

Deuteronomy – Part 4

Therefore... – Deuteronomy 11-16

As we continue to study the second sermon of Moses, the pivotal section in the book of Deuteronomy, consider the tone of urgency and love which Moses uses in his address to the Israelites. He knows he only has a few short hours left in his life. The forty-year countdown is almost complete since these sermons are being delivered on the first day of the eleventh month in the fortieth year. (Dt. 1:3). Only one month is left of the forty years before the people will mourn the thirty days for his passing.

Moses has lived every line of Deuteronomy. He is the embodiment of the journey itself, and yet he will never enter the Promised Land. He's played a major role in two separate worlds: prince of Egypt and wilderness dweller. Since he will no longer be with them as they enter the new land, he wants to impress on them to enter it with a new mindset, a new identity, not based on fear, but on wholehearted faith, obedience, and love toward God.

Because Moses is concerned that Israel will allow their fear to override their faith and cause them to refuse to enter the Promised Land again, he reminded them of their failures, not to discourage them, but to help them face that fear. Fear defeats our future and must be conquered within our hearts. Because fear rewrites reality, twists our memories, and poisons our trust, it causes us to forget the good that God has done.

Moses has reviewed the commandments, the people's consecration, and how God tested their hearts and disciplined them. Deuteronomy 9 adds another topic: God's ability to strengthen His people against nations greater, stronger, and wiser than themselves.

I. Understand therefore...

Moses begins Deuteronomy 9 with, "Hear, O Israel..." Pay attention, he says, because you are going to cross that dividing line, the Jordan River, and pass into the land where the giants are. These are the same people their ancestors had been afraid of and who caused the fear that kept them from entering Canaan forty years before.

"Understand, therefore, [because there are big, scary giants greater and mightier than you are]" that God is going there ahead of you. The LORD thy God, the same One who is a "faithful God and keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him" (Dt. 7:9), is a "consuming fire" (Dt. 9:3). Picture a field of straw that someone has set on fire. How rapidly that fire consumes the chaff in its path. "Understand, therefore," that God will destroy the Canaanites quickly. Notice, God doesn't ask them to measure the battle; He asks them to measure God's faithfulness!

Then, Moses adds a caution: Don't think, when you've possessed the land, that it's because of your righteousness that He gave it to you. No way! It was because the nations were so wicked, and God is completing the promise He made to your ancestors. You just aren't that righteous; you are stiff-necked! (Dt. 9:4-6).

"Stiff-necked" is used to describe a young heifer unaccustomed to being in a yoke and pulling a cart. It is unruly and draws back from the yoke, trying to wriggle its neck out

of it. Moses reminds these people of various instances in which they have acted in the same way, pulling away from God's guidance and disobeying His commands.

They had provoked God so often. They weren't even out of Egypt before they provoked God the first time! (Ex. 14:11-12). On through the wilderness it continued. Moses reminded them of how he had interceded more than once to keep God from wiping them from the earth. It wasn't a quick prayer for them, hoping God would take pity. He agonized over their sin. Although not manipulative, it was a gut-wrenching plea for their lives. They had turned to worshiping the golden calf when they agonized over Moses' delay on the mountain and wanted a god they could see (Ex. 32). Then God sent fire at Taberah to consume those who continuously complained (Numb. 11). Again, they complained and quarreled because of the lack of water at Massah (Ex. 17), and then they were dissatisfied with the constant diet of manna at Kibroth-hattaavah (Numb. 11:4-35). Moses told them, "Ye have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you!" (Dt. 9:24). No, it wasn't for their righteousness that God gave them the land; He was just fulfilling His promise to Abraham.

In Moses' recounting of Israel's sin, we can see a transformed man from the haughty Egyptian prince who killed a man in anger and had to flee for his life. We see a holy leader, not because his face has shone from God's glory, but because it has been covered in ashes. He has pleaded for the sins of others with tears and for his own failures that he wishes could be relived. God doesn't just forgive; He transforms. Failure doesn't have to be an ending. It can be the place where love shows up the deepest.

