

Devotional Meditations on the Book of Deuteronomy

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2023

#1A - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 1:1

The word "Deuteronomy" literally means "second law." The book likely gets its name from the fact that it restates the Ten Commandments, which were previously recorded in Exodus 20. But it also repeats and reiterates the history of Israel's wilderness wanderings. Moses warns them of the dangers and deceitfulness of sin and a heart that would turn away from God. However, the book not only recalls the past. It outlines various regulations for her present life as a nation and concludes with a prophecy about the future. Thus, the book reaches both backwards and forwards in its historical scope. One can truly say that the entire history of redemption is contained in this book, albeit in seed form.

But it also looks inward towards the heart of the Israelites. Over and over again, Moses makes it clear that their covenant with God is one that finds its locus in their hearts. The word and works of God are not only to be seen in marvel that with the eyes, but kept and preserved in the heart. indeed, the state of their "hearts" is a heavy emphasis throughout the book. They are to love Him with all their heart, be on guard against pride in their hearts, and be circumcised in their hearts to love and fear the Lord.

Deuteronomy is also a covenant document. Ancient treaties or covenants from this part of the world follow a clear structure that is reflected in parts of the book. Broadly speaking, ancient covenants consist of a preamble identifying the ruler making the covenant, a historical prologue describing how this relationship came to be, a set of stipulations or rules imposed by the ruler, and finally, a set of sanctions (blessings or curses) that will befall them if they break the covenant. The Ten Commandments seem to contain these general elements. The prologue identifies YHWH as the God who is entering into covenant fellowship with them. The historical prologue reminds them of God's gracious redemption of them from slavery in Egypt, and the commandments themselves are the stipulations that define their life before YHWH. There are also elements of blessing and cursing intermixed throughout, offering life and death for Israel with respect to their faithfulness to the covenant.

Some have attempted to strictly outline Deuteronomy according to the treaty format, dividing it into separate sections that correspond to these treaties. Other scholars have noted that not all the treaties are exactly the same in every era. It is also worth noting that we should not view Deuteronomy as simply "borrowing" pagan literary forms for divine use. There is an undeniable general correspondence between the treaty elements we see among the surrounding cultures and what we see in the Bible. However, the Biblical covenants describe a special relationship with God that is uniquely revelatory of His unique character. In particular, God's covenant with His people is thoroughly gracious through and through. By contrast, pagan covenants were largely works-based arrangements and often imposed by conquest and force. Instead of seeing the biblical covenants as the "copy" and the pagan covenants as the "original," we should instead view it the other way around. Pagan Covenants pervert the order and structure of God's design in his relationship with mankind. Ironically, in

their rebellion they also betray the fact that they are creatures made in God's image and cannot escape this reality.

The Book of Deuteronomy is also the last words of Moses to Israel. we can view it in some respects as his last will and testament. This gives Moses' words an extra weightiness. It begins by noting that these words were written in the fortieth year of their wilderness wanderings. It ends with a record of the death of Moses in Exodus 34. It notes that since his death, "there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face" (34:11). Moses was an unprecedented figure, and there would not be another like him in the entire Old Testament period.

That is—until the arrival of Jesus. Moses was a great servant, faithful in God's house. Jesus is a Son over God's house, faithful to His Father (Heb. 3:1-16). He is worthy of greater glory than Moses. Moses testified to the things that were to be spoken later. Jesus is the bringer of those future glories. He sends His Spirit to circumcise our hearts and write His law upon it. Through Christ, the life words of Moses to Israel are words that speak to us, that we may never forget the mighty words and works of Jesus and hold fast to Him all our days.

#1B - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 1:1-46

Deuteronomy is a transitional book. The introductory verses lay out Israel's immediate past. They have spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness. It is now time for them to move from the era of the Exodus to the Conquest. The land of Canaan is before them, and they are to go in and take possession of it, through which God will fulfill His promises to the Patriarchs (1:8).

Moses has been a great leader. However, even when the church has been blessed by such men, they should not be led by single human individuals. If a man like Moses cannot handle the burdens alone, how much more difficult will it be for lesser men! In verses 9-18, Moses reminds us of how God appointed elders to assist in the administration of justice among the people. They are to handle the "normal" cases, while Moses will step in for the more difficult ones. In the New Testament, God has appointed that the church be governed by a plurality of elders.

While church government is not part of the "being" of the church, it is part of the "well-being." In other words, a church that differs in its approach to church government (i.e., episcopal or congregational) does not thereby become a false church. However, the fact that a book as significant as Deuteronomy begins with a reminder about the structure of their government as a church and as a nation is significant in underscoring its importance.

At the same time, the passage also reminds us of the limitations of God's earthly servants. Moses highlights his own weakness and inability to carry the responsibilities placed upon him. The elders largely have a judicial role in which they help settle disputes and cases among the Israelites. At the root of these problems are matters of sin in the heart, which only God's Spirit can address. God uses the processes He establishes to work His grace, but the human means cannot be confused with the Divine agent working through them.

Even when things are "set up" and the church is formally functioning properly, this does not guarantee "success." This is seen vividly in the next section, which reviews Israel's initial refusal to enter the Promised Land. Early on in their journey through the wilderness, God brought them to the border of Canaan and called them to go up and take possession of it. God allowed them to send out twelve spies who reported back concerning the fruitfulness of the land. God's promise proved true: the land was good, flowing with milk and honey! However, they were also terrified by the greater size and strength of the inhabitants of the land. They were filled with fear and did not trust the Lord, who is mightier than all and had promised to fight for them.

It is important to note that the text explicitly states that Israel's failure was a failure of faith (1:32). God's covenant with Moses was a covenant of grace that summoned the people to have faith in His word. At the heart of the "Law" of Moses is the commandment to believe in the Lord. We can do nothing with God until we first put our trust wholly in Him. When we understand that at the heart of our covenant relationship with the Lord is to do battle against His and our enemies, this point becomes even clearer. We wrestle not with flesh and blood or the kings of Canaan, but with the spiritual forces of darkness and the kingdom of Satan. We will have no victory over such great forces unless the armor of God is upon us, which we can only possess by faith.

And such was God's promise. Just as He did in Egypt, so He would do in Canaan. He would fight for them. He would carry them, just as a man carries his son (1:31). Yet they did not trust in His promises. Their lack of faith meant that they would not possess the land and die in the wilderness. However, this did not make an end to God's promise. The next generation would inherit the land.

This narrative is not only for the Israelites; it is for us in Christ, upon whom the end of the ages has come. Although we are still sojourners on earth, the kingdom of God has arrived in us through Christ and His Spirit. The call today is to take up arms in the battle of the Lord. This war is not fought with guns and tanks, nor is it fought with political activism. It is a spiritual battle that encompasses the daily struggles of life in our families, church, work, and other areas of life. These realities must shape our mindset and perspective. We will often be tempted to flee from God's call because the enemies seem too great. But in Christ, we have one who will fight with us and for us. He will carry us like a father carries a son. He has wandered with us and experienced all the miseries of this world. He was tempted and tried just as we are, yet was without sin. He is greater than Moses, who died and did not cross into Canaan. Jesus died but rose again and passed through the heavens, taking possession of the inheritance

as the heir of the Father. He has been installed as the head over all things, far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion. Every knee will bow before Him. It is ours to trust in the power of His word as we shine the light of Christ to the nations: not for judgment but for salvation.

#2 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 2:1-37

As we saw in our introductory devotional, Deuteronomy is a covenant document. Covenants can be either human or divine. Human covenants from this time period often began with a historical prologue outlining the past relationship between the two parties of the covenant. God's covenant with His people is unique, and we should not quickly assume too many similarities between ancient human covenants and divine covenants. However, the presence of a historical prologue seems to be a clear similarity.

Deuteronomy thus begins with a review of Israel's past relationship with the Lord. In a word, it is characterized as patience and grace on God's part, with unbelief and rebellion on Israel's part. The chapter picks up where we left off in chapter 1. It describes Israel's passage through several foreign lands on their way to Canaan: the land of the Edomites, Moab, Ammon, and the land of King Og.

Not all these people are destroyed or engaged in battle. The lands that are spared are done so to fulfill God's gracious promises. They are not to contend with the Edomites because God has given it to Esau as a possession (2:5). Likewise, Moab is to be left alone because God gave that land to Lot as a possession (2:9). The same thing is noted of the territory of Ammon (2:19). At one point, an analogy is even drawn between God's dispossessing the land of the Horites for Esau, just as Israel did to their land (2:12).

Note how God's peace indirectly touches the nations that surround Israel, especially those that had a connection to Abraham. Just as He fulfilled His word to them, so He will keep His word to Israel. If He honors His promises to the nations outside His covenant of grace, how much more will He honor His word to His son, Israel? He gave a promise to them which remains firm and steadfast. These are not redemptive relationships in the sense that they come under the covenant of grace and fellowship in Israel, but they are a reminder of God's future plan to encompass the nations within His gracious kingdom of salvation. Just as Jacob and Esau were reconciled towards the latter part of their lives, so the Israelites and the Gentiles will be reconciled into one body in Christ.

But with Sihon, things are different. His land had been given into the hand of Israel. Although God gave him the opportunity to let Israel pass peacefully, the Lord "hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate" (2:30). This language recalls what God did to Pharaoh in the Exodus. God told Pharaoh to "Let my people go" or face plague and judgment. So also God told Sihon through Moses: "Let me pass through your land peacefully" (2:27). In both cases, the rulers refused and came under divine judgment. Ironically, the hardness of their hearts became a mirror for Israel's own failure and unbelief. They

became like the nations in refusing to listen to God's call to take possession of the land. They failed to fight the good fight of faith and gave in to fear. Although the entire generation of fighting men died and never saw the Promised Land, God did not abandon them. For "forty years the LORD your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing" (2:7).

The overall message of this historical prologue is God's faithfulness, grace, and mercy. Although God would have been just to reject and destroy Israel, He kept His word to them. Although they were faithless, He remains faithful.

In this, we see a preview of God's grace in Christ. Note especially the language of Moses in verse 6: "You shall purchase food from them with money, that you may eat, and you shall also buy water from them with money that you may drink. For the Lord has blessed you in all the work of your hands."

This language is picked up by Isaiah when prophesying the future kingdom of Christ: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1). This language is picked up by Jesus when he declared: "Is anyone thirsty, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37). In the book of Revelation, the Lord says: "Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price" (Rev. 22:17). God allowed them to buy temporal water and food that sustained Israel in their earthly journeys. In Christ, God gives us spiritual food and drink that will sustain us to eternal life. Although we may be faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself (2 Tim. 2:13).

#3 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 3:1-29

Chapter 3 concludes the "historical prologue" that initiates the last book of Moses. The previous chapter recounted their interactions with Edom, Moab, and Ammon, the nations that bordered Israel. It concluded with their defeat of Sihon, the king of the Amorites. In chapter 3, we pick up where we left off and recall Moses' account of their defeat of King Og and their arrival at the edge of the Promised Land.

Up to this point, God's plan has been strategic. Israel is facing a series of major battles ahead, and these initial battles with Og and Sihon serve to prepare Israel for the years to come. Central to this training is the transition from fear to faith. In verse 2, Israel is exhorted not to fear Og and assured that the Lord will defeat him, just as He did with Sihon. This exhortation is repeated in verse 22 in reference to the rest of the Canaanites who will be conquered under Joshua's leadership.

Israel is called to put their trust in what they cannot see and forbidden to fear what they do see. They are to walk by faith, not by sight. Overcoming fear is essential in training every good soldier. Fear not only robs the army of a potential victory but also often leads to certain defeat. When you have the

ability to fight back, there is still a chance for victory or at least survival. However, if you turn around and run away, you become an easy target, susceptible to being shot in the back.

Moses himself experienced this struggle of faith. The chapter includes a reminder of his moment of failure. While Moses was almost entirely faithful to God, he also had a moment of weakness. As a result, Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. This serves as a reminder that, as faithful as Moses was, he was not the ultimate leader over God's house.

What applies to Israel in types and shadows also applies to us in Christ. Jesus also contrasts fear with faith several times during His earthly ministry (Mark 4:40; 5:36). By calming the storm with His powerful words, Jesus reveals Himself as the Lord not only of the nations but of all creation. Even the wind and the sea obey Him. He conquers the powers of darkness in a way that surpasses the achievements of Moses or Joshua. Sihon and Og were merely earthly manifestations of the power of darkness through human rule. Jesus defeats the devil himself, effortlessly driving out his minions from those possessed by demons.

As in Moses' time, Jesus has sufficiently demonstrated that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. We have nothing to fear in this life. The core of our struggle as believers is transitioning from a state of fear to one of faith. If we know that in Christ no enemy can stand against the church of God, what is there to hold us back from a life fully dedicated to serving Him? Fear leads to various other sins. When we trust in the Lord, it brings peace of heart and mind that surpasses all understanding. By faith, we are filled with God's sufficiency and blessedness, enabling us to sacrificially love others from the depths of our hearts. In light of possessing God Himself, what do we truly lose in earthly sacrifices?

However, when fear overwhelms us, our focus shifts to what we might lose in this life, and our orientation towards life changes. We transition from a stable mindset to a "survival mode" of existence. We start taking drastic measures to control our surroundings, particularly the people around us. Panic sets in, and people can become so overwhelmed that they are simply unable to function.

In Christ, we may face direct attacks from the most terrifying and powerful enemies imaginable. But in Him, there is the promise of certain victory, not through our own strength, but through His.

#4 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 4:1-49

Deuteronomy 4 is a special chapter. In it, we begin to transition from the "historical prologue" section of the Mosaic covenant to the "stipulations" or laws. Chapter 5 contains those stipulations in summary

form in the Ten Commandments, while much of the rest of the book will expound and apply them to Israel's life in the land.

Chapter 4 is also unique in that it contains many aspects of the covenant. It reminds us of who God is, what He has done for His people, promises of blessing and threats of cursing, appeals to witnesses, etc. The thing that ties all these elements together is its emphasis on the reasons for and purposes of covenant obedience. It answers the questions: why do I need to be loyal to God, offer Him my heart and service, and carefully keep His commandments? This is an important question for the Christian to answer: why should we obey God? Let us summarize some of the reasons given in this passage.

