

Deuteronomy – Part 3

The Lord our God – Deuteronomy 7-8

In his second message (Dt. 4:44-11:32), Moses reviews with Israel what God expects from them. He has reminded them of the Law; they had promised to hear and to do all that God has said. Because God is unique, the only true God, Moses counseled them to learn His laws, keep them, do them, and then teach them. They are to take advantage of every opportunity to reinforce these words to their children, whether they are sitting, walking, lying down, or getting up. Their actions should always reflect that they love the Lord with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind.

Moses also reviews the conditions they will find in their new land: “great and goodly cities” which they didn’t build, “houses full of all good things” that they did not put there, “wells” they didn’t dig, and “vineyards and olive trees” they didn’t plant. But he also cautions them to “Beware, lest you forget the LORD!” If things come too easily, we tend to forget where they came from! (Dt. 6:10-12).

Prosperity wasn’t the only thing Moses warned them to beware of. Idolatry was rampant throughout Canaan, but “Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve Him, and shalt swear by His name. Ye shall not go after other gods... for the LORD thy God is a jealous God.” (Dt. 6:1-15). If they turned from Him to the other gods, God would be angry and destroy them from the earth, just like He was about to do with the people of these heathen nations.

As they prepared to enter Canaan, their obedience and reliance on God alone would give them success. It was God who had brought them *out* of Egypt, to bring them *into* this land that He had promised their forefathers. (Dt. 6:23). As the LORD commanded them, they were to obey His laws and fear (reverence) Him because it was for their good. In their efforts to drive out the nations and possess the land for themselves, God would drive out the nations before them and preserve His people alive.

I. God’s Choice

Deuteronomy 7 begins with the word “When.” “When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee...” God didn’t use the word “if” because there was no doubt in God’s mind that this was going to happen; He was the One doing the casting!

Seven nations are listed that Israel is commanded to drive out of Canaan, “nations greater and mightier than Israel.” Why would God want to destroy them? These nations traced their ancestry back to Noah’s grandson Canaan (Gen. 10:15-19), so the inhabitants of the land were generally known as Canaanites. Each tribe, though, was considered a separate nation and inhabited all the land except Philistia.

Noah had cursed Canaan for the sin that his father Ham had committed when he saw Noah’s nakedness. (Gen. 9:20-26). Some commentators feel that, though Ham had committed the sin, Noah didn’t curse him because God had previously blessed his son. What God had blessed, Noah wouldn’t curse. Some feel that Canaan may already have had tendencies toward this type of wrong behavior, so he was cursed in Ham’s place. Among other offspring of Canaan were the Sidonians, Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Each of the seven nations had its own distinct culture. The Hittites were known for their advanced legal systems and military prowess. The Amorites were a dominant force in the region, often associated with large city-states. Together, these nations controlled great areas of land, usually centered around one or more fortified cities. They had a far greater population and military strength than Israel.

All these nations worshipped multiple male gods, with Baal being the dominant one. Asherah, however, was the primary goddess of all nations. In Chaldea, she was known by the name Ishtar; in Greece and Rome, Astarte. These religions were centered around fertility cults that involved temple prostitution, human sacrifice, and orgies. Archaeologists have excavated many of their temples, high places, stone pillars, and altars. Some sites even contained large numbers of containers with the remains of sacrificed children.

Idolatry is detestable to the God of Israel; He is a God of holiness and justice. The presence of these nations in Canaan posed a significant threat to Israel's spiritual purity and relationship with God. Therefore, the command to destroy these nations was not merely a military conquest but a divine command to preserve the holiness of the Israelite community. As we will see in Judges, the remnants of these idol-worshipping nations would become a snare to Israel.

When these nations were delivered to Israel, they were to kill them, utterly destroying them, showing no mercy. They were not to form a covenant with them or allow marriage between their children and these nations, keeping them from forming alliances. Over the years, some have said that this means God's people can't marry those with a different skin color or from a different nationality, but that is found nowhere in Scripture. This is what the New Testament calls "being unequally yoked," marrying a believer and a non-believer, and has nothing to do with culture and skin color. Being unequally yoked would easily cause them to worship something other than God.

