so they would be able to provide for the needs of their families (verse 15). If the poor suffered because they were not being paid, God would hear their cry and hold their employers accountable. The orphan and the foreigner were to be treated fairly. No Israelite was to take advantage of them. The cloak of a widow was not to be taken in pledge for this was likely all she had to keep herself warm. Israel was to remember how they had been treated when they were in Egypt. They were to put themselves in the place of the foreigner and treat him or her as they would have liked to be treated.

One of the ways Israel could respect the needs of the poor was to leave fruit on their trees and crops in their fields. When they harvested their fields they were not to go over them a second time but leave what they didn't get the first time for the poor (verse 19). When they harvested their olives by beating the tree, they were not to go over the branches a second time. The rest remained for those in need (verse 20). The same principle applied to their grapevines. They were to go over them once and leave the rest for the widows, orphans and foreigners who could gather freely from what remained. In this way, the needs of the poor were addressed. God demanded that His people recognize the poor and needy in their midst and each one was to do his or her part to ease their suffering.

There is one more law in verse 16 that falls into this category of respect for one another. Notice in verse 16 that the fathers were not to be put to death for the sins of their children nor were the children to be put to death for the sins

of the fathers. Each person in Israelite society was to take personal responsibility for their actions and sins. Each person was to take the punishment for their own actions. Way back in the Garden of Eden, when Adam was accused of eating the forbidden fruit he immediately blamed his wife, telling God that she had given it to him. Eve, on the other hand, blamed Satan for tempting her (see Genesis 3). Neither person wanted to take responsibility for their sin. God reminds his people that each person who sinned would be accountable for their own sin. They would have to answer to God or pay the penalty for their own actions. No society can flourish when its individuals refuse to take responsibility for their sins.

For Consideration:

- What does this chapter teach us about the importance of marriage vows?
- How did the Law of God regarding remarriage protect the wife from a disrespectful husband?
- How was Israel to demonstrate compassion when they loaned to their fellow Israelite?
- What are some of the ways God asked Israel to show respect for each other in their society?
- Are there individuals you have a hard time respecting? What does this chapter say to you today?
- Are there neglected people in your society? Who are they? How can you show them that you care for them and their situation?



## For Prayer:

- Do you know someone who has gone through a divorce or is in a hard marriage? Take a moment to pray for that person. Ask God to help them and bring His solution to their situation.
- Ask the Lord to show you if there is anything you can do to minister to those in need in your society.
- Ask God to help you to be more respectful of your brothers and sisters, especially those you find hard to love. Take a moment to review what we have considered in this chapter. Ask the Lord to help you to apply one principle to your relationship with someone in your life.

## 26

### RESPECT AND JUDGMENT

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Read Deuteronomy 25:1-19

*Respect for a Brother Guilty of a Crime (verses 1-3)*

Deuteronomy 25 is quite interesting for what it teaches us about balance in respect to individuals and judgement. As we begin, Moses gives an example of some men who had a legal dispute among themselves. Their case was to be brought before the judges of Israel who would make a decision. If the guilty party deserved to be beaten the judges would lay him down and have him whipped the number of lashes his crime deserved. Notice, however, that there was a limit on the number of lashes they could give. Verse 3 tells us that they could never give him more than forty lashes. Notice the reason for this in verse 3.

If he is flogged more than that, your brother will be degraded in your eyes.

The idea is that if they flogged the man more than forty lashes he would be humiliated before those present and they would look down on him. Even in punishment, the criminal was to be treated with dignity and respect. The purpose of punishment was not to humiliate or depreciate

the guilty person but to correct and bring him back to the right path. We would do well to remember this today as we deal with discipline in our churches and in our families.

*Respect for an Ox Treading the Grain (verse 4)*

Notice how this concept of respect moves into how Israel treated their animals in verse 4. Moses told the people that when they were treading grain they were not to muzzle an ox.

In order to separate the stocks from the grain the Israelites would have an ox draw a threshing sledge over the stocks. The grain was then separated from the stocks and stored in barns. Moses told his people that as long as the ox was working for them they were not to stop him from eating his share of the grain.

The principle found in the law about the ox applied to a variety of situations in life. The apostle Paul would apply this principle to paying Christian workers in 1 Corinthians 9:1-9. There would also be application in this law for how the Israelites treated those who worked for them in their fields and homes. Israel was to treat all who served them with respect and pay them well for their efforts.

*Respect for a Deceased Brother and his Widow (verse 5-10)*

Verses 5-10 deal with a situation where a brother died without having a son. This meant that there was no one to inherit his property and carry on his name. In Israelite culture this was a serious matter. The law stated that, in this case, the wife was not to remarry outside of her family. To do so would transfer the property of her husband to

another family. Instead, her husband's brother was to marry her and give her a child. The first child of this union would belong to the dead brother and he would inherit his father's property and carry on his name (verse 5-6). The wife would also not have to live with the shame of not being able to provide a son for her former husband.

In the event that a brother did not want to marry his brother's wife, she was to go to the elders of the city and tell them (verse 7). The elders would speak to the man and try to persuade him to fulfil his responsibilities as a brother-in-law. If he absolutely refused to marry her, his brother's wife would approach him in the presence of the elders of the city, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say:

“This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line” (verse 9).

From that point onward that man's family line would be known in Israel as “The Family of the Unsandaled.”

The man who refused to marry his brother's widow was allowing a family line to stop and a name to be forgotten. His lack of respect and concern for his deceased brother and his widow was a serious matter before the Lord and the nation as a whole. Before the elders of the city he would be disgraced. His family would from that moment on bear the shame of his unwillingness to help his brother's widow and carry on the name of his brother.

### *Respect for a Man's Privacy (verses 11-12)*

In verses 11-12 we have a case of two men fighting. In an effort to rescue her husband from danger, the wife reached out and grabbed his enemy by his private parts. The

attempt here is to harm him. Her act is bold and disrespectful and was a serious matter before God. In fact, this act of grabbing the man's private parts was so serious that the law of God commanded that her hand be cut off (verse 12). Even to save her husband from harm, this woman was not to humiliate or harm his enemy by grabbing or wounding his private parts. This law was, in part, to preserve modesty but also to protect a man from not being able to bear children and pass on his name to future generations.

### *Respect for Customers in Business (verses 13-16)*

Honesty and integrity in business is addressed in verses 13-16. The seller was to respect every person who came to purchase his goods. He was not to have two different weights and measures (heavy, light, large or small). Instead he was to use an accurate measure for everyone. He was not to make the rich pay more. He was not to take advantage of the poor. He was to be fair and honest in all his dealings with every person he came in contact with in his business.

### *Respect for God and His Purposes (verses 17-19)*

Verses 17-19 speak about Israel's obligation to wipe out the memory of the Amalekites. The reason for this is found in verse 18. It was because of what they did to the people of God who were coming out of Egypt. Verse 18 tells us that when God's people were weary and worn out, from their bondage in Egypt, the Amalekites cut off those who were lagging behind. They had no fear of God or what He was doing with His people. They had likely heard about the victory God had given them over Egypt and how He had opened the sea to allow them to pass through, but they cared nothing about those signs. Amalek wanted to destroy God's people and keep them from the purpose God

had for them. Their disrespect for God in the matter brought His wrath upon them. They would be destroyed.

Notice in all these laws there is a theme of respect. God's people were to respect the dignity and honour of their fellow Israelites. This respect was shown in how they carried out business, how they resolved conflicts between them and how they provided and cared for each other in times of need. Lack of respect for each other was a serious matter. In the case of a man who refused to care for his brother's widow, his family line would bear forever the shame of his disrespect. In the case of a woman who disrespected a man by grabbing his private parts, her hand would be cut off. The Amalekite's disrespect for God's people and His purpose for them brought His judgement so that they were destroyed and their memory wiped out.

A lack of healthy fear and respect of God and for each other has been the source of many sins throughout the history of the world. If we are to take the message of this chapter seriously, we will take the time to consider our actions and correct any lack this chapter brings to mind.

For Consideration:

- Is it possible to humiliate a fellow believer because of his or her sin? How easy is it to destroy a person's spirit and reputation by gossip or spreading stories about what he or she has done. How important is it that we respect the dignity of even those who have fallen into sin?

- This passage speaks about not muzzling an ox while he was treading the grain. How important is it for us to do our part and provide for those who serve us. What does this teach us about our responsibility to care for our spiritual leaders?
- Take a moment to consider your relationships with those around you in your society. Are there people that you have a hard time respecting? What would God have you to do about this?
- Does respecting a person's dignity mean that we should never punish them for their sin? How do you find a balance between respecting a person's dignity and punishing them for their sin?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to respect those who have fallen. Ask Him to show you how you can restore them.
- Thank the Lord for those He has given to minister to your spiritual and physical needs. Ask Him to show you how you can show your respect and appreciation for their ministry.
- Ask the Lord to show you if there is any way you have not respected your brother or sister in Christ. Ask Him to forgive you and teach you to walk in His purposes.

## FIRST FRUITS AND TITHES

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Read Deuteronomy 26:1-19

When things are going well for us we tend to forget the source of our blessing. As Israel stood at the border of the Promised Land, the Lord God wanted them to remember where they had come from and what He had done for them. He did not want them to take their blessings for granted. To help them remember His kindness and generosity, God commanded two special offerings be set apart.

### *First fruits (verses 1-11)*

The first offering that was to be set apart was the first fruits. At every harvest the Israelites were to take the first of their crops from the soil, put them in a basket and bring them to the priest at the tabernacle or temple (verse 2). There in the presence of the priest they were to say the following:

“I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come to the land the LORD swore to our forefathers to give us” (verse 3).