First, we obey because it is what God declares in His word. God's word defines what true righteousness is. We are not to add to or take away from God's word (4:2). His revelation to us comes in the form of written statutes and rules. They are not just revealed verbally in a spoken word but permanently set down in an unchanging, written word. They are carved in stone. Our ultimate prayer is that God would inscribe them by His Spirit in our hearts so that we may have a permanent remembrance of them and a constant desire to follow them.

Second, the God who reveals these things to us is the glorious, one true God who alone is to be worshipped. He has done wonders in the heavens and on the earth that no other god has done or could do. Special emphasis is given in the passage to the first and second commandments. There is only one true God. They saw no form of Him when He revealed Himself. They only heard His voice (4:12, 33). He spoke from fire and thunder with the majesty of a great king. Unlike the Canaanites and the Egyptians, they are not to worship the heavenly bodies or any other created thing (4:19).

Third, this means that obedience is the path to life and the way we will walk to take possession of our inheritance. Multiple times Moses sets forth life and the inheritance as the end of obedience. But obedience is not the cause or basis of life. We cannot earn our salvation or heaven. But our obedience is the way to life. As Paul states, God has prepared our good works ahead of time that we might walk in them (Eph. 2:10). To get our heavenly inheritance, we have a path to walk just as Israel did. It is a long and difficult one. We have the promise that God will carry us just as a man carries his son (Deut. 1:31). But the end of that path is life. Good works are related to life not as a meritorious cause to an effect but as a means to an end. As Paul states, the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. As the Larger Catechism states, good works (graciously prepared for us by God) are "the way which He hath appointed them to salvation."

Fourth, our obedience is part of the way the covenant promise of God is passed from generation to generation (see verses 9 and 25). We do not make our children Christians by our obedience, but in serving God, we do set an example of godliness before them. If we instruct them in the Christian faith but live as non-Christians, we are only teaching them how to be hypocrites.

Fifth, obedience and disobedience are met with blessing or curse. The blessing is held out as a gracious reward for imperfect obedience. God does so to tenderly allure us to follow Him. We ought to obey no matter what: God is God. What He says goes. But He is kind and loving and deals with us as a father deals with his children. But He is also a jealous God. Disobedience exposes the hardness of our hearts. There is no salvation apart from faith. God is patient and gives opportunity for repentance. But persistent rebellion and unbelief will be met with judgment. Even Moses was not exempt from the chastisement of the Lord in this regard (4:21).

Yet even then God holds out grace and mercy. Moses's encouragement to obey turns prophetic in 4:30-31: "When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey His voice. For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that He swore to them."

Such is our gracious God. He does not save us because we have earned it by our works. But our salvation consists of a complete liberation from sin: both in its guilt and enslaving power. Christ fulfills the demands of the law for us by His obedience and death (justification). The Spirit begins to fulfill the law in us through our sanctification (see Romans 8:4)."

#5 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 5:1-33

This chapter contains the Ten Commandments or the "Ten Words." If the book of Deuteronomy as a whole is a covenant document, the Ten Commandments contain this covenant in miniature. Moses himself refers to them as the "tablets of the covenant" (9:15). In 4:13, he equates the covenant itself with the Ten Commandments: "And he declared to you his covenant... that is, the Ten Commandments."

This concept can be difficult for some to grasp. They tend to view the law simply as precepts or "bare" commandments. In a narrow sense, there is truth to this. Paul sometimes speaks of the law simply as a command or a precept in his arguments with the Judaizers. They had separated the law from Christ, rejecting him while holding on to the outward forms and precepts of Moses. Paul makes it clear that in this sense, the law only brings death and condemnation.

However, there is a broader sense in which we can view the law as more than just a bare precept. If we consider it the way God revealed it and intended it, we see that it is a part of God's gracious covenant with his people. To be sure, the moral law contained here was supplemented by ceremonial and judicial

laws that were temporary types and shadows. But the ultimate purpose of God for his elect was to guide them in their lives in Christ.

There is no way to exhaustively meditate on God's law in a devotional like this. Psalm 119 contains such a meditation, and it only scratches the surface. Much of the rest of Deuteronomy applies and expands on these Ten Commandments. Instead, today let us reflect on how God uses the moral law for a gracious end.

First, the revelation of God's law is a manifestation of grace in that it reveals God's holiness and our unrighteousness. The revelation of the law was accompanied by fire, reflecting the searing purity of his holiness. They heard his majestic voice and were filled with fear. They knew that in their sin, they would be incinerated in the purity of his presence. And so Moses stood as a mediator to graciously intervene for them. In this, we have a picture of Christ who stands between us and God. As a priest, he has sacrificed for our sins and intercedes for us before God. The law helps to humble us and see our need for a mediator. We must find our righteousness in another. We need grace to be given a heart that desires to serve God. All this is revealed in the circumstances behind the revelation of the law.

Second, the law begins with a triumphant declaration of what God has graciously done to save us. The prologue declares: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (5:6). In Egypt, they were slaves and, in this way, symbolized our participation in the kingdom of Satan. Outside of the Lord, we are under the tyranny of the devil. We are enslaved to sin. We are guilty, under the sentence of condemnation, and doomed to the penalty of death. Sin has a controlling power over our lives. We cannot help ourselves. We are in bondage to our sinful lusts. Through his redeeming grace, we are liberated from this slavery and brought into a fellowship of life with God in Christ Jesus. This is reiterated in the fourth commandment, where we are told that Israel must allow their servants to rest even as God gave them rest and freedom from slavery in Egypt.

Third, the law contains gracious promises of blessing for those who follow it. In the second commandment, we are told that the Lord will show favor to those who love him and keep his commandments. God's gracious covenant love will be with his sincere servants. Likewise, in the fifth commandment, we are given the promise that honoring authority in our lives will be accompanied by blessing and a long life. No one can keep God's commandments perfectly. We often fall short. God is pleased to accept our imperfect, sincere obedience in Christ. His blood covers our shortcomings. The fact that he offers a reward and blessing for our obedience is a matter of grace.

God was gracious to bring Israel out of Egypt and bring them to the point where he gives them the law. God was gracious in how he used the law to humble them and give them a spirit of devoted service. God sprinkles his grace throughout the law to remind them of his love and care for them.

None of us can keep this law perfectly. Even the holiest in this life have only a small beginning of the obedience that God requires of us. Yet God is gracious in revealing this to us. He shows us how we fall short and are in desperate need of a Savior. But he also shows what he is working in us by his Spirit, who will write this law in our hearts and minds that we might love and serve him all our days.

#6 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 6:1-25

In our earlier devotionals, we observed that Deuteronomy follows the pattern of a covenant document. We have covenants today as well, although we typically refer to them as “contracts.” They are formalized agreements that serve to legally bind each party according to the terms of the contract. Ancient man also had covenants, especially between kings and their people. Those covenants had a clear structure that is also seen in Deuteronomy. The broad outline looked like this:

1. **Preamble:** the king identifies himself and his greatness.
2. **Historical Prologue:** the king recounts his past deeds with the people.
3. **Stipulations:** the king outlines the obligations of the people under his reign.
4. **Sanctions:** blessings are promised for covenant loyalty, curses are threatened for disobedience.

Other elements can also be identified, such as the calling of witnesses and the taking of an oath.

In this chapter, we come to the section outlining the “stipulations” of the covenants. This is the heart of the book and runs from 6:1-26:19. Interestingly, it also seems to generally follow the order of the Ten Commandments. The first few chapters of this section deal with serving and loving the one true God (the first commandment), forbidding images and false ways of worship (the second commandment), and dishonoring God’s name (the third commandment). In chapter 15, we have a discussion of the Sabbatical year, which would bring us to the fourth commandment. The outline is not exact, but it does seem to follow the general flow of the Decalogue.

Therefore, it is for good reason that this section begins with an emphasis on the greatest commandment in the Law: to love God above all with all that we are and have. Jesus identified this as the greatest commandment in the Law (Matthew 22:37). The law is nothing without God. Geerhardus Vos described legalism in this way: it obeys but does not adore. The law comes to us embedded in God’s covenant of love with us. It serves as a formal outline and example of the proper expression of our gratitude for Him. We are to honor Him in our lives. The text describes this as the “fear” of the one true God. This is not a

terror or fear that shrinks back from God as an angry judge but a reverence for Him in His greatness, glory, and grace toward us as His people.

The law is to be followed not to earn God's blessings but to express our thankfulness. Israel must remember that when they are in the land, they will enjoy cities they did not build, full houses they did not fill, cisterns they did not dig, and vineyards they did not plant. All the blessings they enjoy were not from their works or their righteousness; they came from God's grace.

It is also something that should preoccupy our lives to the extent that we desire it to be passed on to our children (6:7-8, 20-21). God's covenant is with us and with our children. If we love the Lord, our hearts' desire must be that they, too, will walk in the faith (3 John 4).

God's law ultimately aims for our heart. It convicts us where we fall short and guides us when we, in true repentance, desire to please the Lord. We do so not to earn His favor—for what can a sinner earn from a perfectly holy God? We have been saved from great slavery. He who has been forgiven much will also love much. Our great God is more than worthy of the first affection of our hearts and the best efforts of our hands.

#7 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 7:1-26

As we noted yesterday, this section of Deuteronomy roughly follows the order and flow of the Ten Commandments. In this section, we reflect on the significance of the preamble and historical prologue of the covenant, in which God declares Himself to be their God and Israel to be His redeemed people.

Verse 6 indicates that this involves the principle of election. Israel is a holy people, specially chosen by God to be His treasured possession. Clearly, election on God's part is not a cold, heartless, or arbitrary act. It involves His deep love, mercy, and affection for His people. This covenant-historical election is a reflection and type of His eternal election of His people to salvation. That is why the Bible describes eternal election as according to "foreknowledge" (Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:2). "Knowledge" here is taken in the Hebrew sense of intimately loving and knowing a person. For example, the Bible speaks of Adam "knowing" his wife Eve. This is clearly more than abstract or mathematical knowledge. It involves God's personal love and affection towards the objects of His elective love. They are, as Deuteronomy beautifully states, God's "treasured possession."

Feeling loved and cared for is a basic human need. Many of us who have been blessed with stable families and a loving Christian community often take this for granted. Those who have been damaged through the effects of sin in their relationships with their fathers, mothers, or other family members

carry with them wounds that deeply affect how they interact with others in the world. They have great difficulty trusting others and struggle to receive love extended to them. What a blessing to know that even if our father or mother fails us, we who are God's people possess the unchanging and never-ending love of God.

This election is also done according to God's grace and is not based on works. This is true of Israel's national election as well as eternal election. It was not because of their great numbers or national stature that God chose them. They were the fewest of all peoples and were in a state of servitude when God called them to be His own. Instead, election is based upon the free love of God and His gracious covenant promise to His people. This point is reiterated in chapter 9 where it is repeated multiple times that God did not allow them to possess the land because of their own righteousness. Election is unto good works, but it is not based upon them.

Israel is to remember this fact as they enter the land. It will be by God's power and strength that they will conquer and inherit the land as their possession. They are not to trust in the powers of the world by aligning or cooperating with the kingdoms of darkness, much less trusting in other gods. As God's chosen people, they are to live holy lives, trusting in His strength.

These things are true for us in Christ, even as they were true for Israel. As Peter states, we are a chosen race and a holy nation. As sojourners and exiles in this world, we are to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which war against the soul (1 Pet. 2:9, 11). This language reflects the pattern of God's exhortations in Deuteronomy, although the true nature of the spiritual conflict comes more to the forefront. We are in Christ, who was Himself chosen to be our Redeemer. In Him, we are also chosen to be God's children. We are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood (1 Pet. 1:1).

#8 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 8:1-20

When God allows us to go through times of anguish and trial, we often ask a simple question: "Why, God?!" The pain of our suffering seems incongruous with the declarations of God's love sprinkled throughout the Scriptures. If God loves me, why does He allow me to hurt? If God wants to feed me, why does He allow me to hunger? If He wants me to trust in His love, why does He bring so many things into my life that cause me to doubt?

In this chapter, God reveals His secret purpose in His plan for Israel in such things. In Christ, it is also revealed to us.

God had promised that He would bring them into a good land, but they ended up in a wilderness. God told them He would give them a land with springs of water, but they found themselves thirsting in the desert. They had the promise of pomegranates and fig trees, but He let them hunger and fed them with strange manna. Why?

This text gives the answer. God declares to Israel that He did this to humble and test them. Human nature is prone to pride. When we lack earthly sustenance and security, we quickly cry out for help. But when we are filled and satisfied, we quickly forget the God who provided for us and are filled with self-sufficiency. God humbled them. If pride drives us away from God, and being humbled drives us to Him, what a blessed place to be!

In addition to humbling them, God also describes His purpose as a "test" to show what was in their hearts. Satan made this point in his argument with God over Job: "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (Job 1:9). God is often pleased to bless us with the good things of this life, for which we sincerely thank God. But the person so blessed is always accompanied by Satan's question. If God stretched out His hand and touched all we had, would we curse God to His face (cf. Job 1:11)? Israel, like Job, was tested in the wilderness. God wished to demonstrate whether they knew that man did not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeded from the mouth of God.

His word is the source of every blessing. We must love the gift more than the giver. We must value the spring more than the streams that flow from it. We must put our faith in Him and His promise even when we lack what we desire in this world.

Such was the path of Jesus. Israel was tempted and tested in the wilderness. They failed that test of faith. Israel was humbled, and they turned from God, longing to return to slavery in Egypt. But Jesus passed that test. When Satan found Him humbled and hungry in His wilderness temptation, Jesus declared from this passage in Deuteronomy that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (see Luke 4 and Matt. 4). By the power of the Spirit of heaven, Jesus overcame the tempter. By that same Spirit given to us, our longing for heaven overcomes our sinful lusts on earth.

#9 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 9:1-29

The New Testament often puts the law of Moses in contrast to the grace of Christ. John 1:17 states: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." In Romans 6:14, Paul states: "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

The law-grace contrast is extremely important for our understanding of salvation. First, it puts to death the idea that our works of obedience can merit a reward from God. To be "under law" in this sense means to stand on our own before God. As sinners, no one can stand before Him! Secondly, it is also important for the doctrine of justification. Justification relates to our legal status before God. We are declared righteous in the courtroom of heaven on the basis of Christ's righteousness imputed to us and received by faith alone. Good works are also a gift of grace and follow after justification. Good works flow out of faith as its fruit. They are necessary in the person justified but are not necessary in relieving justification.