Altars and images were to be destroyed, their groves (Asherah poles where they worshipped) cut down, and their graven images burned. God would judge every man, woman, and child of these nations by death to keep His people from turning away from Him and causing them to be destroyed as well. God made it evident that these people were doomed. He knows how much they hate Him and His people. It helps us see the seriousness of sin.

While this may seem extreme to us, even harsh, it is not cruelty that results in their destruction, but judgment. For almost 500 years, God had been watching the Amorites and all these other nations as their wickedness continued to grow. In making His covenant with Abram (Abraham), God told him that his descendants would come back to that land "for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full [their sin wasn't great enough to warrant immediate judgment]" (Gen. 15:16). He delayed His judgment so that there was no excuse for the Canaanites (broad term for Amorites) not to repent. Our Lord is long-suffering, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9).

Leviticus 18 recorded the multitude of sins that the Canaanites had committed; they had steadily gotten more corrupt and immoral. God told them, "In all these, the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: and the land is defiled; therefore, I do

visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.” (Lev. 18:24-25). Their sin was so upsetting that even the land spewed them out!

II. Coming into Canaan

When God brought Israel into this new land filled with unbelievers, they had some responsibilities to perform and some commands to obey. Israel was to be a holy people to the LORD their God, set apart to Him. God has chosen them for Himself over all the other peoples of the world, not because they were such a large nation or even because they were the smallest. The only reason He chose them to become His people was because He loved them. It was just that simple!

Now, God is following through with the oath of land that He promised their ancestors. Moses tells them, “Know, therefore...” (Dt. 7:9). Whenever we see the word “therefore,” we need to see what it’s there for! In this case, they had just been reminded of the fact that God chose them, loved them, and redeemed them out of bondage. “Know, *therefore*, that the LORD thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations [immeasurable future]. He repayeth them that hate Him to their face, to destroy them; He will not be slack to him that hateth Him, He will repay Him to His face.” God will openly and clearly, during this present life, be smitten so that the hater of God would realize that this judgment was from God.

Because God keeps His word both to bless those who love Him and destroy those who don’t, Israel had to keep three things. “Thou shalt, *therefore*, keep the commandments [general instructions like the Ten Commandments], and the statutes [details and specifics on how to fulfill the commandments like rituals/festivals], and the judgments [decisions or rules that guide the application based on the principles of the laws], which I command thee this day, to do them.” What God says, He does.

“*Wherefore* [on the other hand] it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them that the LORD thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which He sware unto thy fathers” (Dt. 7:11-12). The Hebrew word “wherefore” indicates that which comes after, the end or result of completing something, such as reward, wages, etc. Here, it conveys the idea of a reward for heeding God’s commands, just like there will be a punishment for sinning against Him. So, then, God is making a conditional covenant: if you will obey, if you will do, if you will keep.

As we read in the commandments of the Lord found in Exodus and Leviticus, many dealt with health codes: the kind of food they must eat and sanitation. Now God says that if they learn, keep, and do, or practice, these laws, they will not be harmed by the diseases that came upon the Egyptians. Why? Because they followed the good health practices that God had laid out.

You may have noticed how many times this chapter repeats the phrase, “The LORD thy God”—15 in all! This emphasizes the covenant relationship between God and Israel, highlighting that they are bound by mutual agreement to obey His commands. He is their sovereign, protector, and provider. As such, they are bound to serve Him and no other god.

As the LORD their God, He encourages them to be unafraid of those inhabiting the land that God had given them. He reminds them many times how He used His power

to remove them from slavery, by sending “signs and wonders, and the mighty hand, and the stretched-out arm, whereby the LORD thy God brought thee out: so shall the LORD thy God do unto all the people of whom thou art afraid. Moreover, the LORD thy God will send the hornet among them...” (Dt. 7:19). They knew how God had used plagues on Egypt to bend them to His will.

In similar ways, God will lead His people to victory over their enemies in the future just as He had done in the past. This would include obvious supernatural power (the hornet), but only in the amount needed for the present. This would mean continually looking to Him for the next victory. God would direct and lead them in His timing so that they didn’t move too quickly against the nations. Moving too quickly would cause their numbers to drop too drastically. Some areas of the wilderness would then become empty, allowing wild beasts to overtake the area. This would cause a whole new set of problems.