God's covenant was not based on Israel's worthiness either, but on His mercy. This generation of Israelites hadn't committed these sins against God, but, unfortunately, they were the ones who would bear the consequences. Moses was reminding them of the kind of God we have. When most of us would have turned away, God didn't. Even when God burned with anger, He stayed. God was faithful.

II. Therefore, What Does God Require?

After reviewing Israel's past sins, Moses asks the people, "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the LORD, and His statutes which I command thee this day for thy good?" (Dt. 10:12-13).

This is a question that every one of us should be concerned with: What *does* God require of us? Is it the same as He required for Israel? As His child, how do we show our allegiance to Him? Allegiance can be defined as "loyalty, commitment, adherence, faithfulness, and duty." This is the expected response of a subject to their ruler. Therefore, what obligations and responsibilities do we have toward our Creator?

Since we know that God exists and He created us, we can conclude that we were created for a purpose. We can be sure that God wouldn't have just stuck us on earth and said, "Here you go. You're on your own now. Good luck!" Even though God created Adam to care for His world, there was also a time each day that they walked and talked together. Our lives must reflect both.

Moses, in his instruction to Israel, says that the first thing God requires is to fear Him. But how can we love a "fearsome" God or fear a "loving" God? While the definition of

fear can mean “to revere or respect,” Jesus made it clear that those who do not accept Him really should “fear” God. “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him” (Mt. 10:28; Lk. 12:5). When Someone can destroy not just our body but has the power to cast our soul into hell, He is truly a fearsome God!

When God tells us that we aren’t to make idols or graven images in any form or likeness because He “is a consuming fire, even a jealous God” (Dt. 4:23-24; 9:3), we should pay attention! Psalm 18:8 tells us that “smoke rose out of His nostrils, and fire out of His mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it.” Isaiah 30:27-30 also gives us vivid imagery of what God’s wrath looks like and continues in Isaiah 33:14, “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” Our first response to this should be to confess our sins and accept Him as our Savior, because then He becomes our Father and will not destroy us. He has promised that, as believers, our soul will abide with Him forever in heaven. (Rom. 8:17).

When we fear God, we humble ourselves before Him as our Lord. No longer are we “stiff-necked.” Once we remove our pride from the equation and stop thinking that our way is best, we will be able to truly love and find joy in Him—even when things are tough. We are no longer to be afraid of God, but to fear Him as His child. This means we are to obey and trust Him, acting upon His words because we don’t want to displease Him. No longer will we be the object of His wrath; our goal will be to please Him, not fight against Him.

Without the fear of God, we would never stop doing evil; everything we do will become “right in our own eyes” (Dt. 12:8; Prov. 21:2). He is the deterrent that restrains us from doing evil. But, on the other hand, without the grace of God, we would have no real desire to do good. His grace encourages that goodness and helps us “to walk in all His ways.” By nature, we walk in our own ways, rather than in God’s. (Isa. 53:6). Going our own way makes us think we are in control. We can do what we want, when we want, and if we want—that’s what Jonah thought too... until he was thrown off the boat to keep it afloat and got swallowed by a fish for his disobedience!

Remember, God doesn’t leave us to live our lives without instructions. Ephesians 4:1-3, 17 tells us to walk “with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace... Not in the vanity [arrogance] of our own minds.” We are to walk in love, in holiness, having no fellowship with the darkness of this world, being careful how and where we walk, not walking as fools, but as wise children. (Eph. 15:1-15). Colossians 1:9-10 tells us to walk in wisdom and spiritual understanding, to be fruitful in our work, and to increase in the knowledge of God.

Once we have begun walking with the Lord, we are to grow in our love for Him. He doesn’t require us to love His service, His house or the people in it, or even His truth. He calls us only to love Him—the rest will come about because of our love for Him. Deuteronomy 6:5 has already shown us that we are to “Love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” Jesus said that this will make our joy full. (Jn. 15:10-12). This is the most difficult of His requirements to sustain because we must give Him everything! We resist this because it is the grand total of anything of us can offer.

In Hebrew, to “love Him with all our heart” refers not only to our emotional state and feelings, but also to our will, our thoughts, and our choices. It involves both our mind, intellect, and actions that accompany those choices. These things include physical and spiritual matters, every part of what makes us the person we are.