But beyond this, this law-grace contrast in Paul and John might lead to another question: "Does this mean that the law of Moses is therefore devoid of grace?" This is a tricky question to answer. If we answer it wrongly, we might be in danger of turning law into grace and therefore confusing the two. This would destroy our salvation.

When we read Moses carefully, we find that the commands of the law were never intended to be a way for Israel to earn their salvation by works. The moral law in the Ten Commandments was given in the context of God's covenant grace—it is even shaped by the contours of a gracious covenant arrangement. The commands of God flow out of His love for us. They guide us in how to express our side of covenant love and fidelity to Him.

The grace of God in this covenant is perhaps no more clearly expressed than in Deuteronomy 9. This chapter sets Israel in the promised future, when they will conquer the nations, settle in the land, and eat to their full. Throughout the whole process, God makes it clear that it is by His power and grace that Israel is not only granted but also inherits the promises.

First, God promises that He will graciously fight for Israel against the nations that oppose them. Verses 1-3 declare that God will go before them as a consuming fire and destroy and subdue the nations. Although to them, this is an act of judgment as the people had become corrupt, violent, and evil, to God's people, this is a gift of grace. It is by God's power—not theirs—that they will be granted the land.

Second, after they are in the land, they will experience its blessedness as an expression of God's grace. No less than three times, God declares that it is "not because of your righteousness" (4, 5, 6) that they possess and enjoy the land. It is not Israel's greatness or righteousness that is the cause of God's gift to them but the wickedness of the nations. As far as their moral character is concerned, they are stubborn and rebellious people (6-7). Moses recounts their rebellion with the golden calf (before Mt. Horeb, no less!) and their complaining at Taberah, and how they only survived because of the mediatorial pleas of Moses.

At no point are God's covenant blessings given to Israel because of her righteousness. They are a gift of grace. She only contributes her sinfulness so that through her, God might manifest the glories and fullness of His grace.

What is true of the type is all the more true of the antitype. Christians who take God's word seriously and seek to worship Him faithfully have not arrived at a state of perfection because they see themselves as better than others. A formally "faithful" church may have avoided modern errors of false doctrine and false worship on the left hand, but another snare lurks on the right: the sin of pride, self-sufficiency, and self-righteousness.

Christians have received the fullness of God's grace in Christ. If we truly believe this, it needs to shape our entire attitude and life. Moses was closer to God than any other Israelite, and he was the meekest man who ever lived. Humility is therefore a chief mark of the Christian. If we know that all we are and have is given by grace, where is boasting? What becomes of judging others? What becomes of self-exaltation? What becomes of constantly seeking validation for ourselves while invalidating others? It all must die on the cross with Jesus: "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

#11 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 11:1-32

Deuteronomy 11 continues Moses's reflection and exposition of the Ten Commandments (i.e., the decalogue). The outline of Deuteronomy roughly reflects the order of a covenant document, with a preamble, historical prologue, stipulations, and sanctions (among other things). In this chapter, Moses continues to focus on the first section of the decalogue, where God declared His name and mighty works of redemption for Israel. Parts of it also bleed over into the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me."

One theme of the chapter is that our obedience to God is tied to our love for Him. The greatest commandment is to love God with all that we are and have. We not only obey—we adore Him. God reveals Himself in such a way as to fill us with a sense of genuine awe and wonder at His greatness. Specifically, He recalls His powerful judgments over Pharaoh and Egypt, along with the rebels in the wilderness. The adjective "great" is used multiple times. As humans, we are naturally drawn to that which impresses us, whether great feats of athletic strength or exceptional displays of beauty. We watch television programs with marvelous displays of both in nature among the creatures of God. Children go to the zoo and spontaneously exclaim their amazement when the animals display their unique beauty and abilities. That sense of awe and wonder is what God desires of us toward Him. If we saw a lion in a field, we would not need anyone to convince us to stand back and respect its territory. So also the Lord desires that we would remember and behold His mighty works and thus love and fear Him.

Additionally, God reminds Israel of the blessedness that He holds forth to them as a consequence of walking in covenant love and fidelity to Him. God is a good God, showering every blessing upon His people. He desires their good, not their harm. The prospect of this future blessedness is the basis of His appeal for them to love and obey the Lord. The land they are going into is a land of blessing. It is not like Egypt that needed irrigation and laborious toil to bear fruit. It is like a garden prepared by God, blessed with both early and late rains, flowing with milk and honey. It reminds them of the garden of Eden, where the fruit of the earth came forth naturally. The painful toil and labor that was the result of Adam's sin would be mitigated, for this is a land that always has the eyes of God upon it. This blessedness would be a constant reminder of God's love and affection for them and was designed to lead them to love and obedience.

Yet even as God tested them in the wilderness, He would also test them in the Promised Land. In addition to these blessings, God set before them the prospect of cursing for disobedience. This curse-sanction would not be imposed simply because of small infractions to the law of God. God is gracious and deals with His people graciously, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. But He is a just God and will by no means clear the guilty. Curse is held out for idolatry: the total abandonment of covenant fidelity in a high-handed betrayal of God. If they abandon the LORD and serve other gods, they will only meet with God's wrath and anger. He alone is the source of life and blessedness. To abandon Him is to have only His wrath and curse.

These types and shadows that served to instruct OT Israel are also true for us in Christ. The NT frequently sets before us the work and greatness of Christ for our redemption. He has worked great wonders for us, atoning for our sins and conquering death. There is no greater name in heaven or on earth. We are to be filled with awe and wonder at His sovereign power. He rules not only Pharaoh but all the nations. Even as the Books of Moses record His mighty works, so the Gospels and Acts record His deeds of love and power to preserve His church in the face of the evil one. Trouble and difficulty await us in the wilderness of this world, but God is preparing for us a good land in heaven above. In that place, there will be no more curse, trial, or temptation. We will eat of the tree of life. Toil and pain will be no more. We will sing eternally of His mighty works with the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb. We will never cease to be filled with awe and wonder in His presence as we sing, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power" (Rev. 4:11).

#12 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 12:1-32

This section of Deuteronomy follows the general flow of the order of God's covenant outlined in the Ten Commandments. The previous sections have focused on the LORD as the one true God, their covenant king. Moses has reminded them of the many mighty works of redemption done by His hand and that He

alone is to be the sole object of their worship. Chapter 12 switches to the second commandment, which forbids images in Israel's worship. More broadly, this commandment requires that God be worshiped only in the way that He has revealed in His word. Theologically, we refer to this as the "regulative principle" of worship: what God has not commanded is forbidden.

The first step towards introducing the true worship of the true God is the destruction of all false idols. All pagan altars, pillars, statues, etc. are to be dashed into pieces and burned with fire. God would choose both the manner and place of their worship. There are good reasons for this. Beyond the fact that it is a technical violation of God's law to worship Him in ways He has not commanded, it is significant that by this time the pagan worship of Canaan had become violent and brutal. We know from other parts of the Bible that it was perverse and involved cult prostitution of males and females. As this text directly indicates, it also involved child sacrifice (12:31).

Blood is also forbidden in this chapter. God's purpose in this command is not simply dietary. Blood has a distinct and important sacred purpose in worship. It was that by which Israel could obtain atonement for their sins. Given the centrality of this aspect of worship, no blood was to be consumed or used for any other purpose except worship and sacrifice. The language of the prohibition reminds us of God's words to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. There, He allowed them to eat of any tree in the garden except for one: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. At that time, He had only given them the plants for food. After the fall, death is introduced, and animals are also consumed. It also reminds us of the wilderness wanderings. At that time, Israel grew tired of manna and craved meat. So now they are allowed to eat as much meat as they desire, only they cannot eat the blood.

Other briefer details in the passage also relate to worship and its importance. The Levite is not to be neglected in the towns of the land. He is without an earthly inheritance and therefore depends on the support of the people. This is not simply due to their personal-familial relationship with him. Whether they are "friendly" with him or not (hopefully they are!), he is the one who brings the revelation of God to them.

God saves us that we might worship Him. He brought Israel out of Egypt that they might hold a sacred feast to Him in the wilderness. In Christ, He has rescued us from Satan's hand so that we might declare the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light. We do not worship Him with images, nor with that which can be touched or seen. We worship Him through the word of God. This comes to us in its reading and preaching each Lord's Day as we respond to Him with words of praise and thanksgiving. God restricts us to His revealed will in worship because He desires that we embrace His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. His saving grace is revealed only in the sacred Scriptures, which is signified and sealed in the sacraments. There we find the blood of Jesus, which alone can atone for our sins. In Him alone is life. All other idols lead to death. He is the only name under heaven by which men may be saved.

#13 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 13:1-18

This section of Deuteronomy deals with matters related to worship. It is addressed most directly in the second commandment, which not only forbids images but also requires that we worship the Lord only in the ways that He has commanded in His word.

But this subject also extends to the first and third commandments, which address the proper object of worship (God alone) and the ultimate fruit of our worship and service (i.e., the honor of God's name). Interestingly, our church's Larger Catechism reminds us that the third commandment requires us to "holily and reverently" approach all the means whereby God makes Himself known, including all the ordinances of worship. God's revelation is holy and should be treated as such.

Deuteronomy 13 connects some of these dots for us by emphasizing the importance of prophetic revelation in worship. It warns Israel against a false prophet who might arise and seek to persuade them to worship other gods. False prophets were to be put to death. The same punishment was to be imposed even on a close family member who sought to lead them away from God.

This may seem like a harsh judgment. After all, don't we all value religious liberty? Haven't we learned throughout history from religious wars and man's tendency towards tyranny that capital punishment for religious offenses is not appropriate?

Indeed, these are the very things we confess as a church (see: Confession of Faith 23:3). So why then do we not follow the dictates of Deuteronomy for false doctrine?

First, Israel was under a special arrangement called a "theocracy." This term simply means that God ruled Israel as a political nation. God certainly rules all things by His providence. Jesus is now the King of kings and Lord of lords, but He does not rule theocratically as under the Mosaic administration. The death penalty remains in force for murder (as per God's command in the time of Noah) but not for the other offense unique to the theocracy.

Second, the Gospel now goes to all lands. It is no longer limited to one nation. God's pattern of revelation in the NT (particularly the book of Acts) shows that the church should simply pray for toleration by the government and be viewed as a force for good in society. We do not pray that God would give civil power into our hands but only that we would be able to live a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and reverence (1 Tim. 2:2).

Third, concerning these punishments in ancient times, remember the gods to which the false prophets were leading. They were brutal and perverse, as were their worship practices. They involved forced cult prostitution of both men and women (essentially sex slavery) as well as child sacrifice. Killing another human being is murder, and the punishment would fit the crime. God is not losing His temper over some small infraction or error. He is protecting the innocent and oppressed while ensuring the honor of His name and revelation.

Nevertheless, in the church, proclaiming false doctrine is a serious sin. Often, the church has drifted away from God, adopting the message and worldview of the very pagan culture it was sent to bring a message of salvation. This happened in ancient times when Israel adopted the practices of the Canaanites and worshipped their gods. It happens today when the false church hijacks the form and language of the Gospel to encourage and promote false and perverse views of gender, sexuality, nature worship, and even modern child sacrifice in the form of "abortion."

God reveals Himself in His word. Even as we seek to live faithful and holy lives, we must also seek to preserve sound doctrine. God's true word is the only food that can nourish us to eternal life. For in God's word alone, we find our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Outside of Him, there is only darkness and death. Any human relationship, however dear to us, that draws us away from Him cuts us off from the only source of light and salvation. For this reason, Jesus uses shocking (albeit hyperbolic) language, stating that anyone who does not hate their father, mother, sister, or brother cannot be His disciple. Of course, Jesus is not canceling out our natural obligation to love our family. We are to love even our enemies in the hope that they might be won to Christ. But the strategic exaggeration makes a clear point: our love for Christ must make all other loves look like hatred in comparison.

Likewise, this passage reminds us of how diligent and faithful we ought to be in attending to God's revelation. We must not only listen to its contents but also have the pattern of truth inscribed on our hearts and minds so that we might grow in wisdom and discernment. The evil one loves to clothe falsehood in the robe of truth. A clear mind shaped by God's word allows us to strip the evil one of his disguises and not be tricked by his deception.

#14 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 14:1-29

Chapter 14 continues Moses's exposition of the commandments that pertain to the worship of God. It consists of two parts. The first part is in verses 1-21 and deals with the subject of the clean and the unclean. The second part runs from verses 22-29 and covers the topic of tithing.

The first section recalls portions of Leviticus that provide more detailed guidelines on this subject. It is bookended by two verses that do not explicitly deal with eating. In verse 1, God forbids various forms of bodily mutilation, and in 21b, they are forbidden to boil a young goat in its mother's milk. Both seem to be connected to pagan worship practices. However, both also involve a distortion of God's purposes for His creation. The human body is a temple of God, and man bears the image of God in both body and soul. The body is sacred and should be treated as such. While the goat is not an image bearer, the mother's milk was intended to give life to its child. To turn it into an instrument of death is a gross perversion of God's purposes for His creatures.

Between these two prohibitions, there are various laws regarding clean and unclean food. God covers every realm of creation: the land, the sky, and the waters. In each realm, He distinguishes between the clean and the unclean. The entire creation becomes a canvas on which God paints His spiritual principles for all Israel to see.

The next section deals with the law of the tithe. Israel is instructed to set aside a tenth of their increase and devote it to the Lord their God. Special emphasis is given to how the tithe is to support the Levites among them, who do not have an earthly inheritance in Israel.

Christians sometimes debate whether the tithe itself is binding on Christians in the New Testament. What is clear is that the principle of regular proportional giving is reiterated by the Apostles (1 Cor. 16:2) and that these offerings are intended to support those who minister the word of God (1 Cor. 9:8-12). The Levites were a sacred tribe, dedicating themselves to the worship of God and the teaching of His word.

The message is clear: Israel is a people holy to the Lord their God. They are His treasured possession. Their external holiness in matters of food and drink is meant to point to the inner holiness of their hearts. It is also meant to point them to the Lord Jesus Christ and His vicarious work on our behalf. Jesus, as the pure, clean, and holy Son of God, bore our uncleanness during His life. The pure one carried our impurity so that through Him, we might become the holy ones of God. He even took upon Himself the ultimate consequence of unholiness: death itself (see 14:21).