Obedience to God would cause Him to bless them and multiply their numbers, not only with children, but also with animals and crops. As their numbers and needs increased, God would lead them to further conquest and expansion. At all times, though, they must keep God’s laws of holiness and wait for His leading because it was only by the LORD their God that the enemy would be delivered and destroyed. It would be impossible without His power. (Dt. 7:20-26).

Little by little, “The Lord thy God would deliver them unto thee [Israel] and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction” until the entire land is conquered. (Dt. 7:23). Moses continues with his warnings, though, because if they fail to enter at this point, who knows what would have happened! They mustn’t become frightened and lose faith. They must not hesitate to enter the land but go in and conquer it! So, Moses is doing everything he can to bolster their faith and confidence in God.

III. Discipline

In Deuteronomy 8, the focus of Moses’ message changes from the people’s consecration to God to their discipline, the testing of their hearts, and the way God proved whether they would keep His commandments or not. Moses writes, “And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know...” (Dt. 8:3).

Occasionally, God allowed Israel to suffer hunger in the wilderness. By this discipline, He showed them that we could not live by bread alone. Only by the power that comes from God could they be truly satisfied. While it is by His goodness that the earth provides for our sustenance, we can’t think that food is all we need to be nourished. This is only an outward picture that, once eaten, quickly vanishes, and we forget Who has provided this for us. Because there is no bodily form, God seems far away; we become blinded to the fact that, without His hand in its provision, we would have nothing.

Most of the time, we don’t even think about God working on our behalf. We don’t always feel He is near or approachable. He’s who we pray to, only half expecting Him to answer our requests. When we have all we need, maybe even an abundance, we expect it to continue. We may even believe we have sufficient provision because we have worked so hard, instead of acknowledging God’s provision.

Israel was blinded in their view of God's works, so God chose to discipline them to help them understand. God tested them, and humbled them, to help them realize that they couldn't provide for themselves...and then, He provided them with food they had never seen before—manna. Our God loves to do things in the way we least expect! Israel needed to realize that they couldn't live on just bread; they could only live if God provided the bread!

When Jesus came, He clarified this truth even further, saying, "I am that Bread of Life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:48-51).

God used the lack of food to "prove thee, to know what was in thine heart." (Dt. 8:2). Who was this proving for? It certainly wasn't God; He already knew everything about them from the beginning. The forty years weren't just about punishing them for their lack of faith in entering Canaan, but a time for God to mold and shape the hearts of His people. He was teaching them valuable lessons about relying on Him and obeying His commands. He would prove to the people themselves where their loyalties lay.

Haven't we all had to go through similar "proving"? Sometimes we think that we are stronger than we are...until God puts us through a test to prove to us how weak we really are. It teaches us that we've got to depend on Him because we can't rely on ourselves!

God never permits any trials to come to His followers that He doesn't use to turn to their advantage. When He allows us to hunger, it is because He wants His mercy to be more observable when He provides us with the necessities of life, like He did with their clothes and shoes: "Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy feet swell, these forty years."

Moses reminds Israel of the blessings God has promised them when they enter the land. They will eat and be full; there will be no scarceness or lack of anything...BUT, they must not forget to keep the commandments, judgments, and statutes of the Lord. (Dt. 8:6-10). They must not think that these things come from THEIR power and THEIR might, but they must remember that it is the LORD thy God that provides what they need. "Who led thee? Who brought thee? Who fed thee?"—it was always God.

If they forget God, begin to "walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish." (Dt. 8:19). Just like God is going to use Israel to destroy these other idol-worshipping nations, so will He destroy those that forget Him. Even though God loves you, it doesn't mean that He loves what you do, or how you think, or where you go. He loved us even before we loved Him and became His child. (I Jn. 4:19). He loves us beyond measure, enough to die for us—but He hates our sin.

Conclusion:

Discipline, while not pleasant, is a normal part of life. (Dt. 8:5). We discipline our children to make them become better adults, just as God disciplines us to help us grow as His children. It's an attitude thing. If we view our hardships and trials as

adversities and forget that He is the One who gives us blessings, taking that credit for ourselves, we will soon be disciplined. Instead, we must view them as opportunities and look for the lesson God is trying to teach us.