This declaration was made in remembrance of the fact that the Lord God had been faithful to His promise to give them



a land of their own. Notice also in this verse that the individual was to make mention of the fact that he had come into the land God had promised his forefathers. In other words, he was personally experiencing the fulfilment of the promise God had made to his fathers.

When the individual offering the first fruit had made this declaration, the priest would take the basket filled with the first fruit of the land from him. The basket would then be set down in front of the altar. With the basket placed before the Lord the individual making the offering would make another declaration. In the presence of the Lord he would say the following:

(5) "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. (6) But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labour. (7) Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. (8) So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. (9) He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; (10) and now I bring the first fruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me."

In this statement the individual recognized that, as a nation, they had wandered from place to place without a home. They went to Egypt for help but they were mistreated and forced into slavery. When they cried out to the Lord, He heard their cries and through great and miraculous signs delivered them and gave them a land of their own, a land filled with the earth's riches. The individual was

then to declare to the Lord, in the presence of the priest that the reason he was bringing his gift was because of what God had done for him. In this the individual recognized that all he had came from the Lord. He remembered where he had come from and how the Lord had taken Israel and made them into a great nation under His blessing. Notice in verse 10 that when the offering was made the individual was to bow down before the Lord. This was an act of submission and gratitude for all God's blessings.

Notice what was to happen to the offering of first fruit. Verse 11 tells us that they were to be shared with the Levites and foreigners with rejoicing and celebration. God's goodness was to be shared with others. Their spiritual leaders and the poor among them were to enjoy the blessings God had given them.

### *Tithes (verses 12-15)*

The second offering God expected from His people was the tithe. It is important to note that there were two tithes in Israel. The first tithe is explained for us in Deuteronomy 14:22-27:

(22) Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. (23) Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always. (24) But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the LORD your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the LORD will choose to put his Name is so far away), (25) then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go

to the place the LORD your God will choose. (26) Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice. (27) And do not neglect the Levites living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own.

Notice in the case of the first tithe, one tenth of the produce of their fields was to be set aside each year and brought to the presence of the Lord at the tabernacle or temple. If the distance to the house of God was too far for the animals, the individual could sell them and travel with the money. When he arrived at the temple he could then purchase animals to offer to the Lord from the money he had received. This tithe was used to support the ministry of the Levites.

The second tithe is found here in Deuteronomy 26:12-15. This tithe differed from the first tithe in that it only happened every third year (verse 12). This tithe is explained more fully in Deuteronomy 14:28-29:

(28) At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, (29) so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

Notice from Deuteronomy 14 that this tithe was not brought to the house of God but stored in their individual towns. Deuteronomy 26:12 tells us that this tithe was to be given to the Levites who worked in their towns, the foreigners,

the fatherless and the widows. This tithe was kept in each location as a reserve for all who were in need.

As with the offering of first fruits, there was a ceremony involved in the giving of the tithe on the third year. When the individual brought the tithe of the third year to the Lord he was to stand before the Lord and make the following declaration:

“I have removed from my house the sacred portion and have given it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, according to all you commanded. I have not turned aside from your commands nor have I forgotten any of them. I have not eaten any of the sacred portion while I was in mourning, nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean, nor have I offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the LORD my God; I have done everything you commanded me. Look down from heaven, your holy dwelling place, and bless your people Israel and the land you have given us as you promised on oath to our forefathers, a land flowing with milk and honey” (verses 13-15).

The Israelite was to declare that he had removed the “sacred portion” from his house and given it to the Levites, foreigners, fatherless and widows (verse 13). Notice that the tithe is called the sacred portion. In other words, it had been set aside by God and was His to do with as He pleased. The individual declared before God that he had given the entire tithe, without holding anything back. By declaring that he had remove all of the “sacred portion” from his house he was releasing himself from any guilt that might fall on him for keeping even a portion of what belonged to God.

Notice also that the person bringing his tithe was to declare that he had been faithful in obeying the commands of the Lord his God. While this was a general statement about his integrity of heart and life it was also a statement about the purity of the gift he was bringing. He was to declare before the Lord that he had not eaten any of this tithe while he was mourning, removed any of it while he was unclean or offered any of it to the dead. These were likely practices of the pagan religions of Canaan. The tithe that was brought to God was to be pure and undefiled.

When the individual concerned had made his declarations before the Lord he was then to call out to God to look down from heaven and bless His temple, His people, and the land He had given them. This is a cry for further blessing from the Lord. It is important to note in verse 15 that God commanded His people to ask for His blessing. God wants to bless. His desire is to provide us all we need to accomplish His purposes. He delights to bless those who use what He has given for His glory and honour. He commands us to come to Him and ask for that blessing for the glory of His name and the blessing of His people and their nation.

Moses concludes the chapter with a challenge to the people to be careful to follow the commands the Lord was giving them. Notice that they were to follow them with all their heart and with all their soul (verse 16). The type of obedience God is looking for does not come from a heart that gives out of obligation and duty. God is looking for a people who delight to obey and who respond to Him in gratitude.

The people of God were to walk in the ways of the Lord and keep His commandment joyfully and from the heart. God committed Himself to them as His people. They would be His treasured possession (verse 18). He would raise

them up above all other nations on the earth to be a holy people, blessed by the Lord their God.

In this chapter we see that those who have been blessed have an obligation to remember the source of their blessing. They are to give joyfully, from the heart, and walk in obedience to the Lord their God. God calls them in return to be bold in asking for His blessings. God promises to hear the prayers of His obedient children, opening His storehouses for them and all their needs.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this chapter about the obligation of God's people to give out of the abundance God has given them?
- How does giving to the Lord and to those in need express gratitude? How is giving an act of worship?
- What does it mean to obey with all our heart and all our soul? How important is our attitude in giving to the Lord?
- How does our lifestyle affect the gifts we bring to the Lord? How important is our purity of life in giving our offerings to the Lord?
- What does this chapter teach us about the desire of God to bless His obedient and thankful people?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you how He would have you to give?
- Ask the Lord to help you to give from the heart, considering it a joy and delight to be part of ministering to the needs of others in His name.
- Take a moment to consider the good things the Lord has done for you. Thank Him for those blessings.
- Ask the Lord to help you walk in purity of heart and life. Ask Him to show you anything in your life that you need to confess. Ask Him for grace to walk faithfully with Him.
- Thank the Lord that His supplies are not limited and that He asks us to come boldly to Him and ask for all we need to accomplish His purposes for our lives.

## 28

### MORE ON

### GERIZIM AND EBAL

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Read Deuteronomy 27:1-26

The Lord God often helped His people understand spiritual matters by giving them visual lessons. Many of the Old Testament ceremonies and festivals were designed to help God's people remember what He had done for them. Some of these ceremonies looked forward to what the Lord Jesus would do as the final sacrifice for sin. Here in chapter 27 the Lord asks His people to demonstrate in a visual way their obligation toward Him and the result of disobedience to His commandments.

As we begin in verse 1, Moses and the elders challenge the people of God to keep the commandments the Lord their God had given them. In order to remember these commandments, when they crossed over the Jordan River they were to set up large stones and coat them with plaster. By painting them with plaster these stones would be very visible for a distance.

These stones were to be set up on Mount Ebal (verse 4) which overlooked the city of Shechem in the heart of the



territory God promised His people. God's people were also to build an altar to the Lord God from field stones and, on that altar, burn offerings to the Lord (verse 5). When the offerings had been made, they were to eat and rejoice in the presence of the Lord their God (verse 7). The words of the Law of God were then written on the stones that had been prepared.

While Moses would not be there to oversee this ceremony, he challenged his people to listen to what he was telling them to do (verse 9). What he was telling them to do by setting up these stones was the will of God for them (verse 10). It was the Lord's way of reminding them of their obligation to follow His commands and not turn from them.

In an even more visible demonstration of the obligation of God's people to walk in His ways, Moses commanded that when Israel crossed over the Jordan they were to perform a ceremony that would remind them of what would happen if they failed to obey the Lord. In verse 12 Moses told the people that they were to divide into two groups. One group would stand on Mount Gerizim and the other group would stand on Mount Ebal.

The town of Shechem was in a valley. To the one side was Mount Ebal with the large plastered stones containing the Law of God. Mount Gerizim was on the other side.

We learn from verses 12 and 13 which tribes were to stand on each mountain. We can see this in the following chart:

<b>MOUNT EBAL</b>	<b>MOUNT GERIZIM</b>
Reuben Gad Asher Zebulun Dan Naphtali	Simeon Levi Judah Issachar Joseph Benjamin

Notice also from verses 12-13 that the tribes that stood on Mount Gerizim were to bless the people. Those who stood on Mount Ebal were to pronounce curses. This ceremony would be performed in the days of Joshua and is recorded for us in Joshua 8:30-33.

From Joshua 8:33 we understand that the various tribes took their place in front of the mountains with the Ark of the Covenant between them. As the people stood on each side of the ark, the Levites would pronounce curses on anyone who chose to disobey the law of the Lord their God. As each curse was pronounced, the people said, “amen” as a sign of their agreement.

In verses 15-26 we have twelve curses pronounced during this ceremony between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. The curse of God would be on the following people:

- Anyone who carved an image or idol and set it up to worship it in secret (verse 15)
- Anyone who dishonoured his father or mother (verse 16)
- Anyone who moved his neighbour's boundary stone (verse 17)

- Anyone who led a blind person astray on the road (verse 18)
- Anyone who withheld justice from the foreigner, orphan or widow (verse 19)
- Anyone who slept with his father's wife (verse 20)
- Anyone who had sexual relations with an animal (verse 21)
- Anyone who slept with his sister or half-sister (verse 22)
- Anyone who slept with his mother-in-law (verse 23)
- Anyone who killed his neighbour in secret (verse 24)
- Anyone who accepted a bribe to kill an innocent person (verse 25)
- Anyone who did not obey the words of the Law of God (verse 26)

God required that His people agree to each of the curses pronounced that day by saying, "amen." As they stood between those two mountains, God's people saw that they had a choice. They could choose to walk in the way of the Lord and know the blessings of Mount Gerizim or they could turn from Him and experience the curse of Mount Ebal. God allowed them the freedom to disobey. He did not force them into obedience. They had a choice to make. But with each choice they would have to face the consequences.