Through the power of His Holy Spirit, we are called to live holy lives, separate from the world around us. The typical form of the holiness codes has been fulfilled in Christ. We are holy saints living in an unholy world. True religion consists, in part, of keeping ourselves unstained by the world (James 1:27). In particular, the worship of God is to be kept clean and pure, untainted by the methods and content of the world.

By the power of God's Spirit, we are washed and cleansed from the ultimate source of filth and unholiness: our sinful natures. Uncleanness primarily stems from the inward condition of the heart, not from outward associations. It is not what enters us from the outside but what flows out of us that determines whether we are clean or unclean (Mark 7:15).

As Paul reminds us, since we have these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1).

Let our prayer be like that of the Psalmist:

"Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51:9-11).

#15 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 15:1-23

In chapter 15, we transition to a discussion of the Sabbath principle as contained in the fourth commandment. In creation, God established a weekly Sabbath, where one day was set aside from the others to be observed as a sacred rest from ordinary labor. In addition to holy things, God's people were also to have sacred times. Besides the weekly Sabbath, the principle of sacred time was applied to special Sabbaths during yearly festivals and monthly "new moon" days.

Interestingly, Moses starts his exposition of the Sabbath with a unique expression of Israel's holy times: the Sabbath year. Every seven years, Israel was to grant a release. This took the form of forgiveness of debt (where owed) as well as manumission from servitude. Slavery under the Old Testament was typically due to an inability to repay debt, in addition to being conquered in war. In the case of a freed slave, the Israelites were to ensure that he did not leave empty-handed. He was to be generously provided for with the fruit of the flock, threshing floor, and winepress. If the servant, out of love and care, desired to stay, he could make the arrangement permanent, but this would be his voluntary choice.

Special emphasis is placed on the fact that during this year, all releases and manumissions should be done joyfully and not begrudgingly: "It shall not seem hard to you when you let him go free from you, for at half the cost of a hired worker he has served you six years" (15:18). Likewise, lending to the poor is to be done freely and generously, without considering the proximity of the Sabbatical year of release to the time of the loan.

This meant that Israelites would, at times, make what may appear as a "bad deal" in the eyes of the world, lending money they knew they would never get back. This ensured that their faith would always be in the promise of God, who gives them the power to gain wealth. He also promised to make Israel a rich and plentiful people, lenders to many nations but borrowers from none. Their willingness to freely give what they currently possess demonstrated their faith in God's continued provision of all good things.

This passage serves as a reminder that at the heart of redemption lies the concept of freedom and liberty. We must be careful not to reduce God's redemptive work to mere earthly or political expressions of freedom. However, under the Old Covenant, God chose to portray our spiritual freedom in Christ through these earthly types and shadows. Israel was to honor these principles in their relationships with the poor and the enslaved because that was their initial state when God saved them: "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you" (15:15). Although we are no longer under the Old Testament theocracy, the principles of debt forgiveness and freedom from servitude reflect God's goodness and mercy. Therefore, it aligns well with the general principles of the Old Testament law to apply these principles within modern-day civil law, as seen in our laws regarding bankruptcy and the abolition of slavery.

However, there is a deeper problem in human society than monetary debt and human slavery (as terrible as those problems can be). We have become slaves of the devil. In our sin, we have become debtors to God. We have not given Him what we owe, and we must pay the debt for our sin.

Interestingly, this passage concludes with a discussion of the consecration of the firstborn, which may seem out of place in a discussion of the Sabbath year. Yet, when we remember that God had promised to send His firstborn Son into the world to be our redeemer, it begins to make more sense.

Jesus Christ has come in the power of the Spirit to proclaim liberty to the captives. He has fully paid for our sins with His precious blood and has set us free from the tyranny of the devil. As the Son he was born free (Gal. 4). But for our sakes he became a slave. Although this meant great sacrifice for Him, He embraced His work with joy (Hebrews 12:2), bringing about the great day of release. He has freed us from hell and granted us access to heaven. We now live in the freedom of God's Spirit, no longer enslaved to sin but serving righteousness. In His resurrection, Christ has entered into the final Sabbath rest, one that is not limited to a day or even a year but endures eternally.

We live our lives with the strength and encouragement that this rest provides. We freely love others, even when they do not love us, because of the full sufficiency of God's love for us. Our entire lives are

characterized by cheerful giving, not only of our physical wealth but also of sacrificial love, kindness, and praise to God.

#16 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 16:1-23

This chapter contains a survey of key yearly feasts for the nation of Israel, including the feasts of Passover, Weeks, and Booths. There were other events on Israel's festal calendar, but these were the feasts that all male Israelites were required to attend (Ex. 23:14-17). In terms of the order of the Ten Commandments, the feasts fall under the fourth commandment, which discusses the broader principle of sacred time. This principle was built into man's life from creation onward with the institution of the weekly Sabbath in the beginning. During the era of Moses, it is expanded into an entire calendar punctuated by sacred times of worship and devotion to God.

We have covered the details of these feasts in our meditations on previous chapters of the books of Moses (Lev. 23). The book of Deuteronomy repeats and reiterates the key events and lessons of the Exodus era, and this is no less true of the feast days.

Recall that the Feasts are all part of the Mosaic typology. Prior to the coming of Christ, God was pleased to preview and prefigure the work of Christ in various forms. Sometimes we see him prefigured in a person and an event. For example, we see a type of Jesus's high priestly work in the intercession of Moses on behalf of the people of Israel. We see him also in the sacrifices, especially those that involved the blood sacrifice of a spotless lamb--in which we see Christ as a substitute in his perfect righteousness.

The Feast Days correspond to the work of Christ in its temporal order. It begins with the Passover, which is the foundation of Christ's work on our behalf. It obviously prefigures his sufferings, crucifixion, and death. The New Testament makes this so clear it is hard to miss. Multiple times the Gospel writers explicitly correlate the history of Christ's work to its correspondence with the Passover. He is the firstborn Son of God whose blood was shed so that the angel of death may not touch us. The unleavened bread points us to the haste with which we ought to turn to Christ by faith. Death is near approaching. In Christ, the end has already come upon us. There is no time to tarry as the day of salvation is at hand. The New Testament also speaks of God purging out the old leaven of our sinfulness that we might be unleavened in sincerity, truth, and righteousness (1 Cor. 5:7-8). This applies both to our individual sanctification and to church discipline. In this way, the Passover (in different ways) points to both our justification through the blood of Christ and our sanctification through the Spirit of God.

Next comes the Feast of Weeks. It is also called "Ingathering" or "Harvest." In the New Testament, it is known as the Day of Pentecost. It was to take place 50 days after the Passover ("pente" is the Greek word for 50). This corresponds to the sending of the Holy Spirit in fullness upon the church so that the

Gospel might go forth to the nations. It is not that the Spirit was totally absent in the Old Testament. Indeed, he was revealed already in creation as he "hovered" over the face of the waters, bringing light and life to creation. He was also revealed in the Exodus, in the pillar of cloud and fire, and as his glory filled the tabernacle. Moses has already pointed to the internal work of the Spirit in the circumcision of the heart (what we call "regeneration"). However, there is a fullness to God's Spirit that would not arrive until Christ's ascension into heaven and the Spirit's Pentecostal outpouring.

If Passover is characterized by its solemnity in the face of death, the Feast of Weeks is marked by its joy. It was, after all, a feast that marked harvest time. Farming is hard work. It is with bitter tears the sower bears his seed, but when harvest time appears, he shall be glad indeed (as our Psalter's versification of Psalm 126 memorably puts it). Out of the fullness that God provides, they are to give the tribute of a freewill offering. All Israelites--both great and small, master and servant--are to rejoice before the Lord. It is a day of freedom, blessing, abundance, and life.

Finally, there is the feast of booths. This corresponds to the time period between the first and second comings of Christ. Saved by his blood and empowered by his Spirit, the church lives as suffering sojourners in this world. They live as heirs and citizens of heaven but also as outcasts on the earth. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, they will all dwell in tents for seven days. This is a reminder that the Promised Land is not their true home. They are just camping here for a time. With them, we long for a better country, indeed, a heavenly one.

#17 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 17:1-20

In Deuteronomy 15-16, we see some overlap in their contents. As we have previously noted, the order of these chapters roughly follows the flow of the Ten Commandments. The focus of chapter 15 was on the principle of the Sabbath, as contained in the fourth commandment. However, towards the end, we read about the appointment of judges and officers in the towns of Israel. This brings us to the content of the fifth commandment: "Honor your father and your mother..."

Although the form of this commandment focuses on the authority of parents in a household, it also has implications for all authority structures in broader human society, including relationships between masters and servants, husbands and wives, as well as the state and its citizens. Not all of these institutions are exactly the same. There is certainly a much deeper bond of love, tenderness, and affection between a man and his wife than between a king and his subject! But they all, in different ways, embody the God-created reality of authority structures in human society. Most fundamentally, this is a reflection of the fact that men and women are made in the image of God. Just as he is the king of all creation, men and women were appointed by God to rule and subdue the earth.

Sin perversely twists these authority structures. Because the corruption of man so infects our lives in this world, we can sometimes have a difficult time distinguishing a God-honoring and image-reflecting use of authority from an abusive and sinful one. This is especially true for those who have been hurt and abused by those in authority. The study of Psychology has clearly taught us that emotional scars of abuse can be deep and long-lasting in this regard. The story of the fall of man and the effect of sin in this regard makes this point clear. Although Adam and Eve were first created in a joyful marriage union of head and body, in which each fulfilled God's call to them in love, the work of the devil led to enmity, alienation, and strife between them. The pattern of the devil's work in this regard reflects his attempt to subvert the order of God's creational design. He took the form of a serpent (an animal who was to be under man's rule) and targeted Eve, who was created to be man's helper and partner. She became the devil's "suitable helper" rather than her husband's. Adam, by his hapless and passive inactivity, followed the devil's lead and plunged himself and all his children into utter destruction. This is all clearly summarized by the Apostle Paul: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim. 2:13). The point here is not to excuse Adam's sin. Paul elsewhere plainly places the burden of responsibility on him as the federal head of the human race (Rom. 5:12ff).

The point is that sin has corrupted human relationships, and the devil seeks to corrupt the God-ordained authority structures. There are sinful tendencies on the part of leaders, as well sinful tendencies on the part of those called to follow God-ordained leadership. On the side of those in leadership positions, competent leadership administered for the good of others becomes intolerable tyranny. On the side of those called to follow others in leadership, the devil's deception stirs up our rebellious hearts so that all becomes yellow to our jaundiced eyes. Moses knew this quite well. He was as faithful a mere human leader as the church has ever seen (Heb. 3:1-6). Yet he was also accused of tyranny and injustice in his leadership. To be sure, the devil also works the other way, bringing harshness and abuse through tyrannical overlords. The Bible is replete with examples of both. The devil is not so foolish as to choose only one avenue of manipulation and deception.

That is why so much emphasis is placed on this passage on the principle of impartial justice in the administration of God-ordained authority. They are not to take or be influenced by bribes. Justice and only justice shall be administered. Ironically, the word "justice" has been redefined in our modern culture to mean the opposite of what God established. Biblical justice means to judge each case by an impartial standard that applies equally to everybody. Worldly justice essentially means that when there is even the perception of an unequal outcome (but only against preferred "groups"), it judges according to the person and not impartially according to the world. Once again, Biblical language is hijacked and redefined to mean the opposite of what God intended.

Furthermore, judgments are to be registered according to adequate evidence. The principle of "two of three witnesses" has broad implications. People are presumed innocent until they are proven guilty.

Likewise, after the process of justice has taken its course, the parties involved are to follow the decisions of those in authority. There has to be a final decision to put an end to human disputes; otherwise, there will be endless quarreling and conflict. A process of appeal is put in place where the difficult cases can be brought up the "chain of command." This ensures multiple levels of accountability.

As we see with the provisions for the king, God's word is to be the final authority and guide in these matters. Human leaders have no authority except what has been given them from heaven. Even the king, who is the supreme authority in the land (humanly speaking), is subject to God.

In these things, we do not simply honor men but God, who providentially stands behind them. We must walk with wisdom and discernment, knowing the devil's tricks in these matters. We resist his attempts to manipulate us to perceive tyranny in competent leadership on the right hand, as well as all abuses of power on the left hand.

In the final analysis, whether we find ourselves called to exercise God-honoring leadership in our relationships, or whether we are called to submit ourselves to the leading of others, we must all seek to be humble and faithful servants of God. He is the great king over all. He lovingly leads us, even where our hearts don't wish to follow. He does so for our good, indeed, for our ultimate salvation. And we have in Christ the one who does both perfectly: he was the Lord who became the servant. He suffered injustice for sinners that sinners might receive his perfect righteousness as a gift of grace. He leads us as one who has been led, even through times of trial and pain. He himself went through the wilderness of this world and has a heart of sympathy for us when our Christian calling becomes hard and difficult. Praise the Lord for a faithful Savior who has grace sufficient to help us in our time of need.

#18 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 18:1-22

Chapter 18 continues Moses's exposition of the fifth commandment ("Honor your father and mother"), which was begun in chapter 16. Looking ahead, we see that chapter 19 transitions to the content of the sixth commandment ("You shall not murder...") in discussing cities of refuge for manslayers. Moreover, it was preceded by chapters 15-16, which discussed the fourth commandment (i.e., the Sabbath). Clearly, Moses's discussion follows the flow of the Decalogue.

At first glance, the chapter seems to cover a wide range of content. First, there is a reminder of the Israelites' obligation to support the Levites, followed by a prohibition against the abominable worship practices of the Canaanites. The chapter concludes with a prophecy of Christ, a Prophet greater than Moses, who will come and lead Israel into the fullness of God's truth.

However, upon closer examination, we can see how each of these sections aligns with the principles of the fifth commandment—to honor those in authority over us. Interestingly, from 17:14 to the end of chapter 18, we have instructions for three official offices in Israel, all of which find their fulfillment in the Person of Christ: Kings (17:14-20), Priests (18:1-8), and a Prophet (18:14-22).

The main point is this: in different ways, they must honor and respect these officers, for it is through them that God governs, guides, and leads them.