“Soul,” in Hebrew, refers to life, that which God breathed into Adam’s nostrils to make him a living soul. This is that which sets us apart from any other aspect of creation, including the monkey. It cannot be separated from the body; soul and body are a united whole. In Greek, it suggests the meaning of being so intertwined that, once separated, a human is no longer a being. Just as a last breath is taken in death, so our lives quickly pass through into eternity.

In Hebrew, “strength” doesn’t mean just physical strength but is more like an adverb, like our English word used as in “very” or “muchness.” Jesus calls it two things, mind *and* strength, in Mark 12:28-30. It might be better to think of it as our “energy.” Every last bit of our energy should be directed to loving God and serving Him.

All these requirements are not just to be done “if we feel like it,” but are commands. Even though we can’t offer the same strength of love Jesus gave to us, God still demands this commitment to Him. Sadly, we can’t even sustain a small amount! We fail and feel like giving up. But this may be because we have an incorrect assumption that “love” is an emotion. Like husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the Church and gave His life for us, so we should love God. Husbands are to love their wives whether they are near us or across the ocean, whether we burnt supper or prepared a lavish meal, whether we screwed up the checkbook, or we didn’t remember to pick up his special request from the grocery store. Their job is to love us, period.

The same commitment of our husbands should be reciprocated by us wives as well. We are called to obey them. Now, this doesn’t mean they get to dominate us, but because they are loving us like Christ does, we can choose to obey them. This is the type of love Deuteronomy has been talking about, a mutually beneficial relationship for both God and His servants, for husband and wife. These rules are not to make our life a hardship, but God gave them to us for our good. (Dt. 10:13).

We don’t “fall in and out of love” because of an emotional imbalance. Love is not a choice any more than it is just an emotion; it’s a commitment regardless of how we feel today, or when they forgot to kiss us goodbye, or didn’t take out the trash, or didn’t put the empty toilet paper roll in the garbage. Our marriage vows say we promise, we are committed, that no matter what we feel like, we will love them. That’s what *agape*’ love is. Loving and expecting nothing in return, regardless of the state of our emotions. The same is required for responding to God. Loving God is a commitment, and a discipline; He must be first in our lives.

To serve God with all our heart and soul and keep His commandments, we must “Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart, that ye be no more stiff-necked” (Dt. 10:16). Circumcision, through removal of the foreskin, was intended as a spiritual thing, for cutting off the “flesh life.” They were not to live after the flesh but after the spirit. This sign was to mark God’s people as spiritually minded in contrast to the natural man of the world who was dominated by fleshly, materialistic things. God had used this sign to show that Israel was set apart to God. If their foreskin was not removed, they were considered disrespectful, unclean, and detestable in God’s sight.

This, though, was only an outward, physical observance or duty, like those who participate in rituals but have no real relationship with God. They are only going through religious motions. Something more substantial must be done. The heart must be circumcised, given an inward cleansing from all its filthiness, to be acceptable to God. He wants a relationship that serves and loves Him through our hearts and souls, not a ritual participation.

III. Therefore, Remember Who You Are

As Moses reminds them that they are servants of the greatest Master of all, he brings to their minds the response that is expected as God's chosen people. He reminds them that, as they had been strangers in Egypt, God cared for them and provided them with food and clothes. Therefore, God required them to love the strangers who came among them. By doing this, they would bring praise to God and honor Him. (Dt. 10:19). They were to imitate His actions to others.

God had blessed and multiplied the family of Israel from the seventy people who had entered Egypt as Joseph's family. They had come out of Egypt as "the stars of heaven for multitude," just as God had promised Abraham that He would do. Therefore, they were indebted to always obey His charge, His statutes, judgments, and commands. (Dt. 11:1).

Their children had not seen all of God's mighty acts, but they had. Therefore, they were charged with keeping these laws. (Dt. 11:8). It was not to be a hardship, but a blessing for them. God wanted them to be strong as they went in to possess the land, to live a long life there, to reap the bounty of a land far different from what they had seen in Egypt. This new land of hills and valleys, with plenty of water, was continuously cared for by God Himself.