Are you like Moses, teaching and leading your children to remember what happened before, so they can make a change today? Are you counseling someone who is struggling with their past, or maybe trying to talk some sense into yourself? Moses teaches us that entering into God's promise isn't about ignoring failure, but redeeming it, changing it from something debilitating to something productive. Leadership is not control, but wisdom passed on. Godly words are tools of healing, boundaries, and blessings. What we refuse to remember correctly, we will inevitably repeat.

Maybe you're the one struggling and overwhelmed. You feel the need to tighten your belt, or we don't have enough to pay the bills, or hardships seem to be pressing in, is it only then that you turn to the God we forgot during the good times. Are you going through a time of discipline because you forgot to give God the credit and thought you could do everything yourself? It's easy to do (why else would Moses have devoted so much time to warning the people?). Ask yourself what went wrong, what you need to unlearn, and what you need to learn instead. Confess to God that you have taken Him for granted. Ask Him to help you put Him first in your life and give Him the credit that is due Him for "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17).

Or, are you feeling that everything is going well, you're successful, bills are paid, and there is more than enough for some frills? Beware! Don't forget Who gave them to you! You really don't want discipline! We're not to trust in riches, but to trust in the Lord. When we begin to see the blessings as something other than a result of a gracious and merciful God, forgetting that it was God who gave them to us, believing that our comfort was due to our own hard work or diligence, we give glory to something other than God. Are you taking God for granted?

"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (I Tim. 6:17).

Therefore... (Deuteronomy Part 4)

1) Read Deuteronomy 11-16. What is the point Moses is making in this passage?

2) There are some descriptive words that crop up in these past few passages of our reading. How do you picture each of these words as described in the context?

a. Dt. 7:16 “consume”

b. Dt. 7:19 “hornet”

c. Dt. 9:3 “consuming fire”

d. Dt. 11:22 “diligently keep”

3) What was the reason that these nations were to be destroyed? (Dt. 9)

4) What is “therefore” there for in each of the following verses? Explain the reason that is given for the command.

a. Dt. 11:1

b. Dt. 11:8

c. Dt. 11:18

5) Why was it important that they only offer burnt offerings in the location that God would choose, according to Deut. 12:13-18, or celebrate the feasts in any other location (Dt. 16:6, 15)?

Conclusion:

Have you ever been so scared that you couldn't see what was actually happening in front of you? You couldn't move because you were paralyzed by fear? We have to wonder how afraid that the Israelites were when it kept them from going into Canaan the first time, even after God promised to go with them.

Israel is preparing to try to enter again, and Moses is trying to ensure that this all-consuming fear doesn't grip them again. If they do not enter this time, it could be an even greater disaster than it was before. The last time, they were forced to wander in the wilderness for forty years. What will it be if they refuse God again?

So, Moses is seeking to prop them up, to encourage them, to declare the problems that exist. He wants to be realistic about these problems, to review them, and break each into small, bite-sized pieces to analyze what they could do differently to prevent the same outcome from happening again. At the same time, Moses wants to encourage their hearts by reminding them that the God they serve is greater than any obstacle they will face.

As Christians, when we encounter problems in life, it is also important to look at them realistically as well. We may not encounter a complete lack of food available, no water for miles around, or poisonous snakes that we can't get away from, but there will be problems. It is foolish to make light of such things. Our problems may seem just as overwhelming as the problems Israel encountered in the desert and the giants and walled cities in Canaan. Do we have financial failures that threaten us with bankruptcy? A child that has committed a crime? A parent, spouse, child, or even ourselves that have an incurable disease? These are very real problems that can threaten our peace.

We need to take a look at them, take a step back, and analyze them. But, like Israel, we need to look beyond the problem and realize that we have a God that is far more capable than we are at solving problems. He has the added advantage of knowing the end result and how to get us there, even if He has to manipulate things, like sending birds to feed us, to make the result come out the way He desires for us. His power is just as capable today as it was in Moses' time. He sustained Israel when everything looked bleak and no answer was in sight...and He will do the same for us if we keep our eyes on Him and trust Him to do what is best for us.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah." (Ps. 46:1-3).