

# Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 1:1-17:22

Anchor Church | Spring 2024

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## **The Story of Scripture: An Overview**

### **Creation**

In Genesis, God shows himself to be the Creator. He has always existed, and as we study Scripture, we will find he has always existed as the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one God in three persons. Everything else was created by him from nothing, a fact that shows us he is wholly different from us. As we are introduced to his creation in Genesis 1, we see that everything he has made is good, and we feel a tension because we recognize that the world as we know it misses the mark. It is not good that people get old, that loved ones get sick and die, that the world is filled with violence and corruption.

This tension in the story is intentional. Things are not how God created them or wanted them to be. He created a good world, and at its heart is a garden called Eden that represents the best of it. Here he places a man and woman (Adam and Eve), both created in the image of God, to rule over creation and to fill the earth with the glory of God. This is a world with no sin, no sickness, no violence and no death. They have everything that they need. They have fellowship with God, they have a purpose, and they have the use of all of creation. God gives them life freely with only one condition: they can eat of the fruit of every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they eat from it, they will die.

### **The Fall**

In the next scene, a serpent enters the garden. This creature suggests that God does not have humanity's best interest in mind, that maybe they know more about what they want than God does. He suggests that God denies them the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because he does not want them to be like him. And instead of trusting in the goodness of God as displayed throughout his creation and provision for them, they disobey God. This is known as the Fall. At this point, sin and its consequences enter into the world, and it is corrupted. From here, the Bible shows how the choice of Adam and Eve to disobey God leads to increasing destruction and death. It corrupts everything it touches, and humanity can do nothing to rid itself of the problem. Evil is in our world because we invited it in, and there is nothing we can do to shut it out again. This is the tension we are meant to feel as we read Scripture: one that echoes our experience in what is often a cruel world.

But God is gracious. Instead of letting death be the last word, he makes a promise in Genesis 3:15 even as he doles out the consequences of disobedience. When talking to the serpent, God says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." God promises that there will one day be an offspring (or seed or child) of the woman that will defeat the serpent. He will be hurt by the serpent, but in so doing, he will crush its head. This promise will become clearer as the story unfolds.

### **The Good Seed and Righteousness by Faith**

After this, we see the effects of sin driving the world into chaos. Just as God promised, sin has led to death. People are choosing immorality, violence, abuse, destruction, and death. A few faithful hold to the promise of a seed of the woman: a serpent slayer who will set things right, but even these show themselves to be thoroughly infected by sin. The story of Noah illustrates this. Things have gone horribly wrong up to this point: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). But Genesis 5:28–29 says, "When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son and called his name Noah, saying, 'Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.'" Lamech, Noah's father, understands the promise of Genesis 3:15 that God will send a serpent slayer to set things right. He hopes that his son is this man. And as Noah grows, it looks like he might be; God recognizes that he is the one righteous man on earth.

Because the world is so evil, God floods the earth, saving only Noah and his family. This story teaches us something about the heart of man. Although God has brought judgment upon the earth and is restarting with one righteous man and his family, sin has so permeated the human heart that even Noah, a righteous man who has just been spared judgment, shows his brokenness. The next time we hear about Noah, he is drunk and naked, shaming himself before his children. Even the most righteous man on earth falls far short of God's standard for humanity. Noah looked like he may be the promised seed of the woman to slay the serpent, but he is as broken as all the rest. Though his faith is to be emulated, he cannot save even himself, much less the world. And by Genesis 11, we see the world openly rebelling against the rule of God again. This shows there is a heart problem with humanity. We choose to cut ourselves off from

God, the source of life, and in doing so, we choose destruction. That is the clear trajectory for humanity established in Genesis.

But just as things are looking hopeless, God steps in and chooses a man who will later be renamed Abraham to receive a great promise. In Genesis 12:1–2, God says to Abraham, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Of particular importance here is the idea that all the families of the earth will be blessed through Abraham (more on that in a minute). Of immediate concern to Abraham is how God can make him a great nation even though he has no children and has a barren wife. But in Genesis 15, God reaffirms his promise, and Abraham believes God and in so doing clues us into how a sinful and broken people might be able to be made right with our creator. Genesis 15:6 says, “And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” Abraham believes that God will come through on his promise, and God counts Abraham’s faith as righteousness. This clues us into why people like Noah are considered righteous even though we see that man’s heart is broken. They believe the promise of the seed of the woman who will slay the serpent. And God is narrowing his promise when he covenants with Abraham to bless the nations through his offspring or seed. The serpent slayer will be a child of Abraham, and he will be a blessing to the nations.

The OT’s definition of righteousness can be surprising to many. Many see the OT way to salvation as observance to the law of Moses, but this is not the case. It is by faith in the promises of God. Romans 4:1–3 assures us that this interpretation is correct, “What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’” Faith, not works, is and has always been the basis of justification. However, it is important to note that belief and obedience are closely related throughout Scripture. Belief is counted as righteousness, but that belief is always accompanied by a heart that is motivated towards obedience by the grace and mercy received. Thus obedience is the fruit (or result) of a life of faith. Faith, not works, is counted as righteousness. Obedience flows out of this faith. Obedience can be thought of as living out the identity God gives us because of our faith. We will look at this more in our discussion of the New Testament.

Just as we would expect from our knowledge of humanity, Abraham and his descendants continue to exhibit evidence of heart problems. Throughout the rest of the OT, they lie, they cheat, they sleep around, they murder. They are thoroughly broken. They will never make themselves pure. Even the best choose themselves over God. It is important that we see salvation as something completely out of the reach of humanity. But more importantly, God steps in and provides salvation to those who are willing to repent. God is faithful despite failures. He continues to pursue his people. He continues to offer forgiveness and mercy to those who will respond in belief to his promises.

## **The Exodus and The Law**

A few generations down the road from Abraham, we find that his family (the Hebrews or the people of Israel) has grown large, but they are enslaved to the Egyptians. It is important to note that this is predicted in Genesis 15:13, a fact that should only further confirm the sovereignty of God in our minds. Things are not good. Not only are they oppressed, but their numbers intimidate Pharaoh, and he decrees that every Hebrew male child born be killed by being cast into the Nile (Exodus 1:22). But one woman, in an effort to save her baby son, places him in a basket and floats him down the same river. The daughter of Pharaoh finds the child and raises him as her own. This man is Moses. He will lead Israel in the exodus, a climatic moment in history where God delivers Israel from Egypt and establishes them as a nation. This will be the moment by which OT believers remember the faithfulness of God and becomes the bedrock for their hope of future deliverance.

The story of Exodus shows the power of God. He uses the deliverance of Israel to tell a story that will be repeated over and over again. A man will bring a broken people out of the bonds of slavery and into a Promised Land. The story of Moses will set the trajectory for the greater redemption story where Christ comes to save his people from sin and death and restore them and the world to their intended place. Moses, through the power of God, pleads with Pharaoh to let his people go. God sends ten plagues, each proving his power over the gods of Egypt and the last of which costs the Egyptians that which they took from the Israelites: their firstborn sons. Israel is spared this fate through what becomes known as the Passover. God calls each house to sacrifice a lamb and paint its blood on the door posts. They are to then eat a special meal that becomes known as the Passover meal. That night as the angel of the Lord is putting the firstborn to death, he passes over the houses that believe God and act on his commandment to sacrifice the lamb, resulting in the sparing of their firstborn sons. This final plague convinces Pharaoh to release Israel.

Despite the miraculous ways God delivers them from Egypt, including the crossing of the Red Sea, they again choose fear rather than trust him. God leads them on the way to Promised Land in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of

fire by night. He feeds them manna that miraculously appears on the ground. He gives them water from a rock when they have nothing to drink, and still they grumble against him.

Finally, they come to a place called Mount Sinai and something amazing happens. God makes a covenant (probably the best way to understand a covenant is a promise that is marked by loyal relationship) with Israel that they will be his people if they will obey what he calls them to do. That sounds good to them and so they say they will. Moses then goes up the mountain to meet with God and before he can come back down, they have already failed. They make an idol and begin worshiping it. The only thing that keeps God from destroying them is his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Eventually, they move on. God leads them on towards the Promised Land (Canaan), and he continues to provide for them on the way. As they near the land, they send out twelve spies to investigate. It is a rich land but also one filled with powerful people. Ten of the twelve spies report that they do not believe they can take the land. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, disagree and urge the people to trust God. Instead, they doubt his promise and try to stone Joshua and Caleb, rebelling against God. God intervenes and is again on the verge of destroying Israel. Only his promise stays his hand. The consequence for their actions? None of this unbelieving generation will get to enter the Promised Land. All but Joshua and Caleb will die in the wilderness as Israel is made to wander in it for the next 40 years.

This includes Moses. He is like Noah in that he appears to be the one who will bring about the promises of God, but despite his great faithfulness, he too sins in ways that show us he too is broken and in need of God's intervention. This is never more evident than when he strikes the rock at Meribah in disbelief and frustration, and God says to him, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them" (Numbers 20:12). Even the great prophet Moses falls short of God's perfect standard and is lost apart from God's intervention.

It is amazing that God continues to provide for Israel even as they wander through the desert. But the message is clear – disobedience displays a lack of belief in the promises of God, resulting in wandering through the desert rather than entering into the Promised Land (an image that will later represent entering into the rest of God). As the 40 years come to a close, Moses gives some last instructions to the Israelites before he dies, and they enter into the land without him.

In Deuteronomy 28–29, Moses reminds them of the covenant they have made with God. If they believe in him and his promises as demonstrated by their obedience, he will bless them in all kinds of ways. If they disobey, they will experience curses, most notably they will face exile at the hands of their enemies. Deuteronomy 30:15 sums it up this way, "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil." But Deuteronomy 30 also lets us know what is going to happen. They are going to disobey and go into exile. They are going to do exactly what everyone before them has done. They are going to choose to disobey God and die, and here we are clued in as to why: they have uncircumcised hearts. They can't love God how they are supposed to because their hearts are infected with sin and must be made new. This is also called a "heart of stone" (Ezekiel 36:26). But there is hope. There will be a day that God intervenes. Deuteronomy 30:6 says, "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." God is doing something on the behalf of his people that they cannot do for themselves: change their very hearts.

This echoes what we see in Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 12:1–2. God is at work to bring about salvation for his people, and we are seeing his plan slowly unfold. It is something he must do on our behalf. God will send a seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. He will be from the line of Abraham, and he will be a blessing to the nations. Genesis 15:6 assures us that those who are considered righteous are those who believe the promises of God. These believers will be the ones whose hearts have been circumcised so they will love God with all their hearts and souls that they may live (Deuteronomy 30:6).

Despite the warning, the prediction of Deuteronomy 30 comes true. Upon entering the Promised Land, Israel's obedience quickly wavers. Numerous accounts like Joshua 7 show the Israelites disobeying God thinking they know better than him about what will make them happy. At times, they keep things for themselves they were told not to; other times, they are fearful. They do not completely conquer the land. Judges records in great detail a people who are quick to forget God. He intervenes to save them over and over again, sending judges to help, but they continue to fall into unbelief and disobedience. Judges is summed up with its last verse, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

## **Kingdoms, Prophets, and Exile**

At this point, God allows Israel an earthly king. A man of kingly stature named Saul receives the crown. However, despite his appearance, it quickly becomes apparent that his life does not match up. He becomes murderously jealous of a young man named David that God chooses to replace him as king (remember disobedience illustrates a lack of belief). David is a man specifically chosen by God. He is from the tribe of Judah. We didn't talk about this, but in

Genesis 49:10, Jacob, a descendant of Abraham, declares that Judah, or more literally an offspring of Judah, will rule forever. All peoples will obey him, and the kingdom will be so wealthy he can tie his foal to the choice vine and wash his garments in wine. These are Messianic descriptors, meaning that these things describe the Messiah, the one God is sending to set things right, and the Messianic Kingdom he will usher in. This is important now because it hints to the meaning of the promises of God given here.

The serpent slayer will be a seed of the woman (a human), a seed of Abraham, from the tribe of Judah, and as we will see, a son of David (meaning in the lineage of David). David seems to be the next contender for the position of serpent slayer. God handpicks him. As a boy, he slays the giant Goliath when all of Israel trembles before him. He is patient and merciful to Saul despite Saul's murderous intentions towards him. He is even called a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). But we will see that he too is broken, most notably in his sin with Bathsheba. He will sleep with her, a married woman, and then have her husband killed to cover his sin. Again, the Bible clearly illustrates even the best of men have hearts that are deeply flawed. David is not the Messiah. But he does receive a promise from God that focuses the expectations of deliverance. God promises David, "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). One from the line of David will rule forever as the Messianic King. This Kingdom will be described in further detail in the prophets, but the gist is that it will be an everlasting kingdom marked by righteousness and justice: the two major concerns of God's law.

After David dies, his son Solomon begins his rule. His rule, like his father's, starts out promising. He asks God for wisdom and receives it. He writes much of the wisdom literature in Scripture (Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and much of Proverbs). He is successful in his reign. The nations come to meet him and pay tribute. In some ways, he is a picture of what the Messianic King might look like, but he is as fallen as the rest. He lets his numerous wives lead his heart after idols rather than stay true to God.

The rest of the accounts of the kings of Israel are much like this. Most are outright rebellious. Some make a call for renewed faithfulness, but the trend is towards disobedience. As a result, God does just what he said he was going to do. The people choose disobedience and in doing so, they choose the curse (Deut. 30:15-20).

This leads to disaster for Israel. Under Solomon's son, the kingdom of Israel is split into two kingdoms: Israel in the North, and Judah in the South. The kingdom of Israel is conquered by the Assyrians and carried off into exile. The same happens to the kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians. At this point, the question is how one in the line of David will sit on the throne forever and set things right if there is no throne in Israel? But we must remember that during the periods of the kings and now in the exile, prophets are sent to tell the Jewish people they are about to be punished and then while in exile why they are being punished. They have disobeyed God and are experiencing the curse Moses discussed in Deuteronomy 29. But that is not the end of the story. They are also reminded of who God is, how he is faithful to his promises, how he is merciful, how he has redeemed them in the past, and how they can expect him to do so again. And he will do so in a way that will address the problem they have been unable to address themselves. He will give them new hearts.

There are many clarifications of the promises of God in the prophets. In our brief overview it is important to see that there will be a Messianic (anointed one, promised deliverer) King from the line of David (Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-5) and yet greater than David (Psalm 110:1), who in some way is like a son of man and yet who seems to share in the divinity and authority of God (Daniel 7:13-14), who will suffer for the sins of others (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) and yet will rule forever in righteousness and justice over a world that has been freed from sin and its curse (Isaiah 11:1-9). This king will not only save Israel but will bring salvation to the nations (Isaiah 49:6). We see that the members of this new kingdom will have a new covenant with God in which he will write his law on their hearts and mind (Jeremiah 31:31-34), meaning he will make them into the kind of people with hearts that are able to love follow him. There is more than we can discuss in this short overview, but it is important to see the expectation of redemption and salvation that exists because of the promises of God revolving around the seed of the woman as declared by the prophets throughout the exile.

This is where the OT ends, with the expectation of a Messiah, a serpent-slayer from the line of David who will be a blessing to the nations, who will provide forgiveness of sins, conquer death, and rule eternally with righteousness and justice. However, as they trickle back from exile and are allowed to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, no one thinks that this new kingdom has come. Israel languishes, waiting for its promised deliverer, and they will do so for 400 years. The question for Israel is, "When will this Messiah come?"

## **The Messiah**

This is the context for the coming of Jesus—a once perfect world broken by an act of rebellion by the very ones created to be caretakers of it. This rebellion has led to broken fellowship with the creator, humanity's enslavement to sin, suffering caused by evil, and ultimately death. Hope seems distant, but deliverance is coming in a most unexpected way.

It is important to note that the NT writers see the coming of Jesus and his preaching of the dawning kingdom of God as the fulfillment of the OT Scripture and its promises. This is why Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus connecting him to Abraham (Matthew 1:1-17), Luke records a genealogy connecting him all the way back to Adam (Luke 3:23-38), and all of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) make frequent use of OT quotes and allusions to confirm Jesus as the promised Messianic King. They believe God's promises in the OT and see them fulfilled in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Although there are plenty of examples of God choosing people of low station to fulfill his purposes, the typical Jewish expectation for the Messiah was one who would come in political power. That is not how Jesus comes. He comes from humble beginnings. When he starts his ministry he chooses twelve men to invest in. He doesn't choose the best and brightest; he chooses fishermen and a tax collector. But as he begins to minister, it becomes clear that Jesus is different. He heals people; he casts out demons; he shows his authority over nature; and he miraculously provides sustenance. He amazes the crowds as he teaches as one with more authority than they have never seen. He forgives sins; he overturns the temple; he explains how they have misunderstood the teachings of the OT. He claims to be the fulfillment of OT, the way to the Father, the living water, the light of the world. But most amazing of all, he claims to be the Son of God: one with God the Father. That is what all his teachings and miracles are pointing towards. The Messiah (or Christ as he is called in the NT) has come and his miracles are showing the dawning of the new kingdom promised in the OT. But the Jewish leaders are skeptical, which is unsurprising as it threatens their positions of power, and they begin to plot to kill Jesus.

Jesus' teachings are surprising. He teaches an upside-down economy for the new kingdom he is ushering in. The meek will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). You must love your enemies (Matt. 5:43-48). You must store up your treasure in heaven, not on earth (Matt. 6:19-21). Those who want to follow him must expect to be hated and persecuted (Matt. 10:16-25). Those who are like children will be the greatest in the kingdom (Matt. 18:3-4). Those who desire to be great must serve (Matt. 23:11-12). Earthly riches make entering into the kingdom difficult (Matt. 19:23-24). Those who wish to keep their lives must lose it (Matt. 16:24-27). Then Jesus shows what he means by all of this by serving us in a way that we could never repay. He does something for us that we could never do for ourselves. He pays the penalty for our sins. The greatest among us, the very Son of God, serves a world that has been rebelling against him since the beginning of time and takes our sins upon his shoulders. He takes our penalty for our sins—death. The God of the universe becomes the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:5, "...he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed." And because he is perfect, because he is sinless, because he is the Son of God, he rises again from the grave (Matt. 28:1-10). Jesus—the seed of the woman, the blessing to the nations, the Davidic king, the suffering servant, the Son of God—has fulfilled the promise of God. He crushes the head of the serpent. He defeats sin and death and inaugurates the new kingdom.

## **Our Place in the Story**

This is where you and I find ourselves in the story. Sin and death have been defeated, and we are offered a choice. Will we trust Jesus and his work on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins or will we trust in ourselves and our works? At first the answer seems easy. But Jesus calls us to count the cost of following him. He is coming back to set all things right, but until he does, we are to be sharing his story so that others might be saved. And what the Bible tells us is that many will reject him and in so doing reject and persecute us. Belief in him will mean hatred by the world. The call to follow Jesus is the call to forget about temporary, earthly gain and to pursue Jesus and his coming kingdom. It is the call to be willing, like Jesus, to suffer injustice. It is the call to share the gospel with those who are still dead in their sin so that they too can know God. We will find that we are exiles in this world, that we don't really belong, but we will also find that the temporary cost will be eternally worth it (Matt. 13:44-46). Luke 9:23-25 says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" We will all die. But Jesus tells us that a temporary life surrendered to him will result in salvation and eternal life with him in his new kingdom.

Revelation 21:1-4 says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'" This is just a small glimpse into what God has in store for those who accept what Jesus has done on their behalf, who believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God. While we await his return, we are called to live in such a way that we demonstrate our belief, particularly in our proclamation of the gospel of Jesus to those who do not know him.

In short, we respond to the story of Scripture by knowing Jesus and making him known.

**Questions to ask when reading Scripture:**

1. What is the author's main point in this section of Scripture?
2. Where does what I'm reading fit in the overall story of the Bible? (i.e. before or after the Exodus from Egypt; before or after Jesus; before or after the resurrection, etc.)
3. What does it mean for those who were the original audience?
4. What does it mean for me today?
5. How should I change in response to this Scripture?

**A Few Resources for Understanding the Story of Scripture**

**For Small Children:**

*The Biggest Story* by Kevin DeYoung

*The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name* by Sally Lloyd-Jones

*The Big Picture Story Bible* by David Helm

*The Garden, the Curtain, and the Cross* by Carl Laferton

thebibleproject.com

New City Catechism (Available as a book or for free as an app on both iOS and Android)

**For Youth and Adults**

thebibleproject.com

*The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses* by Chris Bruno

*Multiply* by Francis Chan

**For a More In-depth Look**

*The Servant King: The Bible's Portrait of the Messiah* by T.D. Alexander

*Old Testament Survey* by Paul House and Eric Mitchell

*God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* by James M. Hamilton, Jr.





## Week 1

### Deuteronomy Overview

By Harvey Edwards, IV

#### Introduction

Deuteronomy was written by Moses and is the fifth and final book of the Pentateuch. It finishes Moses' history of Israel which began in Genesis with God's creation and ends with Israel preparing to take possession of the land God promised them through Abraham.

As always, we should be reminded that the Bible is meant to be read in concert with itself. Deuteronomy is the next step in the story of God rescuing a people for himself from sin and death. After the fall in Genesis, God begins his plan for salvation from sin. This plan includes a man named Abraham. God chose to bless Abraham so that he might bless the nations through him and his offspring. God promised Abraham that he would give him the land he would show him, but first his descendants would be slaves for four hundred years. Then, in keeping with his promises, God delivered Abraham's offspring in the exodus from slavery in Egypt and established them as his people—the nation of Israel—through the Mosaic Covenant on Mount Sinai. But despite God's rescue of his people and his provision for them, when he brings them to the edge of the Promised Land the first time, they are too afraid to enter and are therefore forced to wander for forty years in the desert until that generation has passed.

Deuteronomy is an account of Moses preparing Israel to take possession of the Promised Land. Moses is the prophet of God, mediating the words of God as he renews his covenant with this new generation. The book begins with a reminder that Israel has been wandering for forty years in the wilderness because they doubted the goodness of God. But despite their unbelief, God keeps his promises to Israel. God is faithful. Even in the wilderness he protected and provided for them, and now they are to take possession of the land just as the Lord promised their forefathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Israel's doubt and the consequences of their disobedience are recounted in order to remind Israel of the importance of their obedience. Their obedience is a literal matter of life and death. At the end of Deuteronomy, Moses will say,

<sup>15</sup>“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. <sup>16</sup>If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>17</sup>But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup>I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. <sup>19</sup>I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, <sup>20</sup>loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them” (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

There is blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. There is a direct connection between action and consequence. Because of this, it might be easy for us to get distracted by thinking that Deuteronomy is mainly about rules and regulations. When we read it this way, it becomes incredibly confusing. Much of what we read in Deuteronomy will sound foreign to us. We may feel overwhelmed by the number of instructions God gives his people. We may not be able to deduce why Israel is allowed to eat or wear certain things while being forbidden other things. Some regulations may appear arbitrary to us, at least as people far removed from an ancient Near East context. But a few things will help us as we read through the book.