Recall that the Levites were commissioned by God to have spiritual oversight over the people. Besides their ritual duties in the tabernacle/temple, they were the resident teachers of the people (see Malachi 2:7). The sacrificial system was tied up in Jerusalem, and ordinary Israelites had access to it only occasionally. However, they had regular access to instruction from God's word through the Levites in their midst.

Although the Levitical priesthood has been fulfilled, the New Testament continues to exhort the church to support ordained teachers of the word of God, such as missionaries, pastors, and evangelists. Paul encourages the Galatians to share all good things with the one who teaches (Gal. 6:6). In 1 Tim. 5:17, Paul reaffirms the same principle, appealing to Deuteronomy to support his point. In 1 Cor. 9:13-14, he reiterates the same point, even appealing to Israel's support of the Levites to make his case.

In most churches, giving primarily goes to support their pastor(s), missionaries, and expenses necessary for the ministry of the word of God. By doing this, we not only love our neighbor but also show our devotion to God and His word. It demonstrates that we are putting Him and our spiritual well-being first in our lives, not being tied to the things of this world.

Next, this principle is applied to Israel's response to prophetic revelation in their midst. Negatively, they are to turn a deaf ear to all false revelation, whether in the form of divination, sorcery, fortune-telling, omen-reading, necromancy, etc. These practices, still present in the modern world, testify to man's inner "sense of the divine," but also to his corrupt nature. Men seek to access a realm beyond what is seen, but they do so through the powers of darkness rather than light, dishonoring the one true revealer: God Himself. He has spoken His pure word in the Scriptures.

In this, we see how the church is obligated to testify against false doctrine. The true church must remember that they are not the only voice speaking to the world. While avoiding what is false expresses our love, honor, and obedience to God, it is essential to not become overly polemical in the ministry of the world. Preaching should not be solely focused on what we are against; rather, it should hold out Christ as the Savior of sinners. There is also a danger in thinking that positive exposition of the Christian faith is sufficient. The church must be equipped not only to know the truth but also to distinguish it from

error. Just like a sailor needs to identify signs of safe waters and hidden dangers, the church needs discernment. Avoiding what is false expresses our love, honor, and obedience to God; He alone has the word of life, and it is His voice that we should heed.

The chapter concludes with a prophecy of a prophet like Moses who will arise and bring a final revelation to God's people. Moses was unique in his prophetic function in the Old Testament era. While other prophets received revelation in dreams and visions, to Moses, God spoke face to face as a man speaks to his friend (Ex. 33:11). This prophecy ultimately refers to Christ, our redeemer. Moses was faithful as a servant in God's house, but Jesus is the Son over God's house (Hebrews 2). In the past, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in the last days, He has spoken to us in a Son (Hebrews 1:1-4). Jesus was closer to God than Moses and even the angels, being the radiance of the glory of God and the exact representation of His being. We must pay careful attention to His word of grace. The day of salvation is near, but the time is short. We honor Him as our mediator (the final Prophet, Priest, and King) when we trust Him, obey Him, love Him, and adore Him. He loved us and gave Himself for us, and so we love Him and give ourselves to Him.

#19 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 19:1-21

Deuteronomy 19 transitions to a discussion of the principles of the sixth commandment: "You shall not kill." This commandment not only prohibits the taking of another person's life but also all forms of harm we might unlawfully do to another person. Positively, it requires that we do all that is in our power to preserve the life and safety of our fellow man. In the next several chapters, we will see this commandment applied to various matters. Here, Moses connects it to cities of refuge and the administration of justice.

First, Moses discusses cities of refuge. There were three of these in Israel established for those who killed their neighbor unintentionally or by accident. They serve as a reminder that this sinful world is filled with heartbreak and tragedy. Sometimes, we see the ugly fruit of sin when it spews forth in anger and violence. While this is hard and sobering for those who lose loved ones to murderous acts, there is at least the possibility of justice for them.

But lives can also be taken due to accidents. Brakes fail on vehicles, leading to head-on collisions. People get terminal cancer at young ages. In such "accidental" losses of life, there is a different set of emotions. While intentional and unintentional deaths are both difficult and tragic, in the former, at least, there is someone to whom blame can be assigned. Thus, some semblance of earthly justice can be done to rectify the situation. In accidental losses of life, we are largely left with aching pain in our hearts that is haunted by its apparent purposelessness. We ask: "Why did this have to happen? It seems to be a

pointless loss of life!" These cities of refuge are a reminder of God's grace and mercy in such circumstances. Sin has affected this world, but God will provide a refuge of life in the midst of death. But for the intentional murderer, there will be justice, either in this life or in the next.

Next comes a brief discussion of property boundaries. At first, it may be difficult to see how this relates to the sixth commandment. But consider that the land was not only the property of the Israelites but that which gave them sustenance and life. It was from the land that the fruit of the earth would come and replenish their physical lives with strength and nourishment. To change a boundary marker may most properly fall under the category of theft, but insofar as the land relates to their sustenance, it also involves preserving and maintaining their lives. Insofar as it is a type of heaven, it contains the same principle. The land reminds us of God's presence in Paradise, who is the only source of life and light.

Finally, the chapter concludes with laws relating to the administration of justice. Courts of law and justice were established in Israel to be a check on man's sinfulness and a restraint upon his evil tendencies. But God knows that such institutions can also be twisted by the evil one. What Paul says of the law itself in Romans 7 can also be true of those means God gave to administer it. In order that sin might be shown to be sin, it produces evil through that which is good (cf. Rom. 7:13). For this reason, there are strict rules governing how justice is to be formally administered. In particular, the accused is to be considered innocent until proven guilty. They cannot be condemned on the basis of mere accusation, nor can the testimony of one suffice to convict. It must be corroborated and convincing.

Yet when the accused is found guilty, appropriate justice must be administered. The punishment must fit the crime: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life.

In these laws, we see a reflection of what is spiritually true of all of us in our sin. We are both victims and perpetrators of evil in this sinful world. The ultimate reason for the presence of evil is our own sin. All of us have murdered in our hearts if we have been angry with our brother (cf. Matt. 5:21-26). Even the smallest sin is an offense against an infinitely holy and righteous God, deserving eternal punishment. The punishment will fit the crime, and there will be no escaping the judge of the universe who knows all the evidence against us in His omniscient knowledge.

But thanks be to God that we have a substitute who has given himself for us. He offered himself to fulfill the law of justice: life for life. Through His perfect righteousness, we are not only forgiven but declared perfect in the court of heaven. From that place, we await His glorious coming, when He will take us to the true city of refuge where we will dwell with Him eternally. No boundary stone will mark the limit of that land, for it is filled with the glory of the eternal God.

#20 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 20:1-20

Deuteronomy 20 is all about war. There are good reasons why Moses sees fit to cover this subject, as the new generation of Israelites is about to enter the Promised Land and face an age of battle.

This provision is a reminder that although the Bible prohibits murder, it does not forbid taking life as a punishment for capital offenses. The "law of the talon" explicitly states that the punishment must fit the crime, including "life for life." Thus, the sixth commandment is best translated as "you shall not murder."

Many professing Christians have wrongly concluded that the Bible forbids a just war, or that the teaching of Jesus is inconsistent with the death penalty. In both the OT and NT, it is clearly stated that the State is armed with the sword. The sword is not for wrist slapping. The State is commissioned by God with power to punish evil as an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

To be sure, the State can be corrupted and even hijacked by the forces of evil to promote evil and punish those who do good. The fact that the State is armed with the sword does not mean that it always wields it lawfully. Likewise, although the State can wage war on just and necessary occasions, this does not mean that every war is justified or even wise. There will never cease to be corruption and evil among men. In such situations, the cost must be carefully counted. All too often in war, things can quickly escalate, and the "cure" can turn out to be worse than the disease. We must pray that the Lord would give wisdom to those entrusted with such difficult decisions.

But this all relates to what is universally true based on the general equity of what is contained here. Deuteronomy 19 applies these principles to a very specific time and situation in redemptive history. Failure to recognize the unique application of these principles leads to all kinds of misunderstandings of the Bible's teaching. Dishonest opponents have tried to argue that this passage promotes maniacal genocide or the use of unmitigated force in the conquering of one people by another.

First, remember that this is taking place in the era of the theocracy. This means that during this era, the church and the state are essentially overlapping entities. God's people constitute a single family (i.e. the sons of Abraham) organized as a particular nation. We no longer live in a theocracy. The NT church is an international, worldwide organization and organism consisting of people from all nations of the earth. It does not formally possess a political dimension in which it has power over earthly matters of the "sword." Its power and discipline are spiritual. Its weapons are not earthly. It fights with the persuasive power of the word of God. It only speaks to matters of civil importance in extraordinary circumstances and typically insofar as they affect the well-being and freedom of the church. Christians pray for wise and faithful leaders. But the church's goal is not to rule the nation it inhabits. We pray for God-fearing rulers insofar as this will ensure a greater sense of accountability and faithfulness on their part. But

whether our leaders are Christians or not, we pray that God would work through them for the common good.

Likewise, it is important to note that the nations and kings Israel is to conquer are far from innocent and noble peoples. All too often, God's conquest of these nations is painted as an unjustified land grab. God's people are the oppressors, and these nations are the oppressed.

The reality is these nations had become utterly sinful and corrupt in ways that would likely still shock modern man. The brutality and evil were deeply embedded in the basic institutions of their culture. Their worship practices involved forced sex slavery of both men and women. They had a regular practice of burning their children to death in fire as an offering to their gods. Additionally, these nations were constantly at war with one another. It is not as if Israel's conquest of the nations was out of keeping with the activities of man during this era.

Israel's wars against these nations were just. And unlike the unmitigated brutality of the wars prosecuted by other nations, God provides many provisions for mercy.

We see this mercy first for the Israelites. Nations often send their young men to war. This creates tragic situations in which death comes upon them in the flower of youth. Thus, God grants provision for them to be excused from battle if they have built a new house and not dedicated it, planted a vineyard and not eaten of it, are engaged but not yet married, etc. Death is inevitable in this sinful world. But tragic death in war is mitigated by God's mercy. The promise of long life in God's blessed land is honored by the God who gave it. The fearful and faint-hearted are also granted reprieve, not only for their own good but for the good of their fellow soldiers.

But there is also mercy for the sinful nations. Before the city is struck down, they are to be given terms of peace. Rather than immediate, complete destruction, they are to be given the option of serving as forced labor as a subjugated nation. Given that their conquest was a just judgment of God for their sin, this offer would be the equivalent of "life imprisonment" in the case of an individual with a capital offense.

Likewise, although certain nations and cities were to be devoted to total destruction under God's just judgment, in those that were offered terms of peace, only the males were to be destroyed in battle. Likewise, the fruit-bearing trees were to be left intact as they were necessary to feed the population.

The conquest was clearly the execution of God's just judgment upon the sinful nations. While there are understandably aspects of this that are difficult to understand, those that stumble over this teaching fail

to realize that it is but a foretaste of a greater judgment to come. One day all men will stand before the judgment seat of God and be repaid according to what they have done. The unrighteous and unbelieving will be cast into the lake of fire and outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But in Christ, God shows mercy to men—not just the lessening of temporal punishment but an escape from eternal death. Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross. Although he was innocent, he bore our guilt in his body on the tree. Through him, we are rescued from the judgment to come. If the Lord kept a record of sins, who could stand? In Jesus, our sinful record is erased, and we are clothed in his perfect righteousness.

Let us then live thankful lives in holiness and purity. Let us not be conformed to the world in its wicked and corrupt practice—for on account of these, the wrath of God is coming. Let us instead be transformed through the renewing of our minds that we might be found pure and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

#21 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 21:1-23

In the larger context of Deuteronomy, we are still in that long section of the book in which Moses expounds and applies the law of God. Israel has been established as a holy nation in theocratic form. The law will serve as their "constitution," binding both citizens and leaders alike in their interactions as a people and in the administration of justice.

In the last chapter, we were reminded of the reality of accidental death. In this sinful world, there are times when we can make a direct connection between the evil of man's heart as it spews forth in murder. While such a situation is tragic and heartbreaking, we can at least connect the dots of justice such that the perpetrator will be made to pay for his crime. Some semblance of earthly justice can be done, even though the grieving cannot recover their lost loved ones.

This chapter begins by confronting us with another aspect of tragedy in a sinful world: unsolved murders. In this situation, Moses outlines what to do if a murdered man is found somewhere outside a city with an unknown assailant. They are to determine which city is nearest to the man, which is given responsibility to deal with the matter. The elders of the city are to come forward before the Levites and declare their innocence and ignorance of the crime. After that, atonement is to be made so that judgment may not come upon the city.

The scene reminds us that God is a God of justice. Just as Abel's blood cried out from the ground for vengeance, so unsolved crimes demand justice. While perpetrators of unsolved crimes may escape

justice in this life, there is a judge in heaven from whom no one can escape. But it also reminds us of the mercy and grace of God. He has grace even for criminals. Christ comes not to save the righteous but sinners!

The next section deals with laws relating to the rights of women in different marriage situations. Keep in mind that in interpreting this passage, the redemptive historical context must be kept in view. First, this was an era in which, due to Israel's hardness of heart, things like divorce were permitted. But that did not mean that God endorsed it. God's patience in overlooking aspects of our sinfulness does not constitute his divine imprimatur on the practice. It certainly does not establish it in perpetuity. This basic principle is enunciated by Jesus in his disputes with the Jews over divorce. Divorce was not commanded by God in the OT. It was a sinful practice that God, in his divine wisdom, permitted due to their hardness of heart. Although it was not totally abolished through governmental force or law, rules were established that would mitigate its damaging effects--especially for the woman who might be put away by her husband.

By way of analogy, we can make similar points regarding both polygamy and slavery. Obviously, these are distinct issues, and the principles are providentially applied a little differently in both, but the fundamental idea is the same. God permitted less than ideal and sinful cultural institutions in the OT era. But he did not thereby permanently endorse them. In fact, in all these instances, he made clear laws mitigating the sinful effect upon society. When compared to our modern world, these may still seem insufficient. But when we compare how Israel was commanded by God to deal with these circumstances with how they were typically handled in the surrounding nations, the Divine mercy is evident.

