

"Instructing the Second Generation"
Lesson 19 - Deuteronomy 8:1-26:19
Maggie Fitzpatrick

There isn't a day that goes by that we don't hear of some type of change happening in our world. A few are good; many, not so good. But one thing never changes, and that's the Word of God!

Well, we're deep into the book of Deuteronomy in this week's lesson. Are you ready to review eighteen chapters of laws, clarifying commands, admonishments and warnings? I know most of our lesson had us just look up specific verses from these chapters; however, really reading these chapters will give you great insight into what God was demanding of His people: loyalty, trust, honesty and obedience.

Even though we are covered by the New Covenant, the Law God gave to Israel has a purpose for us too. The Apostle Paul wrote that the Law is, "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, [and] for training in righteousness." (2 Timothy 3:16) Paul also wrote, "I would not have known about sin except through the Law." (Romans 7:7) The Law reveals our sinfulness and leads us to realize we need God's mercy and grace.

I'll provide examples of laws Moses gave to the Israelites that demonstrated God's holiness, His heart, and character, what He loves and hates. From those laws, the Israelites more fully knew what it meant to love Him and to love others.

Let's get started, shall we?

Moses was nearing the end of his life and knew he would not be entering the Promised Land. God's special leader would soon be replaced by the written disclosure of God's Law.

The Law was more than just the Ten Commandments. God delivered to Moses a series of messages to prepare Israel in key areas of their life: religious, civil, community, personal, economic, and military, to name a

few. Although there were numerous laws, they were not intended to cover every possible circumstance.

Commentator, Bob Utley wrote, "The laws were to teach them how to live in the Promised Land and how to live together, but most importantly they were to teach them how and why to love God and obey Him. God's people needed instruction, laws, promises of rewards and discipline. In a sense, Deuteronomy is Israel's constitution."

This second generation of Israelites preparing to enter the Promised Land had not witnessed all the plagues and miracles God performed as He delivered their "fathers", the former generation, from Egyptian slavery. But they had seen that generation die in the wilderness as a discipline for rebellion. So, they had a lot to learn about who God is, how to worship, obey and trust Him.

Moses began with a history lesson of how God led their forefathers out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and provided miracles in the wilderness. He provided them food and water; their feet didn't swell, and their clothes didn't wear out. I imagined when an Israelite wife told her husband she needed a new dress, he replied, "Why? The one you're wearing looks brand new!"

NOT BECAUSE OF THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS

There's nothing like being reminded of your faults to humble you. Be glad you weren't an Israelite because Moses told them they were "not all that", or whatever the equivalent in Hebrew would be! It wasn't because they were so righteous that they were going to live in "a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills." (Deut. 8:7)

I like what The Message Bible says were the reasons: "But when God pushes them out ahead of you [speaking of the Canaanites], don't start thinking to yourselves, 'It's because of all the good I've done that God has brought me in here to dispossess these nations.' Actually it's because of all the evil these nations have done. No, it's nothing good that you've done, no record for decency that you've built up, that got you here; it's because

of the vile wickedness of these nations that God, your God, is dispossessing them before you so that He can keep His promised word to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." (Deut. 9:4,5)

Did you catch the two reasons why they would get to enter the Promised Land? God was the Landlord, and He wanted the wicked Canaanite tenants evicted. Additionally, God had promised the land to Israel's ancestors, and God is a Promise Keeper.

However, I think there were two more reasons. One is God's great love for the stiff-necked nation, "The Lord set His heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them." (Deut. 10:15) God's love is the basis for His relationship with His people. The other was because of God's grace. Israel didn't deserve to be rescued from Egypt or be blessed with the Promised Land, but then neither do we deserve to be rescued from sin by the blood of God's Son.

Leaving the history lesson, I'll address some of the laws regarding Israelite's relationship to God, specifically to love, obey, and remember Him.

LOVE GOD

Deuteronomy may seem to be just a lot of rules; however, it is among the top five books of the Bible that uses the word "love." "Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." (Deut. 10:12)

Jesus restated that command in Matthew 22. He said the first and greatest commandment is, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37)

OBEY = BLESSINGS DISOBEY = CURSES

Moses taught the Israelites that blessings would come with obedience, and curses with disobedience. He declared, "I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse – the blessing if you obey the commands

of the Lord your God; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods." (Deut. 11:26, 27) In 11:29 they were instructed to go to Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal when they crossed the Jordan River to formally pronounce those blessings and curses aloud. Six tribes stood on each Mount as the Levites recited specifically what they were as stated in Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28. There was to be no misunderstanding of what was expected. Bible expositor, William R. Newell wrote, "God is placing before His people the conditions of their occupancy of Canaan. All these conditions sum themselves up into one great word: OBEDIENCE."

Israel would be unique among the nations and God would lead them to victory if only they would bend their stubborn wills and obey. This quote further clarifies consequences of obedience and disobedience. "Obedience shows itself in long term safety. Disobedience shows itself in long term punishment." (Pastor, Tyler Velin)

It was true for the Israelites and it's true for us today that when we know God, we love Him, and when we love God, we will want to obey Him.