For Consideration:

- God gave His people a visual symbol of their obligation to Him in the form of large painted stones with His laws written on them. In this chapter, however, the Lord also pronounces a curse on anyone who would make an image or idol. What is the difference between an image or idol and the Laws of God written on stones?
- What kind of things can we do to remind ourselves of our obligation toward God and His Word?
- Does God force us to obey His commandments? Does He always protect us from disobedience?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to keep you from honouring anything above Him.
- Ask the Lord to keep His Word always before you. Ask Him to help you to be filling your mind with His Word so that you are aware of His requirements and promises.
- Thank the Lord for the strength He gives through His Holy Spirit to walk in obedience to His Word.
- Thank the Lord that He has given you a free will to choose obedience. Ask Him to help you to walk more fully in obedience to Him and His commands.

## 29

### BLESSINGS AND CURSES

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Read Deuteronomy 28:1-68

In chapter 27 the Lord commanded His people to perform a ceremony between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. The tribes were divided in two. Half of them were to stand on Mount Gerizim and pronounce the blessings of God on the nation if they obeyed the laws of God. The other half, standing on Mount Ebal were to pronounce the curses of God on those who chose to disobey. As we move now into chapter 28 the Lord lists the blessings and curses His people could expect.

In verses 1-14 the Lord God explains the blessings that could be theirs by walking in obedience to His commands. God would set them above all other nations on the earth if they would walk in His commands. According to verse 3 these blessings were promised on both their life in the city as well as in the country. In other words, no matter where they lived, God would see their obedience and reward them. Notice the list of blessings promised to those Israelites who walked in obedience to Him.

- 1) God would bless their children, their crops, their livestock and herds (verse 4)

- 2) Their harvest would be blessed and they would have plenty to eat (verse 5)
- 3) They would be blessed wherever they went—when they came in or when they went out (verse 6)
- 4) Any enemy that rose up against them would be defeated and scattered (verse 7)
- 5) God would bless their barns (harvest) and everything they put their hands to do (verse 8)
- 6) God would establish Israel as a holy people so that the world would see that His favour was on them to prosper and protect them. All nations would fear them. (verses 9-11)
- 7) The Lord God would open heaven and the storehouses of His bounty giving them rain and blessing the work of their hands (verse 12)
- 8) They would lend to many nations out of their abundant prosperity but never have need to borrow (verse 12)
- 9) God would set them up as the head so that other nations would respect and admire them. Israel would always be at the top and never at the bottom (verse 13)

Notice in verse 13, however, the word “if.” This word is important and indicates that these blessings were only for those who walked in obedience to the commands of the Lord. None of these blessings were guaranteed if they did not walk faithfully with their God. If they wanted these blessings, they could not turn from the Lord God and His

commands. They could not serve other gods and expect to experience the fullness of God's blessings in their lives (verse 14).

It is important at this point that we consider what God is telling His people here. He is reminding them that there was blessing in obedience. The fruit of their land did not depend on their good agricultural techniques and science. Their military success did not depend on how big an army they had or how well trained it was. Their success as a nation depended on their relationship with God and how they walked with Him. This is something we need to understand in our day as well. Consider what would happen if our nations turned to God and sought Him with all their hearts and minds. Would we not see a tremendous difference in the quality of our lives? The crime rate would drop. There would be harmony and justice in our courts and workplaces. I believe we would see a difference in the productivity of our fields. Disobedience to the Lord God has stripped us of His blessing in our land. Only by turning back to God can these blessings be restored.

Having reminded His people of the blessing of obedience, the Lord now tells them what would happen if they turned their back on Him and walked in disobedience. He tells them clearly in verse 15 that His curse would be on them. This curse would find them whether they were in the city or in the country. Wherever they were they would not be able to hide from God. Here is a list of the curses that would come upon the nation if they ignored the commands of the Lord:

- Their basket (harvest) and their kneading trough (food supply) would be cursed (verse 17)

- Their children, their crops, their herds and flocks would be cursed (verse 18). Likely referring to the fact that they would not have any offspring or that their offspring would be sickly.
- The curse of God would follow them wherever they went (when they came in and when they went out). They would not be able to get away from it. (verse 19)
- God would send confusion on everything they set their hands to do until they were destroyed (verse 20)
- They would be plagued by disease, fever, inflammation, heat, drought, blight and mildew until they were destroyed from the land (verses 21-22)
- The sky would be like bronze and the ground like iron so that it would not rain and the ground would not produce crops (verses 23-24)
- They would be defeated by their enemies (verse 25)
- Israel would become a “thing of horror” (NIV) to all the nations. In other words, they would be despised by the nations of the earth.
- Israelite carcasses would be food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth (verse 26). Their dead bodies would be eaten by wild animals and not afforded a proper burial.
- God would afflict them with boils, tumours, sores and itch that could not be cured (verse 27)



- God would afflict them with blindness, madness and confusion of mind (verse 28)
- They would be unsuccessful in everything they put their hands to do (verse 29)
- They would be oppressed and robbed “day after day” and no one would be there to rescue them (verse 29)
- They would be pledged to be married to a woman but someone would rape her (verse 30)
- They would build a house but not be able to live in it (verse 30)
- They would plant a vineyard but never enjoy its fruit (verse 30)
- Their ox would be slaughtered before their eyes but they would eat none of it (verse 31)
- Their donkey would be taken forcibly from them (verse 31)
- Their sheep would be given to their enemies and they would not be able to do anything about it (verse 31)
- Their sons and daughters would be given to other nations and they would wear out their eyes watching for them to return (verse 32)
- Foreigners would oppress them and eat the produce of their land (verse 33)

- They would be afflicted with painful boils spreading from the soles of their feet to the top of their head. These boils would not be curable (verse 34)
- God would drive Israel out of their land and set other nations over them. There in foreign lands they would worship gods of wood and stone (verse 36)
- Israel, as a nation, would be despised, ridiculed and mocked by all the nations (verse 37)
- The locusts would devour what they sowed in their fields (verse 38, 42)
- Though they planted vineyards and olive trees they would not eat the fruit (verse 39-40)
- Though they had children, those children would be taken from them and sent into captivity in another country (verse 41)
- The foreigners who live among them would rise above them (verse 43-44)

God makes it quite clear in these verses that His hand would be against all those who turned their back on Him. His curse would pursue and overtake them until they were destroyed (verse 45). What happened to the generation that turned their back on God would serve as a sign to future generations of the danger of turning from God and His ways. This would be a warning so that future generations would turn to God.

Notice that it was not the desire of God to turn His back on His people as a nation. Those who walked away from Him

would be severely punished so that future generations would see and turn to God. It was God's desire to bless His people. The severe nature of the curse shows the seriousness of walking away from God. God's desire for His people was very real but we must never forget that His holiness and justice is also very real. He will punish sin. His anger against sin and rebellion cannot be denied.

Notice in verse 47 the kind of obedience that the Lord expected from His people. He wanted them to serve Him joyfully and gladly. The kind of obedience demanded here is not a forced obligation but an act of love and devotion. In fact, this verse shows us that God's people were not to serve Him just for what they could get from Him. If we serve God so that we can gain his favour and blessing, we are not serving out of love and devotion to Him. The type of obedience God expected from His people was a joyful and glad obedience that came from hearts full of gratitude and love for Him.

Because God's people did not serve Him with this joyful and glad heart, they would die hungry, thirsty, and naked, stripped of all God's blessings. Their enemies would put an iron yoke on their neck, oppressing them and forcing them into servitude until they had been destroyed (verses 47-48).

Even before the people of God entered the land He had promised them, Moses warned them that this land would be taken from them if they did not walk in obedience. God would bring a nation against them, speaking a language they did not understand. That nation would swoop down on them like an eagle. It would not have pity on the young or the old. It would devour their livestock and crops, leaving nothing behind. It would lay siege to their cities and

even though they were protected by high walls, they would fall (verses 49-52).

Their enemies would cause so much suffering in those days that they would be forced to eat their own children to survive (verse 53). Notice the extent of the curse of God in verses 54-57. The most sensitive and caring husband would show no compassion for his own family. He would eat the flesh of his dead child without sharing any with his wife or family, leaving them to starve instead. The most gentle and sensitive woman among them would refuse to share the afterbirth from her womb or the dead children she had given birth to. Instead, she would hide them with the intention of eating them by herself in secret. It is hard to imagine such conditions but this is what the Lord said would happen to all who refused to walk in His ways.

Those who refused to follow the laws of God and revere the glorious name of the Lord would suffer the consequences of their sin. Plagues, disasters, lingering illness and diseases would cling to them until they were destroyed (verses 58-61). Though they were as numerous as the stars of the sky they would be uprooted from the land. Just as the Lord promised to prosper them, now He promised to ruin and destroy them if they disobeyed. They would be scattered from one end of the earth to the other. They would find no rest or place of their own to live. They would have anxious minds, weary eyes and despairing hearts (verse 65). Day after day they would be filled with dread because terror would fill their hearts all day. They would be sold as slaves like they were when they were in the land of Egypt (verse 68).