Deuteronomy is about God's covenant with his people—it is about relationship. The creator of the universe has chosen to enter into relationship with a people who have rebelled against him. There are many “why” questions that we will be unable to answer about this relationship because we are unable to comprehend the mind of God (like why God chose Israel instead of another people, or why he places certain stipulations on his people, etc.), but there are plenty of things we can understand. God is revealing something of his character, his faithfulness, his holiness, his justice, his mercy, and his sovereignty. He is demonstrating the universal nature of what it means to be in relationship with him—he is the God of every part of our lives. And he is demonstrating the necessity of a response to the relationship that he has initiated. God initiates and enables relationship, but there is a response required. Israel is to respond through covenant faithfulness.

The covenant stipulations are about responding to the relationship God has initiated with Israel. This is why it begins with a recounting of what God has done for them. It is why so many of the regulations point directly towards

honoring God, and the others point to honoring God through how people relate to one another. The covenant is about how Israel is to move into this land of blessing and live in such a way that they remember that this provision is all God's grace to them. They demonstrate their faith and their love by responding to God with obedience.

While there is much to be learned in considering why God calls his people to certain standards (think how Paul applies Deuteronomy 25:4 in 1 Corinthians 9:9 to show us God's concern even for the ox and therefore his concern for those who are ministers of the gospel), the point of Deuteronomy will be missed if we fail to see that Israel's physical history is part of how God is working out salvation for all of God's people. God reveals something of his character and something of his purposes, but we see something about humanity as well. Even God's chosen people—those who have seen God powerfully work for them and provide for them, who have been told exactly what they need to do to be right with God, who have been given direct promises of blessing and curse for obedience and disobedience—even these people share the problem we all have. We have hearts that are inherently sinful. Like all of us, Israel is in need of something only God can do: they need to be changed, or as Moses says in Deuteronomy 30:6, their hearts must be circumcised so that they can follow the Lord. We are all totally dependent on God's grace to be able to live in relationship with the Lord. Later biblical authors, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, will expound on what this will look like. For instance, in Jeremiah 31:31-34, Jeremiah says that God will make a new covenant with his people because they were unable to keep covenant with him. In this new covenant, God writes his law on his people's hearts such that they will be a people who can and will follow him.

In the New Testament, Paul demonstrates the necessity of God's enabling us to live in relationship with him. In Galatians, Paul shows us that salvation is only available through faith in Jesus. His death paid the penalty for our sin, and he rose again to give us new life. He poured his Spirit out on us to change us and to make us into a people who can live rightly with him. This is impossible apart from Jesus. Paul uses the standard of Deuteronomy to point to our desperate need for Jesus. In Galatians 3:10, he quotes Deuteronomy 27:26, saying, “<sup>10</sup> For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’” None of us could keep this standard, and if we try to depend on the law, we stand cursed. But Paul shows us that Deuteronomy also points towards what God has always been at work doing—providing a way for sinners to be restored to him through Jesus. Galatians 3:13-14 say, “<sup>13</sup> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’—<sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.” Deuteronomy 21:23 tells us the curse for any sin punishable by death is to be hung on a tree. Paul tells us that in dying on the cross, Jesus took our curse upon himself, so that by faith in him we might be set free.

Like all of Scripture, Deuteronomy is pointing us towards Jesus. Deuteronomy tells us of the holiness of God and the goodness of his ways. It warns us of the nature of sin and the disastrous consequences of it. Deuteronomy lays out the filter by which we are to see the world so that we see the holiness of God, the goodness of his ways, and our desperate need for heart change. This then highlights the undeserved grace of God to those who belong to him. When we see this, we should respond in faith, love, and obedience to the God who has graciously rescued his people from sin and death.

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### Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

### Passage Specific Questions

1. Why is it important to remember that the covenant God is reaffirming with Israel in the book of Deuteronomy is based on his relationship to them?
2. Read Galatians 3:10-14. What does Paul mean when he alludes to Deuteronomy 27:26, saying, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them”? How does this relate to Galatians 3:13-14?
3. In Deuteronomy 30:6, Moses says, “<sup>6</sup> And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.” What is a circumcised heart, and how will that allow his people to love God?

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### The Main Point

Deuteronomy prepares us to understand the holiness of God, our need for mercy and heart change, and our need for the kind of king that only Jesus can be.

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**A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- Galatians 3:10-29 – Paul discusses the interaction of the law and what Jesus accomplished through his death on the cross.
- Deuteronomy 30:1-8 – Moses predicts Israel’s rebellion and points to their need for God to change their hearts.
- Jeremiah 31:31-34 – Jeremiah looks forward to the day that God will change his people’s hearts.

## Week 2

### Deuteronomy 1:1-46 – Recounting Israel’s Doubt

By Harvey Edwards, III

#### Introduction

If you grew up in the South when I did, you might not have ever been disciplined by having to go to “time-out.” In fact, I don’t think I even heard of the term as a child. In my time, the favored technique for punishing significant disobedience was basic, corporal punishment—intensely painful, mercifully brief. It was usually administered by parents (hopefully Mom, not Dad), but it was also freely practiced by school officials, and even the occasional babysitter, and nobody seemed to have any problem with that.

How effective it was as a stand-alone disciplinary tool is arguable, my own experience suggesting not very, since a regular Sunday afternoon belting for both my brother and me was the usual in our household. After three hours of Sunday School and church, and an additional hour or more of lunch with the family (including slow-chewing grandparents), my brother and I could not get through making our beds and hanging up our Sunday clothes without taking a break to enjoy a friendly wrestling match/fist-fight. We were well aware that our nap-craving Dad had a hair-trigger with the belt on Sunday afternoons, but no matter, it was always the same—the noise level rising to the critical degree, the door bursting open, my Dad yanking his belt out as though drawing a sword, our desperate appeals for a fair hearing being wholly disregarded, the lashes being sharply applied, and then his leaving—without a word—as suddenly as he appeared. Following which our two older sisters would incredulously reproach us for being so bone-headed that we couldn’t remember that the exact same thing had happened the previous Sunday afternoon (and the one before that, and the one before that).

The discipline stung, as most forms of discipline do, but sadly our obedience was not much improved. Looking back as a mature adult, I can guess why. My father successfully trained a lot of hunting dogs, utilizing only consistent application of simple rewards and punishments, no talking necessary. With the dogs, it worked really well. But even at our young ages, my brother and I were more complex than those dogs. We were created with the capacity to reason and make moral decisions. How much more effective might our punishment have been if only we had been challenged at the end of it to think seriously through a few simple questions? What mistakes did I make? How did they affect me and others? How might I make better choices going forward? This is the usual protocol I observe being practiced by my own children at the conclusion of their children’s time-outs, and I commend them for it. My well-intentioned Dad was a loving father, an excellent provider, and certainly consistent, and that went a long way. But his abrupt departures at the conclusion of the discipline “without a word” seems to me to have been a mistake.

As we begin our study of Deuteronomy, the people of God are concluding their own painful, forty-year time-out of wandering in the wilderness outside the Promised Land, and as the next generation nears the time of a second try at entering it, our all-wise Heavenly Father has plenty to say to them. Let’s consider his words, and as we do, think about what lessons they might contain for us.

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#### Read Deuteronomy 1:1-46 together

#### Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

#### Passage Specific Questions

1. What mistakes did the original Israelite generation make? Is there an instance you can recall of making one or more of the same mistakes?
2. How did the mistakes of the Israelites affect them? How did it affect others? How have mistakes you’ve committed affected yourself and others?
3. How might the Israelites improve their situation going forward? How might we use their story to help us move forward positively after an error?
4. How do you understand the concept of the corporate responsibility of a church? Consider this in regard to disciplining persistently sinful behavior, or countering propagation of erroneous doctrine, or practicing discernment in choosing leaders.

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## Commentary

### Deuteronomy 1:1-8

As this chapter begins, the nation's forty year timeout is nearing its end and the post-punishment sermon of Moses commences. The recorder of the sermon sets it all up with very specific and important details. First, we are told that the words that follow were given expressly to Moses by the Lord. Through Moses, it is none other than the Lord who is speaking to "all Israel," and the implication is that when the Lord speaks, people should listen. We are next given the exact date of the sermon—on the first day, of the eleventh month, of the fortieth year of the nation's wandering in the wilderness outside the Promised Land. And finally, we are given the location of the sermon—on the east side of the Jordan River, in the Arabah, which is the name for the lowlands extending all the way from the Sea of Galilee to below the Dead Sea. We learn from Numbers that the Lord has recently fought to gain this favorable ground for Israel, driving out the local pagan kings Sihon and Og, and perfectly situating Israel just across the Jordan from the planned invasion point at Jericho. This is indeed an auspicious location for post-punishment exhortation.

Seemingly out of place in this section is the curious notation that it is only an eleven day journey from Horeb, where the commandment to invade was originally given, to Kadesh-barnea, the oasis on the edge of the Promised Land where forty years earlier the commandment was disobeyed. Interesting fact, but what's the point? The Israelites are not there now, so why reference this distance? It seems likely that this oddly placed notation of the relatively short distance from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea is meant to drive home to the Israelites an important point: What should have taken you eleven days if you had trusted and obeyed the Lord has instead taken you forty years! Instead of thriving in the fruitful Land of Promise, you have wasted the best years of an entire generation, wandering and barely subsisting in a wild and hostile desert. Consider that!

Moses then goes on to remind the people of exactly what the Lord had instructed their parents to do 40 years earlier. They were to have left Horeb and gone directly out into the land of Canaan, trusting the Lord to enable them to possess it. He describes the vast limits of this land promised to them (a promise as yet unfulfilled) and then seeks to bolster their confidence in his faithfulness by reminding them of a promise that has already been miraculously kept: Their spiritual father Abraham, childless with his barren wife Sarah into their nineties, did indeed in accordance with the Lord's promise give rise to this nation of millions. To drive the point home further, he recalls that even as Israel emerged from hundreds of years of harsh captivity in Egypt, they were "as numerous as the stars of heaven," requiring the appointment of scores of commanders and judges to administer justice for the nation. And he reminds them of the charge they were given to judge faithfully and fairly, without partiality or fear, because they judged on behalf of the Lord. They should not forget that these requirements remain in place in all that they do, as the character of the Lord never changes.

Has anyone been taking any sermon notes so far? If not, take a glance at what I've teased out, though what strikes you about Moses's sermon may well look different:

1. The Lord disciplines those who rebel against him.
2. To disobey the Lord's command is a fruitless and wasteful enterprise.
3. Our God gives second chances and is gracious to forgive and restore.
4. The Lord makes provision for our future success (as in driving out Sihon and Og).
5. The Lord has always kept his promises in the past and can be trusted to do so in the future.
6. In all our assigned tasks, we are ultimately answerable to the Lord.

### Deuteronomy 1:9-33

In this section, the writer has laid out for us the time course of the commandment of the Lord to go up and possess the land, as well as the way in which the Israelites responded to it. First, we learn that though the journey from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea was relatively brief—11 days—it was not easy. In fact, it is described as a terrifying traverse through the wilderness. This experience immediately preceding the inauguration of the planned military campaign was clearly unsettling to the Israelites, notwithstanding that the Lord had already miraculously delivered them with great signs and wonders from captivity in Egypt. The Lord sought to settle them, telling them through Moses, "Do not fear or be dismayed." But they remained apprehensive, and took no immediate action when the command to go up and take the Promised Land was issued.

Instead, a reasonable-sounding idea was advanced to study the issue further. They proposed to Moses that they should choose twelve men to spy out the land before launching the invasion, and thinking it wise, he agreed. In Numbers 13:1-2, this idea to first spy out the land is represented as a directive given by the Lord, but in the Deuteronomy sermon,

Moses presents it as though it originated with the people and was merely acceded to by the Lord and himself. In any case, though such a mission could potentially have been helpful to the invasion, it turns out not to have served that purpose well. The spies were able to confirm that the land was indeed good and fertile, with abundant fruit; but rather than being spurred by this good report to move forward, ten of the twelve spies became fixated on the barriers to success they witnessed while on the trip. They noted the great cities, “fortified up to heaven.” They were intimidated by the large stature of some of the inhabitants they would have to fight, known as the “sons of Anakim,” probable ancestors of the later character we know as Goliath. And as they circulated their anxieties among the people, there arose a “murmur” in their tents, accelerating even to the point of accusing the Lord of hating them, of bringing them out of Egypt only so that he could have them destroyed by the Amorites.

Moses sharply condemns this unwarranted slander, and as he delivers his sermon to the current audience—a generation removed—he even accuses them of sharing in this sin of unbelief and rebellion. Making repeated use of the word *you* rather than *they*, he says, “*you* did not believe the Lord *your* God, who went before *you* to seek *you* out a place to pitch *your* tents, in fire by night and in the cloud by day, to show *you* by what way *you* should go.” Though those listening were not the chief decision makers at the time of the rebellion, all being younger than twenty, Moses declines to hold them completely innocent. Perhaps there was some role they might have played in standing up for obedience, even if in their relative powerlessness they might not have carried the day? It would certainly be interesting to know the minds of these children of that earlier generation, who stood thusly accused of the sins committed primarily by their parents.

So, from this section, a few more of my sermon notes:

7. The Lord’s previous provision in times of trouble should be remembered and give us confidence for both the present and the future.
8. Immediate obedience upon receiving clear instruction from the Lord is always preferable to delayed obedience.
9. It is a grave sin to disbelieve in God’s goodness and love for us, and especially to accuse him of hating us so that we can justify our rebelliousness.
10. There does exist such a thing as corporate culpability. A body of people that behaves rightly or wrongly does so according to the accumulated actions and inactions of its individual members. Therefore, whatever level of power we might individually have within a group, none of us is ever relieved of the burden to speak up boldly for the right.

### **Deuteronomy 1:34-46**

And now we see the Lord’s response to this unwarranted mistrust, fallacious accusation, and rebellious disobedience: Wrath—mighty, dreadful, righteous, and consequential! Though Moses does not review the whole story in this account, we learn from Numbers 14:11 that the Lord burns with anger and even threatens to strike down the entire nation with a pestilence, disinherit them, and make of Moses a new nation “greater and mightier than they.” But following a passionate appeal by Moses for the Lord to pardon the people for the sake of his own name, the Lord relents. The punishment is softened considerably, though not entirely canceled, as the Lord swears that none of this generation, except Joshua and Caleb, will ever see the Promised Land. Instead, the people are condemned to wander in the wilderness until their deaths. This sentence even applies to the great law-giver Moses, who has served God and his people faithfully, but who, being a representative of the Law, has ultimately failed in his commission to lead his nation into the Promised Land. He is to be replaced by Joshua, a type foreshadowing Jesus, who will lead the new generation to engage the battle, win the victory, and take possession. And knowing how great a burden will be placed on Joshua’s shoulders, Moses charges the chastened nation to begin their encouragement of Joshua even now, as their time of wandering is about to begin. Still speaking for the Lord, he commands the Israelites to turn away from the Promised Land and proceed through the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea.

Foolishly still thinking they know best, and seeking to gain clemency from their sentence, the Israelites belatedly fasten on their weapons with the intention of going up into the hill country now to fight the Amorites as previously commanded. But it’s too late. The opportunity given by the Lord has passed, and his sovereign timing is not subject to adjustment by the whims of men. He mercifully informs the Israelites through Moses that they should not go up, as he will not be in their midst fighting for them. When they “presumptuously” go up and attack the Amorites anyway, the results are as disastrous as might be predicted. As Moses tells it, they are soundly defeated and then chased by the Amorites “as bees do” all the way back to Mount Sinai. Thus defeated and discouraged, they settle in that general region and begin their forty-year sentence of wandering.

Concluding sermon notes:

11. Disobedience always carries consequences.

12. Even though we may mistrust God and incur his wrath, he always keeps his covenants and remains merciful to his own.
  13. Spiritual leadership entails bearing heavy burdens. We should pray for and encourage those who lead us.
  14. Belated obedience is sometimes just another form of disobedience. When God calls us to action, his timing is always the best timing.
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### **The Main Point**

The Lord has convincingly demonstrated in countless ways his power, love, and complete trustworthiness. He has promised much, and has kept every promise. Unlike the Israelites, we are blessed to live under the New Covenant inaugurated by the resurrection of Jesus, with our sins forgiven, our futures secure, and our hearts softened and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This enables us to love, trust, and obey our loving Father and to boldly follow him wherever he leads.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- Numbers 13 and 14 – a fuller account of the doubt and rebellion of Israel.
- Genesis 13:14-17 – God promises land and innumerable descendants to Abraham.
- 1 Corinthians 3:1-8, 5:1-6, and Revelation 2 and 3 – churches are rebuked and complimented for their corporate failures and successes.

## Week 3

### Deuteronomy 2:1–3:29 – God Sustains and Protects Israel During the Wandering

By Brandon Wingler

#### Introduction

As a former history teacher and someone who generally enjoys studying history, I've often encountered or been asked the question, "Why do we study history?" Usually this question is paired with some sort of remark about how "history is boring," that historians are "too caught up in the details," or some exclamation wondering, "What is the point of studying these dead people and events from so long ago?" To be fair, I admit that not all history is that interesting, some historians certainly can miss the forest for the trees, and "the point" of studying history can sometimes seem trivial at best. But the study of history is often important for several reasons. We can learn from the past and attempt to avoid repeating mistakes. We can better understand our current culture and historical context by learning about those that came before our time. And we can get an idea of where the future might lead (even if that idea might be a very rough estimate).

In the passage this week, Moses recounts a portion of Israel's history, and in doing so, he accomplished several major tasks. First, his account of Israel's failure to trust God in the wilderness warned the next generation of Israelites not to repeat the errors of their parents. Second, Moses' account of God's faithfulness to Israel reminded them of God's character and his plan of salvation. Third, Moses' illustration of God's faithfulness and sovereignty encouraged the Israelites to trust God and look forward to the fulfillment of his promises. While much of this passage centers on God's promise of the land, God's plan of salvation and promises extend much further than a physical strip of land sandwiched between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. This passage—just a small part of Israel's history—points to the grand story of God's work to redeem a people for himself and to deliver them from the bondage of sin and death into the freedom of eternal life found only in Christ.

As Christians, we look back at Christ's life, death, and resurrection as the fulfillment of God's promise to crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). We look forward to Christ's future return where all things will be made new, and those who believe in him will join together to worship God in the New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 21–22). While we wander in the present and await that day where we can cross into the promised New Heaven and New Earth, we can look to the history recorded in Scripture to see how God has been faithful to deliver his people and fulfill his promises. In doing so, we can learn from the mistakes of those who rebelled, be encouraged by those who believed, and strive to live faithfully in the present by trusting that God is good and he will fulfill his promises, just as he did to Israel long ago.

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#### Read Deuteronomy 2:1–3:29 together

#### Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

#### Passage Specific Questions

1. Moses warned the new generation of Israelites by recounting the errors of those before them. Can you think of some errors you've been warned to avoid in the Christian life?
2. How have you seen God sustain you up to this point? How can God's perfect history of faithfulness to provide and protect for his people encourage you for the challenges ahead?
3. Moses died only getting to glimpse the Promised Land after wandering through the wilderness for the majority of his life. How can we live faithfully in the here and now while we await the day we get to settle into the fullness of God's presence in heaven?
4. Can you think of any desires or requests of yours that God may not have granted? How did you respond?

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#### Commentary

##### Deuteronomy 2:1–25

The first few chapters of Deuteronomy contain select historical recollections of Israel's journey in the wilderness all the way up to the initial stages of entering into the Promised Land. In chapter two, Moses first recalls the time spent at Mount Seir. This territory was part of Edom and was settled by the descendants of Esau back in Genesis 36. Esau was the



brother of Jacob (later renamed Israel), and it's no secret that these two brothers had a rocky relationship and a history of distrust. As Jacob's descendants, the Israelites, approached the Promised Land and entered into the territory of Edom, there was undoubtedly some tension in the air. Yet despite the potential for conflict, God ensured that Israel had their needs met and instructed them to not engage in war with Edom. God granted the descendants of Esau the land of Edom (Deuteronomy 2:4), and he promised Israel its own land as well.

Moses then recalls Israel's journey when they neared the territories of Moab and Ammon which were settled by the descendants of Lot, the nephew of Abraham. God had allocated certain land to Lot's descendants, just like he did to Esau's descendants, and Israel was commanded to only take for themselves the land that God had promised to them. Moab and Ammon had previously been inhabited by various groups of people who were described as giants, and this elicited the fear of the Israelites. God ensured that these groups were dispossessed of their land and that Esau's descendants came into possession of the land. These notes are important since they demonstrate that God ensured Esau's descendants would possess the territory he was allocating to them by dispossessing the land from those who were no longer permitted. By using Moab and Ammon as a model, Israel could be encouraged to trust that God would also carry out his promises to them.

The adult Israelites who sent spies into the Promised Land (Numbers 13) saw the giants in the land, and then feared that they would not be able to fight them and take the land that God had promised them. In Numbers 14, God informed Moses that no one from the adult generation of the Israelites who rebelled in the wilderness would enter in the Promised Land except for Caleb and Joshua, the only spies who trusted that the Lord would help them overcome the inhabitants in the Promised Land. After the last of the rebellious adult generation of Israel had died out, Israel crossed the brook Zered which separated the land of Edom and Moab. The territory of the people of Ammon was nearby, and God continued to instruct Israel to avoid engaging in war and to only set their focus on the land that God had promised to allocate to Israel. Another historical note explains how God cleared the territory of Ammon of the giants, so for yet another time, God's faithfulness and sovereignty are emphasized.

This section concludes with God's command for Israel to continue their journey into the Promised Land and begin to take possession of the land. Just as God delivered the land of Edom to Esau's descendants and the land of Moab and Ammon to Lot's descendants, he promised to deliver the Promised Land to Israel. The lesson for Israel was clear: God is in control of the earth and all that is within it, and he will fulfill his promises and accomplish his purposes.

## **Deuteronomy 2:26–3:22**

Moses proceeds to recall how God sovereignly orchestrated the events of history to enable Israel to begin its conquest of the Promised Land. Moses sent messengers to King Sihon of Heshbon, offering terms of peace and requesting to proceed through the land he claimed just like Israel had already proceeded through Edom, Moab, and Ammon. Moses is clear to remark that Israel is proceeding to the land that God has promised for them. Yet Sihon denied this request, and Scripture informs us that God hardened Sihon's heart, just like he did to Pharaoh in the Exodus account (Exodus 7:3; see also Week 9 in Exodus: Part I of the Anchor Church Community Group Guide for further discussion on God's sovereignty in the hardening of hearts).<sup>1</sup>

The Israelites continued their conquest by defeating King Og of Bashan and taking possession of the land that God delivered to them. Significantly, King Og is noted to be what was "left of the remnant of the Rephaim," one of the names of the groups of giant individuals living in the land (Deuteronomy 3:11). The historical note in the text further explains that Og's "bed of iron" (possibly his sarcophagus or coffin that was left as a display, much like an artifact in a museum) was approximately 13½ x 6 feet (how about that for a king sized bed?).<sup>2</sup> The point of this information is not simply to provide neat historical details that would make for some interesting (and challenging) Bible trivia; the point is to emphasize God's power and sovereignty and reinforce the truth that God will accomplish his purposes and fulfill his promises.