DO NOT FORGET THE LORD

The Israelites were told, "Do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe His commands, His laws and his decrees." (Deut. 8:11) The Israelites didn't have numerous copies of God's Law laying around in their tents. They depended on their memory by reciting and repeating the Law to help them from generation to generation to remember what God commanded.

Moses told them, "Place these words on your hearts. Get them deep inside you. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder. Teach them to your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning until you fall into bed at night." (Deut. 11:18-20) When I visited Israel, I was fascinated by Orthodox Jews who wore a small box, called a phylactery or frontlet, tied to their forehead and left arm. The phylactery holds key Old Testament verses to keep God's words close to their hearts during prayer times.

I wondered if the author of Hebrews remembered Moses' words when he wrote that God said, "The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant.... I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts." (Hebrews 8:7,10)

What helps you remember God's Word? Memorizing certainly can help plant His Word in our hearts and minds. For those of us who have lost the strong "muscle memory" we once had, I find songs of faith, especially hymns which contain sound doctrine, help me reflect on God's promises and truths. Sometimes I'll read God's Word aloud. Although, I must admit, not the genealogies! Reading aloud gets more of me involved. I see it, speak it, and hear it. It's been said the one thing for sure we can take with us to heaven is God's Word!

God established three religious Festivals to help Israel remember that He delivered, protected and provided for them in Egypt and through the wilderness. The Passover (Festival of Unleavened Bread) was to commemorate that God delivered them from Egypt. It is considered the most important of the Jewish holidays. The Festival of Weeks (Pentecost) was a time to celebrate the gift of God's Law. The Festival of Tabernacles was for Israel to remember when they dwelled in the wilderness in tents. In each of the festivals, the people were told to celebrate and rejoice. Remembering what God has done for us is cause for celebration. Isn't that why one of our favorite Easter songs is Christ the Lord Is Risen Today? Alleluia!

KEEP HOLY

Moses taught the Israelites they were to keep themselves holy, "for you are a people holy to the Lord your God." (Deut. 14:2) Israel was to be set apart from the pagan peoples with their pagan practices. Moses gave them laws about their clothing, shaving, forbidding them to mutilate their body, and forbidden was behavior that was contrary to nature. They were prohibited from eating certain foods, possibly because they were associated with Canaanite idolatry or for health reasons. For those of you who love a good pork barbecue, be glad you're under the New Covenant because pork was definitely off their menu! I am so grateful we live under the New Covenant of grace, especially when it comes to food!

RIDDING THE LAND OF PAGAN WORSHIP

Of all the sins that would befall Israel, their struggle to not follow pagan gods was the most dangerous in terms of its consequences to them individually and to the entire nation. When first entering Canaan, God was very explicit they were to rid the land of everything related to the pagan's religion. "You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the Lord hates." (Deut. 12:31) To rid the land of the detestable things, the Israelites were commanded to:

Destroy Idolatrous Altars

Canaanites worshipped a multitude of gods and goddesses. Their places of worship were all over the land, on mountains and hills, even under trees. The Promised Land belonged to God and He did not want His people to be enticed and ensnared to follow wicked and cruel practices which were an abomination to Him. They could not have misunderstood what God commanded them to do with shrines and idols: "break down, smash, burn, cut down, wipe out." (Deut. 12:3) The land was to be purged of all evidence of idol worship.

Ignore False Prophets

God warned the Israelites of prophets, dreamers of prophetic dreams, even family members who would entice them by saying, "Let us follow other gods." (Deut. 13:2). Forsaking the true God for idols and horrific practices of false religions were, as J. Vernon McGee wrote, "like a cancer; a cancer that must be cut out."

Abstain from False Religions and the Occults

Idolatry was everywhere in the Promised Land. Even seemingly harmless inquiries about it could lure the people to idol worship. They were commanded, "Do not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, "How do these nations serve their gods?" (Deut. 12:30) God strictly prohibited divination, sorcery, witchcraft, spellcasting, mediums, occult

practices and child sacrifices which God called “an abominable thing that the Lord hates.” (Deut. 12:31; 18:10,11)

The snare of idolatry comes in subtle forms. So even today, we must be on guard to avoid those things that will distract us from God.

GOD’S HEART REFLECTED IN LAWS FOR THOSE IN NEED

God’s heart and compassion for the poor and disadvantaged can be seen in numerous civic and social laws. He was concerned for the Israelites well-being and their interaction with each other. “If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them.” (Deut. 15:7) This was the foundation of many laws God created to care for the poor and for those in society that could easily be neglected.