It is important that we see that Israel's greatest enemy was disobedience. Their protection and blessing was found in the Lord God and walking in His ways. If they turned from

Him and His commands, they would unleash a great curse on their land that would ultimately destroy them. They were to be more afraid of dishonouring God than they were of the enemy nations around them. They were to be more careful to walk in obedience than they were to strengthen their armies or care for their crops. What would destroy the nation of Israel was not larger and more powerful armies but a lack of concern for God and His ways. God's blessing was there for them to take. He would not hesitate to shower them with every blessing imaginable, but for that to take place they needed to seek Him with a rejoicing heart.

We are left to wonder if we have unleashed this curse on our own nations and churches today. It is not greater programmes and education that will restore God's blessing. It is not great preaching that will renew our lives. Ultimately it is obedience to God and His purposes, no matter the cost. He longs to bless, but we must learn to walk in obedience and faithfulness.

#### For Consideration:

- What is the connection in this chapter between obedience to God and His blessing on our nations and personal lives?
- What differences do you think you would see in your nation or in your local Christian assembly if each person longed from the heart to walk in obedience to the Lord God.

- What do the curses of God in this chapter teach us about the holiness and justice of God? Does a loving God ignore sin?
- What has been the result of disobedience to the Word of God in your community or local Christian fellowship?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to walk in obedience to Him in every way.
- Thank the Lord that He is a holy God. Ask Him to help you to accept and respect this part of His character.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord that He has forgiven you and spared you from judgement through His death on the cross.
- Ask the Lord to restore a burden in your church to walk in obedience to His purposes in all of life.
- Ask God to give you a rejoicing heart in your walk and service for Him.

## A REMINDER

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Read Deuteronomy 29:1-29

As chapter 29 begins, we have a reminder to the people of God of the covenant they had made with their Lord. He promised to be their God and they were promising to obey Him and follow His purposes. Notice that verse 1 mentions two covenants.

The first of these covenants is the covenant made with the Israelites in Moab. This may be a reference to Deuteronomy 1:5-8:

(5) East of the Jordan in the territory of Moab, Moses began to expound this law, saying: (6) The LORD our God said to us at Horeb, "You have stayed long enough at this mountain. (7) Break camp and advance into the hill country of the Amorites; go to all the neighbouring peoples in the Arabah, in the mountains, in the western foothills, in the Negev and along the coast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the Euphrates. (8) See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the LORD swore he would give to your fathers—to

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—and to their descendants after them.”

If this is the covenant God made with His people in Moab, it related to giving them the land He had promised their fathers.

The second covenant mentioned was the covenant made at Horeb. Horeb was the region around Mount Sinai where the Lord gave Moses His law. It was in Horeb, at the foot of Mount Sinai that God laid out His requirements for His people, teaching them how He expected them to live.

In Moab, God explained His commitment to His people as a nation, to give them their own land and to be their God. In Horeb, at Mount Sinai, God gave His law, showing His people what He required of them in return.

As we continue in this chapter Moses assembled the people and reminded them of what the Lord God had done for them since they had left the land of Egypt. He reminded them of the miraculous way in which God had set them free from the powerful grip of Pharaoh. There were people present who had seen these signs and the powerful deliverance of God. Notice, however, in verse 4 that though people present that day had experienced the deliverance of God from Egypt they had not been given a mind that understood, eyes that really saw or ears that really heard. In other words, although they had seen Him work, they still did not trust God or learn from what He had done. They complained and grumbled in the desert. They could not trust God and His ways. They doubted His provision and guidance.

During all this time in the wilderness, they completely missed the working of God in their midst. Moses reminded



them that, over those forty years of wandering, their clothes and sandals did not wear out. They had no supply of food with them, but every day they had plenty to eat (verses 5-6). The eyes of God's people failed to see this provision of the Lord or recognize His hand in this.

One of the great tragedies of our day is that we fail to see God in the little things of life. God was concerned about how long the clothes the people were wearing lasted and that they had something to eat each day. These are things we often take for granted. We often look for God in the big things but fail to see the miracle of the small.

From the desert, God's people moved into the territory of Heshbon and Bashan. There they met two kings, Sihon of Heshbon and Og of Bashan. These kings came out to fight Israel. God gave Israel victory over them and their land was given to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh (verses 7-8). In this, God demonstrated His grace and wonderful compassion toward a grumbling and complaining people. He also demonstrated His faithfulness to the promise He had made to His people.

Moses reminded the people, in light of what God had done and promised, to be careful to follow the terms of the covenant He was making with them. Everyone who lived among them, from their leaders to those who carried their water, was obligated to follow God's commands as laid out in His law (verse 11). That day Moses called the people to renew their commitment to the covenant relationship with God. Verse 12 leads us to believe that Moses was asking them to swear an oath to be faithful to God and Him alone. He reminded them that God would confirm them as His people and be their God just as He had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (verses 3-15).

Part of walking in faithfulness to their covenant with God was to turn from any other god. Moses reminded them of the gods made from wood, stone, silver and gold they had seen in Egypt. He challenged his people to be sure that no one among them returned to these idols and foreign gods. They were to do all they could to keep their land pure and undefiled by pagan idols and gods. Notice how he describes these gods and idols as roots of bitter poison (verse 18). In other words, these gods and idols would destroy them as a nation and take them away from the one true God.

Moses knew that God's people would be tempted by the pagan gods and idols of the nations around them. This was not the only temptation, however. In verse 19 we see that the knowledge of their covenant relationship with God would make Israel say: "I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way." In other words, they clung to the fact that they were part of a nation that had been chosen by God. They felt that God had an obligation toward them to care for them and forgive them no matter how they lived their lives. Their security would be in the fact that they were part of a nation God had called out for himself. They believed now that because they were a special people, God was obligated to care for them even if they were not living as He required.

Moses reminded his people, however, that being part of a nation that was chosen by God would not give them security if they were not walking with God in obedience and faithfulness. God would judge those who turned from Him even if they were His people. Moses promised that all the curses of the law would come on the people who persisted in sin even if they were part of God's chosen people (verses 20-21).

Being a member of the nation of Israel and under a covenant relationship with Him would not spare them from the wrath of God if they did not walk in obedience to His law (verse 22). If they turned from God, they would suffer the consequences and curses recorded in His law. Their children and foreigners would see the curse of God on their nation. They would see the diseases, the lack of crops and vegetation. Their land would become like the lands of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboaiim, which God overthrew in His anger (see Genesis 19). Admah and Zeboaiim were cities closely related to Sodom and Gomorrah and likely destroyed with them in the days of Abraham and Lot.

If God's people turned from Him they would be punished even as God punished Sodom and Gomorrah. People around them would ask why this terrible destruction had come on the people of Israel (verse 24). Moses told them that the answer would be:

“(25) Because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, the covenant He made with them when He brought them out of Egypt. (26) They went off and worshipped other gods and bowed down to them, gods they did not know, gods He had not given them. (27) Therefore the LORD's anger burned against this land, so that He brought on it all the curses written in this book. (28) In furious anger and in great wrath the LORD uprooted them from their land and thrust them into another land, as it is now.”

The reason for their punishment and destruction would be because they had turned from the Lord their God to other

gods. God would strip them of His blessing if they were unfaithful to Him and His Word.

We see from this the importance of walking in absolute obedience to the Lord God. Israel's future depended not on her military or political strength but on her walk with the Lord God and faithfulness to His covenant. This same principle applies today. Our success as a people of God hinges on our obedience to Him and His word.

Moses concluded with a final word of advice to God's people in verse 29. Here in this verse He reminded them that the secret things belonged to the Lord their God but those things He had revealed belonged to them and their children so that they could follow the words of His law. In other words, there would be many questions about how God worked. There would be times when God's people would not understand His ways or why He was asking them to do things a certain way. These things will not always be revealed to us. God has a reason for what He does. We must trust Him in this. What is important for us is to walk in the light of the truth God has revealed. We don't have to understand everything in order to obey. There are things about God and His ways we will never understand. We must learn to obey what we know God is commanding us to do even when we don't understand His overall purpose.

This principle is important for us to understand. Some have refused to set out into what they felt God leading them to do because they have not understood what He was trying to do or how He was going to work out all the details. Others have chosen to ignore clear principles of Scripture because they did not see how they were relevant to their modern society. God is not asking us to understand everything before we chose to obey. He is asking us for simple obedience whether we understand His ways or not.

## For Consideration:

- What was the covenant promise of God to His people? What did He expect from them in return?
- One of the problems with God's people in the desert was that they did not truly see what God was doing in their midst. Their clothes and sandals did not wear out and they had all the food they needed, but they failed to be thankful for these blessings. What has God been doing for you? How easy is it to miss what God is doing in our lives?
- God was asking His people to make a commitment of faithfulness to Him. How important is it for us to make this commitment to God?
- Some of God's people had a false sense of security. They believed that because they were Israelites they would be safe and protected from the judgement of God. Moses showed them how wrong they were. What kind of things do we hide behind in our day for security? What is the only security we have as believers?
- Do we need to understand before we obey? Has God ever led you in ways you did not understand? Are there clear commands in Scripture you have trouble understanding? What is the challenge of Moses to you?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He promises to be your God and remain faithful to you. Ask Him to help you to be faithful to Him.
- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to the things He is doing in your midst. Ask Him to help you to see His blessings more clearly.
- Thank the Lord that He alone is our security and His death is our only guarantee of salvation and freedom from judgement.
- Thank the Lord that He knows what He is doing and what is best for us and our society. Ask Him to help you to trust His Word and His leading even when you do not understand.

# 31

## CHOOSE LIFE

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Read Deuteronomy 30:1-20

Over the course of the last few chapters we have seen the danger of turning from God and disobeying His commands. The curse of God was very real for the nation of Israel. In later years they experienced that curse as their land was destroyed and they were led off into captivity in Babylon. We must never forget that the Lord God is a holy God who cannot tolerate sin and evil. In His justice all sin must be punished, all evil must be destroyed. This should also give us great cause to thank Him for the Lord Jesus who came to pay the penalty for our sin so that we could be forever united with the Father.