As the sovereign ruler with supreme authority over his creation, God gave over the land of Sihon and Og to Israel by ensuring their victory in battle. Whereas the previous generation of Israelites feared that "the people are greater and taller" and "the cities are great and fortified up to heaven," the new generation of Israelites found that "there was not a city too high" in their journey into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 2:36; 1:28). Nothing, not even the strongest and mightiest of men, can thwart God's promises or overrule his authority and power.

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<sup>1</sup> Anchor Church, "Study Guides," <https://anchorchurch.us/resources/study-guides>.

<sup>2</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 120.

After conquering the land, Moses allocated portions of the land to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. This was in response to their request to settle in the land as they saw it was suitable for their plentiful livestock (Numbers 32). Moses ensured that the tribes did not stay in their land while the rest of Israel went on to battle to try to possess the rest of the land. Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh agree to settle their families and animals into the land and send fighting-age men with the rest of Israel to aid in the conquest. Moses reminds Joshua, the eventual successor of Moses and military general of Israel for the remainder of the conquest, that the Lord will bring Israel into the land and defeat their enemies, just as he did against Sihon and Og.

### **Deuteronomy 3:23–29**

In these final verses, Moses pleaded with the Lord to allow him to cross into the Promised Land along with the rest of the Israelites. Despite Moses' desire to enter into the land, God denied him his request, remaining consistent with his earlier response to Moses' anger and disobedience in Numbers 20:2-13. Instead, God permitted Moses to gaze upon the land from the mountain, but he could still not enter the land that he had spent the majority of his life leading Israel towards. God instructed Moses to commission Joshua, to encourage him, and to strengthen him as he prepared to lead Israel into the land that God had promised for them.

I can only imagine how Moses must have felt when God denied his request to enter into the land. To spend forty years working towards something and not being able to experience the finished result of that pursuit would be devastating. Yet Moses was at least able to see that the work he had done was not in vain. God would still carry out his plan of salvation and bring Israel into the land he had promised them. And while Moses did not get to enter into the Promised Land in his life, he did get to enter in the fullness of the presence of God after his life. The Promised Land, as great and as desirable as it would have been for Moses and the Israelites, was still only a shadow of the perfect land God has prepared for all his children.

God denies many of the desires of our heart and the requests we bring in prayer. God, in his infinite wisdom and perfect goodness, sees it as good to do so because he knows the big picture while we do not. Although we ought to bring our desires and requests to the Lord in prayer, we should also learn to be content that God may not grant us our desires or requests, and we may never come to fully know why he has chosen to do so. We can, however, request that God's Spirit conform us to the image of his son Jesus so that we may learn to be more content and satisfied that we have God as our Father, and all the blessings and inheritance that comes along with being a child in his family. Although we cannot fully experience the blessings and inheritance in this lifetime, just like Moses could not fully experience the Promised Land in his day, we can join Moses atop the mountain and see from a distance the future fulfillment of God's promises. We can trust that God will deliver us and carry out his plan of salvation to the end, just as he has always done.

### **Aside – Holy War Against the Canaanites**

Few issues in the Old Testament are more controversial than the historical accounts of Israel conquering the various groups of Canaanites in the Promised Land. The scriptural language used is intense. Deuteronomy 20, which contains laws regulating warfare for Israel, says, "In the cities of these people that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction" (Deuteronomy 20:16-17). After conquering Sihon, Moses records, "We captured all his cities at that time and devoted to destruction every city, men, women, and children. We left no survivors" (Deuteronomy 2:34). With such strong and unambiguous language, the question of Israel's actions in war, and God's command for Israel to go to war, naturally arises.

To begin, I think it's important to acknowledge that we simply cannot sufficiently cover this topic in a short commentary. I highly encourage anyone interested in further reflection on this issue to pick up a copy of *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* by Paul Copan.<sup>3</sup> In that book, Copan devotes three chapters to this issue, including a fourth chapter which generally addresses the issue of religion and violence. I also encourage those struggling over this issue to do two things: first, approach God in prayer with your concern and ask for his Spirit to help guide you in your study of this topic. Second, bring your concerns or questions to the elders here at Anchor Church who I know will gladly walk with you in trying to discuss and better understand this issue. Finally, I want to emphasize that although some discussion will follow to try to make sense of this issue, this is still an astonishingly complex topic that requires more space than this commentary can offer.

In Genesis 12:1-7, God called Abraham into covenant relationship with him and promised to bless Abraham and his descendants:

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011).

<sup>1</sup> Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

<sup>4</sup> So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. <sup>5</sup> And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, <sup>6</sup> Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup> Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.”

God promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants, to bless those who bless Abraham, and to curse those who dishonored Abraham. Later, in Genesis 15:13-16, God told Abraham,

“Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup> As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. <sup>16</sup> And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

God told Abraham that his descendants would be “sojourners in a land that is not theirs” and that they would be “afflicted for four hundred years.” After this time, he promised that Abraham's descendants would come back to the land (referring to the land of Canaan).

The Amorites, a people group in the land of Canaan, were not judged for their sinfulness and rebellion against God in Abraham's lifetime. But four hundred years later, Abraham's descendants, Israel, entered into the land promised to them by God and inhabited by the Amorites and other Canaanite people groups. In his self-revelation of his character in Exodus 34:6-7, God told Moses, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.” The Lord had been merciful and patient for several generations, but the time eventually came for God's judgment against the Amorites to be poured out. In doing so, God utilized Israel as his instrument of judgment.

In fulfillment of his promises to Abraham, and in accordance with his character and his rightful authority, the Lord carries out his judgment and establishes the boundaries of the nations. Yet the Lord is also merciful, and his desire is to redeem people and save them from their slavery to sin. The Canaanites, despite their wickedness, were still one of the many “families of the earth” (Genesis 12:3) that could enjoy the same covenantal relationship with God that Abraham and his descendants did if they would only repent and turn from their sin and worship God. Canaanites who repented and trusted God, such as Rahab (Joshua 2; Hebrews 11:31), were spared the judgment of God. Today, we all have the same decision in front of us: Will we repent from our sin and trust in God? If so, we can enjoy covenantal relationship with him and one day enter into his presence in heaven. If not, we will experience judgment for our sin, just as the Canaanites and the rebellious Israelites experienced.

Some additional thoughts concerning this issue:

- Some biblical scholars consider the language in Scripture concerning Israel's conquest, such as “there were no survivors,” to be exaggerated rhetoric consistent with the language of warfare at that time.
- Language concerning Israel's quest to take the Promised Land often talks about “driving out” and “dispossessing” the Canaanites of their land (e.g., Numbers 21:32; Deuteronomy 9:1; 11:23; 18:14; 19:1), which may not require a complete annihilation of the Canaanites.
- Not all the Canaanites were destroyed, as many historical accounts in Scripture in Joshua, Judges, and other books demonstrate.
- The wars against the Canaanites were not ethnic cleansing since they were not motivated by racial hatred but were motivated by Israel's obedience to God's command to take the land that he had promised to give them.
- Negative attitudes toward the Canaanites were based upon their worship of pagan deities and the various practices that came along with such worship (e.g., incest, bestiality, child sacrifice).
- God commanded Israel to show concern for non-Israelites (e.g., Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

There is much more that could and should be said about this issue, but the main point here is that God, as the sovereign Creator and perfect Judge, has the rightful authority to command Israel to carry out his judgment against the Canaanites, and all people have the responsibility to repent from their sin and trust in God who will redeem people from every nation (Revelation 7:9-12).

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### **The Main Point**

God always fulfills his promises and sustains his people. God is sovereign over history and delivers his people from the bondage of sin and death. We may not always get what we desire, but if we trust in God, he will give us exactly what we need.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- Numbers 13:1-14:38 – The account of the spies sent to Canaan, Moses' intercession for the unfaithful Israelites, and God's judgment upon the unfaithful Israelites.
- Numbers 21:21-35 – Israel's defeat of King Sihon and King Og.
- Numbers 32 – The allocation of land to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

## Week 4

### Deuteronomy 4 – Keep Your Soul Diligently

By Michael Green

#### Introduction

I spend a lot of time these days thinking about my kids leaving the house, taking their first steps into adulthood. I have a senior in high school preparing to graduate, and we're currently dwelling in the book of Proverbs as a family. Many proverbs counsel children to remember their father's teaching (e.g. Proverbs 6:20-22). They should tuck away the things their mother told them. They should not forget the instruction that they were given in their household as they become adults. That teaching will guard them. Now we all know that that's not necessarily true in every household, but in a household where the children have been taught to love Christ, where the gospel has been shared, and where the Bible has been central, children should guard that teaching with all their might. They should remain and abide in what they have learned about Christ. I know that Barb and I have failed many times as parents, but my deepest hope is that our kids were pointed to Christ. And I hope when they leave us, they remain and abide in him. I often tell them that my two greatest hopes for them are that they know and love the Lord, and secondly, that they know him rightly through his book. The rest, I tell them, is just gravy. No matter the future components of their lives, with Christ, they have everything. Without Christ, they have nothing.

Moses has led the Israelites as God's chosen instrument, his hand-appointed deliverer, taking the Israelites out of the bondage of Egypt in a way that only the Lord could orchestrate. And now about 40 years later, they stand on the precipice of a momentous event in redemptive history: entering the land promised to their forefathers (originating in the Abrahamic Covenant). Moses can't go with them. So, he's going to take this opportunity to counsel them to not forget what he has taught them. They need to remember the Lord. Then they need to remember who they are in the Lord. They have a unique relationship with the Lord as God's chosen people. And then remembering those things, they need to live in accordance with his ways as Moses laid out in the law (the Mosaic Covenant) about forty years prior. They need to live set apart in order to glorify God.

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**Read Deuteronomy 4 together.**

#### Study Questions

5. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
6. What does this passage teach me about me?
7. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
8. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

#### Passage Specific Questions

5. What's the purpose(s) of the Law?
6. If believers are saved by grace through faith, what is the impetus for and purpose of obedience in the life of a believer?
7. What is unique about God's relationship with Israel, and how does that relate to modern-day believers?
8. Who is the true Israel and what sets them apart?

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#### Commentary

About forty years have passed since that great moment in redemptive history that now serves as a central metaphor for the Israelites' relationship to the Lord—their exodus out of Egypt—where the Lord delivered them out of bondage in a miraculous way that only he could bring about. Now, they are on the cusp of the next great stage in the fulfillment of the irrevocable promises of the Lord to his chosen people. The Israelites stand ready to enter the land sworn to their forefathers. In Deuteronomy 4, we see that Moses, not able to enter with them, is going to take this opportunity to cast the vision for them as they enter the land. In looking ahead, he first wants them to look backward. He wants to remind them of **(1)** who the Lord is and **(2)** who they are in relation to him. And once they've been reminded of those things, He wants to set the vision for them living as a people set apart to the Lord by reminding them of **(3)** the law given by God forty years prior on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34). They are a people for his own possession, a people that are to live according to his ways, bringing him glory, and making his name great among the peoples of the world.

## **Deuteronomy 4:1-14**

Moses begins with an exhortation for the people to follow the decrees he is about to remind them of when they enter the promised land. Throughout chapter 4, several motivations for obedience to the Lord are articulated. The Israelites should obey the rules given by the Lord “that [they] may live” in the promised land (v. 1). Obedience to the Law will display “wisdom and understanding” to the surrounding people groups (v. 6). Neighboring peoples will see them as a “great nation” (v. 6) and wonder that “a god is so near” the Israelites (v. 7), bringing glory to the only true God. The Israelites will learn to fear the Lord through the Law (v. 10) and pass it down to their children. They should obey because they are in covenant with the Lord (v. 13) and “God is a consuming fire, a jealous God” (v. 24). Falling into idolatry will result in “utterly perish[ing] from the land,” being “utterly destroyed” (v. 26). The Lord delivered them out of Egypt “that [they] might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him” (v.35), and he spoke on the Mount Sinai when he gave the Law that “he might discipline [them]” (v. 36). The Lord has all authority in heaven and earth, and he has prescribed how the Israelites should live in a way that is set apart from the rest of the world. In summary, Moses articulates three primary motivating factors for living according to God’s ways:

- a. The Lord is God, and he chose them in love;
- b. It brings glory to his name; and
- c. It will go well with them.

In our day and time, I think it necessary to point out that these are decrees of the one and only Sovereign. They are laws; they aren’t suggestions. They aren’t accompanied by a comment box for management to take feedback and work to get better. The one true Lord doesn’t need improvement. His ways are the only true and right ways, and he is good. His ways always work for his glory and our good. As such, Moses strictly warns the people of Israel that “nothing should be added to them or subtracted from them” (v. 3). They don’t require improvement; they require obedience. In reminding them about the seriousness of the situation, he harkens back to what happened at Baal of Peor (v. 4). He’s referencing when the Israelites, in their wandering in the wilderness after the exodus, gave themselves over to following false gods, abandoning their covenant with the Lord and making sacrifices to Moabite gods. As a result, a plague killed 24,000 Israelites and the Lord commanded that the chiefs be hung and displayed for all to see as a visible picture of the seriousness of turning away from the Lord and following other gods (Numbers 25:1-9).

The Israelites should diligently work to “keep [their] souls” (v. 9), so that they will remember the one true God, how he met with them on Mount Sinai where “the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom” (v. 11). They heard the very voice of God. Their Creator spoke to them and tailored a set of rules to guide their lives. In a unique moment in time and space, God entered into a covenant with the Israelites alone. And that is special. Moses counsels them to diligently work not to forget that. The Lord setting his love upon them is what sets them apart, for his glory and their good.

## **Deuteronomy 4:15-31**

Prior to reviewing the Ten Commandments with the people, Moses dwells on a sin that seems to undergird most other sins: idolatry. This is probably due to the fact that idolatry is such a root-level sin in the human heart. As such, he reminds the Israelites that they aren’t to serve fake, dead gods. They are to serve the one true living God. The Lord is not like the other gods of the surrounding peoples. Those are fake gods, made by human hands. When they met the living God at Mount Sinai, they “saw no form” (v. 15). Thus, they should not try to represent him using created things. God is not a part of creation. He stands alone as Creator. He is over, above, and outside of creation, the one uncreated being. To try to fashion him using material substance is to immediately demean him and malign his nature. To bring him down to creation is wrong, and, inversely, to elevate creation to a god-like status is equally wrong. So, the Israelites should not make idols based on created things like humans, birds, the moon, the stars, etc. as they dwell in the promised land.

The one true God acts and speaks. To borrow a phrase from Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:2, he is not a “mute idol.” Moses reminds the Israelites that this is the God that delivered them “out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people for his own inheritance” (v. 20). Their deliverance was a mighty act of God, and it was always part of his divine plan. Many generations prior, God told their forefather Abraham all about it (Genesis 15:13-14). He would deliver his descendants out of bondage and bring them into the land promised to Abraham in Genesis 12 and reiterated in Genesis 15. He has accomplished the former and is about to accomplish the latter.

However, Moses won’t be able to go with them due to his actions at Meribah (Numbers 20:2-13). There, the people of Israel grumbled against Moses, Aaron, and the Lord for a lack of water in their wilderness wanderings. Their actions displayed a lack of faith in the Lord, as clearly evidenced in stating that they had been brought out of Egypt to the wilderness to die. Moses capitulates to the people, doesn’t bring about the water in the way that God commanded him to in this instance, and thereby doesn’t uphold the holiness of God to the people. In response, God declares that Moses will

not enter the promised land. Moses desires that they remember their covenant with the Lord, even in his absence, warning them that “the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God” (v. 24).

Moses warns them that if they turn away, they will be expunged from the land. He vows by heaven and earth that they “will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed” (v. 26). He forecasts a pretty grim future for Israel in the upcoming phases of redemptive history. They will turn away to other gods. The Lord will “scatter [them] among the peoples” (v. 27), and they will find that the gods of “wood and stone” fashioned by “human hands” are powerless to save them. Contrary to the omnipotence of the one true God that set his love upon his chosen people, delivering them in a mighty fashion from the bondage of slavery in Egypt and intimately shepherding them to the land promised to their forefathers, their future gods will be impotent. But they will turn back to the Lord, and in time they will find that the Lord is merciful, faithful even when they are not. As Paul says when speaking about the Jews, “What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? <sup>4</sup>By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar...” (Romans 3:3-4a).

**Deuteronomy 4:32-40**In this section of Moses’ speech, he revels in the otherness of the Lord and the unique nature of his relationship with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He closes his vein of thought with two reminders and another exhortation to obedience. He first reminds them of the one true God and the love that he has set upon his people. His leadership is personal. He is their creator, same as he is for all of creation, but his relationship with Israel is unique among all the people groups of the world. The ruler of all of creation is the personal ruler of the Israelites. He has entered into a covenant with them, and he is shepherding them. They are his sheep, and he is guarding them, guiding them, and blessing them. Part of the impetus is that the world will see it and stand in awe of the Lord and what he has done. The one true God has set his love upon this people, taking them under his wing. And in light of that, Moses exhorts them yet again to obey the Lord their God when they enter the land that he has graciously provided for them through no merit of their own. Rather, he tells them, “it is because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them” (v. 37). They should obey the Lord’s commands because “the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath there is no other” (v. 39). He wants them to store that fact in their heart, propelling them toward rightful obedience.

#### **Deuteronomy 4:41-43**

In verses 41-43, Moses sets aside cities for persons to be able to flee to who have accidentally committed manslaughter. Chapter 19 of Deuteronomy elaborates that these are refuges for “the manslayer” who “kills his neighbor unintentionally without having hated him in the past” (v. 4). The ESV Study Bible note for 19:4-6 provides helpful context: these cities exist to “ensure justice for a manslayer who might otherwise be vulnerable to vengeance from the avenger of blood, that is someone from the victim’s family.”

#### **How This Fits into the Metanarrative of Scripture**

It’s always important to discuss how the immediate events of a given book of the Bible fit into the broader context of what the Lord is doing in the story arc of redeeming his creation. First, it’s important to note that the Abrahamic Covenant preceded the Mosaic Covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant is a one-sided covenant, where faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness. It is not a merit-based covenant where righteousness is mustered from within and the covenant holds as long as you uphold your end. Abraham believed God, and the righteousness of God was credited to him as if it was his own. The Mosaic Covenant came hundreds of years after that.

The Law given to Moses was never meant to be a means of righteousness. As Paul writes, “if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law” (Galatians 3:21b). The proper way to relate to the Law, even in Moses’s day, was through faith in the Lord. Not all of ethnic Israel responds to the Lord in this way. That’s because not all of ethnic Israel is the true Israel (Romans 9:6-7). The true Israel is the elect children of God that respond to the Lord in faith (if prior to the cross, faith that God would provide salvation through his coming Messiah and if after the cross, faith that God has provided salvation in his Son, Jesus Christ, who is the Messiah). Physical circumcision, for example, the primary indicator of Abraham’s descendants, never saved anyone. True circumcision is circumcision of the heart by the Spirit (Romans 2:28-29) that is offered to us based on the finished work of Jesus on the cross, the apex of his lifelong, perfect obedience to the Law.

Christ didn’t just fulfill the letter of the Law. As the perfect image of the invisible God, the true and better Adam and the true and better Israel, he fulfilled the intent of the Law. The Law reflects God’s character, and Christ perfectly embodied that character. He alone is worthy based on merit. He alone is righteous to the core. Israel was never going to live up to the Law. No human could, except for God’s Son, Jesus Christ. The Law convicts of sin; it doesn’t provide the remedy for it. Accompanying the Law, after all, was the sacrificial system which acknowledges the reality of the ongoing

presence of sin even in those that have faith in the Lord, much less those that don't. Righteousness was never meant to be obtained by obedience to the Law.

That is why it is important to note that the Abrahamic Covenant preceded the Mosaic Covenant. From tip to tail in Scripture, righteousness is by faith alone through grace alone. The Abrahamic covenant is one-sided: it is an act of God upon man, not vice versa, and it is based on the free gift offered in Christ's sacrifice for the sins of mankind. When we turn to him in faith, his righteousness is credited to us as if it is our own. Those that have or will respond in faith are the true Israel. Those are the true children of Abraham (Galatians 3:29, John 8:31-59). Some of those persons are part of ethnic Israel and some are not. However, it was always God's plan to send his Son through Israel and to the world. The portion of ethnic Israel that is saved, is saved solely because of the finished work of Christ. Those that are not a part of ethnic Israel are saved by the same means, the finished work of Christ.

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### **The Main Point**

There is one true God. He has set his love upon the elect and shepherds them intentionally and intimately. Out of the knowledge of who he is and what he has done for them, the true children of Abraham should walk in his ways.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- Romans 9-11 – God's purposes in election and the remnant of ethnic Israel
- John 8:31-59 – Not all of Abraham's descendants are true "children of Abraham"
- Galatians 2:15-3:29 – We are saved by grace through faith, not through obedience to the Law



## Week 5

### Deuteronomy 4:44 -5:33 – The 10 Commandments

By Sebastian Schmidt

#### Introduction

I was born and raised as a Catholic in former East Germany. To belong to a Christian organization of any kind made you an outsider/minority and a thorn in the eyes of the socialistic regime that the former Soviet Union rulers had appointed. My understanding of God and His ten commandments was the opposite of what I believe now. I was introduced to a God who judged all people according to their deeds and sorted them into categories of good and bad. I was told that at the end of every Christian life, all their deeds would be put on a heavenly scale and that there would be 3 categories they could land in. 1<sup>st</sup> Heaven, 2<sup>nd</sup> Purgatory, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Hell. As a 10-year-old, I still thought I could make it right into Heaven with some luck. As a teenager, I was not sure about going to Heaven anymore. I had to confess my sins to our priest once a month, and somehow, I got the feeling that I would never be able to measure up to all the rules given and that for sure I would need to spend a lot of time in Purgatory. I thought that only the priests, monks, nuns, and, for sure, Mother Teresa would directly qualify for Heaven and that bad guys like Hitler and Stalin would go to Hell right away. The majority, the average people like me, would spend more or less time in Purgatory, depending on the weight of their sins. Therefore, my hope was for a speedy Purgatory recovery: that God would soon understand that I am not that bad of a person and that after recognizing that, I would be promoted into heaven very quickly.