We see this first in the situation where a woman from a conquered people is taken as the wife of an Israelite. It was the practice of warring nations to subject the surviving people to forced labor and also for the men of the conquering army to take the surviving wife of a slain man in marriage. Such a practice would not be permitted in the fullness of New Testament revelation. Although the fact of the practice is recognized in this passage, its emphasis is upon the rights of the woman as a human being to be granted mercy and appropriate treatment.

While it's not a perfect analogy, modern conventions and rules for the treatment of POWs might serve as an apt analogy. She has to be allowed to mourn for her for an appropriate time. If she is to be taken as a wife, the husband's obligations are to be fulfilled for her. It is to be recognized that such a situation would be humiliating for the wife, and thus she is to be treated properly. She cannot be sold as a slave and must be given full freedom if the husband no longer wishes her to be his wife.

Again, in the fullness of New Testament revelation, the practice itself would not be allowed. Jesus clearly forbade polygamy, and history shows that there are better ways for nations to rebuild relations with defeated enemies for the common good. But in the context of these practices in the ancient Near East, the emphasis strongly falls upon the rights of this woman as a human being.

Similar things can be said about the second situation, in which a man has two wives. He is to fulfill his obligations as a father and a husband irrespective of his greater or lesser emotional affection for either one. Clearly in the New Testament, he would not have multiple wives as polygamy is forbidden. But again, the emphasis is placed upon the rights of these women in the context of their marriage union. The husband must fulfill his duties to them as commanded in God's law.

The final scene is also quite sobering. It deals with the rebellious son. Space does not permit a full treatment of all the questions we might have about the passage. I do think it is significant that this "son" is clearly not a young boy but a grown man. Note that he is described as being both a glutton and a drunkard. Whatever specific form his rebellion and disobedience had taken, it was clearly severe and had taken place over an extended period of time. We are not to think anything so absurd as the fact that God would implement capital punishment because a child is going through their "terrible twos." Folly is bound up in the heart of a child. They need loving nurture and discipline to unbind their hearts that they might be filled with wisdom. However, rebellion against authority is a serious sin, especially toward our parents. When parents have done their best to love, care for, and provide for their children, it is a great sin for them to despise and reject their parents. It is a rejection of God himself as our Heavenly Father.

But thanks be to God for Jesus Christ. The law provided for the mitigation of the effects of sin and restraint upon man's evil. The law can restrain, but it cannot heal men. It holds out the threat of death to put a limit on the spread of corruption. But only Christ can fulfill its demands, bear its punishment, and free us from death. He is the faithful Son from the Father, who perfectly obeyed his voice, yet was executed as if he were a rebel. (It is noteworthy that the charge against him was insurrection!) Through grace, he becomes our faithful head and husband, who cares for us as his holy bride. Although we were his enemies, he loved us and died for us. Now reconciled to God, we are his friends. Although tragedy befalls us in this sinful world, we look forward to heaven, where all wrongs will be made right, and death will be transformed into everlasting life.

#22 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 22:1-30

The last several chapters have dealt with matters of life and death. They were part of Moses's exposition of the sixth commandment: you shall not steal. In chapter 22, we transition to the seventh commandment: you shall not commit adultery.

Obviously, there is some overlap in its contents. The first part of the chapter contains laws relating to property and possessions. This would properly relate to the eighth commandment (you shall not steal). Specifically, God's people are to do what is reasonably within their power to restore lost goods to their brethren. Likewise, when taking animals from nature for food, they are forbidden to take the mother with the young. This ensures that their food supply among the animals may perpetuate as they reproduce to feed and nourish human beings. We are not to overharvest the earth. Hunting and fishing

to extinction is a careless waste of God's resources to man. It robs from the future to indulge the present.

There is also a law that relates to ensuring our neighbor's safety, obviously relating to the sixth commandment. Parapets are to be built on the roofs of houses, ensuring the safety of those who dwell there. We are to do what we can to preserve the life of our neighbor.

There is also a commandment regarding tassels on the corners of the garments worn by the Israelites. As Numbers 15:37-41 indicates, these were to serve as visible reminders of their holy status before God and his requirement that they live in a way that reflects that spiritual reality. Interestingly, the language used with regard to the tassels relates to the seventh commandment: "...not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after" (Num. 15:39). The fact that they are on clothes may also relate to the principle of purity expressed in the seventh commandment, as they obviously serve to cover our nakedness.

The intermixture of these various laws does interrupt the expected flow of the book as it has generally been following the order of the Ten Commandments. If we scan ahead through the rest of this section, we see that the overlap continues and the clear demarcation of the commandments as structural markers diminishes. But it is a helpful reminder that although we can make distinctions regarding the various areas in which God's law applies, it is still essentially one (James 2:10). Its unity reflects the unity of God himself, as well as the fact that the whole law is summarized in the commandment to love—both God and our neighbor.

But the majority of the passage deals with the principle of sexual purity as contained in the seventh commandment. Sexual desire and activity have only one outlet for God-honoring expression: the marriage union of one man and one woman. Every sexual thought, word, desire, and deed outside this holy arena is defiled and sinful. Adultery is forbidden. At this time, it also carried the death penalty. This may seem severe. Under the NT administration, the death penalty is restricted to murder (as per God's instructions to mankind in the Noachic covenant). But recall the special circumstances of the theocracy. God was specially present among them and gave them special privileges that increased their responsibility before God. Note also that when both the man and the woman are willing participants in the adulterous encounter, both are held equally responsible.

Different provisions apply in cases of rape. The only evidence required is that the woman cry for help in the incident. If the incident takes place in an open field (and by extension in any place or circumstance where she could not be heard), then the woman is to be presumed innocent. Both then and now, the vast majority of sexual crimes are committed with men as the aggressors. This is factored into the process of determining the innocence of the woman in such matters, as she receives the benefit of the doubt.

Therefore, careful attention needs to be given to the circumstances when assessing guilt and responsibility in cases of adultery. Sometimes the two are both willing accomplices and need to be held accountable. Sometimes the man is clearly the aggressor (either through brute force or manipulation). Careful weighing of the evidence needs to take place when deciding such matters. This also applies to accusations relating to virginity prior to marriage. We do not presume guilt based on an accusation. The rights of all are to be preserved even as justice is done to protect the innocent and hold the guilty accountable.

Like other passages in Deuteronomy, this chapter is sobering in that it reminds us of the destructive and deceitful power of sin. This is especially the case with anything related to sexual desire or activity. The Bible describes it as a fire that burns within us. Although it affects and tempts men and women in different ways, we are to be vigilant in maintaining a life of purity before our holy God. The fact that God no longer commands that the death penalty be imposed as a civil punishment does not change the fact that God will judge the sexually immoral and the adulterer (Hebrews 13:4).

No one is totally sinless in these matters. Jesus tells us that if we even look at another person with lustful intent, we have already committed adultery with her in our hearts. The same is true with regard to daydreaming about unlawful relationships with the spouses of others.

In the final analysis, this passage reminds us that sin deserves death. Outside of Christ, we are all under the sentence of condemnation. Thanks be to God that he is our holy Savior who kept God's law perfectly. He didn't deserve death, but was punished in our place to erase the record of our wrongs. He sent his Holy Spirit to enable us to fight against the lusts of our flesh and walk in holiness before him. Although we will struggle all our lives with the remnants of the flesh, we have the promise of final victory through him who loved us and gave himself for us.

#23 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 23:1-24

As we saw last week, there is a great deal of overlap in this section of Deuteronomy. Early on, the book fairly consistently followed the flow of the Ten Commandments. As we move deeper into the "second table" of the law (i.e., commandments 5-10), Moses moves between the commandments a little more freely. This is perfectly legitimate and consistent with its divinely inspired character. God is one, and so is his law. The second table can be summarized in a single commandment: love your neighbor as yourself. By moving between commandments more quickly, the overall theme of love arguably stands out more clearly.

Moses covers material that could be assigned to the commandments concerning adultery, theft, false witness, and honoring your father and mother. Some of it involves ceremonial matters that could also

relate to the aspects of the first table of the law. In this devotional, we will just offer some thoughts on the passage in the order it presents itself.

First, we have laws relating to entering the Assembly of the Lord. A man whose reproductive organs are crushed is not permitted to enter God's assembly. This is likely because his inability to reproduce renders him incapable of participating in the generational blessing promised to Israel in the covenant. The emphasis quickly shifts to a discussion of people in the surrounding nations of Ammon, Moab, and Edom. In the NT era, the church consists of believers in all nations. But in the OT, it was coextensive with a single nation—Israel. As far as the exclusion of foreign nations is concerned, the primary issue here is not ethnic or racial but religious. Gentiles who fear the God of Israel and believe in him were given access (albeit limited) to the worship of the one true God. In the fullness of times, these temporary barriers would be removed.

Even here there are distinctions made. The Ammonites and Moabites were forbidden to come into God's assembly to the tenth generation because they oppressed Israel in the wilderness. They sought to curse Israel, which God turned into a blessing. The Edomites, however, are Israel's brothers. They are the sons of Esau, Jacob's brother. They are not to be abhorred. After the third generation, they may enter God's assembly. Amazingly, God says the same thing about the Egyptians (!). Although during the reign of the Exodus Pharaoh, they were enslaved and mistreated, before that, they were treated well in Joseph's days. Whether in the better or worse times, God's grace is truly amazing. These provisions clearly foretell a day when God's grace will extend beyond Israel to the nations.

Next, Moses discusses matters related to uncleanness in the camp. This moves more into the ceremonial aspects of the law. It recalls aspects of the books of Leviticus and Numbers. Common sense confirms the divine wisdom in associating things like a man's nocturnal emission or excrement with uncleanness. These are created aspects of human life and are unavoidable aspects of the physical function of our bodies. But they require cleansing and covering. God was pleased to associate these basic functions of the body with the spiritual realities of the filth and impurity of sin. It is stomach-churning for a reason. If we want to see what is really inside our corrupt hearts, all we need to do is glance in the toilet. What a powerful reminder of our need for God's cleansing Spirit!

Interestingly, the passage also includes an important law regarding slavery. If a slave escapes from his master, he is not to be returned. Instead, he is to live among them freely in the town that he would choose. We have seen in previous chapters that God "permitted" certain cultural practices and institutions that otherwise did not conform to his divine righteousness. Although he allowed it to go unpunished, he did not thereby endorse it. In the fullness of NT revelation, things would be different. These include matters like divorce, polygamy, and slavery. Even though in the OT, the theocratic law of Moses does not yet abolish these practices, it certainly points in that direction. God has not chosen to make us perfect in a single instant but bring us to the perfection of holiness gradually through a lifelong process of sanctification. What is true individually also applies redemptive-historically.

The emphasis of God's law on these matters (especially slavery) is on regulating and mitigating its sinful effects. Slaves were not to be mistreated. Likewise, it was a temporary situation: they would be granted the opportunity for manumission after a set time. Likewise (as this passage indicates), an escaped slave was to be given a safe harbor in the town to which he fled and not returned to his master. It should not be a surprise that it has only when nations were under the influence of Christian principles (either directly or indirectly) that the institution has been abolished.

Next, there are laws forbidding cult prostitution for both men and women. As Romans 1 reminds us, the downward spiral of the rejection of the one true God is an ugly one. It starts with the denial of God as the creator and Lord of all. His will defines human nature. We are created male and female after God's own image. Gender and sexuality are determined by God's will and expressed in our created constitutions. We are not our own. We are what God made us. A rejection of those created realities is a manifestation of spiritually self-destructive rebellion against God. This includes homosexual desires and activities, as well as a rejection of one's God-given gender as expressed through their natural biology.

Pagan worship reflects this distortion of reality. The gods of the nations reflect the depravity of men, and this corruption becomes embedded in their worship practices. Modern man is more sophisticated in his expressions of rebellion, but the ugly realities are the same. There is child sacrifice and cult prostitution today, albeit it is "dressed up" in different forms (i.e., gender ideology and abortion).

The passage is rounded out by prohibitions against charging interest for loans between Israelites. Foreigners may be assessed interest, but not their brothers. Likewise, vows must be performed. We must keep our promises even if to our hurt. Our hearts must be filled with generosity and mercy. An Israelite may glean from his neighbor's vineyard or field to taste and eat when passing by, but he is not to harvest for himself.

In all these things, we see the glorious character of God. He is generous and benevolent, showering gifts on unworthy man. He is also merciful and gracious, granting deliverance to the captive slave and protecting the vulnerable from oppression. He is pure and holy, and his people must reflect this reality in their lives as individuals and as the Christian church. All these things are summed up in Christ. He was the Lord who became the slave so that in him we might have liberty and freedom from sin. Delivered from the tyranny of the devil and renewed in his image, we live holy lives through the power of his Spirit. As such, we shine as lights in a dark world that his grace might extend to the nations of the earth.

#24 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 24:1-22

We have observed through our meditations on Deuteronomy how the law works to restrain both the acts and effects of sin. It holds out the clear punishment, curse, and destruction for our sins. This causes man to think twice before plunging headlong into the indulgence of his sinful inclinations. The law can restrain, but it cannot heal man. Only God's Spirit can work to renew the dead heart and vivify us to desire God and love righteousness.

Likewise, God has been pleased to save us (in part) through a gradual process of sanctification. Our justification is completed in a moment, but our sanctification takes a lifetime. God is patient with us. He is pleased to leave us in an imperfect condition as long as we are in this flesh. It is only in heaven that we will be perfect.

What is true of us personally in our sanctification is also reflected in the flow of redemptive history. The law of God was given to Israel (in part) to constitute them as a theocratic nation. The law reflected the glory of God and the purity of heaven, but it was not sufficient to bring perfection. During that era, God allowed certain practices that, in themselves, did not fully conform to His perfect will or the ideal condition of relations between men. In the fullness of time, some of these would be absolutely prohibited (such as polygamy and no-fault divorce). In the case of slavery, the divine light of revelation would shine with greater light to lay the groundwork for the eventual abolition of the institution. God's patience with our sins and imperfections is not to be interpreted as his endorsement of these practices.

In this passage, we are confronted with this fact in relation to marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Under the Mosaic administration, there remained a cultural practice of sending away an unwanted wife. This created situations in which a wife might move from man to man, marrying and divorcing frivolously. Although the Pharisees of Jesus's day interpreted this passage as Moses's approval of divorce, Jesus makes it clear that this was simply a divine permission due to their hardness of heart. The granting of a certificate was likely to ensure that if the wife was put away without just cause, she would have proof of this fact in a legal document such that she wouldn't fall into disrepute.