While the wrath of God is very real and all who turn from Him will suffer the consequences of their sin, God is also full of mercy and compassion. Notice as we begin chapter 30 that the Lord reminded His people that when all the curses came upon them and they took them to heart, wherever the Lord had dispersed them among the nations, He would restore their fortunes (verses 1-3).

Notice in these verses that the people would be dispersed among the nations. This means that they would no longer be in the land the Lord had given them. Their sins would

strip them of their blessings. They would experience the curse of God because of their rebellion. Though He would punish them, God would not completely abandon them.

In verses 2 and 3, God offers His people hope. He promises that if they and their children returned to Him with all their heart and their soul in the land of their exile, He would restore their fortunes. He would again have compassion on them, gather them from all the nations where they had been scattered and bring them back to their own land (verses 4-5). The condition for the restoration of blessing was that His people return to the Lord with all their heart and soul.

The word “all” is significant in this context. When we return to the Lord with *all* our heart and soul there is no room for anything else. All our heart and soul belongs to Him. This is a picture of total consecration and devotion. This is what the Lord expected of His people. He expected that they would devote themselves to Him completely, rejecting all other gods. He expected that they would commit themselves to walking fully in His commandments. This fullness of God’s blessing will only fall on those who commit themselves to walking in His ways.

God has great promises for those who commit themselves to Him and His ways. Notice that these promises would come even when they were undeserving of them. God’s people would wander. They would be separated from their land. They would experience His curse. It was in the midst of their rebellion that they would hear this call to return to the Lord. The Lord would not only forgive them but they would again experience His abundant blessing. No matter how far we have wandered from the Lord, this call still comes to us. If we return, God will renew His favour and



blessing. Let's take a moment to consider the blessing the Lord promises the wanderer who would return to Him.

First, God promised that He would make those who returned to Him with all their heart and soul to become more numerous and prosperous than their fathers. God would not withhold His blessing from these rebellious Israelites if they returned to Him. Their sins would no longer be held against them. He would treat them as if they had never sinned against Him. His blessings would not be withheld because of their former rebellion. All who returned to Him, sought His forgiveness and devoted themselves to His purposes would experience more blessing than the nation had ever seen before. What an encouragement this is for those who have fallen into sin. Complete forgiveness and overwhelming blessing is promised to all who will repent and seek His face.

Notice the second promise of the Lord to those who would return to Him. In verse 6 the Lord promises to circumcise their hearts so that they could love Him. One of the biggest obstacles to our walk with the Lord is the hardness of our heart toward spiritual things. It is natural for us, because of our sinful nature, to love the things of the world. We are naturally drawn to the world, its sins and attractions. How can we ever truly seek the Lord when our heart is divided?

God promises to circumcise the hearts of those who come to Him. He will soften our heart and cut out its hardness. This softening of the heart would give His people the ability to love Him and devote themselves to Him in a new way. It would open their eyes to God. Their affections would be taken away from the world and the attractions of this world and set on the Lord God. How we all need this circumcision of the heart to set us free from the things that attract us. Only when God softens our heart can we love Him and

devout ourselves to Him. We cannot love Him with our hardened sinful heart but God promises to change the heart of any who will come to Him and seek His face.

A third promise of God to those who would return to Him is found in verse 7. Here God promised to curse their enemies and those who persecuted them. In other words, they would be released from the grip of their enemies. There are many enemies in our spiritual lives. Sometimes it seems that we just can't seem to experience the victory we need over them. God promises that those who return to Him will know this victory. Notice that the victory comes from God. Many times we try to overcome our spiritual enemies in our own strength and fail. Victory does not come in human strength and wisdom. The victory of verse 7 comes from God. God promises victory to those who will return to Him and seek Him and His ways. If we will commit ourselves to doing what God commands with all our heart, He will give us the victory we so desperately need.

Fourth, God promised His people in verses 9-10 that if they returned to Him with all their heart He would again prosper them in the work they had set their hands to do. Their wives would again bear many children and their livestock and crops would be blessed. They would experience abundant prosperity under the blessing of God. Notice that the key to this prosperity was not in good agricultural or medical techniques but in obedience to the Lord God and walking with Him with all their heart and soul. The prosperity God speaks about here is the fruit of obedience. Many of us want prosperity and fruitful ministries without walking in obedience. We want the world and its ways but we also want the blessing of the Lord. The obedience God speaks about here is not going to be easy. He calls us to lay down our lives and sacrifice all we have to Him. We must offer Him our plans and goals in life. We must surrender our

desires and ambitions. We will face the opposition of the world. We will have to discipline our hands and minds and feet to follow the purpose of God. Obeying the Lord with all our heart and soul is costly, but there is rich blessing attached to it.

That blessing may not come in the form of big houses or cars or even money in the bank. Jesus had none of these yet He was richly blessed. Paul suffered much as he moved from one town to another but he would have described himself as being the most blessed man on the earth because of what he had in the Lord God. God will supply all we need to accomplish His purposes.

It would be very easy for Israel to look at the requirements of God and say, "It's too much, I could not possibly seek the Lord with all my heart and soul." Perhaps you too, as you seek to live the Christian life have wondered if it was possible. The Lord knows how easily we can be discouraged and speaks to this point in verses 11-14. Here in these verses He reminds His people that what He was commanding them was not too difficult for them to follow or beyond their reach. As Israel looked at the requirements of God they saw them as being as high as the heavens so they could not be reached. They saw them as being beyond the farthest sea, so far away that they could not get there. They were overwhelmed with the laws, obligations and requirements of God and felt that they were impossible to obey. The idea here is that not one of them could ever hope to keep these requirements.

God reminds them in verses 11-14 however that what He was requiring them was not out of their reach. It was near them. It was in their heart and mouth and they could obey. We need to understand this verse, however, in the context of what the Lord God has just told them. He told them in

these verses that despite their former sin, He would accept and forgive them. He told them that He would circumcise their hearts and give them a heart that sought after Him. He told them that He would give them victory over their enemies and prosper the fruit of their hands. You see, God would enable them to do what He asked them to do. The strength for obedience and victory was in God. Admittedly, they would not be able to keep those requirements in their own power, but God did not expect them to do this. He would be their strength. He would change their hearts. He would give them victory. The battle was His and He would win if they trusted their lives into His hands.

God set before his people life and death (verses 15-16). Notice in verses 16 that His desire was that they walk in His ways and commandments and experience life and blessing to the full. God would not force them into obedience, however. His people were free to walk away from Him. They were free to bow down to other gods. If they did, however, they would suffer the consequences of His holy judgement. They would not live long in the land He was giving them (verse 18). God would cast them out and remove His blessing from them.

That day, God called His people to choose between life and death, blessings and curses. He pleaded with them to choose life (verse 19) so that they and their children could walk in His blessing. He reminded them that He was their life and the source of their blessing. He called them to choose Him and live. That same call goes out today to each of us.

## For Consideration:

- While the wrath of God is very real against sin and rebellion, does God completely abandon those who fall? Will He accept them if they return to Him?
- What does it mean to return to God with “all” our heart and soul?
- Are the requirements of God too difficult for us to follow? What promises does God give to those who will return to Him with a desire to follow His Word?
- What is the difference between seeking to please God and following Him in our own strength and trusting God’s enabling to accomplish His purposes in us? Have you been trusting your own strength or in the Lord?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His grace and mercy toward us even when we stray from Him and His commands.
- Thank the Lord that He is willing to restore us to our blessings if we return to Him with all our heart and soul.
- Ask the Lord to “circumcise” your heart so that it is more tender to Him and His ways.

## 32

### JOSHUA, A SONG AND THE WORD

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Read Deuteronomy 31:1-29

God's people have been on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Their time to cross over that river and take possession of the land the Lord had promised was drawing near. Moses has been instructing them and teaching them the requirements of God as they prepared to take over this land. He has been reminding them that the secret of their success in that land was obedience to the Lord God and His commands.

Moses was 120 years old when his people were preparing to cross the Jordan. For forty years, Moses had been Israel's leader. He had taken them from Egypt to the border of the Promised Land, but now his responsibilities had come to an end. He had accomplished all that God wanted him to accomplish and the time of his death was fast approaching.

Not having Moses as their leader would be very different for the people of God. He had been the only leader they had known as a nation. God had used him in powerful

ways. The Lord had spoken directly to Moses, performed great and miraculous signs through him and filled him with wisdom to resolve many conflicts among the believers of his day. Who was going to fill the role of leader when the Lord took Moses from them?

We can imagine that the people of Israel were concerned about moving into the land of Canaan without Moses. Moses reminded them, however, that the Lord God would cross over the river before them and destroy the nations so that they could take possession. Notice how he reminded the Israelites in verse 4 of how God had defeated Sihon and Og on the eastern side of the river. God would do this again when they crossed into the land He had promised their fathers (verses 4-5).

Moses told the people that day that Joshua would cross over the river ahead of them. That is to say, he would be their new leader. God had chosen him to lead Israel in the conquest of the land. God called His people to be strong and courageous in light of the fact that He would go before them with Joshua. Moses promised that the Lord would not leave or forsake them in this conquest of the land (verse 6).

Speaking particularly to Joshua, Moses commanded him also to be strong and courageous (verse 7). He was to go before the people and set an example for them. In the strength of God, he was to lead his people in the conquest of the land before them. He was not to be discouraged in this calling, for God would go before him and be with him until he had completed the task he had been given (verse 8). Notice also in verse 7 that not only was Joshua to lead his people in the conquest of the Promised Land but he was also to see that it was divided up among them when they were settled.