The German Wikipedia describes Purgatory in this way: “In Purgatory, the torment consists in the fact that the deceased already feels the perfect presence and love of God, but because of their sins, they do not feel worthy of his love.” That sounds even more horrible now than when I was a child. Did this theory give me hope of salvation? Kind of. Not sure. And why did Jesus have to come down to earth and die on the cross? I didn’t understand. Maybe it was an accident? Surely, He did not have to die for me because I am not that bad, and somehow, after a certain amount of time in Purgatory, I would be released and end up in Heaven anyway. I hoped I would not fall into the 3<sup>rd</sup> category, Hell, right away.

Thankfully, through God’s Grace, my eyes were opened, and true Christians invested in me and showed me that the law was never intended, if kept 100%, to grant us access to God’s Kingdom. Nor would any human besides Jesus ever come close to keeping the law 100%.

The law was given to show us that we desperately need a savior who can reconcile us with God.

Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Jesus wants us to trust in Him and love Him with all our hearts and minds. He knows that if we love Him and put Him first, it will bring us joy and fulfillment to keep His law as enabled by the Holy Spirit he has given us. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Now I have confidence that my Savior Jesus Christ has made a way for me and all who repent and trust Him to be reconciled with God. It was never about what I could do but what Jesus had already accomplished on our behalf on the cross. If you ask me now about my hope, I can clearly say that I believe Jesus has already secured my salvation. I do not need to live in fear for the rest of my life, insecure of whether I would qualify for Heaven or not.

There is nothing better than hope and trust in our Lord Jesus!

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#### Read Deuteronomy 4:44 -5:33

#### Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about myself?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

#### Passage Specific Questions

1. Is trying to keep the 10 commandments a burden to you, or do you enjoy keeping them?
2. Do you think you can keep at least one of the 10 commandments throughout your whole life without failing it once?
3. Will God be happier and reward us if we add additional man-made rules to make us look better than others?
4. What do you believe would qualify you for Heaven?



## Commentary

### Deuteronomy 4:44-5:5

These verses give us a brief background of the geographical area the Israelites were living in and remind us how God provided this part of the earth for them by giving them a victory over the two former kings, Sihon and Og. Remember that God did not allow the “Exodus generation” to enter the Promised Land because in fear they failed to follow God’s command to conquer the land in the first place 40 years ago. Now, after the old generation had passed away, the new generation of Israel was ready to enter the land of Canaan and cross the Jordan River.

Only Caleb and Joshua from the old generation (the only two spies of the 12 tribes who trusted God with His plan to conquer the land, Numbers 14:20-38) were allowed to enter the Promised Land. Even Moses was not granted to go because of his rebellion at Meribah when he struck the rock with his staff instead of telling the rock to yield water as commanded by God. This failure to do precisely what God had told him to do cost Moses the opportunity to enter the land.

Moses knows that his life would soon come to an end and reminds the Israelites about the covenant God made with them at Mount Sinai. He wants to ensure they trust the Lord and finally enter the Promised Land. He knows that the statutes and rules given by God are to be taken literally and that disobeying them can cause serious consequences. Moses clarifies that they need to remember and carefully obey the Ten Commandments. He also reminds them that the covenant God gave to their fathers at Mount Sinai is still binding for them because He made the covenant with the Nation of Israel and not just with the people present back then. But what does the covenant stand for, and what can the Israelites take away from it by keeping it?

It is essential to understand that the law was never given to the people to provide a way into Heaven. Deuteronomy 4:40 promised the Israelites “...that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time.” Furthermore, the law was given to us so that we might see that we cannot keep it and that we are in desperate need of a Savior who, by shedding His blood, makes a way for us to be reconciled with the Father. Romans 3:20 tells us, “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” Sadly, a lot of so-called Christians believe that good deeds will make them worthy of being accepted by God and thereby miss the point of a truly repentant heart. God is not interested in good deeds if they are not done out of a loving relationship with Jesus. Jesus tells us in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Only people with circumcised hearts who died to self and try to keep the commandments wholeheartedly will be recognized by Jesus. But the understanding is that this can only be done by those who have been given the Holy Spirit, who changes our hearts and begins to sanctify us such that we begin to live according to the character of God.

### Deuteronomy 5:6-21 - The Ten Commandments

As followers of Christ, the Mosaic Law is not binding for us. Paul writes in Romans 7:6, “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.” However, Paul states very clearly in 1 Corinthians 9:21 that we need to follow Jesus’ teachings instead: “To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.” Also, Paul writes in Galatians 6:2, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

The Pharisees once asked Jesus the following question: Which commandment is the most important? He told them the two following commands: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37, 39-40). This sounds like a shorter version of the Ten Commandments repeated in Deuteronomy 5. The first four are about how our love for God should look, and five to ten are about how we should love other people. Hypothetically, if we could keep these two in Matthew 22:37, 39-40, we could keep all ten from Deuteronomy 5 (knowing that no one besides Jesus can perfectly keep them anyway).

### 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment - “You shall not have other gods before me.”

Does that mean there are other real gods like our God? By no means. There is only one true God, and He is the God of the Bible. He is the Creator. All other so-called gods are man-made illusions that will fade away over time and cannot deliver what they promise. “[F]or my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13). In the time of Moses, men made gods with the following names for example Mammon (wealth), Baal (power), Asherah (fertility), Moloch (child sacrifices to ensure prosperity for the future), and many more. The names of the gods may have changed

over time, but the essence is still the same. The world still worships money, power, pleasure, and sex and sacrifices children in the form of neglect or abortion to follow their man-made gods. Pursuing other gods will numb our relationship with God and will prevent us from experiencing the complete joy God has in store for us.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment - “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”**

This commandment sounds easy to keep for us in our days. At least, I do not know people in our Western world who have carved images of God/gods in their houses and bow down to or worship them. But please do not put a checkmark on this one on your imaginary easy-to-keep commandments list.

My parents brought many little statutes home from cruises to the Middle East, Greece, and the Caribbean. For example, from Greece, they brought each of their six grandchildren a little owl figurine, which is supposed to help them master tests at school or college. Another thing I remember was a weird looking carved wooden face you could hang on walls in your house, which is supposed to keep evil spirits out.

Anyway, this commandment not only warns us not to have images of false gods but also warns us not to make images of our God out of our imagination. This would mean that we could describe God in His fullness. How He looks, works, thinks, and so on. What do you think? Will the smartest of us be able to figure Him out? No chance! All we can do is attempt to pull Him down to our level and belittle who He is. He is the Creator! We can only think in human, earthly, and created terms; therefore, we can only describe Him in those.

As a true believer, the longer we walk with Him, the more we understand that we cannot get close to correctly describing Him by any means. Everything we would come up with would only be a vague shadow of who He is.

The same applies to ascribing something special to a church building or other objects we may use to worship Him. He does not want us to relate to Him through worshiping things. He wants us to have a direct and deep relationship with Him personally, not through worthless, man-made things.

Further on in this commandment, we read that our God is a jealous God. Does that mean He envies man-made gods? He is not jealous like we often think about jealousy when someone envies someone else. He is not jealous of other gods because He doesn't believe they could become dangerous for Him and dethrone Him. He knows they are worthless, but it saddens Him when we worship them because He loves us and wants the best for His children. God is righteously jealous if people worship false gods because this worship truly and only belongs to Him!

The last part of this commandment is often misunderstood, and people think that God would punish sins down to the fourth generation of the ones who sinned. If we slowly read this passage, we see that this is only true for those who hate him and don't follow Him. The ones who love Him are made righteous through Jesus' blood. Please don't believe the lie that our ancestors' sins automatically become ours and will hurt our lives. While our families sins affect us, there is nothing like generational curses or destructive family strongholds. We cannot rest in the hoax that a particular sin in our lives was just handed down from our parents, and there is nothing we can do about it. I used this excuse often when struggling in my early relationship with my wife. I usually shut down conversations with this phrase: “That's just who I am. This is an inheritance of my family. I cannot change.” And without Jesus in our life, this might be true. But every believer's sin was dealt with at the cross. There is no excuse to cling to sin. If we are in Christ, we are a new creation and have become children of God. “Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

God even promises us in this passage that He will show steadfast love to thousands of those who love Him and keep His commandments. God delights in showing mercy to those who turn in repentance to him. If we are truly born again through trusting Jesus, we can be comforted that the Holy Spirit is making us new.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment - “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.”**

The phrase OMG (“Oh my God” or, in German, “Oh mein Gott”) is something I grew up with in Germany, and I thought this was just the way you quickly respond to everything, which does not go well. Be it a little accident, like hitting your finger with a hammer or missing a significant opportunity to score in sports. Regarding this misuse of God's name, I do not see a difference between Germany and the US. I hear OMG on soccer fields, at work, or even in church settings.

Honestly, it took me years to ban this form of handling frustration about my inabilities from my vocabulary, and I still sometimes fail. The name of the LORD is holy! We cannot make Him responsible for our shortcomings or that a football game does not end in our favor. So please identify patterns in your life when you usually use the Lord's name in

the wrong context and work hard to minimize and hopefully stop it altogether. Let us only properly use His name when we want to connect to Him, be it to praise Him for what He has done or to ask Him for help to overcome difficult situations.

We should not use His name to manipulate Him to get something to fulfill our agenda. We should be careful not to use the Lord's name trivially, speak of the Lord without respect, or invoke the name of the Lord to advance our agenda with others. We are told to use His name with an obedient attitude. "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:14).

**4<sup>th</sup> Commandment - "Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days, you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day."**

Sabbath has its roots in the creation order. God wants the Israelites to remember that he is the provider. Resting on the Sabbath required the people to trust the Lord. For example, he was the one who delivered them from Egypt and into the Promised Land—this was his provision and they were to remember it. For Christians, the Sabbath is not primarily to remember how God led them out of Egypt but to remember how Jesus delivered us and to rest in Him. For us as New Testament people, there is no longer a strict Sabbath day. But the principle of the sabbath should be practiced with a time of rest that reminds us of God's provision—both daily and through what he has done for us ultimately in Christ. We should meet together regularly where we should find rest by worshiping Him and remembering what He has done for us. God knows that if we lived the same way every day, we would lose sight of Him and stay busy with daily tasks. Knowing that He has all the power to deliver us out of all dire circumstances should give us hope and fill our hearts with joy and thankfulness. Mark 2:27 states "And he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.'" The Sabbath is meant as a blessing for us to find rest in Jesus' work, not as another religious burden and a stepping stone to make it into Heaven.

**5<sup>th</sup> Commandment - "Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."**

If we believe that God is and was in control over everything, we understand that it was His plan for us to be born into a particular family at a specific time and location. It is not coincidental that our parents are our parents. We may like the situation we were born into, or we may not.

We can divide our relationship with our God-given parents into two chronological stages. The first stage is when we are still young and depend on their provision and supervision. During this time, God commands us to obey them 100% if they parent us in step with the Bible. There are no excuses. Jesus set an excellent example for us when His parents lost sight of Him traveling back home from the Passover festival in Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-52). His parents were already returning when they recognized that Jesus was missing. He was twelve years old and stayed in the temple courts, listening to the teachers, and asking them questions. He excuses His behavior, expecting His parents to understand that He had to remain in His Father's house, which was not wrong. But His parents did not understand why He stayed there and asked Him to come with them. Instead of arguing with them and showing them that He did not do anything wrong, He obediently follows them home.

The second stage is when we have grown up and are living our own lives. We can make our own decisions even if our parents disapprove of them. In this stage of life, it is more about understanding that God chose our parents for us and that we must respect and honor them for raising us. This might be tough for some who did not have a healthy relationship with their parents during childhood. In those cases, the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment does not mean to honor our parents for their wrongdoing, but still to respect them in their God-given position as our biological parents.

**6<sup>th</sup> Commandment - "You shall not murder."**

God makes it clear that murdering someone is a sin (it started with Cain & Abel in Genesis). There are some situations when killing another person is not a sin, like self-defense or killing as a part of a righteous war.

In the past, I always thought this commandment was easy to keep, and I didn't have to worry about it at all. This might be true in the case of physically taking someone's life. But the Bible makes it clear that taking someone's life is not the only way of murder. For example, Jesus warns us in Matthew 5:21-22 that murder starts with what we think and say, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'"

But I say to you that everyone angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.” Murder starts within our hearts. We have all murdered in our hearts, even if we have never actually killed someone.

The best way to avoid murder is to follow Jesus’ teachings. When He answered the Pharisees’ question, which command is the most important? After He told them, “You shall love the Lord your God”, He said, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31). If you love the people around you like yourself, the likelihood of murdering someone physically, with words, or thoughts tends towards zero.

### **7<sup>th</sup> Commandment - “And you shall not commit adultery.”**

Every sexual act or lustful thinking outside of the boundaries of biblical marriage between one man and one woman is called a sin. Like the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment, committing adultery is not only a sin if just physically carried out, but once more, it starts within our hearts. Jesus warns us unmistakably in Matthew 5:28, “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” To clarify, it is not about the first look when someone attractive walks by and we recognize him or her. It is about the intentional 2<sup>nd</sup> and further lustful looks.

Sorry, I need to write about watching pornography here. Please don’t believe the lie that pornography is okay since it does not hurt anybody because you’re only watching it and don’t physically act with someone outside of marriage. Watching pornography is powerful enough to destroy marriages even if only one partner is involved in it. Even if the marriage isn’t destroyed, at the very least it minimizes the God-intended enjoyment of sex within marriage.

If you struggle with this, please don’t fight this battle alone. Talk to your community group leader or one of the elders.

### **8<sup>th</sup> Commandment - “And you shall not steal.”**

There is not too much to say about this commandment. We should not take things that do not belong to us and make them our own. For example, that starts as a kid smuggling a candy bar from a grocery store. Or it could be not returning to the cashier after we discovered an item placed in our shopping cart’s lower deck had not been scanned. Or you were trying to cheat on your taxes or being a sluggard at work. You can fill in the blanks. We should trust the Holy Spirit to show us the difference between trying to save money, time, and effort and where stealing begins. If we feel conviction, it is usually a good indicator that we are on the verge of stealing. In this case, don’t do it.

### **9<sup>th</sup> Commandment - “And you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”**

The God of the Bible is truth. He is the definition of truth. When we study the Bible, we cannot find a single case when God lied or did not keep His promises. God loves the truth and hates lies. On the other hand, we have the accuser. Lies are one of the devil’s sharpest tools. The devil loves lies because he knows that they destroy relationships, cause destruction, and, in the worst case, lead to death.

The word “lie” itself or “bearing false witness” does not sound that harsh, but the Bible compares it to weapons that can kill. Proverbs 25:18 says this: “A man who bears false witness against his neighbor is like a war club, or a sword, or a sharp arrow.” These are weapons meant to kill other people.

No one lies for the first time as a witness in a courtroom or becomes responsible for wrongly accusing someone out of the blue. Apart from Jesus, we usually start the lying journey as little kids to prevent us from our parent’s righteous punishment. We have the rule in our family that kids can only have sweets after mom or dad approves it. I remember it like today: I heard some noise coming out of the pantry and found our youngest son with his mouth full of chocolate and both hands full of candy. I asked him if he had any sweets without asking Mom and Dad, and he answered right away, “I did not eat candy,” barely being able to speak because of the sheer amount of chocolate in his mouth. He knew he was wrong and broke a family rule and hoped that by lying, he could avoid punishment. That may sound funny now, but it’s a slippery slope. No lie is okay, not even the tiniest white lie. The problem with lying is that we get used to it and possibly build our whole life upon a network of lies. If we do not stop it, we may lie to our spouse, children, boss, or even in a court setting. And all that because we want to hide something and make ourselves look better than we are or to make someone else look worse to promote our agenda.

Every lie bears heavy on the liar’s shoulder, and in the end, we reasonably lose friends, jobs, and spouses, or get imprisoned. When we become believers and understand that God hates lies, we must stop the trajectory of a liar’s life immediately. We need to own our wrongdoing, apologize, and maybe face tough consequences through the justice system. But nothing is better than to destroy the path of lies and take that burden off our shoulders.

Even if we can hide our lies in front of this world forever, God sees them anyway and will righteously hold us accountable for every single one at the given time.

**10<sup>th</sup> Commandment - “And you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife. And you shall not desire your neighbor’s house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”**

To “covet” means we are jealous about something that rightly belongs to someone else and we want to have it. This could be true about almost everything we can think of.

The 10<sup>th</sup> commandment gives some examples. The first two (wife/husband, house) still fit perfectly into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and we can add some popular things we are prone to covet in our days: power, wealth, health, beauty, and things like cars, jobs, to name some. Social media is full of them. But why are celebrities not the happiest people on this earth? They are setting the standards when it comes to the categories mentioned above.

Maybe it has not so much to do with what we have but rather with whether we are satisfied with what we have. From a biblical perspective, God provides His people precisely what they need at a given time. This means that if we trust in His provision, we should be satisfied and grateful for what He provided us with because He provides us with exactly what we need and is best for us. At the same time, we should also be happy for our neighbors and what God has provided them with. If we think life is unfair, we indirectly question God's sovereignty.

There are two lifestyles we can choose from here on earth. One is a truly born-again Christian who trusts in God and loves to invest in heavenly things. His reward will be waiting for him in the New Jerusalem. Or two, we choose to covet all the things here on earth and invest everything in it and, therefore, will only receive a short-lived reward in this life.

Paul gives us this advice in 1 Timothy 6:17-19: “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of what is truly life.”

Filled with the Holy Spirit, we can diligently manage our time and finances to help further the Kingdom of God while storing treasures in heaven. If our minds are set on things above, don’t be afraid to enjoy what God has provided us with in this life. We should understand that even if we could have all the world can offer, it would just be a fleeting pleasure and is nothing compared to what we can expect in Heaven. Therefore, spend your time and finances wisely and don’t covet because this world cannot deliver. The best way to deal with coveting is to follow Jesus’ command to love our neighbors as ourselves. Because if we love them, we can be happy with what they have and lovingly wish the best for them.

### **Deuteronomy 5:22-33**

Moses reminds the Israelites once again about how God delivered the Ten Commandments. He spoke to them from the mountaintop out of the midst of a fire while the Israelites were standing at the bottom of the mountain. The people were astonished by what they had just witnessed and were still alive because no one was supposed to get close to the Holy God. Still, they were afraid that they all could die if they stayed close to Him and asked Moses to interact with God on their behalf and, therefore, asked if they were allowed to go back to their tents in a safe distance. God was pleased with how the people reacted, that they were afraid of Him, and that they promised to keep His commandments. God blesses them and instructs them to keep His commandments, “that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.”

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### **The Main Point**

The Ten Commandments were not given to us to provide a merit-based way into Heaven but to show us that we cannot keep them. They should point us to the only one who could keep them. It should open our eyes to make us see how sinful we are and to see sin for what it is. Sin destroys lives and will never deliver what it promises. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, has made an end to all sin. If we repent and love Him, He will write the law on our hearts and make us able to follow it as an act of love to Him.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- Galatians 3 – We are saved by faith, not by trying to keep the law.
- Matthew 5:17-20 – Jesus came to fulfill the law, not to destroy it.
- 1 John 2:2-6 – Keep Christ's commandments and walk in His ways.
- Psalm 119 – God steadfast love and provision displayed in his law.

## **Week 6**

### **Deuteronomy 6:1-25 – The Greatest Commandment**

By Aaron Barnes

#### **Introduction**

Come Thou Fount is one of my favorite hymns. It speaks directly to what I think I struggle with the most. I struggle to believe that God is the one that is orchestrating all things for his glory and my good. There are times that I fail to remember all the things that God has brought me through and how he is currently sustaining me. If you need a reminder, like I do daily, you should simply look up the lyrics to this song and read them aloud. Take a few minutes to do this and try to read it multiple times. Emphasize different lines of the hymn each time you read it. Pray them back to God.

Some of my favorite lines would have to be, “Let Thy goodness like a fetter bind my wandering heart to Thee.” I need to be reminded of God’s goodness and grace. I also need to be reminded to live in light of that truth. A big part of this is teaching the next generation the Greatest Commandment, so that they can have the opportunity to hear and know God is good, trustworthy, and worthy of worship. What a joy it is to be reminded of this truth and then to turn around and teach it to the next generation.

What is this Greatest Commandment? In Matthew 22:34-40, Jesus answered this question with what God had told Moses, and then what Moses told the Israelites before they went into the land of promise. He quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment” (Matt 22:37-38). The Greatest Commandment also motivated and encouraged the Israelites to keep all other commandments as a way to honor the Lord. To make sure that he drove the point home, and to remove all doubt, he continued, “And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 22:39-40).

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#### **Read Deuteronomy 6:1-25 together**

#### **Study Questions**

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

#### **Passage Specific Questions**

1. What are some reasons that we typically think of as to why we should love God?
  2. We are all prone to wander, especially when times are good in our lives. What are some things that you do to make sure that you remember God? That you do not become arrogant and prideful?
  3. Knowing that we are all responsible for discipling the next generation, how are we actively carrying that out?
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#### **Commentary**

Deuteronomy Chapter 5 ends with a strongly worded encouragement for the Israelites to keep the commands of God, so that “it will go well with” them (Deut. 5:28-33). Deuteronomy 5:29 says, “Oh that they had such a heart as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever!” This verse is both joyful and saddening. Joyful, because it holds within it the answer to a life that pleases the Lord. Saddening, because God uses words that point to the Israelites’ tendency to forget him and the good things he has done for them over the years. May we be people that strive to remind one another of the good deeds of the Lord and continue to teach the next generation to do likewise.

#### **Deuteronomy 6:1-3**

Chapter 6 opens with a call back to “the statutes and the rules” that have been given to them while they were in the wilderness and it is a restating of what God has given to them at the close of Chapter 5. In the New American Commentary on Deuteronomy, Eugene Merrill says it this way,



Thus the exhortation not to turn to the right or to the left (5:32) becomes an injunction to fear the Lord, a fear that results in obedience to the decrees and commands for generations to come (6:2). The command to walk in the ways of the Lord (5:33) is also restated, this time in the appeal to hear and obey (6:3). In both cases it is with the end in view that God's people might live (5:33) and do so with success, prosperity, and for many years.<sup>4</sup>

The hyperbolic expression, "in a land flowing with milk and honey," should bring to mind all of the ways that God is going to graciously provide for them. Later in this chapter (6:10-12), Moses is going to point to these things so that they will be reminded of his goodness and mercy and respond to God in loving allegiance. "The very soul of the covenant is not coerced or obligatory obedience, but love. God's love is evident in his desire that all go well with Israel."<sup>5</sup> "God's word is the open door into the treasury of his grace."<sup>6</sup> If we are to live lives that are in loving response to God's love for us, it begins with a healthy fear of who he is and will always be—the Creator and Sustainer, the Author and Finisher of our faith, the Alpha and the Omega. He is our good and gracious Father.