The passage also creates a bit of an exegetical dilemma in sorting out the ethics of divorce and remarriage. We do not have the space to get into all these details in this devotional. In the fullness of NT revelation, marriage can only be dissolved on the grounds of the death of one spouse (Rom. 7), adultery (Matt. 19:9), and irremediable willful desertion (1 Cor. 7:15). In cases of divorce, we are not left to our own private discretion but should follow a public and orderly course of proceeding with the church and with the civil government.

But even here divorce is not a "fix" for the problems human sin creates in marriages. Even when justified, it carries its challenges, especially for the children affected by it. Sometimes it is necessary due to the corruption of man and (in severe cases) the protection of the vulnerable from harm. But like the

law as a whole, it mainly serves to mitigate and restrain the effects of sin. We need God's healing Spirit to bring restoration and grace.

The chapter continues with several laws ranging from marriage to slavery, to ceremonial uncleanness, and theft. Although the subject matter jumps around a bit, it paints on a broad canvas the principle underlying the second table of the law: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

A newly married man is not to go out to war. He is to enjoy the first year of his marriage with his wife. Marriage as an institution recalls the perfection and joy of man's estate of innocence in the garden. It was a time of peace and life, not war and death. Just as the theocracy as a whole was an earthly shadow of heaven, so this provision allows newlyweds to enjoy an approximation of paradise—insofar as this is possible in a sinful world. They are to be shielded for a brief time from the tragedy of death reflected in the curse of Adam's fall. This ultimately points them to their blessed marriage union with God in Christ, which will be fully consummated at the end of the age.

A millstone is not to be taken in pledge because of its importance for the life and sustenance of the people. It is necessary for food production. Life is thus to be honored, and mercy is to reign in such matters. Likewise, the passage later reiterates how mercy is to reign in such matters. Pledges are not to be aggressively collected. When what is offered in pledge is necessary for the person's essential well-being, special provisions apply to allow them to use it temporarily.

Man-stealing is explicitly prohibited. This is reiterated in NT revelation (1 Tim. 1:10). While slavery as an institution is not entirely abolished in the NT, the groundwork is laid for its abolition when a society comes under the influence of Christian principles. Given that the trans-Atlantic slave trade was built upon the practice of "man-stealing," we can see how this is especially the case in terms of our nation's history.

Leprous disease is to be carefully dealt with according to the Levitical law. Although the ceremonial laws relate to matters of worship, they also (by extension) often involve matters related to the love of our neighbor. Given the contagiousness of leprosy, it is not difficult to see how this principle applies in this instance.

Wages are to be paid promptly. The poor are to be compensated with daily payment as it is all they have to live on.

Justice is to be applied individually: each man is accountable for his own sin. Fathers are not punished for their children, nor children for their fathers. To be sure, there are times (especially in the OT) when a

culture becomes so corrupt that there is a measure of corporate judgment that befalls the city. Sodom and Gomorrah were examples of this. But note that the righteous were also warned and given the opportunity to flee.

There is a sense in which the sins of the fathers will have an effect on their children. In this sense, God does say that He will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me. But there is a difference between a father's sin affecting their children and them being held guilty for it.

Generally speaking, we see a greater emphasis on the principle of individual accountability as we move toward the NT. God was pleased to deal with His OT people as a nation, so they did at times endure "corporate" judgment. But the most fundamental principle of law is a principle of individuality: each person will give an account of his own sins.

This principle has greater relevance for our modern culture, which tends to assign group guilt according to one's "group-identity" (according to gender, race, economic status, sexual orientation, etc). Ironically, it uses the Biblical terminology of "justice" to describe this practice. But by biblical standards, it is the height of injustice. In matters of human justice, we do not punish children for the sins of the fathers, or vice versa.

As the last part of the passage indicates, special attention is to be given to the merciful treatment of the fatherless and the widow. In these matters, Israel is to especially remember that the entire nation was at one time in a similar humble condition. They are to remember that they were slaves in the land of Egypt when the Lord showed them mercy and redeemed them. A free flow of merciful support towards them is embedded in the provisions of the law and is to be reflected in their practices as a nation.

Thus the law restrains their sin but also points them to a greater redemption. In the fullness of time, Christ would come bringing a clearer and greater expression of heavenly revelation. In the future glory we will share with him there will be no more fatherless or widow. The poor and downtrodden will be made rich in him. Ugly realities of sin, infidelity, and divorce will be wiped away from this cursed world and we will be made perfect in the marriage supper of the Lamb.

#25 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 25:1-19

Like many previous chapters, this section of the book presents us with some challenging passages. We need to remember the theocratic and redemptive-historical context for Moses's application of the law to the life of Israel. As we have noted earlier, this essentially means that we would not make a direct

application of every provision in the modern world. This principle of interpretation is referred to as the "general equity" of the law of Moses. It is articulated in our church (i.e. the presbyterian church) in its Confession of Faith in these words: "To [Israel] also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require" (Westminster Confession 19:4). In simple terms, this means that the judicial or civil laws in the OT only apply insofar as they contain general principles expressive of God's moral will.

How exactly did this work out? Although God doesn't change, our redemptive-historical circumstances do change. In the OT Israel was a single nation under a God-ordained form of civil government. There was a king in Israel who represented God to the people. This is no longer the case in the NT. As a nation, they had a special status with a special promise of blessedness in that land. Likewise, they had a special promise of military victory as they followed God's word in the conquest. This is no longer the case in the NT. Further, Israel's life of blessedness was so tied to the idea of inheritance. Therefore marriage and reproduction were tied to the perpetuation of that inheritance among the nations.

Some laws are more affected by this theocratic context than others. For example, the commandments about just weights and measures are as applicable now as they were then. We are to be fair, honest, and forthright in our business dealings (13-16). Likewise in matters of justice, there are to be no cruel or unusual punishments. Hence if the just punishment for a crime is a beating, it is to be no more than 40 lashes. God is a God of justice: he will by no means clear the guilty. But his justice is harnessed for a gracious, restorative end: to restrain evil and guide us in the paths of righteousness. The law thus serves the greater ends of the promises of grace.

Other laws are more deeply embedded in the theocratic context of Israel. This is perhaps no more clearly seen in the law regarding the Levirate marriage. This practice involved the wife of a deceased man marrying one of his surviving brothers so that his name might not be blotted out from Israel and his inheritance continue in his family line. The wife is not to marry outside the family or a stranger.

The practice seems very strange and foreign to us in the modern world. Keep in mind that it appears many Israelite men were not all that eager to perform this duty towards their sisters-in-law--hence the specific provision to public disgrace such a man who refuses to perform it.

Such a practice does not continue under the NT administration. However, we are required to care for the widow in our midst, particularly widows in our own families. Younger widows are encouraged to marry, both for their own good and that a "holy seed" may be born within Christian families and in the church of God (see Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy). The Levirate marriage was intended as a theocratic form of this principle. Although the shell has dried out and thrown away, the moral kernel remains for us in Christ Jesus.

Appreciating this theocratic context also helps us rightly interpret another provision of the passage. When two men are engaged in a fight, a wife is forbidden to intervene by seizing the private parts of her husband's enemy. To be sure, the Mosaic law permits the use of deadly force in self-defense in cases where one's life is reasonably threatened. This is true even in the case of a home burglary at night (Ex. 22:2-3). By extension, it seems reasonable to conclude that a bystander may also intervene with deadly force to prevent a murder.

Why then this specific prohibition against a man's wife seizing her husband's enemy by the private parts? First, it seems that the fight has not elevated to the point that their lives are at risk. Although coming to blows is a sin, there is often strange decorum and respect that is often observed between men when engaged in physical combat. They desire to dominate one another, but their intention is not always to seriously harm or to kill each other. To be sure, there are situations where this is not the case and a deadly outcome is intended. Such seems to be the case here. In such instances, it is often best to simply let the fight play out or seek lesser means of restraint. It is worth noting that it is probably unwise for a wife to intervene in such a fight between two men as she may be inadvertently harmed in the "crossfire."

But the theocratic context is also significant here. If the man's private parts were seriously damaged he would be incapable of reproduction. In this context, it also seems to be too extreme of a means of intervention for the woman to pursue. This would not only constitute physical harm to him, but also to his family and the integrity of the transfer of his inheritance to his family members. We might think that "he had it coming" or that he could have avoided this situation by exercising better self-control. While he does bear some responsibility in this respect, a bystander's use of force must be appropriate to the situation.

The perceived oddities of these commandments actually point us indirectly to something essential to our salvation. God was pleased to send the Savior into the world through the process of childbirth. Adam was born from the dust. Jesus would be born of a woman. This is tied into human reproduction insofar as his coming would be the result of a long line of generations. God promised Adam and Eve that a seed of the woman would come to crush the head of the serpent. This seed would not come in the figure of Cain (Gen. 4:1) or even righteous Noah (5:29). It would not arrive until the birth of Jesus. He came into this world through an extraordinary generation: born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law. He is the heir of all things--the Seed of Abraham to whom the promises find their ultimate fulfillment.

These laws ensure the perpetuation of the seed of Israel and the typological inheritance of Canaan. They point us to God's faithfulness in bringing us Christ the redeemer. In him, we are assured of our final heavenly inheritance and our full membership in the house and family of God.

#26 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 26:1-19

Deuteronomy 26 concludes the long section at the heart of the book that outlines the stipulations of God's covenant people. These are much more than mere "rules" to follow. They serve as a guide for how Israel is to reflect the gracious covenant union they have with the Lord their God. Their hearts are to be near him in worship and adoration. The inner love they have for God is reflected in their lives with their neighbors in merciful and righteous conduct. Although some aspects of the Mosaic law are temporary and tethered to their redemptive-historical context in the theocracy, they possess a general equity that is still useful for us.

Chapter 26 rounds out this discussion by reminding them of the principle of "firstfruits" in relation to the tithe. The firstfruits were the first of the crops to come forth during harvest time. They also served a representative function insofar as this "part" of the harvest was reflective of the whole. The idea was that while God was only given a "part" of the harvest as an aspect of their worship, the whole harvest was to be received with thanks and used to the glory of God. The principle also finds expression in the tithe (which is discussed next). God required a tenth of all their increase, which was given to the care of the Levites along with the lowly in Israel. Although God required a tenth be given directly to him, it was representative of the devotion they were to give the Lord in their entire lives.

Although our earthly lives are temporary, He gives us responsibilities in relation to our situation in this world. Many of you are fathers and mothers who tirelessly care for your families. Many of you work long hours to provide for yourselves and share something with those in need. God is pleased to give us ample time to do these things. He did give us six days for all matters related to this earthly life. The seventh is a Sabbath to the Lord. He has not asked that every moment be directly devoted to him—as if he were a "needy" personality that required our attention. But insofar as all of life is lived to God's glory, indirectly every part of life is done for him: whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we do it all to God's glory.

So it is with our earthly possessions. By necessity, the largest portion of it is often taken up in our worldly responsibilities. But a portion of it is set aside and devoted to him in worship. This goes largely for the provision of the ministry of the Gospel and the care of the poor in the church. But in all of our lives, we use what God has given us not for our glory but for his.

The heart of God's law is that we love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The firstfruits and the tithe are wonderful reminders of this reality. By ending this section of Deuteronomy in this way, Moses is reminding the people that in both the first and second tables of the law, the honor and glory of God himself are in view.

The passage also outlines declarations the Israelites are to make as they present their offerings to the Lord. These verbal confessions were to help ensure that Israel was not only following the right form in their offerings, but that their heart was also in the right place. Sometimes the Bible contrasts an empty "hearing" of the word with its proper "doing." It is obviously right to do this. Christian teaching without Christian practice is a hollow, lifeless shell. But Christian practice can be done in a lifeless way just as much as Christian teaching. The Jewish church of Jesus's day had plenty of people who gave large sums to the poor, but not in a way that honored Christ.

First, the declarations made by the Israelites were reminders of God's abundant generosity, grace, and mercy to them. They were nomadic wanderers when God called them. Then God delivered them from great humiliation and tyranny in Egypt. With grace and mercy, God delivered them. Instead of a barren wasteland, he freely gave them a land flowing with milk and honey. The recitation of God's mighty works positions the Israelite giver in the proper frame of mind: one of humility and thanksgiving. They are only freely giving what God first gave to them. Giving is not done to earn anything from God but to express our thanks to him.

Secondly, these declarations were a reminder of God's delight in the cheerful giver. They are to give with joy out of the abundance of God's goodness and delight in him. After all, it is harvest time. The hard work of the spring and summer is paying off in the harvest of fall. Although with bitter tears the sower bears his seed, when harvest time appears he shall be glad indeed.

And so our lives reflect the joy of the abundance that we have in Christ Jesus. The Israelites had earthly types and shadows to help them grasp these spiritual realities. In Christ Jesus, the firstfruits of heaven have arrived in us through the resurrection of Christ and the sending of the Spirit. Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. The Spirit is the down payment of the world to come and the final harvest at the end of the age. The power of resurrection that will one day raise up these earthly bodies is already in us who believe. We have been liberated—not simply from Pharaoh's political domination but from the tyranny of sin and of the devil.

The life we live as Christians is difficult. We are often beset by our sins and failings. Our consciences are afflicted because we are not yet what we should be. The blessings granted to us are not seen, touched, tasted, or felt like the earthly harvest of the Israelites. They are grasped by faith, which all too often is very weak even in the best saints. So we cry out to God: "I believe, help my unbelief." With a greater measure of faith, we also share in a greater measure of joy in this life. May that especially be true today on this day of rest and worship, but also on every day as we seek to glorify and enjoy him forever.

#27 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 27:1-19

Chapter 27 transitions to a new section of Deuteronomy. As we noted before, the book follows the general pattern of an ancient covenant document. Examples of covenants are found throughout the Bible itself. We also have examples in other ancient texts from the general time period. The basic elements of these covenants are as follows:

Preamble

Historical Prologue

Stipulations

Sanctions

The Ten Commandments display these basic elements with the preface (containing the preamble and historical prologue), the commandments themselves (the stipulations), and the sanctions of blessing or curse for the faithful and unfaithful.