God had a purpose for Moses and a very different one for Joshua. Moses had established God's people as a nation in the wilderness, giving them their laws and showing them what God required. Joshua would establish them in the land God had promised their fathers. God's purpose for each of us is different. He has a special call on each life and has gifted us in different ways for the accomplishing of His purposes.

The great concern of Moses in this book is that the people of God take heed to the commandments of God. Joshua would bring them into the land and establish them in their own properties. Their success as a nation, however, depended on their walk with God. To be sure that God's people were constantly reminded of their obligation to God, Moses wrote down the law the Lord had given him and gave it to the priests, Levites and the elders of Israel. In verses 10-12 he also commanded that every seven years (on the Sabbatical year) when the people of God had gathered together for the Feast of Tabernacles, this law be read in the hearing of all the people. During this feast, God's people would be reminded afresh of their obligation to God. Their children, who had never heard the law, would hear it read to them and learn of their obligation to God. It should be remembered here that books were not available at this time nor could many people read. They did not have a scroll in each home to read every day. They depended on times like this to hear the reading of the Word of God. By writing down the law of God and giving it to the leaders of the nation, Moses guaranteed that it would be passed on to the next generation. The health of the nation depended on their obedience to this law, so those scrolls would have been very precious indeed.

In verse 14 the Lord told Moses that the day of his death was drawing near. He commanded him to bring Joshua to



the Tabernacle where he would be commissioned by God for the responsibility of leading His people into the Land of Promise. On that occasion, the Lord descended on the Tent in the form of a pillar of cloud. The cloud remained at the entrance of the tent while the Lord spoke to Moses. He told him what would happen when he was gone. The Israelites would prostitute themselves with foreign gods, forsake the God of their fathers and break the covenant He had made with them (verse 16). God told Moses that he would become very angry with His people and would hide His face from them until they were destroyed because of their sin. Great disasters would come upon them and they would recognize that their agony was because they had turned their back on the one true God (verse 17).

As Moses listened on that day, God commanded him to write a song. He was then to teach this song to the people of Israel as a witness for God against them. This song is recorded for us in Deuteronomy 33. It is a prophetic song that speaks about the anger of God being aroused because His people had abandoned Him. This song, would explain to Israel why they were being punished and why God had turned his back on them (verses 19-22). The people would learn this song in the days of Moses but it would not be until later that the significance of it would become real to them. The song was a warning to God's people of the dangers of turning from God and His laws.

It appears that Joshua was in the Tabernacle while the Lord was speaking to Moses and warning him of what would happen when he died. After God had spoken to Moses and commanded him to write a song, He then turned His attention to Joshua. God commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous. In doing so, God is offering strength and courage to Joshua for the task he was about to undertake. He was opening up the storehouse of

heaven for him to take all he needed in strength and courage. As he stood against the enemies of God's people, he would need these two gifts from God. God offers him all he needs to accomplish the mission. He will do this for us as well. He will always equip us to do what he calls us to do as we seek Him and His provision.

Notice also in verse 23 that God promised not only strength and courage to Joshua but also His presence. We cannot underestimate the importance of the presence of the Lord. What are our gifts without the presence of the Lord? Many are content with gifts and calling but fail to understand their need of God's presence. In His presence is life and power. His presence on our gifts makes them powerful and useful. Our gifts are mere tools; the power for service is in the presence of God. God would not only equip Joshua with the tools he needed but also the power to accomplish his task through His presence.

When Moses finished writing the words of the Law of God from beginning to end, he gave it to the Levites. The Book of the Law was kept beside the Ark of the Covenant. It was to be there as a witness of God's purposes for His people. It would be a written reminder of their obligation to God. This book would condemn them if they turned from God.

As Moses prepared to die, he knew that the people would rebel against their God. They would not listen to the words of the law. Though God had given them everything necessary for obedience, they would still turn from Him. Joshua would be empowered to give Israel the land west of the Jordan. God's requirements would be written for all to read and hear. Moses composed a song to warn them of the coming danger of rebellion against God. Despite all that God had done for them, the people would turn their backs

on His blessings and walk away from His law. The results would be devastating for them as a nation.

For Consideration:

- What was God's call on Moses' life? What did God commission Joshua to do? What is His purpose for your life?
- How important was it that the people of God obey His commands? What would be the result of their disobedience?
- What did Moses do to assure that the Law of God would be passed on to future generations?
- How did God equip Joshua for the ministry to which he was being called?
- Are spiritual gifts enough to accomplish the purposes of God? What role does the presence of God play in our ministries?
- How do you think Moses felt after having led his people for forty years when he heard God tell him that his people would worship idols and false gods in the land he was giving them? What is the measure of success in ministry?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you His purpose for your life. Thank Him that He promises all you need to accomplish that purpose.
- Thank the Lord that He has given us the written word so that we can know Him and His requirements.
- Ask the Lord to be with you in the ministry He has called you to do. Thank Him that His presence brings power and protection.
- Ask the Lord to give you the faithfulness of Moses to minister even when you don't see results.

## THE SONG OF MOSES

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Read Deuteronomy 31:30-32:47

In Deuteronomy 31 we saw that the Lord commanded Moses to write a song that would act as a prophetic witness against His people. This song was taught to the Israelites so that they would be warned ahead of time of the dangers of wandering from the truth of God's commands. In obedience to God, and under his divine inspiration, Moses wrote this song and taught it to the people (31:30). We have the words recorded for us in Deuteronomy 32:1-47.

The song of Moses begins with a call to heaven and earth to listen. All of creation was to be a witness to the words of this song. You don't call someone to witness something if you are not sure it will take place. Here in this song, heaven and earth with all its inhabitants are called to be a witness. God stakes His reputation on the words of this song. These were the things that would come to pass. There was no doubt in the mind of God that they would come to pass. Heaven and earth hear the warnings. When these things happened it would not be because Israel was not warned. By giving them this song, God was giving them all the warning they needed.

Notice in verse 2 that the Lord called all of creation to let His teaching fall like rain and His words like dew and showers on the new grass. The idea here is that the teaching of God in this song was to fall on the earth and instruct the earth. It was to refresh and cause them to grow. It was to be their nourishment and life.

Verse 3 reminds us that though this song contained warnings for the people of God, its intention was to proclaim the name and greatness of the Lord. Over the course of this song we will see how Israel would fall and turn from the living God. God would punish them but in His mercy they would be restored. The song speaks of the justice of God. It describes him as an all-knowing and all-powerful God. It reminds us of His compassion and mercy to those who had fallen. It presents God as the one true God who is over all false gods and to whom every knee would one day bow. It is a song of warning but it is also a song that presents the Lord God as a sovereign, holy, all-knowing and compassionate God.

Moses describes the God of Israel in verse 4. He has six things to say about the Lord God in this verse.

First, God is the Rock. A rock is a sure foundation and cannot be moved. As a Rock, the Lord is unchangeable and sure. His people can trust Him.

Second, God's works are perfect. Whatever God set His hand to do was perfect. There were no flaws in His work. His creation was perfect. His purpose for humanity was perfect. God is not the author of our imperfections. He can never be blamed for evil or sin.

Third, all of God's ways are just. That is to say, He treats as all with fairness. If we are punished, we are receiving

from God what we deserve. He does not show favouritism in His judgement or purposes for our lives.

Fourth, God is a faithful God. He will be true to His word, His character and to His creation. He does not change but remains stable and strong. He will be true to His word and promises. He will care for us even when we have failed Him.

Fifth, God does no wrong. All God does is fair, good, just and holy. God can never be accused of sin or evil.

Finally, God is upright and just. This speaks of God's character. What He does is righteous and good. He has no bent to evil or sinfulness. He is the measure of all that is good and fair.

In verse 5 we see that while God is just, perfect, holy, faithful and upright, His people are very different. They would act corruptly toward God. They are described as a "warped and crooked generation." That is to say, they would turn from the path of righteousness and follow after evil.

Notice also from verse 5 that it would be to Israel's shame that they would no longer be His children. In other words, by their actions they would turn their back on their heavenly Father. They would walk away from Him and become like the nations, no longer resembling Him. They would no longer have any fellowship with Him. They would no longer love or delight in Him, rejecting Him as their Father. They would repay His kindness and mercy with rebellion (verse 6). He formed them but they would walk away from Him.

In verse 7 Moses called the people to remember what God had done for them. They were to look into their history and

see the great works He had done on their behalf. In seeing what God had done for them, perhaps they would have a better awareness of the seriousness of their rebellion. Let's consider what Moses' song has to say about what God had done for His people.

In verses 8-9 the song reminds Israel that the Lord had given them the nations as their inheritance. While they were not yet living in the land God had promised, the Lord had already set it aside for them. Through Joshua they would conquer the nations living in the land of Canaan. Their land would be divided according to their numbers. Every tribe would have all they needed. This was not the result of their strong army, but because God had set this land apart for them from the beginning of time. He had prepared a place for them so that they could prosper and live under His blessing. He drove other nations out so that His people could have their land.

When God found His people they were in the desert. They had no land of their own. They wandered in a barren place with howling winds and empty fruitless sand (verse 10). God took them from that place and led them to the land He had chosen for them. He shielded and cared for them as they wandered through the wilderness. He set them apart as a special people and guarded them as the "apple of His eye." In other words, He loved and treasured them.

Verse 11 describes God's relationship with His people like that of an eagle protecting its young and teaching them how to fly. He spread His wings over them and when they fell He caught them on his wings and carried them to safety.