### Deuteronomy 6:4-9

This section of our text is referred to as the Shema by traditional, Orthodox Jews. The word means "to hear, to pay attention, to understand, to pay."<sup>7</sup> This hearing is much more than just a soundwave that slams into our ear holes that we then interpret into action. It's kind of ironic that I am writing this chapter because Leesa and I are in the season of parenting where we have to repeat the same things over and over again. Just the other night, I found myself trying to explain the difference between hearing and listening. I told them that listening is what we do when we listen to music, the noises outside, or the like. Hearing is what happens when we actually put action to what we have heard. For instance, if they listen to me tell them to clean their room and get ready for bed, I know that they've truly heard me when their actions prove to me that they've heard me—their rooms are clean and their nighttime checklists are complete. However, the flipside is also true. If I come back a few minutes later and they are in the throws of a mighty NERF gun battle and haven't given one thought to obeying my instructions, then I know that they listened to me talk, but chose to disobey and disregard my instruction which will bring disciplinary action that they may not have chosen.

For the Israelites, this would plague them throughout their lives. At times, they would have seasons of obedience when they would hear and respond in loving surrender toward God. Other times would be seasons of listening and disobedience that would bring the Father's loving discipline upon them.

"The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (6:4b). Most times, when Christians use the name God, they are referring to God the Father. However, as we make our way through the scriptures we see that the name God contains in it much more than just one person. God is triune—Father, Son, and Spirit. This means that God is three persons and yet he is still one God. He is not one God that chooses to represent himself in one of three different ways depending on the moment—that is known as Modalism and it is heresy (a false teaching that is in direct opposition to the true teachings found in scripture). God is triune and that truth is foundational to our walking with him and worshiping him in our daily lives.

The Israelites are about to enter a land that has been and is currently inhabited by people from many different backgrounds, with many different beliefs and practices, and who worship many different gods in many different ways. Israel will be the proverbial odd man out. In moments like this, if you are anything like me, you can sympathize with them and relate to the temptation to want to bend on true biblical teachings. It isn't that I want to blatantly rebel against the Lord. I just prefer to not stick out like a sore thumb. I want them to invite me to their parties. This wanting to be liked isn't inherently evil, but if it is not held in tension with God's word, our desires will lead to our own demise. Moses is trying to stay in front of this temptation by reminding the people of who God is. God is God. He isn't one of many gods. He is the ONLY God. When the people enter into the land, it is important that they continue in the commands that God has given them. There shall be no melding of different practices and religions with what he has given them resulting in some sort of polytheistic syncretism. He alone is God and it is him alone that they will worship.

This command to worship and follow God alone continues for us today. It is easy for us to want to treat the things of God and culture as some sort of all-you-can-eat buffet that we can pick and choose from depending on the desires that hit us at the moment. The reason we (Anchor Church) preach God's word the way we do, expositionally and book by book, is that we will be less likely to treat the things of God flippantly. Preaching the whole counsel of God is helpful to

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<sup>4</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 160–75.

<sup>5</sup> Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 177.

<sup>6</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Equipped (Deuteronomy): Acquiring the Tools for Spiritual Success* (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1999), 27.

<sup>7</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Equipped (Deuteronomy)*, 26.

prevent misinterpretations of biblical texts. My prayer is that we are a people that learns to love the word of God and respond in loving obedience to all of the things he has created us to be and commanded us to do.

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” What Moses is pointing to here is that, in response to who God is and what he has done, they are to love God with their whole being. To love God with their emotions only would lead to a hollow, fake it ‘til you make it, kind of relationship. To love God with their mind only would lead to a gnostic type of relationship, as if there is some sort of secret knowledge that would result in favor with God. To love God with their actions only would result in a works-based salvation, which we know is not how anyone is justified by God. Just as Abraham was counted as righteous (Gen 15:6), so they were to believe God and act in loving response accordingly with all that they possess—emotions, knowledge, and actions.

In verses 6 and 7, we see that they are to revere God and his commands with such devotion that their entire lives will be consumed by it. Out of their love for the Lord, they would want to teach their children diligently. I love that God chose to use the word “diligently.” This word brings to mind a sense of persistent perseverance, like that of a river eroding the ground as it cuts a path through the earth. They were commanded to teach their children the commands of God that flow from a loving heart and obedient disposition. God, in his grace and kindness, gives his people multiple opportunities to tell the next generation of his goodness and grace, so that all may know and believe.

Parents, teaching our children about God and the way in which we are commanded to go should not be seen as a burden, but a privilege. God has entrusted us, as their parents, with the soul care of those made in his image. If we attempt to take credit for the work of God in their lives, then this can become a daunting task. But if we remember that it is only by the work of his Holy Spirit through the teaching of God’s word that any of us can be changed, then that can relieve us of any undue pressure we place upon ourselves. To those without children, the command is the same. We are to tell the next generation of the good things God has done for us, in us, and to us so that all may hear and know that he is good and trustworthy.

I do not think that verses 8 and 9 are to be taken literally. I truly believe that when they are told to “bind them as a sign” on their hands, “frontlets between their eyes,” and put them “on the doorposts” that they are being told that the commands of God should be the first things they consider and do. Some questions to ask can be, “How does this impact the way that I interact with my friends?” “How should I think about what we do with all that God has given me—time, talent, and treasure?” “How would God want to use my family within our neighborhood?” If we begin to take this teaching literally, then we can easily fall into the temptation to legalize all the teachings of scripture and become like the religious leaders that opposed Jesus in the New Testament.

### Deuteronomy 6:10-15

The command to fear God is such a hard thing to do in times of prosperity. “As C.H. Spurgeon is reputed to have said, ‘Adversity has slain its thousands, but prosperity its tens of thousands.’”<sup>8</sup> Moses is warning the people of that very thing. If they forget to fear the Lord, then they will slip into rebellious sin. As a preventative measure, each blessing from God is contrasted with the fact that they did not do anything to bring it about. The table below was borrowed from R. Kent Hughes’ commentary on Deuteronomy.

|       | The Blessing that Was Not Earned  | The Greatness of the Lord |
|-------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 6:10b | ...with great and good cities     | ...that you did not build |
| 6:11a | ...houses full of all good things | ...that you did not fill  |
| 6:11b | ...cisterns                       | ...that you did not dig   |
| 6:11c | ...vineyards and olive trees      | ...that you did not plant |

Isaiah 26:3-4 is a call for us to place our hope and trust in the only one that can keep us sure, “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting

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<sup>8</sup> Paul E. Brown, *Deuteronomy: An Expositional Commentary*, Exploring the Bible (Leoministry, UK: Day One, 2008), 69.

rock.” In seasons of prosperity, we tend to forget the Lord and begin to rely on our own perceived accomplishments. It is in these moments that we are wise to remember that everything that we have or will ever have (and the things we do not have or will never have) all comes through the gracious hands of the Father (James 1:16-18).

### **Deuteronomy 6:16-19**

This section is a warning against testing God. Moses reminds them of what took place at Massah, the place in the wilderness where water came from the rock. The name of the place literally means “testing.” Moses is telling them that they should not continue to put God to the test, because he has already proven his faithfulness to them and they should not have reason to doubt his goodness.

I think that most of us realize that we should not put God to the test. Yet, I think that in application, we fail to understand this commandment. Let’s look back at the “water from the rock” that took place in Exodus. In Exodus 17:1-7, we read of the disgruntled Israelites quarreling among themselves and with Moses. They allowed their current circumstances to cloud their memory of how God has always provided for them. Their question about the water wasn’t one that we might ask as a simple request. This question and the way that the Israelites asked it were of an accusatory nature. We should read it as (my interpretation here), “Listen, Moses. Did you really just bring us all out here to die of thirst? If this God is really with us, then he will give us water...and NOW!” Written this way, it is easy to spot the glaring discrepancy in the responses to God’s provision. But if we were to bring it into our everyday conversations, it might sound something like this, “God, if you want me to take that job in another city, then they will call me and offer it to me.” “God, if you want me to be a missionary in that area of the world, then you will close every other option.” “God, if you want me to date that person, then they will send me a text tonight and ask me on a date.” “God, if you want me to \_\_\_\_\_, then you will \_\_\_\_\_.” See how easy it is for us to slip into this testing God mindset? There isn’t anything wrong with us asking God for understanding or even praying over a specific decision, but we have no right to refuse to act without some sort of sign or to demand that God make our decisions so crystal clear that they are unmistakable. We have the entirety of scripture to read and be reminded of God’s provision in the past and the promise that all things will be for his glory and our ultimate good. Instead of delaying our decision or doubting God’s provision, wouldn’t it be better if we would just pray about the decision and then walk in faithfulness to God? Trust in his faithfulness to provide. Know that what he has started in us, he will complete (Phil 1:6).

### **Deuteronomy 6:20-25**

As we begin to wrap up this chapter, it is interesting to note how curious children are. When was the last time that you had to teach a child to ask a question? Haha! I mean, there are times that we need to teach them how to ask good, or maybe better, questions. But there is no need for us to teach children to ask questions. It is built into our very nature to be curious about the world that we live in and the people around us. In his commentary on this section of the text, Paul Brown gives us a great encouragement and reminder as we think about how to best approach teaching the next generation.

This final section of the text draws attention to an opportunity and a responsibility. The curiosity of children and their readiness to ask questions provides opportunities for teaching them the ways of the Lord. Parents need to seize these natural opportunities. In this lies their responsibility. Children are to be taught the story of God’s redeeming love. They are to be encouraged to believe his Word, to fear and reverence him, and to walk in his way.<sup>9</sup>

What a joy and privilege that we get to teach the next generation. As we have already discussed in the portion above, teaching the next generation to fear the Lord and follow his commands should be one of the most important things we do.

All of these reminders—the history of God’s faithfulness, the plagues in Egypt, the miracles in the wilderness, and much more—should drive home the understanding that the Israelites are God’s chosen people because of his love for them. He commands that they follow his ways and him alone. He knows that if they fail to tell the next generation, they will continue to slip into their default mode of rebellious sin. These commands are also followed up with the promise for their good, that they will live long in the land that God is bringing them into. Once again, obedience to the commands of God should be from an overflow of love in the hearts of his people.

Knowing who we are and whose we are reminds us that our identity is something that is to be received, given to us by the Creator. If we are going to be a people that fears God and loves to obey his commands, then we need to “catch up on the past and be reminded of all the Lord has done for his people—and all that his people have done and not done in return for his blessings. If a new generation of believers is to march into the future in victory, they need to get back to the

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<sup>9</sup> Brown, *Deuteronomy*, 72.

roots and learn again the basics of what it means to be the people of God.”<sup>10</sup> The chapter ends with the same opportunity that Abraham was given, in Genesis 15:6. If they believe in God, then it will be counted to them as righteousness. It is counted to them as righteousness not because of the strength of their belief, but on the one that their belief rests. And the same is true for us. Will we choose to obey God? Will we trust in his goodness and provision for us through Jesus?

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### **The Main Point**

The Israelites were about to enter a land “flowing with milk and honey,” but that was inhabited by people who worshiped false gods and practiced a way of life contrary to God’s commands. If they were to live as God intended, they would need to build reminders into their way of life and continue to tell the story of God’s faithfulness. Out of love and devotion to the Lord, we too are given the same kind of command—believe God, trust Jesus, teach the next generation to do likewise.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- Genesis 15 – God establishes his covenant with Abraham.
- James 1:2-18 – God will orchestrate seasons of life so that he can produce faith in us.
- Matthew 3:13-17 – We see Jesus baptized, the Holy Spirit descend upon him, and God declare his approval of his Son.

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<sup>10</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Equipped (Deuteronomy)*, 24.

## Week 7

### Deuteronomy 7:1-26 - God's Chosen People

By Will DeBell

#### Introduction

Growing up I loved playing sports, and from an early age I was a part of many different teams. These started with recreational and church leagues in various sports that always had some degree of competition, but ultimately served as a means for providing exercise and fun with the hope of learning some life skills along the way. As I entered middle school and high school, there was a shift where things became more serious. I remember being in 7th grade at Tuscaloosa Middle School and trying out for the basketball team. Up until that point I would have considered myself a pretty good basketball player. I was one of the better players on my church league team and even had the occasional invitation to play on the “main court” during P.E. where the better players would typically occupy the center court. However, when it came time for tryouts and the choosing of the team, I found myself on the outside looking in. This was my first exposure to being cut, and it was a disappointment. Fast forward a few years to my 10th grade year at Northridge High School and I had grown significantly and improved my skills. That year I made the cut and from that point on I continued to participate in competitive athletics. Through athletics I experienced both sides being chosen and being left off of a team. I participated in countless practices, team meetings, game plans, and pregame speeches that were a part of the build up to the main event, the game.

My experiences with athletics can give us a lighthearted frame of reference for how we can begin to look at this passage. Moses is the leader of the Israelites, God's chosen “team,” and he is speaking to them before they embark on the conquest to take the lands from the nations that currently reside there. Here he will reveal the game plan for how they are to carry out this conquest and will use this passage to motivate the people to obediently follow the Lord.

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#### Read Deuteronomy 7:1-26 together

#### Study Questions

5. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
6. What does this passage teach me about me?
7. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
8. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

#### Passage Specific Questions

1. God chose Israel to be his people because he loved them. As new covenant believers, how do we know that God loves us?
2. How do we experience the blessings of Abraham as New Testament believers?
3. Take some time to reflect on your life, specifically your walk with the Lord. How has the Lord used past experiences in your life to grow your faith?

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#### Commentary

#### Deuteronomy 7:1-26

Chapter 7 continues the portion of Deuteronomy that has been described as covenant stipulations. In this section, Moses reviews the requirements for Israel to remain faithful to the Mosaic covenant. More specifically, Moses provides the Israelites with instructions regarding how they are to handle the conquest of the new land, followed by the reason that they are to engage in this conflict.

#### Deuteronomy 7:1-5

To begin, we see listed out the seven nations that stood in the way of the Israelites inhabiting the land. These nations included the Hittites, Girgashites, Ammonites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. According to Craigie, these seven nations were relatively small individually, especially in comparison to present day, but verse 1 tells us that these nations were “more numerous and mightier” than the Israelites.<sup>11</sup> This aligns with the theme seen throughout

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<sup>11</sup> Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 177.

scripture of the Lord choosing to use the weak, flawed, and outcast to carry out his purposes and plans. The fact that the Israelites were inferior and lesser in number was not something to cause fear as the Lord was with them and would give the enemy over to them (v. 2). However, to uphold their end of the covenant, the Israelites must be obedient by completely destroying the enemy. They were then given further instruction to not form any covenant relationship with them and to not intermarry with them. These stipulations were given to protect the covenant between the Lord and his chosen people. If the Israelites were to make a covenant with these nations, it may indicate a lack of faithfulness on their part to God. Furthermore, if they were to intermarry, it would be another area of potential vulnerability, “for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods” (v. 4). This would be a potential and likely stumbling block to upholding their covenant relationship with the one true God. One final stipulation is given in verse 5—all Canaanite religious equipment was to be destroyed to remove any potential temptation to adopt the religious practices of the nations that they had conquered. Through these stipulations we can see a practical application for our lives that is consistent with New Testament teaching regarding the mindset and approach we should have when dealing with temptation and sin. One example is found in Matthew 18:8-9, which states,

“and if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.”

Here Jesus uses hyperbole to provide instruction and to emphasize the importance of dealing with sin. While I don’t think the Lord would want us to harm ourselves, I do think this passage, along with the instructions given to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 7, paint a clear picture of the severity of sin and the call to deal radically with temptation and sin in our lives.

### **Deuteronomy 7:6-11**

In this next section, Moses expounds upon the reasoning for the commands given in the previous verses. We see that the Israelites’ favor is in no way related to their strength or numbers (vs. 7), but is because He loves them and has chosen them. Craigie states it this way, “Their holy character does not indicate inherent merit, but rather divine choice; God has chosen Israel to be a people prized more highly than all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”<sup>12</sup> We can see similar language in Ephesians 1:4-5 “even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.” As new covenant believers, these truths apply to us because of what Jesus has done. We see this demonstrated in 1 Corinthians 5:21, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” So, despite our sin and apart from anything we have done, God set his love on us through of Jesus.

### **Deuteronomy 7:12-16**

Here we see that the blessings promised to Israel are contingent upon their obedience and adherence to the Law (v. 12). Craigie states it this way, “this did not mean that obedience merited divine blessing, but rather that obedience maintained the proper covenant relationship with God; and his people could experience the blessing of God only when the covenant relationship, which involved reciprocal responsibilities, was properly maintained.”<sup>13</sup> By living according to these rules and regulations they will experience the blessings of Abraham found in Genesis 12:2-3. These blessings came in the form of seed (offspring and lack of barrenness), land (both the physical land and the fruits from the ground), and general blessings (blessed above all others with no sickness and no disease). Verse 16 concludes this section by again returning to the military conquest theme of this passage. They are instructed to “not pity them” in order that they might avoid the temptation to serve other gods.

When we are reading passages like this, we need to be careful to read them in context with the entirety of Scripture. This doesn’t teach a promise of prosperity for obedience. As believers, we are not promised that life will be easy and without trials. We see all throughout the New Testament that as believers we will face persecution and trials, but we have a future hope in Christ. As John 16:33 states, “...In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” The blessings of Abraham attributed to Israel are what we as new covenant believers are promised one day when Christ returns in the new heaven and new earth.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 179.

<sup>13</sup> Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 180.

<sup>14</sup> Bible Talk, “Deuteronomy 7-8: On God’s Love, Our Security, and Turtles All the Way Down,” Episode 57: June 1, 2022,

## **Deuteronomy 7:17-26**

In this final section, our focus is brought back to the military conquest that is soon to come for the Israelites. Moses is encouraging them to fight fear by remembering the Lord's faithfulness in the past, specifically in the Exodus when he brought them out of slavery in Egypt. This is an excellent reminder for us as well. When we face uncertainty or fear, we should remember what the Lord has done for us throughout our lives and how he has proven Himself faithful. On the *9 Marks Bible Talk* podcast, Alex Duke stated it simply: "if you are afraid in your heart, remember what the Lord has already done." There is also comfort found in verse 21, "You shall not be in dread of them, for the Lord your God is in your midst, a great and awesome God." Our God is faithful and has proven Himself time and again throughout history to be worthy of our worship, praise, and life.

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### **The Main Point**

God chose his people because he loved them and desired to have relationship with them. In order for the Israelites to fully experience the blessings of that covenant, they were to follow in obedience. We have the same opportunity to experience the fullness of God because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and we look to his future coming where we will one day experience life with him in the new heaven and new earth.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- Exodus 23:20-33 – Parallel passage regarding the conquest of Canaan
- Genesis 12:2-3 – The promise of blessings for Abraham
- Genesis 15 – God's covenant with Abraham

## Week 8

### Deuteronomy 8:1-20 – Remember the Lord Your God

By Bruce Mullins

#### Introduction

Sunbeam bread holds a special place in my heart. From childhood sandwiches, buttered toast for breakfast, and steaming on a stack of ribs, Sunbeam bread is perfect for the job. Just thinking about it, I can picture the package with Little Miss Sunbeam smiling while eating her slice of buttered bread. But I recently found out that for about one month out of the year Sunbeam bread changes the picture of Little Miss Sunbeam.

Every year, for over 60 years, after Thanksgiving, Sunbeam changes the picture of Little Miss Sunbeam from the classic smiling image to one of her bowing her head in prayer. In the background are stars accompanied by the words “Not by Bread Alone,” quoting Jesus from the gospel of Matthew. Matthew 4 is about the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus responds to Satan’s efforts to tempt him to turn the stones to bread by directly quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 saying, “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Deuteronomy 8 focuses on the importance of the Israelites remembering their time in the wilderness and maintaining their covenant with God as they enter the land of Israel.

On Sunbeam’s website they explain why they make this change as follows: “[Sunbeam] stands by their view that people need more than the physical, they need the spiritual to truly live. Jesus Christ has often been referred to as the ‘bread of life.’ At Sunbeam, the feeling is that the slogan brings people back to remembering what’s important in life.” In many ways this quote perfectly summarizes the lessons from Deuteronomy 8—that it is important to remember the ways in which God has provided for us and to stay faithful to Him.

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#### Read Deuteronomy 8:1-20 together

#### Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promises/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

#### Passage Specific Questions

1. Can you describe ways that God has provided for you in your life? Have these provisions always been the way you expected him to provide for you?
2. Have there been times in your life where you needed to be reminded of what God has provided for you?
3. When in your life has it been easier to follow God: when everything seems to be going great or during times of hardship? Explain.

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#### Commentary

##### Deuteronomy 8:1-6

Deuteronomy 8 begins with Moses reminding the people of Israel of the importance of keeping the covenant and how God provided for them in the wilderness. God has set apart the people of Israel as His own through His covenant. The Israelites are to keep the covenant and be God’s “treasured possession among all people, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6).

The Israelites’ time in the wilderness allowed God to test whether they would indeed keep his commandments. Peter C. Craigie describes it this way in his commentary, *The Book of Deuteronomy*: “The wilderness tested and disciplined the people in various ways. On the one hand, the desolation of the wilderness removed the natural props and supports which man by nature depends on; it cast the people back on God, who alone could provide the strength to survive the wilderness.”<sup>15</sup> He continues to explain that miracles, such as the manna, were “designed to teach the Israelites a fundamental principle of their existence as the covenant people of God. The basic source of life was God and the words of

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<sup>15</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 185.



God to his people; *every utterance of the mouth of the Lord* (v. 3) was more basic to Israelite existence than was food.”<sup>16</sup> The Israelites are shown that through faith in the word of God and following God’s commands they will be provided for.

The time in the wilderness also served to discipline the Israelites so that they would continue to follow God’s commandments. Deuteronomy 8:5 says, “[A]s a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. So, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his way and by fearing him.” Discipline is an important part of parenting, and most parents will tell you that if you do not discipline your children early on, you will pay for it later. This is because the younger a child is, the more dependent they are on their parents. As the children grow and become more independent, parents have to trust that they have done their job in disciplining their children in the ways of the Lord and that, therefore, their children will make the right decisions. While the Israelites have been in the wilderness totally dependent on God’s provisions, God has shown them discipline and how to walk in His way. As the Israelites are about to go into the land, they will need this discipline to not stray from the commandments of God.

### **Deuteronomy 8:7-20**

This section of the passage begins with a description of the land the Israelites are going to. The land is described as having not just everything the people will need, but everything in abundance, a land where they will lack nothing, a land where they can be fruitful and multiply. This is in sharp contrast to the wilderness they are about to leave, where everything is lacking. Moses warns that this will cause new challenges as the Israelites will no longer be dependent on God’s absolute provision for survival.