If they diligently obeyed God's commands, loving God and serving Him with all their heart and soul, there would be rain at the appropriate times to produce a bountiful harvest of the crops they had planted. Their animals would be fat and prime. If they served other gods, though, God would shut up heaven, and there would be famine. Therefore, remind yourselves of these things in whatever you do and wherever you go. Teach them to your children, for "If ye shall diligently keep all these commandments... then will the LORD drive out all these nations from before you" (Dt. 11:18-25).

"Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments...and a curse, if ye will not obey." That's always the way it is; it's your choice. You can choose the path of God's blessing for your life, or you can choose the path that will lead to God's curse upon your life. Now, God doesn't curse you; He is warning you, because this manner of life already has a curse attached to it.

If you warn your child that touching that hot burner is going to burn you and the child ignores the warnings and puts his hand there anyway, he's going to get burnt. God is warning of this destruction, "put these blessings upon mount Gerizim and the curse upon mount Ebal," right in Shechem, the area where Abraham first came and Jacob dug a well, to remind you. You have the choice to obey or suffer the results.

God promised that, by their obedience, they would conquer nations more powerful than themselves, and every place their feet touched would become theirs. No one would be able to stand before them because God would put the fear and dread of them upon all the land.

Every place where these nations worshipped their gods must be broken, burned, hewed down, and destroyed. As God's people, they must rid themselves of anything that would hinder them from obedience to God. (Heb. 12:1). God Himself would choose the place where He wanted them to worship Him with their burnt offerings, sacrifices, tithes, and offerings. Worship that God desires is not a "do as you like, do whatever seems good in your own eyes" (Dt. 12:8) kind of thing. God has prescribed the way He wants things done.

Even today, God has made it known how He wants us to worship Him. Christians are to meet on the first day of the week, meeting together as a body of believers, not out in the woods, or at the beach, or in front of a television. He says that we should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and you can't do that through a TV screen! (Heb. 10:25).

Conclusion:

These requirements are not suggestions but demands given for our own good. (Dt. 10:13). So, how do we fulfill the requirements that God has for us, because we know, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Does that mean there's no hope for us? No. God provided a way to fulfill God's requirement to perfection. Jesus said, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent" (Jn. 6:29). This is something that anyone can do!

"He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8-9). What will you do with these requirements? Will you obey?

Covenant Renewal (Deuteronomy Part 4)

1) Read Deuteronomy 17-26. Continue to highlight the personal phrasing when used with God, such as “the LORD thy God,” “the LORD your God,” etc. and fill in your sheet.

2) How can you tell if a person is really from God, according to Deut. 13?

3) What rules did God set up for kings? (Dt. 17).

4) How did God provide for the Levites? Why weren't they given land like every other tribe?

5) In chapter 19, what were the three cities God set aside in Canaan's land to be used for?

6) What things kept a man from serving in the military? (Dt. 20)

7) Who was not to be allowed into the congregation of the Lord? Why?

8) What circumstances regarding marriage and divorce that are found in chapter 24?

9) God had told Israel to be kind to the strangers in chapter 10. How does he say that the people should provide for them? (Dt. 24)

Conclusion:

This day was a huge day for Moses as he gave these last words to the people. It was a day of giving them his last bit of advice, of sharing his love with them, of looking forward in happiness that they were going to make that choice to enter the Promised Land. Moses concludes this portion by asking God to bless the people.

If you look carefully at the last few verses of chapter 26, you will notice the phrase “this day.” It was an important day for Israel because God had allowed them to again hear God’s statutes and judgments. This day the people had acknowledged God as their God, and promised to walk in His way, keep His laws, and listen to His words.

God had acknowledged that Israel would be His people, a peculiar, treasured people as He had promised before. He also promised to raise them above other nations so they could be holy unto Him.

Each day should be special as we serve God. Each day we should strive to draw closer to God and show others that we are set apart for Him. It’s so easy to follow the crowd, but God wants us to be different. He gave the laws to Israel to help them stand out, to be different than the other nations in what they practiced and worshipped. Will you take this time to acknowledge what you will do for God?

“By Him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb. 13:15-16).