God led His people. There was no other god to lead them. No other god helped them or cared for them. He alone



provided for them and protected them. He alone cared for them (verse 12). His blessing was on them in many ways. He made them to ride on the heights of the land (verse 13). That is to say, His blessing was on them so that they walked in victory. He fed them from the fields and provided them with honey and oil even in the most barren places where they lived (verse 13). They ate curds and milk. They feasted on fattened lambs, goats and rams. They enjoyed the finest kernels of wheat and the rich foaming juice of their grapes (verse 14).

Israel is referred to in verse 15 by the name Jeshurun. The name literally means "upright one." Israel, the "upright one" who had been highly favoured by God grew fat on His blessings. When he had all he needed he turned his back on "the Rock his Saviour" (verse 15).

Israel would turn to foreign gods and fall down to detestable idols. In doing so they would make the Lord God jealous and anger him (verse 16). They would sacrifice to demons and desert the Rock who had fathered them. They would forget the one who gave them birth (verse 18).

Their behaviour would be so repulsive to God that He would turn His back on them. He would hide His face and pull back His blessings (verses 19-20). Because they would make Him jealous by serving idols, God would make them envious using those who were not His people and a nation that had no understanding (verse 21). In other words, He would send them to a people who had no understanding of God. There in their exile they would learn what it was like to be separated from God's blessing and fellowship. They would see what it was like to be stripped of all they had and forced to serve a foreign nation. In that time, they would come to see that serving the Lord God

was far greater than what they had in rebellion. They would see the foolishness of their ways.

God's fiery anger would burn against His people. It would devour their land. God would heap troubles on His people and send His arrows against them for their rebellion. They would suffer famine, consuming pestilence, deadly plagues and be attacked by wild beasts (verse 24). They would die by the sword in the street. Their young men and women would perish along with the elderly and infants. No one would be spared from the anger of God because of their rebellion (verse 25).

While the wrath of God would be very real against His people for their rebellion, God was also a God of tremendous mercy and compassion. Notice in verse 26 that while He could have scattered His people and removed the memory of them from the earth, for the glory of His name, He chose to have mercy on them.

What would the enemy say if God destroyed His people? Would the nations not think that they had overcome Israel and believe that they were more powerful than the God of Israel (verse 27)? God wanted even the foreign nations to understand His power, mercy and holiness.

We catch a glimpse of the broken heart of God for His people in verses 29. "If only they were wise and would understand this and discern what their end will be!" He says. This is a cry for Israel to open her eyes and see what was happening to them. Verse 30 describes what would happen to Israel. One enemy would chase a thousand Israelites. Two enemies would put ten thousand Israelites to flight. This was a far cry from what would happen under Joshua when Israel put their enemies to flight. As time went on, because of their rebellion, the Lord would give them up (verse 30).

He would no longer fight for them and they would be helpless before their enemy.

While Israel would suffer the consequences of their rebellion, in time, God would reveal Himself as the true and faithful God. The gods of the nations were not like the God of Israel (verse 31). The vines of these nations came from Sodom and Gomorrah. That is to say, they were just like Sodom and Gomorrah in their rebellion against God. Their grapes, or the fruit of their culture, was poison and filled with bitterness (verses 32-33).

God saw the rebellion of His own people. He also saw the evil of the nations. He describes their evil as a poison that He kept in reserve, sealed up in a vault. The day was coming when that vault of poison would be opened and, in due time, its contents poured out over the evil doers. The day was coming when the nations would be judged for treating God's people with contempt and subjecting them to forced labour and bondage. God would judge the nations but would have compassion on His people (verse 36).

In those days, the Lord would reveal that the gods of the nations were nothing. These gods would not be able to protect them from the anger of the Lord. God would reveal to all nations that He was the one true God and there was none but Him (verse 39). He would reveal Himself as the God who takes life and gives life. He is the God who wounds but also the God who heals (verse 39). The day was coming when God would sharpen His sword to take vengeance on the enemies of His people (verse 41). His arrows would be drunk with the blood of His enemies. His sword would devour their flesh (42). His people, whom He had disciplined, however, would be lifted up again and their land restored (verse 43).

The song of Moses showed His people that in the days to come there would be a great rebellion against God. Their enemies would overpower them and they would experience the removal of God's blessing from their land. God would not forsake them, however. While they would be disciplined, they would not be forgotten. The day would come when God would restore their land to them. All these things happened when the Assyrians and Babylonians took Israel captive and burned down the city of Jerusalem. The restoring of God's people to their land would take place, at least in part, under the ministry of Ezra and Nehemiah.

When Moses finished teaching the nation the words of the song he told them to take to heart what he had told them. He reminded them that what he was telling them was not mere words but life (verse 47). If they obeyed the commands of the Lord, they would know life and blessing in the land the Lord had given them. If they refused to obey, even what they had would be stripped from them. Their success in the land of Israel was going to depend entirely on whether they walked in obedience to God or not. If they walked faithfully with God and His Word, they would live a long time in the land He had given them. If they did not, the land would be taken from them.

There was a choice for the people of God to make. They could choose life and blessing by walking in obedience to the laws of God or they could lose everything by rebelling. God leaves them this choice.

For Consideration:

- What does the song of Moses teach us about God?

- What did God do for His people according to this chapter? What has God done in your life?
- How does this passage describe the tender relationship of God to His people?
- Does God discipline those He loves? Does He forget them in their punishment?
- As believers, are there consequences for our sin?
- How would this song be a warning to the Israelites about the days that were ahead for them?

For Prayer:

- Consider the characteristics of God described in this chapter. Take a moment to thank the Lord for who He is and what He has done for us.
- Thank the Lord for the relationship He wants to have with His people.
- Thank the Lord for His patience with you in your sin and failures.
- Thank the Lord for His Word, which, like this song of Moses, is a warning to us about the dangers and consequences of sin.
- Thank the Lord that He has compassion and mercy on us even when we fall.

## 34

### MOSES BLESSES HIS PEOPLE

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Deuteronomy 32:48-33:29

In the last section of Deuteronomy, Moses taught a song to his people. This song was a prophetic warning to them of what would happen in the days to come when they turned from the Lord. It was on the same day that Moses taught this song to his people that the Lord called him to Mount Nebo in Moab (32:48-49). From that mountain God would show him the land He was going to give His people. God told Moses that He would die on that mountain. He would not be allowed to go into the land of Canaan because he had disobeyed God before the people in the region of Meribah (see Numbers 20:6-13).

Knowing that his death was near, Moses spent his final hours pronouncing a blessing on the people of Israel. Chapter 33 records this blessing.

#### *Introduction*

Deuteronomy 33:1-5 form the introduction to Moses blessing. It begins with a general introduction. In verse 1 Moses presents a picture of the Lord. Moses tells us that the Lord came from Sinai. This is where Moses had received the

laws of God and where he had spent much time in the presence of the Lord.

The Lord introduced Himself on Mount Sinai to His people. He came over them in Seir (the land of the Edomites) and shone on them in Paran (desert). Notice in verse 2 that Moses told his people that the Lord came with His myriads of holy ones from the south and from the slopes of the mountain. While it is difficult to know exactly who these holy one were, some commentators believe them to be the angels of God who went with His people protecting them on the way to the Land of Promise. It may also be that the “holy ones” referred to here are the Israelites themselves. Evidence of this interpretation can be seen in the context. Notice in verse 3 how Moses reminded the Israelites that God loved them. All His “holy ones” were in His hand and bowed at His feet to receive instructions from Him. Those instructions came in the form of the law God gave to Moses (verse 4). Verse 5 tells us that God was king over Jeshurun. The name Jeshurun literally means “upright ones”. Jeshurun is quite clearly a reference to the people of Israel and their calling to be a holy people before the Lord their God and King.

What we see from this introduction is how the Lord chose His people to be a holy people. He gave them His law and introduced Himself to them at Mount Sinai. From there He moved with His people through the desert and into the land He had promised their fathers. His favour was upon them all the way. He did this because He loved them.

From this introduction Moses moves on to his blessing of the individual tribes of Israel. They are blessed by name.

*Reuben*

Reuben is the first to be addressed. Moses has two blessings for this tribe. The first blessing is that Reuben would live and not die. Remember we are speaking here about a tribe. Moses prays that the tribe of Reuben would live on and always have a presence on the earth.

The second blessing was that they would prosper and be large in number. This would be the evidence that the Lord's hand was on them.

*Judah*

Moses asked that the Lord would hear the cry of Judah and bring them to their people. The idea here is that the Lord would give them a land where they could live as a people. Notice that Moses also said that Judah would defend their cause with their own hands. In other words, they would be strengthened in their endeavours. Moses asks that God would be their help against all their enemies and prosper the work of their hands.

*Levi*

Levi had been set apart as a tribe to belong to the Lord. Verse 8 tells us that the Thummim and Urim belonged to Levi. These two objects were worn by the priests (Leviticus 8:8) and used to determine the will of the Lord in a given situation. Levi, of all the tribes, had been especially favoured by God and chosen to be His servants. This did not mean that they were better than the other tribes. In fact, reference is made in verse 8 to Massah (see Exodus 17:7) and Meribah (see Deuteronomy 32:51) where this tribe had quarrelled or rebelled against God.



Although the tribe of Levi had their issues, God had chosen them to be His priests and ministers. This tribe was set aside from all other obligations to watch over the Word of the Lord and guard His covenant. Their dedication to the Word of the Lord was such that they were to be willing to stand against their own parents, children or extended family if they turned from God and His ways (verse 9).

The tribe of Levi was given the responsibility to teach the law of God to their people, to offer incense and burnt offerings to the Lord God on behalf of the people. Moses' prayer for them was that the Lord would bless their skills and the work of their hands so that they could do the work God had called them to do. He also prayed for protection on them as a tribe so that all who rose up against them would be struck by God (verse 11).