The challenge for the Israelites as they settle in the land will be to not forget God and their covenant with Him. This will be a time of prosperity for the Israelites. Moses describes this as a time when their herds, flocks, and gold and silver will multiply (v. 13). “The very blessing and abundance of the land, however, would tend to lull its inhabitants into a sense of complacency and self-sufficiency.”<sup>17</sup> It is important for the Israelites to remember all the provisions God has given them, both in the wilderness and with the abundance in the land, so they do not turn from God and give themselves the credit for what they have achieved. The Israelites need God just as much in the land as they did in the wilderness, and forgetting God and his covenant would have severe consequences.

Deuteronomy 8 ends with a warning of the consequences for turning away from God once they enter the land. The Israelites are warned that if they forget God and turn to idolatry, they will perish just like the nations they have defeated. Even if the Israelites do not think they need God as they prosper in the land, the reality is they need him just as much as when they were in the wilderness. In the wilderness they were reminded daily that without God they would perish. In the land they are still dependent on the blessings of God for what they need, and if the Israelites forget that their blessings in abundance come from God through his covenant, they will lose the land just as easily as they were given it.

When looking at how to apply this passage to today, it is important to look towards Jesus. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus is in the wilderness for forty days and when Jesus grows hungry, he is tempted by Satan to turn the stones to bread. He directly quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 saying, “ ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ” God provided for the Israelites’ physical needs through bread and for their spiritual need through His covenant. Like the Israelites, God provides for us to this day through faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. In our day and age, it is easy to get caught up in pride and think that the blessings we are given come through our own making. But this is folly. Jesus sets the example for us to look to God and His word. The Lord provides and does so in abundance, not just for our physical needs but most importantly for our spiritual needs. Furthermore, through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, we have all that we need to turn away from sin and look towards God. All praise be to Him!

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### **The Main Point**

We are always dependent on God and his provision in both good times and hard times. Forgetting this can lead to turning away from God and towards sin.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- Matthew 4:4 – Jesus’s response to being tempted to turn stones into bread.
- Exodus 16:14-15 – God provides manna for the Israelites to eat in the wilderness.
- Exodus 19:5-6 – Israel’s role to be a holy nation of priests.

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<sup>16</sup> Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 185.

<sup>17</sup> Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 187.

## Week 9

### Deuteronomy 9:1-10:11 – God’s Promises, Not Israel’s Righteousness

By Aaron Barnes

#### Introduction

There is a difference in doubt and unbelief. It can be subtle, but if we are careful to look closely, we will be able to spot the difference. To help make the point, here is a really simple illustration. As kids, many of us may have been a bit nervous about jumping into water that might be over our heads. Even though we can swim proficiently, this irrational fear of the unlikely event that we forget how to swim in the few seconds it takes for us to leave the comfort of the diving board or platform and hit the water, we might be led by our fears and emotions to doubt ourselves. We might not have jumped that day, but we have done it multiple times in the past. Our parents (or other adults) are already standing in the water and they are calling out to us. They’ve caught us many times in the past. We remember the fun! But for some reason, we might be led to think that there’s that slight chance that they won’t catch us and we doubt. We doubt them. We doubt ourselves. But then it happens...we realize what we are doing and something snaps us out of it. We shake off the doubts and jump...SPLASH! That is what it is like when we have doubts, but still choose to believe that things will turn out well and the one that is calling out to us will provide for us.

Then there is unbelief. In a similar situation as the one above, we are there standing on the end of the platform/diving board. We have seen how this has worked out well for us, for our friends, and for those that have gone before us and it has been fun! Yet, there’s that *slight* chance that this time will be different. Our doubts progress into a place that is a bit darker than just doubt. We begin to think up scenarios that *might* happen. Then, instead of jumping in and enjoying all that we know is good, we begin to lie to ourselves. We say things like, “Nah. I’m good. I didn’t even want to jump.” But we know that’s not true. Look at us...we have our swimsuit on. What are we thinking?! Unbelief has taken root.

But, it doesn’t have to be that way. When we are faced with difficult life circumstances and doubt creeps in, we can still choose to act on the things we know to be true, even if our emotions are throwing up all kinds of red flags. We can make the choice to act on truth.

Unfortunately, forty years prior to where they are in this passage, the Israelites chose to NOT believe God and in his provision for them. As a result, their unrighteousness led to many of their deaths as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Yet in God’s grace and kindness, he continues to pursue them and draw them back to himself. It isn’t because of their own goodness and righteousness that God acts. It is only because of who he is and what he does, that they are going into Canaan.

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**Read Deuteronomy 9:1-10:11 together.**

#### Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

#### Passage Specific Questions

1. Share areas of your own life that you tend to doubt God’s goodness and provision, but you choose to trust God anyway?
2. In response to #1, share how you have seen God act in those hard times.
3. Would you mind sharing areas in your own life that you find it difficult to believe that God is good and trustworthy, so that your Community Group can walk alongside you and pray with you in that area?

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#### Commentary

#### Deuteronomy 9:1-3

Once again, Moses declares “Hear, O Israel...” This is the fifth time that Moses has addressed the people in this way.<sup>18</sup> I don’t know about you, but if I hear someone say the exact same thing to me multiple times, it begins to hit differently (as the young folk say). In other words, there must be a reason that Moses is repeating himself in this way. The reason is simple, the Israelites are a “stubborn people (v. 6).” They need multiple reminders as to what is right and what is wrong. Sound familiar? This hits a little close to home for me because this seems to be the way it goes in my life. I usually know what I am supposed to be doing and how I should be walking in obedience to God, but for no other reason other than pure rebelliousness, I think I know better.

Israel is about to finally go into the land to take it as their own, but before they do, Moses reminds them of their previous conversation with God forty years prior. Remember the conversation they had when the 12 spies returned from their reconnaissance mission? Numbers 13:27-33 tells us,

<sup>27</sup> And they told him, “We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. <sup>28</sup> However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. <sup>29</sup> The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan.”

<sup>30</sup> But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.” <sup>31</sup> Then the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.” <sup>32</sup> *So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out*, saying, “The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. <sup>33</sup> And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.”

The emphasis on the first part of verse 32 is mine. I wanted you to take note of what is happening. They are blatantly choosing to disregard God and his provision. In the face of uncertainty, and instead of trusting the one that had led them out of Egypt, they chose despair and resorted to crafting lies. They had just witnessed God do many and mighty signs proving to them his love and care for them and displaying his power over all of creation. Then they spend 40 days in a new land gathering information only to come back and discount the promises of God. THEN they act as if God cannot and will not see them through to the land he has promised them? Only Caleb and Joshua, of the 12 spies, attempted to point the people to obedience and faithfulness to God.

So, here they are again, only this time it has been 40 years and most of the ones that disobeyed God were dead or were about to be. Moses brings them back to the same decision they were faced with 40 years prior. This time, Moses refers to God as a consuming fire that will consume the Anakim (or anyone that would oppose him) as he brings them into the land that he promised to give their “fathers.” Would they choose obedience?

### **Deuteronomy 9:4-7**

Sometimes the hardest sins to repent of and overcome are those that are linked to deep rooted self-righteous pride. In moments of prosperity and comfort, it is easy to slip into a sense of entitlement. When I begin to experience the slightest moments of fleeting success, how easily pride slips into my life. I begin to think things like, “Yeah, I am actually pretty smart. I figured this out all on my own. I mean, I’m not sure how Leesa ever landed such a catch as me.” Hahaha! Ok, maybe not that exactly, but thoughts like that begin to emerge. Am I the only one?

What Moses is doing here is reminding the people that it is not because of anything that they have done that God is driving out the wickedness in Canaan. It is only because of God’s grace and kindness to Israel. He made a promise to Abraham and he would bring it to fruition. “God is always faithful to his promises; when we don’t allow him to rule, he will overrule, and still accomplish his purposes.”<sup>19</sup> What we have seen coming to pass, time and again, is God blessing his people, the people receive the blessing and begin to flourish, they become prideful and rebellious, and God has to bring righteous discipline upon them in order that they might repent and turn back to him.

### **Deuteronomy 9:8-29**

Moses begins to be specific with the previous sins of the people. He is not recounting these sins in their chronological order, but instead he retells them in a way that gradually builds from smaller to greater in degree of sinful

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<sup>18</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Equipped (Deuteronomy)*, 64.

<sup>19</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Equipped (Deuteronomy)*, 69.

guilt that culminated with their unwillingness to move into Canaan from Kadesh-Barnea. The following bulleted list was borrowed from Warren Wiersbe's, commentary on Deuteronomy.

- Mt. Horeb – The people rebelled against God, so much so, that Aaron was drawn into their rebellious acts (Exodus 32). While Moses was on the mountain with God receiving the commands for 40 days and nights, the people quickly moved from obedience to and attempts to follow God, into disobedience and all kinds of wickedness.
- Taberah – Taberah means “burning.” The people complained about their perceived “misfortunes” and God sent judgment in the form of fire to consume those that were complaining (Numbers 11:1-3).
- Massah (Meribah) – Massah means “testing” and Meribah means “quarreling.” The people accused Moses, intending them for God, of not providing and caring for them and their physical needs. They did this through their grumblings about not having water. God uses Moses to bring water from the rock (Exodus 17:1-7).
- Kibroth-Hattaavah – This means “graves of lust.” The people were growing tired of eating manna in the wilderness. God sent them so much quail and made it so easy for them, that all they had to do was reach up and grab the bird, clean it, cook it, and eat their fill. Along with the quail, God sent his judgment in the form of a plague that killed many of them (Numbers 11:4, 31-34).
- Kadesh-Barnea – This is the place where the Israelites committed the sin that was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. When the 12 spies came back and the 10 cowardly spies spoke lies against God's provision and care, this final declaration of unbelief led to them wandering in the wilderness for 40 years...until that rebellious generation had died off (Numbers 13).<sup>20</sup>

In Hebrews 3:12, the writer of Hebrews warns his readers of choosing unbelief as the Israelites had foolishly done in the days of the wilderness, “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.” At its core, unbelief is a sin of the will. It is seeing and experiencing all that God has done and has to offer, and still choosing to not believe. This is where the people of Israel found themselves throughout their journey through the wilderness, and it would plague them even as they made their way into Canaan. And, if we are honest, it is a sin that still plagues us today. Too easily we are tempted to explain away the things God does in our lives, or we are tempted to compromise on the commands of God. Sin clouds our judgment. The more we give into it the deception of the evil one, the less clearly we are able to see the truth in our circumstances. It is in those moments that we need to remember who God is and what he has done. Where the Israelites went wrong was in thinking that they knew better than God did when it came to matters of obedience to him and the preservation of their lives.

Looking at the contrast of leadership between Moses and Aaron. Aaron was a leader that was not willing to put his reputation and relationships with others on the line when faced with a potentially difficult situation. Moses was willing to lay down his life for the sake of those he was leading along and for the glory of God's name. Aaron abdicated his responsibility to spiritually lead in the absence of Moses. When pressured to bend on religious mandates, Aaron broke the first two commandments—don't worship any other gods and don't make anything to worship, in place of God—and fashioned a golden calf for the Israelite people to worship. This has been the thorn in humanity's flesh since the days in the garden. When given the chance to stand firm on the commands of God, Adam and Eve chose to doubt God's goodness and his provision which led to all kinds of evil.

When Moses found out that God was going to wipe them out, verse 25 tells us that he humbly laid flat on the ground before God and pleaded for the people, including his disobedient brother. He recalls God's faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and in that, he ends with “...For they are your people and your heritage, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm.”

Aaron failed God, who had appointed him as a priest; he failed his brother, who was depending on him to guide the nation; and he failed the people who desperately needed strong, spiritual leadership...Moses passed the test. He showed that his great concern wasn't his own fame or position, but the glory of God, and the good of the people. He was willing to die for the people rather than see God destroy them. A true shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.<sup>21</sup>

Moses was willing to lay down his life for the people and for God's fame, even though his life would not have been a perfect sacrifice. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice and actually laid down his life. Deuteronomy 18:15 tells us that “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall

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<sup>20</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Equipped (Deuteronomy)*, 68.

<sup>21</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Equipped (Deuteronomy)*, 67–68.

listen...” This prophet is Jesus. Jesus came to do perfectly what Aaron, the Israelite nation, and even Moses were unable to do. He was sinless. He was perfect. When faced with temptation in the wilderness for 40 days and nights, he never wavered. He was all of that because he IS. Jesus is fully God and fully man, because of that, he is able to do for us what we could and can never do for ourselves.

### **Deuteronomy 10:1-9**

God had every right to wipe out his rebellious people. Yet, each and every time they chose rebellious sin over faithful obedience, God would send his loving discipline in order that his people would repent and turn to him and be healed. When Moses chose to throw down the stone tablets, God could have been very harsh toward him...but he wasn't. He charged him to cut more stones and come up to receive the commands again. Then when Aaron died, God could've just been done with the priesthood...but he wasn't. He provided Eleazar as high priest and the tribe of Levi to care for the ark and the tabernacle. God is good and kind. He will see his purposes fulfilled in his timing, and we cannot sin enough or attempt to work enough in order that we will be able to take an ounce of the glory from him. And that is a good thing!

### **Deuteronomy 10:10-11**

I love the way that this week's text finishes. Deuteronomy 10:10-11 says,

I myself stayed on the mountain, as at the first time, forty days and forty nights, and the Lord listened to me that time also. The Lord was unwilling to destroy you. And the Lord said to me, 'Arise, go on your journey at the head of the people, so that they may go in and possess the land, which I swore to their fathers to give them.'

What we see God doing here is so gracious. Even in the midst of great and rebellious sin and even after the wayward Israelites chose to not believe God, God still chose to use the people of Israel to be his covenant people. He would see them into the land of Promise. He would bring them into the land that he swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

One thing I think is important for us to note as we walk through Deuteronomy is that this isn't a book of peoples' past sins that we have no need to concern ourselves with. On the contrary, it was impatience and unbelief that led the Israelites to idol worship, to crave the things back in Egypt, and to grumble and quarrel against God. If we want to be a people that are known for our faithfulness to God and our unity in the faith, then I think it is important for us to remember that we are susceptible to many of the same types of sins that they struggled with in the wilderness. When we are faced with trials and temptations, let us be a people that choose to believe in God's provision and not in our attempts to provide for ourselves. Let's be a people that when adversity arises and we are faced with compromising on the commands of God and leading lives focused on the good news of Jesus, we are people who live to know Jesus and make him known. He is orchestrating all things, both seemingly good and bad, for his glory and our eternal good, which is our eternal sanctification. His discipline on his people is good and kind. He loves us and wants his best for us, and that's what we need. We need him to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves so that we can live lives that point to the glory of God and make much of Jesus!

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### **The Main Point**

The majority of the Israelite nation chose to not believe in God's provision which led to their wandering for 40 years, and also resulted in a generation not getting to go into Canaan. Their unwillingness to believe God in the midst of their doubts caused them to miss out on a relationship with God that they were meant to have.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- Exodus 32 – The Israelites make a golden calf while Moses is on the mountain receiving the commands from God.
- Numbers 11 – The Israelites grumble against God because of their perceived “misfortunes.” In response, God's anger is kindled and sends fire to consume them (11:1-3) and then he responds by sending quail for them to eat, and a plague along with it that kills many of the complainers (11:31-35).
- Numbers 13 – Spies are sent into Canaan and return with news of the promised land.
- Numbers 17:1-7 – The Israelites test God. In response, God uses Moses to bring water from a rock.

## Week 10

### Deuteronomy 10:12-11:32 – Circumcise Your Hearts

By Will Bomar

#### Introduction

Circumcision of the heart is a simple and complex thing all at the same time. It's simple because God himself circumcises our hearts. It's challenging, though, due to its nature being internal and it's not something that you can *necessarily* see with your own eyes. However, for our hearts to be circumcised, it means that our hearts should love God which requires action from us. From our love should come obedience to God.

In this specific passage, Moses tells the Israelites that their hearts should be circumcised, they should love God with all their heart and soul, and they should obey all that he's commanded them. As you read this passage as well as the study guide, I challenge you to reflect and pray. God desires for us to love him with all our hearts, and sometimes the Lord can reveal ways that our hearts are not fully loving him which can then bleed into our obedience to God.

Because obedience is often a bit more visible and tangible, perhaps consider examining your life by your actions. From there, work your way inwards. What I mean is, if you are struggling with particular sin, an overconsumption of alcohol, gossip, porn, or whatever else, then begin there (external) and look at your heart (inward). If you are struggling with deep dissension in your marriage, begin there (external) and look at your heart (inward). If you're struggling with submitting to God's Word, begin there (external) and look at your heart (inward). Where your sin is manifesting itself is where I encourage you to begin (external) and look at your heart (inward). I would imagine that, as you examine your outward disobedience towards God and allow yourself to look inward from there, you'll find there is a part of you not loving God with all your heart. What you find is what I encourage you to bring before your father who loves you and sees you and already knows the ins and outs of your heart. I encourage you to sit before him and ask him to reveal how you can love him more than your fleshly desires, more than your comforts, and more than yourself.

My hope and prayer for you is that as you read Moses' words to the Israelites, you will meditate on them and reflect on your own heart. Read this chapter and pray with God about the ways in which you can further love him and submit to what he's called you to do. If you are in Christ, you are a child of God and you are loved. We love because he first loved us.

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**Read Deuteronomy 10:12-11:32 together.**

#### Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

#### Passage Specific Questions

1. God told Abraham that circumcision would be a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham. God's Word tells us that our hearts should be circumcised. If God circumcises our hearts (Deuteronomy 30), in what ways will our hearts look different?
2. God desires for his children to love him and obey him. How do you love God? What does your relationship with God look like? What is God asking of you to obey?
3. In chapter 11, Moses reflects on how the Lord rescued, provided, and disciplined the Israelites out of his love for them. When you look back on your story, where can you see the Lord rescued, provided, and/or disciplined you out of his love for you?

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#### Commentary

##### Deuteronomy 10:12-22

In this passage of Scripture, Moses is recorded teaching one of the most foundational and critical elements of the Christian faith – a relationship with God is in the heart of a believer, and the outward expression of that relationship can be observed through obedience to God's commands. He says to, "fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 10:12-13a). This theme of loving God with your heart, while also keeping the commands that

he's given us, can be found woven throughout all of God's Word. In John 14, Jesus, while speaking about this concept with his followers, said, "if anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me will not keep my words" (John 14:23b - 24a). Additionally, James provides an excellent explanation for how the Christian should work out their faith with obedience when he writes,

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. (James 2:17-26)

Moses tells the Israelites that they should walk in *all* of God's ways, serve him with *all* of their heart and with *all* of their soul. He says that we should keep the his commands and statutes. This means that we, as believers, should be vigilant against temptation and comfort to not serve and obey *some* of what God has called us to and *some* of what the Lord desires from us. Instead, we must seek first God's ways as they are *always* higher and *always* good. It's critical for the believer to reflect, examine, and seek conviction from Holy Spirit to ensure that we are loving God with all of our heart and soul.

Verse 14 declares the supremacy of God as it says he rules all of heaven and earth and all that's in it, yet in verse 15 Moses declares that in all of God's glory over all the earth, he chose to love Israel. We must remember that we, through our faith, are now sons and daughters of Abraham (Galatians 3:29). This means that you, believer, are also loved by the God who is over all of heaven and earth. How sweet it is to meditate on the love of God—the God of glory.

In verse 16, Moses continues in his speech to the Israelites by recalling the commandment of circumcision. Circumcision was first instructed by God to Abraham, and this is recorded in Genesis. God spoke to Abraham and said,

"This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant" (Genesis 17:10-14).

For many years, God's people would practice circumcision in the flesh of the foreskin as an outward expression of keeping God's covenant, just as the Lord instructed. Moses, returning to the issue of the heart, is teaching the Israelites that from God's first decree to circumcise, it was always intended that external circumcision was to mirror the internal consecration of God's people.

Later, In Deuteronomy 30, Moses will clarify for the Israelites that this circumcision of the heart will be done by God himself, and that circumcision of the heart is truly an act of God and God alone. The Layman's Bible commentary describes this by saying, "for this work of making hearts right before God, [the Israelites] are utterly dependent upon the Lord. He calls His people to do something, but He must bless what they do, and He alone can make it effective."<sup>22</sup> Moses is saying that it doesn't matter how many of God's commands someone can follow if they do not have a heart that is set apart for God.

We as believers should be able to empathize with the Israelites as this is a very prevalent challenge that we face today. Religion can be tempting for us to follow because it typically provides a framework of ways, rules, and checklists for us to work towards. It looks great on paper, but God's word tells us that no matter how hard we try we can never do enough or be enough. Isaiah 64 says, "we have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (Isaiah 64:6a).

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<sup>22</sup> Mark Strauss, Ian Far, Stephen Leston, Peter Barnes, Termper Longman, Hampton Keathley, Robert Rayburn, and Jeffrey Miller, *Layman's Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy Thru Ruth*, vol. 8 (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour, 2008), 36.

This is the hope of the gospel, though, isn't it? There is nothing that we can do to merit forgiveness of our sins. It is only Christ that has accomplished such a thing on the cross. And when he died, our sins died, too. Rising from the dead, however, our sins were left in the grave and he conquered death so that we might have eternal life with him. Praise God for his sacrifice we could not make! Even our best works are made dirty by our sin, but God in all his perfect ways accomplished the greatest thing that man could never do. That is the gospel.

Therefore circumcision, being a sign of the covenant between God and us, teaches us that circumcision of the heart should also serve a similar purpose. While the heart is inward, our outward expressions should reflect what's inside. The heart of the believer should be a sign to all that a covenant has been made between God and his children, and with all of our heart we should love God. The world should see our heart and know that we are different because we are set apart—consecrated.

In the remainder of chapter 10, Moses provides an explanation for why God is worthy of our full devotion. He provides notable traits of God such as being great, mighty, and awesome. He shows no favoritism and cannot be bribed. He's just, and he sees and keeps the widow, the orphan, and the sojourner. Moses then instructs the Israelites that they, too, should love the sojourner and take care of them. He reminds them that they were once sojourners before the Lord brought them out of Egypt. He instructs the Israelites to fear God, serve him, hold fast to him, and rely on him. God is the one who has done all of these great and terrifying things to which they have all been witnesses, and Moses is ensuring they do not forget that. Moses also tells them that they are as numerous as the stars of heaven reminding them that God does what he says he is going to do, for God spoke a promise to Abraham declaring that one day Abraham's descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Genesis 22:17). We can glean yet again that the Lord fulfills his word.

### **Deuteronomy 11:1-7**

Moses calls for the Israelites to love God. He tells them that they must love him and always keep his charge, statutes, rules, and commandments. He tells them to remember all that God has done for them. Moses is pointing out for the Israelites that they are to love God because God has loved them first. One way he demonstrated this is by delivering them out of Egypt and providing miracle after miracle for their goodness and his glory. The ways God loved them was through rescuing (11:3-4), providing (11:5), and disciplining (11:6-7) them. Moses calls for them to love God and the basis for their love is considering all the ways that God has loved them first. A notable observation of these forms of love is that they were not all easy or comfortable seasons for the Israelites. This can be encouraging to believers as we can trust that God's love is still deeply present in the midst of trial and hardship.