THE LORD’S POVERTY PROGRAMS

Several laws were God’s anti-poverty measures including the command to cancel loans and mortgages every seven years which gave less fortunate Israelites an opportunity to survive. Landowners of olive, grape and grain fields were to leave any leftovers after harvesting or gleaning so the foreigners, orphans and widows could gather food. When we study the Book of Ruth, we’ll learn how this law sustained the great grandmother of King David. A considerate and humane law provided for hungry travelers passing through a vineyard or a field. Because of this law, Jesus’ disciples plucked head of grain when they were hungry.

Moses said God stands up for the fatherless and widows, and He loves those who lived among the Israelites called “foreigners.” The Israelites were also commanded to love the foreigners because God redeemed them when they were once slaves and foreigners in Egypt.

So too did the Lord Jesus command His followers to be compassionate to those in need. He said, “Whatever you [do] for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you [do] for me.” (Matthew 25:40).

When the Israelites encountered someone who needed assistance or support, Moses told them, “Do not ignore it.” (Deut. 22:3) The second

greatest commandment applied to the ancient Israelites as well as to Christians who are saved by grace, "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39) Only a perfect God, full of love and compassion could create a society that would care so deeply about the less fortunate. What kind of society would we have if we lived like God commanded, and demonstrated God's Spirit of love for others?

There's one last thing we should note before I get down to my final remarks. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 speaks about when they settle in the land and say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us . . ."

Does that sound familiar? God knew even before they entered the land that one day, they would reject Him in favor of an earthly king. He set down instructions for that king that were largely ignored as we studied in our United Kingdom series. If ever there were verses that demonstrate God's omniscience, it's that passage.

DEUTERONOMY LAWS SEEN IN NEW TESTAMENT

In this week's Scriptures there were a few laws, including a prophecy, which reflected New Testament passages and events.

WASHING AWAY GUILT

City elders were to perform a ritual hand washing to show they were not guilty of putting to death a potentially innocent person. This law is believed to be the origin of the ritual Pontius Pilate performed when he sentenced Jesus to death.

JESUS A CURSE FOR US

Deuteronomy 21:23 states, "... anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse." The Apostle Paul said, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" (Galatians 3:13) Jesus was crucified on a cross of wood, sometimes referred to as a tree. Paul said when Christ hung on the tree, He took our sins on Himself. He was cursed of God; not because Jesus sinned, because He cannot sin, but because Jesus had to

become a curse for us to take the curse of the law and redeem us from the penalty of our sin. I wonder if Moses could possibly have realized the full significance of this law when he gave it to the Israelites.

REBELLIOUS SON

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 tells us that rebellious sons were to be stoned to death. Bible scholars help us understand this seemingly harsh punishment by explaining that Israel was a patriarchal society, and being a rebellious son was equal to anarchy. The punishment of death wasn't applied to a son whose rebellion was just that he refused to make his bed. The son would have had a long history of rebelliousness and a sinful lifestyle. His parents would have tried every measure to correct him. Both parents were to take him before the city elders and tell them, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard." (Deut. 21:20) The terms "stubborn" and "rebellious," meant the son would have rejected the relationship between he and his parents and refused to obey them. He would have broken the rules of society, defaming the family name.

This law caused me to reflect on the Prodigal Son parable in Luke 15. It's a powerful story which explains grace versus the Law. The son in the parable would be stoned to death for what he had done, and the crowd listening to Jesus' knew what the punishment would have been. Imagine the crowd's surprise when Jesus said the son's father ran out to greet him with open arms, kissed him and welcomed him home. The Law called for death. Grace calls for life. Aren't you glad we are not under the Law? "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

Instead of the judgement we deserve, God gives us mercy and grace. What does this have to do with our lesson? I believe knowing the punishment required by the Law helps us see the magnitude and the depth of grace God has lavished on us, His rebellious sons and daughters.

Did you see Jesus in one of Moses' messages?

GREATEST PROPHET FORETOLD

Reading prophesies about Jesus is exciting and the one in Deuteronomy is considered one of the most specific Messianic prophesies in the Old Testament. Moses told the Israelites, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to Him. (Deut. 18:15)

The Apostle Peter quoted Moses, applying this prophesy to Jesus. "For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people.'" (Acts 3:22) The strong Jewish belief that the Lord would raise up a prophet like Moses led Philip to tell Nathaniel about Jesus, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." (John 1:44)

The eighteen chapters in our lesson this week were the heart of the covenant law. The ordinances Moses gave to the second generation of Israelites were for them to focus on God's love and goodness leading them to choose obedience and loyalty to God.

The laws reflected undeserved grace motivated by God's matchless love. In grace, God chose Israel as His people before they even knew His Law. So too, God chose us while we were still sinners.

After sifting through the nitty-gritty laws and rules, Moses' main message was that the Israelites were to be in awe of God, walk with, love, serve and obey only Him with all their heart and soul. That's what God required of Israel, and it applies to all who follow the Lord Jesus.

It's true Christians are not under the Old Covenant, but Deuteronomy reveals the same God with the same heart who wants us to love Him and love those around us.

God asks each generation the same question, "Do you love me more than all of these?