### *Benjamin*

The tribe of Benjamin was especially loved by the Lord. Moses' prayer was that they would continue to rest in this security, being shielded all day long from their enemies. Benjamin would rest between the shoulders of the Lord. The picture seems to be of child sitting on his or her father's shoulders. There they are safe. Nothing can harm them. It is a picture of intimacy and protection.

### *Joseph*

The sons of Joseph were Ephraim and Manasseh. They were given full status with the people of God as tribes. Moses speaks of these two tribes as Joseph. His prayer was that the Lord God would bless their land with dew from heaven and water below the ground (verse 13). He also prayed for the best the sun and the moon could offer them (verse 14). This would assure that their land would be

fruitful and blessed (verse 15). The favour of the one who dwelt in the burning bush would rest on Joseph's head and he would be a prince among his brothers (verse 16). The reference to the burning bush goes back to the call of Moses in Exodus 3. God met Moses in the burning bush. The idea here is that the one who met Moses in the burning bush would favour the tribes of Joseph.

While Joseph was not a firstborn child, he would be like a firstborn in blessing and power. He is compared to a bull with its horns. He would gore the nations and they would fall under him. While Ephraim would be larger than Manasseh, both of them would be blessed by God and know His favour and protection.

### *Zebulun and Issachar*

Zebulun was to rejoice in their going out (verse 18). This may be a reference to their trading of goods. If this is the case, they would be blessed in their commerce and trade with other nations.

Issachar, on the other hand, would be blessed in their tents. While the tribe of his brother Zebulun was blessed as they travelled, the tribe of Issachar was blessed as they remained at home.

These tribes would offer sacrifices of righteousness on the mountains of their land. They would feast on an abundance of fish from the seas. They would also enjoy the profits from the hidden treasures found in the sand (verse 19). This may be a reference to the success of their fishing industry or to the resources hidden under the ground in their land.

*Gad*

Gad is compared to a lion tearing apart its prey. Those who stood with Gad were blessed (verse 20). It would be a terrible thing to stir up the wrath of Gad. This tribe gave leadership among the tribes. They chose the best land for themselves (verse 21). They would carry out the will of the Lord and His instruments to carry out His judgements. Gad is pictured as a lion ready to destroy his enemies. This may refer to Gad's military power and leadership abilities.

*Dan*

While Gad was like a lion, Dan was a lion's cub springing out of Bahan. This tribe would not be as powerful as Gad but would be a force to be respected, like a lion seeking its prey.

*Naphtali*

Naphtali would experience the Lord's favour in abundance. They would be filled with the blessing of the Lord and would inherit the land south to the "lake" (possibly a reference to the Sea of Galilee).

*Asher*

Asher was considered to be the most blessed of sons. Moses prayed that they would be favoured by the other tribes. God's rich blessing would be on this tribe. He would bath his feet in oil. Notice from verse 25 that the bolts of their gates would be iron and bronze. The tribe of Asher would be secure behind these strong gates.

God would give Asher strength equal to their days. In other words, for as long as they were a tribe, Asher would know the strength of the Lord.

### *Conclusion*

Moses concludes his blessing in verses 26-29 by again focusing our attention on the Lord God of Jeshurun (the righteous one), a name he gives to Israel. Notice what he tells us about the Lord God of Israel.

As a majestic God, He would come from the heavens to help His people (verse 26). He was the eternal God who would be a refuge for His people. He would extend His everlasting arms underneath them and drive out their enemies (verse 27).

As a people, Israel would live in safety, kept by their God. The descendants of Jacob (Israel) would be secure in the land the Lord their God was giving them. It was a land of grain and new wine. It was a land that was watered from heaven (verse 28).

There was no other nation who had experienced the favour of the Lord like Israel. God saved His people from their bondage and slavery. He shielded them from their enemies. No other nation had a god who was also their helper. Israel's enemies would be fearful of them. Israel would be victorious over them and trample down their high places where they worshipped their pagan gods.

It is quite interesting to compare the song of Moses in the previous chapter to His blessing here. In his song, Moses warned of the danger that was coming because of their disobedience. The reality was that they would lose

everything. Here in chapter 33 we see the heart of God for His people. He offers them these blessings through His servant Moses. They would experience these blessings for a time but they would also walk away from them. God has a purpose for our lives. He delights to bless and use us. The question, however, is whether we will continue to walk in that blessing or be like Israel and walk away from it to our own destruction.

#### For Consideration:

- What does the name Jeshurun mean? How did it describe the people of God? Could this name be used to describe you today?
- Notice how the tribe of Levi, as God's priests and ministers, were to do what was right even if it meant turning away from their family. What keeps us from doing what is right today?
- What does this chapter teach us about the care and protection of the Lord on our lives?
- Is it possible for us to walk away from the fullness of God's blessing on our lives? Are you experiencing the fullness of these blessings in your life today?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to walk in a way that is upright and pleasing to Him.

- Ask the Lord to teach you how to do what is right, no matter the cost.
- Thank the Lord that He desires to bless and protect us.
- Ask the Lord to show you what keeps you from experiencing even more of His blessing in your life.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have been content with much less than the fullness of His blessing.

## THE DEATH OF MOSES

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Read Deuteronomy 34:1-12

In Deuteronomy 32:48-52 the Lord commanded Moses to climb Mount Nebo. From there He showed him the land He had promised his people. Moses would not be given the privilege of entering the land. God made it very clear to Moses that it was now time for him to die. He would not return to his people. Moses spent his last moments with the people blessing them and instructing them in the ways of the Lord.

Leaving the people behind, Moses climbed to the top of Mount Nebo. From verse 1 we understand that he went to a peak on that mountain called Pisgah. From this peak, Moses was able to look over the land of Canaan. God showed him the land He was going to give to His people. From that peak, Moses could see a large part of the land God had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (2-4).

For forty years Moses had taken the children of Israel through the desert to this place. Now God was showing him the fruit of his hard efforts. It is true that Moses would not enter this land, but standing on the top of that mountain he knew he had played an important role in getting his people to this point. We can only imagine the emotions Moses

was experiencing at that time. There were times in the desert when Moses had been overwhelmed by the burden of caring for this people. As he looked down from Pisgah, now, however, he must have known that it was all worthwhile. Many times we do not see the fruit for our labours. The call of God, however, is to continue doing what He has called us to do. Moses did not give up in the wilderness and His efforts were greatly rewarded. He could see that now as he looked down from the mountaintop.

If God were to take you to the mountaintop at the end of your life and let you look down to see the fruit of your labours for Him, what would you see? Have you been faithful? Have you walked in obedience? Will there be tears of gratitude and worship to God for what He has done through you or will there be regrets for many unfinished or neglected tasks?

Moses died after seeing the land God had promised his people. Verse 6 tells us that he was buried in the region of Moab in a valley opposite Beth Peor. The verse makes it clear that no one knew where his grave was located. The details of how he was buried are hidden from us. Moses was 120 years old when he died. He appeared to be in perfect health. His eyes were good and he was strong. The blessing of God was on him to the very end of his days. The Israelites would grieve for Moses for thirty days (verse 8).

It may be significant that Moses' body was hidden from the people. He had been their leader for forty years. He had been a powerful prophet. How easy it would have been for the people to elevate him and set apart the place where he was buried as a holy place. God takes Moses from them and hides his burial site. The focus would not be on Moses. There would be no going to his grave site to honour him.



Moses was gone and his body hidden. God's people were to give their undivided allegiance to Him alone.

Notice in verse 9 that before Moses died, he laid hands on Joshua. When Moses did this, Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom. Joshua would be empowered by the Spirit of God to be the new leader of His people. The Israelites knew that Joshua had been commissioned to lead and so they submitted to his leadership (verse 9).

Verses 10-11 end the book of Deuteronomy with a word about Moses. There was never a prophet like him in the history of Israel. He was a man the Lord knew "face to face." That is to say, God spoke to him in ways He has never spoken to any prophet since. There was a closeness and intimacy that existed between Moses and God that had never been seen or experienced before.

One of the fruits of that intimacy with God was the miraculous signs and wonders the Lord did through him. Through this one man, God brought the entire nation of Egypt to its knees and set His people free from their bondage. Never since the days of Moses have we see one man perform such mighty and powerful signs (verses 11-12).

Moses experienced a powerful intimacy with God. The fruit of that intimacy was a work of God that has never been seen since. We are left at the close of this book to wonder how our lives will be remembered. Will they be remembered for their intimacy with God? Will they be remembered for faithfulness in the midst of opposition? Will they be remembered for self-sacrificing service for the Lord God? May God give us grace to see in Moses an example to follow.

## For Consideration:

- Will we always see the fruit of our hard labour? What should we do when we don't see the fruit of our efforts?
- What has God called you to do? Have you been faithful to that task?
- Have we ever been guilty of elevating our spiritual leaders beyond what God requires? What does the hiding of Moses' body tell us about God's desire in this regard? What is the balance between respecting our spiritual leaders and elevating them beyond God's purpose?
- For what was Moses remembered? For what will you be remembered?

## For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to be faithful to Him even when you do not see the fruit of your efforts.
- Thank the Lord that He has chosen to use you for His glory. Ask Him to help you to be faithful to Him no matter the cost.
- Ask God to give you a deeper intimacy with Him. Ask Him to draw nearer to you removing any hindrances to deeper fellowship and power.
- Ask God to help you to finish your life well.



## Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path Book Distribution (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement. F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them freely or at cost price to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

To date tens of thousands of books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books are now being translated into a variety of languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

The ministry of LTMP is a faith based ministry and we trust the Lord for the resources necessary to distribute the books for the encouragement and strengthening of believers around the world. Would you pray that the Lord would open doors for the translation and further distribution of these books?

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