Moses has already given multiple accounts throughout Deuteronomy for how love and obedience are deeply intertwined (6:5-6, 7:9, 10:12). In chapter 11, he's instructing the Israelites first to love God, and with that love for God, obey him. Moses instructs the Israelites to then keep the Lord's commands, that they might be strong (11:8). With that strength, the Israelites are to go in and take possession of the land that they will possess—this land being the Promised Land.

Notice how Moses contrasts the promised land to the land of Egypt and declares that it will be vastly different and greater than Egypt. Moses even previously mentioned Dathan and Abiram (11:6) who specifically desired to return to Egypt. He is making it clear that the Lord is providing a land far greater than Egypt because he loves the Israelites. In Egypt, the people relied on irrigation, but in the Promised Land God will provide the rain (11:11). In this Promised Land, God will always provide (11:12).

He continues and tells the Israelites that if they will obey his commands by loving God and serving him, the Lord will bless them and provide for them. He also warns the Israelites that if they are deceived and disobey God by serving and worshiping other gods, the Lord's anger will be directed at them, and they will not receive blessings of rain and provision.

These warnings and teachings are so critical that Moses tells the Israelites to keep them always in their hearts and minds. He tells them to teach his commands to their children, and to write them on their doorposts, houses, and gates. He instructs them to speak of his commands to their children when they are in their homes as they lie down and wake up. Talk of God should permeate throughout the homes and families of God's children. In response to their obedience, Moses says that God will bless them by providing success over their enemies. It's interesting how their success is not measured in their strength, rather, their obedience to God.

Lastly, Deuteronomy 11:26-32 concludes with Moses summarizing that if the Israelites obey, then they will be blessed. If they disobey, they will be cursed. He instructs them that when they are brought into the land, the Israelites should proclaim the blessing and curses of God. This can be found in detail in Deuteronomy 27.

Brothers and sisters, it can be easy to apply Moses' teaching incorrectly. Remember that we must not fall into obeying God out of hopes for being "successful." Many will take these words and believe that if they are obedient to God then they will receive a successful and happy life. The truth is that God blesses obedience, and he curses disobedience.



Unfortunately, Israel will continue to disobey God and fall short of what he has commanded them. The question we must ask is not “how do I receive blessings;” rather, the question we must ask is “how do I obey God?”

We can be certain that the answer to this question is found in becoming more like Jesus. Paul tells us in Galatians 4 and 5 that Christ’s love will propel us to obey God, and God will bless us for his glory. Therefore, I commend you, believer, in walking in obedience to God. When you fall short, be encouraged that Christ has made a way so that you are forgiven. Holy Spirit dwells within you and my prayer is that you remain hopeful as he guides you day by day to obey our Father.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:16-24).

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### **The Main Point**

We obey God by loving him and love God by obeying him. It is not our good works that earn his love; rather, he loved us while we were still sinners. If we are believers, the Lord has circumcised our hearts, setting us apart for his good works and for his glory.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- Genesis 17:10-14 – Circumcision is instructed by God to Abraham.
- Genesis 22:17 – God promises Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars.
- Isaiah 64 – Our good works are never enough to merit God’s forgiveness.
- Galatians 3-5 – We have become Abraham’s descendants, and our love for God will propel us to obey him.

## Week 11

### Deuteronomy 12:1-13:18 – Worshiping God as He Commands

By Rand Nelson

#### Introduction

When I was growing up, I had a playful relationship with my father. Of course, I respected him, and he was my father, not my buddy—but still there was often joking around, wrestling, and the occasional prank that made our relationship different from that which he had with my five sisters. One of the things I saw my father often do to me and my brothers as a joke literally sent chills up my spine. He would go fetch a refreshing Coca-Cola from the fridge in the carport (or more likely get one of us to fetch it for him), and as he was drinking it—still ice cold from the fridge—he would lift up our t-shirts and place the can on the small of our back, just above our belt line. We'd jump away in a hurry like a cat thrown in a swimming pool, laughing the whole time. Strange as it may seem, this communicated affection to us. In the context of our relationship, we had determined that this was one of the ways—albeit peculiar—that our father played with us, showing us he loved us.

I started dating my wife, Carolyn in 2011. We had been friends for about a year before we started dating (definitely recommend that, by the way), and during that time I really felt like I knew her. By the time we were married in mid-2012, I would have naively said I knew everything about her—but you know one thing I didn't know about her? I didn't know that she had a strong aversion to having ice cold Coca-Colas placed on the small of her back, just above her belt line. In my mind, this was a playful gesture meant to communicate affection and add humor to our relationship. But to her, this was a capital offense, and she would have gladly thrown the first stone. Explaining to Carolyn the background with my dad helped her understand that this wasn't something meant to torture her and make her feel unloved, but it didn't suddenly make her feel appreciated and cherished. That's because this is not a way that she receives affection (and having attempted this on one other occasion, I can tell you it is not an acquired taste).

In today's chapters of Deuteronomy, we see that God sets the standard of how and where he is to be worshiped. We don't get to decide for ourselves what kinds of ways we feel like he should be willing to receive our worship. We are to worship God as he commands.

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#### Read Deuteronomy 12:1-13:18 together

##### Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

##### Passage Specific Questions

1. A former US Navy fighter pilot was recently charged with criminal mischief for destroying and defacing a statue of the Satanic Temple in the Des Moines, Iowa capitol building. Is this similar or different to God demanding his people destroy the high places of the pagan Canaanites? Do you think this is good or bad for Christians to engage in?
  2. Do you think that New Testament Christianity has things that it needs to learn from other religions? Why or why not?
  3. What do you think of the commands here to kill people who tempt others into pursuing other gods?
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#### Commentary

##### Deuteronomy 12:1-7

Chapter 12 begins one of the longest sections of Deuteronomy in the book, outlining specific stipulations for members of the covenantal community. It's a section where God's laws are expanded and explained for God's people. Now, it's important to remember that—because they are about to enter into the Promised Land—their lives are going to change. Some of what we'll look at in this section will serve as a good example of how their lives are going to change.

Moses begins this section reiterating that God's people should take great care to obey all the statutes and rules in the land that God has given them, as a fulfillment of promises made to their covenantal ancestors. This highlights God's

faithfulness through time, and reminds his people that their blessings are inextricably linked to God's goodness and provision.

God's people are instructed to move into the Promised Land and immediately go to work demolishing the places the pagan occupants previously used in their worship of false gods. God's plan for the land is that his covenant people would completely replace the occupants of the land, having devoted them to complete destruction. As part of this overwhelming destruction of the Canaanites, their pagan practices had to go. The language used here is strong: "destroy," "tear down," "dash in pieces," "chop down," and "burn...with fire." This serves multiple purposes for God's people. The obvious one is that complete destruction of the pagan sites would serve in the immediate sense to remove the temptation to use those places for worship of Yahweh. The physical act of destruction was also a symbolic act of rejection—a rejection of the Canaanite gods, and of the legitimacy of their religions (Craigie, 216).

Not only did God not want his people to worship pagan gods in their pagan places, he also did not want them to try to worship Him in those places (verse 4). The idea here is that God's people may have discovered something they liked or appreciated about the pagan worship they witnessed and wanted to add that to how they worshiped God. God is telling them here explicitly not to do that. God gets to decide where and how he's worshiped. In our approach of God, we should seek to worship him as he instructs us to worship him. There is a lot that could be said about this, but I'd like to simplify and say these three things as a means of guiding our worship of God. First, we should use the Scriptures as a guide for how God desires to be worshiped and not our stylistic preferences. Second, some practices are definitely not Christian practices. Things like astrology, tarot cards, Ouija boards, automatic writing, and other New Age and occult practices are not to be used as a means to approach God. Third, while we live in a global culture and may come to appreciate other people's traditions and religious practices in some sense, we do not need to learn about God (or how to worship God) from non-Christian sources. This should be obvious. "The wisdom of the world is folly with God" (1 Corinthians 3:19).

### **Deuteronomy 12:8-28**

Verse 8 introduces a change that will take place as God's people enter into the Promised Land. Remember, it's not been long since they've left Egypt, and their stint wandering around since the Exodus has not been as a thriving nation. As God blesses them in the land they're going into, they will grow as a people and become more and more of an established civilization. Perhaps the clearest image we see of this is the "upgrade" from the portable tabernacle they used for a time into the temple Solomon eventually built. God's people will establish territories and eventually cities, and these cities will not all feature a local place of worship. Because they will be so spread out, some of them may have thought, "I'm not traveling 50+ miles to offer my sacrifice; I'll just offer my sacrifice here next to my house." But there is only one place God will choose to be worshiped by his people. Moses explains to them that they can't worship him just anywhere, but only at the one place the Lord chooses.

However, Moses does mention here that God's people are now allowed to eat meat whenever they want to. Previously, most meat eaten by God's people would have been sacrificial, but now provision is being made for non-sacrificial eating of meat (Barker, 350). What seems to be distinguished in verses 15-27 is the idea that God's people may eat meat at their homes, but only meat that has not been offered in sacrifice. They still are to make sacrifices and the meat of those sacrifices may also be eaten, but remember—they can only sacrifice in the place God is going to appoint for that. The major point is a continuation of the idea already expressed—that God decides how and where he is to be worshiped. So, God's people may eat meat locally, but not in such a way that is meant to localize the worship of God apart from where God says his worship must take place.

Two other things must be said here about eating meat. First, they cannot eat meat with the blood in it; they have to pour it out. This does not mean that they had to ruin their meat by overcooking it, but that the animal should be processed and prepared in some way so that they're not effectively drinking the blood of animals. Pagan ideas about drinking blood abound, and some of them may have even been myths that some pagans believed. So, it could be another degree of separation God intended for his people to be set apart from the pagans they were replacing. More importantly than that, as we read in verse 23, blood symbolizes life and is divinely earmarked for atonement of sins (Barker, 350). So, growing up in an Israelite household, children would have had a reverence of blood in their everyday lives which would have continued through their experience with the Levitical priesthood, all paving the way for its ultimate focal point, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Next, we should say something about the Levites. Verses 12 and 19 both mention the Levites. These were servants of God who worked in the priesthood, and they had no inheritance. You can also read about them in Numbers 18:20-24 and Deuteronomy 18:1-8. Because they have no inheritance from among God's people (their inheritance is the Lord), to survive they rely upon the tithes and offerings of God's people. Moses' statements here are practical reminders to God's people. If people can eat non-sacrificial meat at their houses, perhaps there will be less for the Levites who live

among them. And so twice in chapter 12, Moses reminds the people to remember the Levite and not neglect them. This is one of the many ways we see the people of God in the Bible serving one another in a loving community.

### **Deuteronomy 12:29-32**

How comfortable are you with the statement, “Apart from Christianity, every other religion and approach to life is wrong”? If the statement bothers you, why? As Christians, we should understand that Christianity is God’s salvific self-revelation to humanity. In the Bible, we have an actual glimpse of who God is, his provision of salvation for us, and teachings that help us live in accord with his divine decree. It is not arrogant to understand this to be the actual truth of God revealed.

These verses serve as a transition from the conversation about how to rightly worship God to the conversation that follows about how to handle idolatry. One of the things that may appear shocking to believers today is that the verses that follow seem full of xenophobia and bigotry—at least that is how it would be branded by many in contemporary times. To put it simply, God is not looking for ways that his people can diversify their religion. He has zero interest in there being any outside theological influence, and—it’s plain from the verses that follow in chapter 13—that he views pagan presence and influence as a threat to his people that must be dealt with.

Moses comments on just how wicked and evil these people are by pointing out that in service to their gods, they murder their own children, sacrificing them in fire. One commentator takes the opportunity to point out how these sacrifices were abhorrently wicked, and failed in all of their intentions to reconcile man to God. “To assume the right to sacrifice a child was to a prerogative that was God’s alone, the prerogative over human life. In the fullness of time, God exercised that prerogative in the offering of his only Son as a complete sacrifice of the sins of men” (Craigie, 220).

### **Deuteronomy 13:1-18**

Chapter 13 deals with how to handle the temptation to idolatry that can come from three different sources. This is not to say that these are the only places where the temptation for idolatry comes from; it just lists these three to make the point emphatically. In each of the situations, the temptation to worship other gods is a capital offense. All three hypothetical situations are to result in the tempters being executed. “The legal penalties noted in this chapter may seem at first sight to be excessively harsh, but the reason for the severity lies in the nature of the crime. The continued existence of the covenant community depended literally upon allegiance to the Lord of the covenant...In its implications, the crime would be equivalent to treason or espionage in time of war” (Craigie, 222).

The three situations are as follows: A prophet or dreamer of dreams asks you to join him in going after other gods (verses 1-5), a personal loved one asks you to join them in going after other gods (verses 6-11), and one of the cities belonging to God’s people in the Promised Land becomes led astray by “worthless fellows,” who have drawn away the city’s inhabitants to serve other gods (verses 12-18). The three cases escalate in terms of their severity, but there is not much about them that is different. What should be noted about each of the different situations is listed here below.

In the first instance, it should be noted that the prophet or dreamer of dreams is someone who is somewhat reputable. Verse 2 says that the sign or wonder he prophesied comes to pass. So, this is a guy who is not just pretending; he has given you reason to believe that he might be reputable. Regardless of what he said or did, the fact that he then tries to pressure God’s people to go after other gods immediately disqualifies him. He is to be put to death because he is inciting God’s people into rebellion against him. In today’s world, we likewise should be careful. There are lots of people in ministry who seem to have a good reputation, but should be ignored because their teaching or ministry leads people astray from God. This requires discernment.

The next situation is close to home. Moses is essentially telling the people, “I don’t care if it’s your mom, your brother, your son or daughter, your wife, or your best friend; if they are trying to lead you to serve other gods, they are to be put to death.” As close as it is to home in its temptation, so too is it close in its punishment. The person who was being tempted to sin is to throw the first stone, and then the entire community is to join in and assist in putting that person to death.

The last situation is one where a city has basically fallen to the influence of people who are wanting to go after other gods; “worthless fellows,” the text calls them. In such a case, the people of God are to put the city to the sword, killing all its people and livestock, burning the city to the ground, and leaving it as a heap of stones forever—never to be built upon again.

If there is a feeling in your heart that these measures are too extreme, that is understandable. We aren’t God. We are not worthy of eternal worship. Nor are we righteous enough to understand how detestably offensive this is to a just and holy God. As God reminds them several times in this passage, he is the God who brought them out of Egypt and made them his people. Their loyalty and worship is forever due to him alone. Lastly, this is meant to be a protective measure for

God's people. This is why he refers to it in verse 5 as an evil that must be purged from their midst. It is important that we understand God is not merely desiring our worship; he is reminding us that we are made for him. Our unceasing worship and devotion to him is what our heart most craves and our soul most needs.

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### **The Main Point**

God gets to decide how his people will worship him. What is acceptable and unacceptable is completely up to him to determine. Our lives are lived best when they are lived in humble submission and obedience to his character.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- John 4:19-24 – Jesus explains to the woman at the well that there is no specific place where God's people must worship him.
- John 14:6 – Jesus is the only way to God the Father.
- Deuteronomy 18:1-8 and Numbers 18:20-24 – The role of the Levites among the people of Israel.

## Week 12

### Deuteronomy 14:1-15:23 – Living Set Apart

By Harvey Edwards, III

#### Introduction

When I was ten years old, I noticed a kid on the playground who had drawn a cool-looking symbol of some sort on his forearm. When recess was over, I copied what he had done on my own forearm with a Magic Marker. Mine looked even better than his, because using my black marker, I had done it even thicker and bolder than he had. I was quite pleased with it.

My fifth grade teacher Mrs. Wiggins was not. In fact, she was horrified. In complete ignorance of its meaning and significance, I had drawn a Nazi swastika on my arm. She soon realized that I had done this innocently, which tempered her reaction somewhat. But, wisely I think, she administered some corrective discipline nonetheless. I had to completely remove the emblem that same day, research and write a report that evening on what the Nazi swastika symbolized and how it had been employed in recent decades, locate the admonition in the Bible that forbade “writing” on oneself, and write (on paper, not on my arm), the sentence, “I will not write on myself.”— 100 times. My Dad, a patriotic WWII vet, was naturally supportive of this discipline and helped me with both the report and the biblical reference. We came up with Leviticus 19:28, which in our KJV read: “Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the Lord.”

Thus I learned an important lesson about symbolism. Symbols communicate important ideas. There was a reason why I should not have drawn a swastika on my arm. I was just not mature and knowledgeable enough to understand why.

As we work our way through Deuteronomy and other books of the Torah, we encounter within the Mosaic Covenant admonitions for God’s people for and against all sorts of activities. Some of the Lord’s instructions merely lay out general requirements for ethical living which—if observed—would contribute much to the development of a just, prosperous, and orderly society, bringing glory to God. Others are incredibly specific, having to do with forbidden pagan religious practices, minutiae regarding clean and unclean foods, and the management of financial debt in a primitive agrarian culture. And still others lay out detailed instructions for how a sinful people can live in proximity to a perfect and holy God. They all have the purpose of communicating to Israel that they are a people set apart, called to holiness because the Lord is holy, and destined to be the nation through whom the Lord will bless all the nations, as he promised to Abraham.

Sadly, the Israelites are destined to learn that they are unable to hold up their part of this Mosaic Covenant. They are incapable of holy living (as are all of Adam’s descendants) because they have sick and rebellious hearts. But through his kind providence in bringing into existence this Mosaic Covenant, the Lord has created a system of religious practice chock-full of symbolism that explains not only the truth about the seriousness of their sin condition, but also points to the eventual perfect cure.

As Christians living under the New Covenant, we have seen the cure. It is not the Law, but in hindsight we can see that much of the law was foreshadowing what the cure must be. We needed a perfect sacrifice, and we are given Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God! We needed new hearts, and Jesus has sent his Spirit to live in our hearts, heal them, write his law upon them, and lead us into righteous living. We needed a mediator qualified to intercede for us with the Lord and Jesus has become our great High Priest. How blessed we are to be participants in this New Covenant to which the symbolic Mosaic Covenant so poignantly pointed!

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#### Read Deuteronomy 14:1-15:23 together

#### Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

#### Passage Specific Questions

1. What does it mean to you to be referred to in the Bible as a “child of God” or “his treasured possession?”
2. What is your standard for deciding whether a particular behavior is sinful or acceptable? Does it have more to do with whether you can see that it demonstrably injures yourself or another, or with what God’s Word expressly says?

3. What principles relevant to you do you recognize in the requirement for the Israelites to tithe and to lend generously to their financially oppressed kinsmen?
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## Commentary

### Deuteronomy 14:1-2

The main body of this chapter has to do primarily with regulations about how to mourn properly and which foods are to be considered clean or unclean. But the chapter begins with these important statements: “You are the sons of the Lord your God. You shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” By these three sentences the Lord confers much honor upon his people.

First, he describes them as the *sons* (some versions read “*children*”) of God. Having exposure to the New Testament, we are perhaps not as conscious of how unusual it must have sounded to the Israelites to be described as the very sons or children of God. Their more natural understanding of their relationship to the Lord was that of subjects in service to an absolute, somewhat distant ruler. The Lord’s description of them as his sons conveys a much more personal, individual, intimate—even familial—sort of relationship!

Next, in preparation for further describing who they are, he tells them who they are not. Specifically, they are not a heathen people. They are not people who cut their hair in certain ways or slash their own flesh, in an effort to placate angry, false gods when an important figure in their life dies. They are not excessively preoccupied and devastated by death, as are the pagans, for they serve the God of the living, the Creator and source of all life. Instead, they are *a people holy to the Lord*, set apart by him for holiness, and differentiated by him from all other people on the face of the earth.

Finally, he tells them that they are *a chosen people, a treasured possession*. This special status they enjoy is not conferred because of their own merit or for any works they have performed or might perform in the future, but rather purely as a demonstration of the gracious and blessed purposes he has for them in the unfolding, sovereign plan of his own design.

Children of God, set apart as holy to the Lord, chosen as his treasured possession—once again, with a bit of perception, we can begin to anticipate the plot line of the entire story told by the Word of God, even in these early pages.

### Deuteronomy 14:3-21

These verses outline which foods are clean and which are unclean. We are told that if they are pronounced unclean, then they are considered detestable and to eat them is “an abomination.” Perusing the list, we see that certain common characteristics are possessed by certain unclean foods, and other common characteristics might be possessed by certain clean foods. For mammals, it seems to have to do with parted hooves and chewing the cud. For sea creatures, it has to do with fins and scales. For birds it seems to have something to do with whether or not they are birds of prey, and for insects, whether or not they have wings. For clean animals that have died naturally, they are unclean for the Israelite (perhaps because they have not been bled properly?) but may be sold to a foreigner. And finally, it is forbidden to boil a young goat in its mother’s milk—perhaps because this is an affront to the order of nature (a mother’s milk is meant to nourish it’s young’s flesh, not cook it) or perhaps because certain pagans might engage in this for some perverted purpose—we just don’t know for sure.

In fact, we don’t know for sure about the reasons for many of these designations. Any suggestion that the foods were “detestable” because of some intrinsic relation to disease or nutritional deficiency bumps up against the New Testament account of Peter’s vision while in a trance at Joppa. As you recall, Peter was horrified when told by the Lord, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat,” (Acts 10) as every sort of unclean creature was carried down to him from heaven in a sheet. When Peter protested, the Lord responded, “What God has made clean, do not call common,” effectively negating all the proscriptions so meticulously laid out here and in the other books of the Torah.

And so using that Scripture to help us interpret this Scripture, we must come to this conclusion: Certain foods were designated clean and certain unclean at certain times purely because the Lord pronounced them so. He did this for his own wise purposes, not always transparent to us, but seemingly in Deuteronomy as a means of sanctifying his chosen, treasured children, by behavior and obedient habit, as holy to him alone, set apart from all other peoples on the face of the earth.

### Deuteronomy 14:22-29

This section deals with the tithe, as do other regulations in the books of Genesis, Leviticus, and Numbers. Most scholars feel that the requirements for a tithe actually required two donations of ten percent. One was to be given regularly for the support of the Levites, the priestly tribe who would carry out all the sacrifices and rituals at the tabernacle, and in the future the temple (remember that the Levites were dependent upon these funds, since they were to receive no grant of land upon gaining possession of Canaan). But a second tithe, to support the purpose of feasting, was also required, and it is described here. The people are told that they are to regularly journey to “the place that he [the Lord] will choose to make his name dwell there” and share among their household a tithe of grain, wine, oil, and firstborn of herd and flock. It appears that a central place of worship is envisioned, and it is the Lord’s desire to create in his people a regular habit of worshipful and celebratory feasting at this central place. If it proved too difficult to transport the actual agricultural products, because of distance from the central place of worship, the people were allowed to convert their goods to silver and use it to purchase the elements of feasting at the worship center.

The Israelites adhered to this requirement through the observance of seven main feasts: Four in the spring (Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, and Pentecost) and three in the fall (Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles). To be sure that local Levites and the poor were well-cared for, the tithe each third year was to be kept in the local community and shared not only with one’s own household, but also with the priests and “the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.”

Thus, this tithe requirement further set apart God’s people. They were to be a worshipful community, trusting in the Lord’s provision, celebrating his past works and their current blessings regularly with joyful feasting and generosity towards others, after the manner of their Lord.

### **Deuteronomy 15:1-23**

There was no tax-supported, governmentally administered, social safety net in the agricultural communities of biblical times. But for Israel, speaking through Moses, the Lord laid out his practical solutions for how poverty was to be avoided. Recognizing that land-owning agrarians would from time-to-time experience hardship, either through mismanagement or by virtue of circumstances beyond their control, Israelites were allowed to borrow money from their kinsmen and friends at no interest. Lenders were expected to be generous in supporting their brothers, aware that agricultural success in any given year was never guaranteed, and they too might one day need similar help. Another requirement of lenders, outlined in this passage, was to strictly observe the sabbatical year of release, which occurred every seventh year. Under this directive from the Lord, all debts still outstanding between an Israeli debtor and an Israeli creditor upon the arrival of the sabbatical year of release were to be nullified. That’s right—the lender was to release the debtor from any further obligation to pay his debt back. The Israelites were promised that if they were “careful to do all this commandment that I command you today,” “there will be no poor among you” and “you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow, and you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you.”

But in recognition of the reality that his people would not always comply perfectly with these commandments, in the very next paragraph the Lord tells how a potential lender should behave towards one who has become poor. This may be summarized in three succinct statements: The lender is told to “not harden your heart” towards your poor brother; to “open your hand and lend him sufficient for his need;” and to take care “to not look grudgingly on your brother.” The last admonition in the list is rendered in the KJV as “let not thy eye be evil towards your brother” and is thought to be the source of our idiom about giving someone “the evil eye.” It refers specifically to the temptation to refrain from lending if the sabbatical year of release is coming soon, because your expectation is that whatever sum is lent at that time will likely never be repaid. The Israelites are told that if they fail to act generously, even in this circumstance, and the poor brother cries out to the Lord against the one that denied him, that one will be guilty of sin. But if “you shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him,” “the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.”

The Lord knows that there will always be poor in the land. He understands better than we do all the many, dire consequences that result from our disobedient tendencies. Still, in setting apart a people holy unto him, he calls for acknowledgement and striving towards the loving generosity that so characterizes his perfect nature.

The next topic addressed is that of slavery. The institution in place in Israelite society shares some characteristics with our conception of slavery, but it was different in important ways as well. The typical way an Israelite became enslaved to another Israelite kinsman was chiefly through debt. If he amassed debt that he could not repay, he could at his option offer himself and members of his family to serve as slaves to the one he owed. Acceptance of the arrangement by the creditor was considered a blessing, since it provided a way for one to work off the debt and later re-enter freedom with a good chance of avoiding future poverty. The way it worked was this: The debtor who became a slave would serve the creditor and take no payment for his service other than food and shelter. He would maintain ownership of his grant of land, the means of continued subsistence in an agricultural society, rather than being forced to sell it to satisfy the debt.



The term of service was six years, after which he was to be set free by his owner. Upon release of the slave, in obedience to the Lord, the slave-owner was to “not let him go empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your wine press.” Though no specific quantity of supplies to be provided was specified, the generosity of the slave-owner was to mirror the generosity of the Lord, who not only had redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt, but also was the source of all the bounty and resources of everyone blessed to be an Israelite.

There would be times when the arrangements between the slave-owner and the slave were so affectionate and mutually beneficial that the slave would have no desire to leave his master’s household when the six years were up. In that case, the Lord allowed for the slave to voluntarily align himself permanently with his master, and described a ritual to symbolize the permanence of his attachment to his master’s household.

The practical result of all these policies was to produce a well-ordered society in which there was a spirit of generosity, an equitable and self-leveling sharing of resources, and preservation of individual and tribal land-ownership. These laudable societal qualities gave further evidence to the unique way in which these children of the Lord had been set apart.

The final words of this chapter contain instructions regarding the sacrifice of all the first-born males of the herds and flocks belonging to the Israelites. To understand this passage, we must go back to the time of the tenth plague in Egypt, when God struck down all the first-born male sons and male livestock of the Egyptians, while sparing all the first-born of Israel. Following the Exodus, the Lord required that all the first-born of Israel must be consecrated to him. In the case of sons, this meant offering the first-born to a life of service to the Lord. In the case of livestock, it meant offering the first-born male—so long as it was without defect or blemish—to be killed by the priests as a sacrifice wholly unto the Lord. There was to be no taking of gain from its labor or fleece before it was offered. Upon being sacrificed, its blood was to be poured out on the ground, signifying the cost of the atonement to be paid by our Savior. The meat was then to be eaten by the herdsman, his household and the priests as a gracious provision of the Lord.

This sacrificial system with its rigid rules and strict protocols was designed purposefully in all its particulars by our Lord. It called for the people to trust in God’s beneficence by requiring the first-born to be set aside, believing that others would be born after it; it showed forth the importance of perfection in the one to be sacrificed; and it revealed the insufficiency of animal sacrifice by its needing to be repeated each and every year. This system is chock-full of spiritual lessons for the Lord’s set-apart people to absorb as they perform its requirements and are thereby made to ponder the deadly result of rebellion, the astonishing love of God, and the high cost of redemption that would one day need to be paid.

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### **The Main Point**

In his unfolding plan to redeem a holy people for himself, the Lord sovereignly chooses whom he will and sovereignly lays out how they are to behave. The obligation of those graciously chosen is to listen and obey, and if they do, he covenants to bless them in all that they do.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- Genesis 14:16-10 - Abram gives the first-mentioned tithe to Melchizedek.
- Acts 10:9-16 - Peter’s trance in Joppa regarding clean and unclean things.
- Hebrews, chapter 9 - Christ is both our ideal High Priest and the unblemished and perfect Lamb of God.

## Week 13

### Deuteronomy 16:1-17 – Remembering What the Lord has Done

By Rand Nelson

#### Introduction

Tim Keller's wife, Kathy, is probably not a Russian spy. Yet, years ago when Keller was talking with his congregation after a sermon on the topic of doubt, he admitted that he couldn't prove that with 100% certainty. Do you really know for certain that your spouse, or your parents, or your best friend is in fact not a Russian spy? How could you go about proving that with absolute certainty? I'm not writing this to make you question those around you with whom you work, go to school, or even attend church with at Anchor. I'm only attempting to borrow an example from the late Tim Keller.

No, Keller couldn't prove that Kathy wasn't a Russian spy. And I can't prove that Carolyn is not a Russian spy, but my history with her—our friendship, romance, marriage, rich conversations, laughter, and tears shed together—all convince me that she is who she says she is. I have a record of her faithfulness to me, to my children, and most importantly to our Lord Jesus.

One of the things God intentionally set up for his people as they were leaving Egypt, wandering in the wilderness, and in Deuteronomy as they're just about to enter the Promised Land, were annual celebrations of his faithfulness. The celebrations of Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths all reminded God's people of who he was and what he had done for them so that they would continue to walk faithfully with him, trusting that he would continue to guide and lead them as he always had. They couldn't always see what was ahead, but they could always look back and trust, because he had proven himself time and time again.

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#### Read Deuteronomy 16:1-17 together

#### Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

#### Passage Specific Questions

1. As you look back upon your life with Jesus, what are some ways you have seen God's faithfulness to deliver you, to provide for you, to sustain you?
2. What are ways in our lives that we can intentionally focus upon or create rhythms to celebrate and remember God's faithfulness in our church, in our families, and in our personal walks with Jesus?
3. How can remembering God's faithfulness help us to walk faithfully with him through our trials and our doubts?

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#### Commentary

##### Deuteronomy 16:1-8

To help them remember his goodness to them, God commanded the Israelites to observe certain celebrations annually throughout the year. The first of these three mentioned in Deuteronomy 16 is the celebration of the Passover. As the Exodus is the one defining event in Hebrew history that they are constantly looking back on, it makes sense that they celebrate the definitive, liberating action of God. Generally speaking, Pharaoh rejected all of Moses' pleas to let God's people leave Egypt—even though he was bothered with plague after plague. The plague that really broke Egypt was the death of the firstborn of every Egyptian, including those inside Pharaoh's household. Exodus speaks of this plague as follows:

At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. And

Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead (Exodus 12:29-30).

God's people were protected from his destroyer, because as he went throughout Egypt and Goshen, he saw the blood of a spotless lamb on their lintels and on their doorposts, and he passed over their house. To fail to shed a spotless lamb's blood and cover their household with it would have meant that they would suffer the same fate as the Egyptians. Yet Israel was spared God's wrath, because they listened to his instructive commands and did as he said. Celebrating the Passover annually was a reminder to God's people of how they—imperfect followers of God's commands—were spared because of the sacrificial death of a spotless lamb. The significance of this may not have been recognized by God's people at this time, but as the story of salvation continues to unfurl, so does the image of what God was doing in the Passover.

A few notes unique to Deuteronomy on the Passover. First, the instructions in Deuteronomy include that the Passover animal may be from the flock or the herd (a lamb or a cow). Second, they are not permitted to host their own little Passover celebration in their homes (as would have been done during the original Passover), but rather they are to join together where the sanctuary of the Lord was located.<sup>23</sup>

Lastly, a lot here is said about bread being unleavened—meaning that the bread would not have been able to rise—which takes time and extra steps in its preparation. Some commentators point out that leaven was potentially unclean and therefore should be avoided during this holy celebration, but the text seems to ground that in the tradition of the moment. The Israelites left Egypt in a hurry. As a result, their bread was not able to be leavened. So, during the time of this feast, they eat only unleavened bread. They eat 6 days worth of unleavened bread, which is followed by a day where they have a “solemn assembly” to the Lord, where they are not allowed to do any work. This started on the 14th day of the month of Abib (or Nisan), which is March/April in our calendar, and continued for the entire week, through the 21<sup>st</sup>.<sup>24</sup>

### **Deuteronomy 16:9-12**

The Feast of Weeks is next on the list in Deuteronomy 16. This takes place 7 weeks after the sickle is put to the standing grain. So, this starts 7 weeks after they start to harvest their grain. Leviticus 23 gives us a more precise date for this: “You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering,” although that's not all that much more precise (Leviticus 23:15). Seven weeks is 49 days. Add to that one day for the festival and you get 50 days. In the Greek world of the New Testament, the Feast of Weeks is called Pentecost, because it is 50 days after the harvest starts. The big point of the Feast of Weeks is to show gratitude to Yahweh, who is the reason why their crops grow and they are thus sustained as a people.

The celebration is accompanied by a freewill offering to God, and then all of Israel joins together in a feast. Everyone joins in this feast—sons and daughters, servants, Levites, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widows who would have been among God's people. God uses the Exodus as a reminder to his people that they were slaves in Egypt before God rescued them and brought them out in salvation. This should motivate their generosity to share in the feast with people historically considered the “least of these” who dwelt among them.<sup>25</sup>

### **Deuteronomy 16:13-15**

The Feast of Booths gets its name because it is an annual reminder/celebration where God required his people to “dwell in booths” for 7 days, because this is how they lived when he brought them out of Egypt (Leviticus 23:42-43). Booths are small, temporary huts that are made of sticks and branches. They would have kept safe from the hot sun during the day as well as the coolness of the evenings.<sup>26</sup> The feast is held just 5 days after Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and is intended to be a joyful celebration, serving as a reminder of God's faithful sustaining and guiding his people during their darkest days.<sup>27</sup> Like the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Booths culminates in a feast that brings everyone together in celebration of God's abundant provision.

### **Deuteronomy 16:16-17**

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<sup>23</sup> Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 242.

<sup>24</sup> Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 241.

<sup>25</sup> Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 245.

<sup>26</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Booth,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 374–75.

<sup>27</sup> K. Casillas, *The Feast of Booths*, BJU Seminary, October 9, 2017, <https://seminary.bju.edu/theology-in-3d/the-feast-of-booths/>.

Verses 16 and 17 note that all Jewish males were required to pilgrimage to the sanctuary to celebrate these things together as a people. They were all to come with an offering to the Lord—each giving as he was able to give—to show gratitude to the Lord’s continued provision. In remembering God’s deliverance from Egypt through the Passover, and his abundant provision for his people during each year’s harvest and while they lived in the wilderness, God’s people would have had regularly before them reminders of his faithfulness.

While Christians today do not normally celebrate Passover, the Feast of Weeks, or the Feast of Booths, we do have built into our regular lives and ecclesial calendar moments where we are called upon to remember God’s goodness and faithfulness. The simplest way this is present is the weekly gathering with other believers to celebrate the truth of the gospel and the goodness of God. In addition to that, we celebrate Christmas (the coming of the Lord Jesus), Easter (the death and resurrection of Jesus), and we regularly remind ourselves of his salvation through the taking of communion and the celebration of baptisms. Just as there were constant reminders of God’s faithfulness for the Israelites, so should we recognize and remember God’s faithfulness to us as we live our lives to know Jesus and make him known.

One other note: The New Testament often sets the scene in a story from the gospels or in Acts by telling the reader when throughout the year the event they’re about to read takes place. We should understand and recognize these annual celebrations because sometimes they give us a better understanding of what is happening in the story with Jesus or his followers.

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### **The Main Point**

God’s goodness and covenant faithfulness to his people is clearly seen in the unfolding history of how he loves and serves them. No clearer is this seen than in the provision of the true Passover lamb who takes away the sins of the world, Jesus Christ.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- Passover: Exodus 12:2-39, 34:18-25; Leviticus 23:4-8, Numbers 28:16-25
- The Feast of Weeks: Leviticus 23:15-22; Numbers 28:26-31
- The Feast of Booths: Leviticus 23:33-43; Numbers 29:12-40

## Week 14

### Deuteronomy 16:18-17:20 – A Heart Like God and the Need for a Righteous King

By Harvey Edwards, IV

#### Introduction

No matter the system of government people form for themselves or who they have as their leaders, even a cursory overview of history will reveal that all are flawed. This is not to say that they are equally flawed, but all leave something to be desired. This is because people, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, are inherently selfish. Again, this does not mean that everyone gives equal reign to their selfishness, but there is an ever-present temptation to use power to serve ourselves and those we care for.

This should not be surprising to anyone who has read the Bible. It is the main tension. We don't want to submit ourselves to God. We want to be able to decide what is best. But everyone doing only as they please is a recipe for disaster. For this reason, God sets up a system of authority for Israel as they prepare to enter into the Promised Land. He sets up a system of judges to decide disputes and to guard the people from entering into worship of forbidden things or worshipping in forbidden ways.

Eventually, this system of government will be headed by a king. Israel was to have a king that led them to trust in God, not in the ways of garnering power in this world. He was to lead them in faithfulness. The problem for Israel was that no one was able to lead faithfully. Their kings led them into sin and ultimately exile.

It wasn't the idea of a king that was flawed. It was that even the most righteous of examples of humanity were sinful. There is only one who can rightly fill the throne and be trusted with all authority. There is only one who can lead God's people to faithfulness because there is only one who can change humanity's hearts—King Jesus.

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#### Read Deuteronomy 16:18-17:20 together

#### Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

#### Passage Specific Questions

1. What should a Christian's relationship be to government and politics?
  2. What does it mean to be led by Jesus in faithfulness to God?
  3. What does it mean to submit to Jesus? Are there areas you are willing to discuss where you find yourself trusting in worldly sources of power rather than Jesus?
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#### Commentary

Israel is about to be established in the Promised Land, and this means that their ways of life will change. They will no longer be roaming the wilderness; they will be settled. There will be a centralization of worship and government, new administrative needs, and disputes to be settled. God's people need a system of authority to help them remain faithful to the covenant they made with him.

#### Deuteronomy 16:18-20

Israel is commanded to appoint judges and officers representing their tribes who will judge the people righteously. They are to show no partiality; they are not to pervert justice; and they are not to accept bribes. This is incredibly important because in preserving justice, Israel will preserve the covenant blessings—they will live and inherit the land the Lord is giving them.

In this cultural moment, a word needs to be said about partiality. The idea that people can be divided by social status, skin color, or any system of oppressed and oppressors and have their status impact a ruling is foreign to Scripture. God's concern for Israel's judges is that they are truly just. They are not to show partiality to the rich because they can do something for them in return, and they are not to show partiality to the poor to somehow make up for some perceived inequality. They are to judge based on the truth according to the Word of God. In Leviticus 19:15, God commands, "You

shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.”

While justice is not a difficult concept to grasp, it is difficult for us to apply and live by. It is always tempting to do what will be most beneficial to you and those you care about. But this way of living leads to the unraveling of civilization. It was important for Israel to live justly, both because they were to reflect the Lord and his ways to the nations, and because their future in the Promised Land was based on their obedience to God. But it is no less important to us today. We should love justice as defined by God because we love the Lord and want people to see that his ways are best. In the New Testament, James lets us know that God’s love of justice should be ours as well. In James 2:1-4, he says,

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. <sup>2</sup> For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, <sup>3</sup> and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” <sup>4</sup> have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

### **Deuteronomy 16:21-17:7**

This section of Deuteronomy concerning forbidden forms of worship may seem like a strange deviation from the topic of authority, but it is actually vital to the overall health of Israel. Israel’s government and worship were integrally tied together. As a people, they have entered into covenant relationship with God. If some in the community are forsaking God to worship another god or to worship in a forbidden manner, these people endanger the entire community. As we have seen throughout Israel’s history, humanity is easily led astray. If someone has done evil in the sight of the Lord and transgressed the covenant by serving other gods, the people are to diligently inquire to make certain that the transgression has occurred, and then on the evidence of two or three witnesses, they are to put that person to death. They are to “purge the evil from [their] midst” (17:7).

Notice that the people are to ensure that the transgression has actually occurred. No one should be put to death without ample evidence of their guilt, and those who bring the charge or who witness against the person must be the ones who first put their hands against them to put them to death. They must feel the weight of what they are doing.

In this way, Israel is to purify itself, such that they remain faithful to the Lord as his covenant people. While some are placed in authority over others in Israel, everyone is to spur one another on in obedience. Otherwise, unchecked sin in the community will fester such that Israel is led away into evil and destruction.

### **Deuteronomy 17:8-13**

Those disputes that are too difficult to be decided by the local authorities are to be brought to Jerusalem. The Levitical priests and the judge are to render a decision, and that decision shall be abided by: “The man who acts presumptuously by not obeying the priest who stands to minister before the Lord your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall purge evil from Israel” (Deuteronomy 17:12). Like forbidden worship, to abandon justice and the law as laid down by the Lord is to ignore the covenant and head towards destruction.

### **Deuteronomy 17:14-20**

A time will come in the land when Israel will desire a king. This is not bad in and of itself. God promised a king from the line of Judah in Genesis 49. Here, they are told that they may set a king over them “whom the Lord your God will choose” (Deuteronomy 17:15). But their motivations will be twisted, and that is hinted at here. They want a king “like all the nations” that are around them. Nevertheless, God allows them to set a king of his choosing over them. He will be one from Israel, and importantly, he should be a king who leads God’s people in covenant faithfulness, and to trust in him for their provision. Look at the regulations.

Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the Lord has said to you, ‘You shall never return that way again.’ <sup>17</sup> And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold.

<sup>18</sup> “And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. <sup>19</sup> And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, <sup>20</sup> that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

He will not acquire many horses, many wives, or excessive wealth. These would be the main ways to accrue power in those days. Horses would mean military might; wives would bring political alliances; and wealth would purchase power. Instead of these earthly concerns, the king should concern himself with the Word of God.

When the king sat on his throne, he was to copy the law and his copy was to be approved by the Levitical priests. The king was to study it daily, and to follow it that he might learn to fear the Lord, and that he might lead God's people to do the same.

This theme is developed throughout Scripture. The Psalms deal extensively with this. In Psalm 1, the man who delights in the law of the Lord is blessed while the wicked perish. In Psalm 2, the Lord's Anointed—the king God chooses—will be given the nations, and all who take refuge in this Son of God will be blessed. The Psalms begin with a hope for a righteous king who delights in the law of the Lord and blesses the people, and this hope is developed through the Psalter.

Deuteronomy 17 is incredibly important because it becomes the way that the Scriptures measure the kings of Israel. As the kings go, so go their people.

Consider King David. He was God's chosen king to rule Israel. He was a man after God's own heart; he loved God's law; and he was honored by the Lord. He received the promise that one from his line would rule forever (2 Samuel 7:16). David was Israel's greatest king, and he led God's people to love and serve the Lord. But David was not perfect, and his flaws are only magnified by those who follow him. David's son, King Solomon, begins well. He desires wisdom from the Lord. But he makes some of the same mistakes as his father, and soon his life follows the antithesis of Deuteronomy 17.

- “Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom” (1 Kings 10:23).
- “And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen” (1 Kings 10:26).
- “Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, <sup>2</sup> from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods” (1 Kings 11:1-2).

Exactly what Moses warned against occurs when Solomon dismisses God's law. Solomon turns his eyes from the Lord and begins Israel's descent towards exile: “For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father” (1 Kings 11:4).

The rest of Israel's kings are measured by this standard as well, and there is a downward trend until Israel's hearts are so hardened that there is nothing for them but exile. They earn the curse of the covenant.

But the New Testament shows us that the hope for a righteous king was not in vain. Jesus fulfills this expectation. He is the Lord's Anointed. He is the Christ, the Son of David. He delights in the Law of the Lord. He fulfills it, earning righteousness for God's people, and by his death and resurrection, and through the pouring out of his Holy Spirit on his people, he restores God's people to himself. He does what Deuteronomy points us towards—the day when God will circumcise the hearts of his people, when he will make us into a people who can faithfully love and follow him.

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## The Main Point

Israel's king is meant to lead the people faithfully following God. Throughout Israel's history, as goes the king, so go the people. The only king able to perfectly love and obey the Lord is Jesus. As our king, he saves us and empowers us to live lives of faithfulness to God.

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## A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Psalm 1-2 – The Psalms begin with a discussion of the blessed man who delights in the law of God and the reign of the Lord's Anointed (remember, Israel's king was to delight in the law of God).
- Psalm 72 – The psalmist considers what it means for the king to rule according to the heart of God and to be blessed by the Lord.
- Ezekiel 37:24-28 – Ezekiel looks forward to the day when God will set his “servant David” (the Christ) over his people to lead them in faithfulness as he sanctifies them.

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