In this chapter, we transition to the "sanctions" section of the Mosaic covenant. Moses commands the tribes to stand on one of two mountains. Six tribes stand on Mount Gerizim to pronounce the blessing of the covenant, while six tribes stand on Mount Ebal for the curse. The Levites then make the pronouncement to all the men of Israel. First comes a series of twelve curses followed by "Amen's" from the people (27:15-26). In the next chapter, there is a longer declaration of both blessing and curse (28:1-68).

The largest amount of space is devoted to the curses. There are twelve verses that contain a curse in chapter 27, and then 53 verses in chapter 28. By contrast, the blessing receives only 14 verses.

There is a good reason for this. Although the NT contains threats of judgment just as much as the OT, there is a greater emphasis on the threats in the OT. In God's providence, the Mosaic era, in particular, was one in which few had true faith. Likewise, the OT era as a whole is characterized by the failure of faith of Israel as a holy nation. Although the remnant would be saved, the old era in its forms and as an administration would pass away.

Although more space is devoted to the curses, the structure of the passage actually puts the blessings in central focus. It follows a basic chiasmic paradigm that (when visualized) looks like this:

A - Curses

B - Blessings

A' - Curses

Although Israel will be characterized by God's judgment and curse for their unbelief, his central plan is not to judge but to bless and save. God will consign them over to curse so that in the end, he may bring a blessing to his chosen people (cf. Rom. 11:32). Through Christ, the curse becomes a backdrop against which he can magnify the riches of his superabounding grace.

The curses are pronounced against a variety of sins spanning both tables of the law. However, special emphasis is given to transgressions related to sexual immorality. No less than one third of the curses relate to such sins. There are also two curses against those who would take advantage of the weak (the blind, sojourner, fatherless, widow). Other curses are pronounced against image worship, dishonoring parents, moving a landmark, murder, and bribery. It concludes with a more general curse against those who fail to keep God's law.

The administration and application of the curse sanctions against Israel were tempered by God's gracious covenant relationship with Israel. The theocratic context is also important to recognize insofar as it related to Israel as a corporate nation in relationship to the earthly type of the Promised Land. Although the law always demands perfection, the justified are forgiven and their imperfect works are accepted through Christ's grace. At the same time, the law's demand for perfection does not change. As such, it constantly reminds us of the imperfection of our obedience and our need for Christ.

Hence, when writing to the Galatians, the apostle Paul reminds them that if they depend upon their works for justification, they are under a curse. No one can keep God's law perfectly. But our salvation does not consist of God simply deciding to accept a lower standard of obedience as our righteousness. God's justice must be satisfied. His curse must come against sin and disobedience.

Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ. As Deuteronomy earlier stated: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree" (Deut. 21:23). Christ redeemed us from this curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. This language is striking. He not only bore the curse but became it. Similarly, Paul elsewhere states that God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that in him, we might become the righteousness of God.

Just as he vicariously became sin and the curse for our sake, so through him, we become the righteousness and blessedness of God. This is strong language. It points to the total identification of Christ with all that afflicts us as well as our identification with the entirety of the life and blessedness that is in him.

To borrow from the Heidelberg Catechism, this means that although our conscience accuses us of having grievously sinned against all of God's commandments, we have in Jesus one who has entirely absorbed for us the wrath and curse of God. Through him, we have the propitiation of God's wrath. His anger against us is turned into blessing.

God's love for us in this regard should be reflected in our lives with fellow believers. As he loved us, so we must love one another. There are numerous ways this applies to us, but the greatest test we face in this regard is our willingness to forgive others when they sin against us. By extension, the sincerity of our faith in Jesus in this regard will find expression in our willingness to communicate and to listen to our brothers in working out conflicts. Sometimes this will result in our brothers realizing they have sinned and doing them good by pointing them on the right path. Sometimes our eyes will be opened that there is much more to the story than we realized and that we had rushed to judgment and not exercised Christian charity. The fact that this is a difficult and emotionally taxing process is not an adequate excuse for our unwillingness to do it. God has appointed that the "end" of forgiveness and reconciliation come through the "means" of communication. This forces us to listen to each other through which we come to greater mutual understanding. This process becomes the fertile ground for the harvest of peace and righteousness that is the fruit of God's Spirit. To neglect it is to remain in a barren wasteland.

We aren't simply forgiving the "minor" transgressions by dismissing them as "no big deal." We recognize that even the best saints can fail in pretty major ways. The disciples fell asleep when Jesus prayed at Gethsemane. They all abandoned him when he went to his trial. Peter (who had previously vowed to go with him to prison and to death) denied him three times, even invoking a curse upon himself (Mark 14:71). Yet Peter remained a child of God and forgiven through the prayers of Jesus.

Our profession to believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins is that we are not prepared from the heart to forgive others. To be sure, reconciliation follows after repentance. But our hearts must always be prepared to forgive. Professing Christians too often refuse to walk the hard road of working out their issues with one another through reasonable discussion and communication. Or rather than dealing directly with those with whom we are at odds, we channel our frustrations through others. We certainly have the option to hold our peace and bear with our brethren in love rather than discussing the matter directly. But all too often we don't actually do this. Instead, we allow our hurts to fester, bitterness to take root, and thus give a foothold for the devil in our lives and in the church. Trust and brotherly affection are replaced by suspicion, tension, and conflict. Unresolved conflicts don't simply "go away." Although God is often pleased to restrain the collateral damage they can produce, they end up following and hampering our Christian lives in ways we may not at first fully realize.

The reality is that we have all grievously sinned against God and apart from Christ are under a curse. If we have been forgiven much, we must love much. We cannot plead for the forgiveness of our sins

unless we at one and the same time ask for grace to forgive others (as outlined in the Lord's Prayer). To reach that point requires being willing to listen to each other, but also to communicate with grace and understanding. This is hard work for both parties, but God calls us to no less in the Lord Jesus.

The Gospel consists in the fact that although we have sinned against Christ and wounded him deeply, Christ's love for us is deeper than his hurt. By his wounds, we are healed. When we were enemies, he reconciled us to himself through his death. Do we truly believe this? Let our faith then bear fruit in following Jesus on that same path in our interactions with our fellow brothers and sisters.

In this way, grace will triumph over judgment, blessing over the curse, love over bitterness, God's peace over conflict.

May God grant us grace not only to receive these blessings of Christ but to extend them to others and so glorify him.

#28 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 28:1-68

In the last devotional, we observed how this section of the book corresponds to the "sanctions" section of ancient covenant documents. In other words, it outlines a pronouncement of blessing or curse for those who "keep" or "break" the covenant.

It must be remembered at the outset that although the law itself demands perfection, its administration during the Mosaic era comes in the context of the covenant of grace. The moral law is not only surrounded by this administration of grace but embedded within it. When God pronounces a blessing for covenant keepers, the expectation is not that they are going to be perfect. Likewise, the curse does not come upon them because they retain the remnants of the flesh or that they struggle to be faithful to God. The law contains provisions for sacrifice and atonement for ongoing issues with sin. Through Christ, their sins and imperfections are pardoned. In him, the demand for perfection is satisfied, and we are accepted (warts and all) through his blood and righteousness.

But Israel remains a "mixed" group. Not all Israel is truly "Israel" in the spiritual sense of the term. They have no true faith in the redeemer, and this will be manifested in due time.

On the most fundamental level, the blessings are therefore pronounced upon those who have true faith. The emphasis falls upon the manifestation of faith in sincere, heartfelt obedience. But let us not forget that faith is the fountain from which true, sincere obedience flows.

Likewise, the curses are not pronounced or applied simply because we struggle in the process of our sanctification. If that were the case, we would make void the doctrine of justification by faith and the sufficiency of Christ's atonement. The curses have in view apostasy and rebellion against the Lord. More than once the OT clearly indicates that these curses come upon Israel for unbelief, idolatry, and rank rebellion against the Lord. This is seen in chapter 30, where idolatry is specifically identified as the key identifier of the rejection of God's covenant (30:17). As that chapter indicates, there is also the opportunity for repentance and restoration, such that the curse can become a blessing once again. The heart of covenant loyalty is likewise seen in Israel's obligation to "hold fast to him" (30:20) - a beautiful description of the heart of what it means to believe and trust in God.

Nevertheless, the threats of God's curse are sobering. Many of the details outline pretty horrific miseries for Israel, many of which actually come to pass in the flow of redemptive history. But God would not abandon his people to total destruction. Although in exile, they would fall under the curse of the covenant, with the arrival of Jesus, the nation would behold the fulfillment of God's promised restoration. Through his obedience and death, the curse will be transformed into blessing.

The curses of the law are a sobering reminder of what our sins deserve and the hopeless fate of man outside of Christ. The knowledge of this reality serves to constantly point us back to Jesus, the only name under heaven by which men can be saved. In him is life and blessing. Apart from him there is only curse and death - and that eternally!

#29 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 29:1-29

With this chapter, we see how the idea of the covenant continues to shape the contours of the last book of Moses. The last two chapters have outlined the "sanctions" of the covenant: blessings for those who believe and curses for those who reject God and betray Him. The following two chapters continue to develop this basic element of God's covenant. In 30:1 and 19, you will note that the theme of blessings and curses directly reappears. So we are still clearly in the "sanctions" section of God's covenant.

However, there are a few important themes that are integrated into this presentation that give us a deeper view of the richness and uniqueness of God's covenant. Although Deuteronomy has formal parallels with covenant documents made by conquering kings over their subdued peoples, this is a substantially unique arrangement. God is not a man, and a divine covenant is not a human covenant.

We see one of these unique aspects of God's covenant in the way the oath of the covenant is described. Covenants are ratified by oaths and vows. Thus Moses declares that Israel is entering into a "sworn covenant" with God (29:12, 14, 19). In this chapter, there is clearly an emphasis placed on the oath-character of God's relationship with Israel.

God is the sovereign king, and we are His created subjects. Even if we were simply confronted with the force of His power as Creator and Lord, we would be obligated to obey Him. In God's gracious covenant, our obligations are presented in a different way. God's sovereignty and authority as the Creator-king are not negated or removed, but we are connected to it in a way that reflects His loving and gracious work to redeem.

This is seen in the fact that even without an oath, we are obligated to obey God. The imposition of an oath evidences God's grace to us as it represents His desire that we willingly and freely serve Him. For example, none of us can be forced to marry another; we must enter into a marriage covenant freely and willingly. This is reflected in the marriage vow.

God can subdue even the demons by the force of His raw power. He could do that to us as well. Instead, He chooses to deal with us in the context of grace. This means that the "target" of His desire is our heart. We are to not simply conform our external behavior to His commandments, but He desires that our hearts desire and love Him.

The emphasis on God's oath also draws into view our sinfulness and the need for God's sovereign grace. The law requires that we love the Lord with all that we are and have. Even Christians who sincerely love God are quickly confronted with the impossibility of perfectly fulfilling this demand. Apart from God's grace, we cannot even begin to truly follow God's commandments. At this stage in redemptive history, God was pleased to extend His regenerating grace to only a few. Most of that generation was "passed over," and their hardness of heart was exposed. As Moses says here: "But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear" (29:4). In the flow of redemptive history, He did this so that Israel's failure might serve as a warning for future generations against the deceitfulness of sin. Particular warnings are issued against those who would take this oath on their lips even while they presume to betray God in their hearts (29:18-19). This pattern of hardness of heart would be exposed more clearly in the fullness of times. Christ would come to His people Israel, but they would not receive Him (see John 1:11). Similar words from Isaiah would come to fruition in Jesus's interaction with the same class of Jewish leaders addressed in Deuteronomy (cf. 29:10): "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Matt. 15:18). The book of Hebrews also develops the same theme found in this chapter, warning the church against an empty profession that lacks devotion of the heart.

God requires an oath from Israel to confirm and ratify that their hearts are truly near to Him. When the oath is insincerely taken, it will only serve to testify against them in the judgment.

Such would be the fate of all of us apart from God's free grace. When we look more fully at the idea of the covenant oath, we find that it applies not just to His people but also to God. Although His word is true--it is impossible for God to lie--He confirms His covenant promises with an oath (see Hebrews 6:18). By grace, He has condescended to give us this supreme confirmation of His unchanging love for us.

In Christ, these oath promises are fulfilled. Although all mankind has sinned and rightly deserves the curse--even His people Israel--He has borne the curse on the cross. Although we are faithless, He remains faithful. He has fulfilled the demands of the law and paid its penalty for our justification. By His Spirit, He writes it on our hearts in our regeneration and sanctification. He is our faithful Savior who will never leave us or forsake us.

As the last verse reminds us, there are many mysteries involved in God's marvelous work of redemption. He has not chosen to reveal His secret things to us. But this simple reality is clearly set forth in His revealed word: although we are sinners who have betrayed our oath to God, He is the faithful covenant God. It is not ours to search beyond what He has been pleased to reveal to us but to keep our focus on the heart of His ways in us: the forgiveness and renewal we have through Him manifested in a life of joy and gratitude.

#30 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 30:1-20

We are still clearly in the "sanctions" section of God's covenant, in which God holds out future blessings and curses for those who would break or keep His covenant. Remember, covenant keepers are not perfect people. The law is unchanging. It always demands perfection. This is true after the fall, no less than it was true in the Garden of Eden. As the law reflects the perfect nature of God, it can be no other way. The Mosaic covenants contain many reminders of this fact. But we must remember that the law was applied to Israel in the broader context of the covenant of grace. The moral law was part of a broader revelation of redemptive grace founded on atonement, forgiveness, and cleansing. This was typified in the priesthood and sacrificial system, but also spiritually grasped by true believers under the Old Testament. In this context, the law's demand for perfection was satisfied in the vicarious sacrifice offered on behalf of the Israelites. The perfection of the "spotless lamb" would satisfy God's perfect justice. Although imperfect, God would be pleased to accept and reward their imperfect obedience that flowed from sincere faith. Like faith itself, the reward is a gift of grace.

To unbelievers and false professors who never had true faith, their betrayal of the covenant would be exposed in due time, and the just curses of the covenant would fall upon them.

But chapter 30 moves beyond a simple rehearsal of the potential blessings and curses in Israel's possible future. This was already done in chapter 28. Moses is certainly setting before them the "choice" of life and death, pleading with them to choose the God of life. God deals with us as rational creatures who must wrestle with our desires and make choices for which we are held accountable. God is sovereign over all, but this does not negate human responsibility and the real choices we must make as we are tried and tested in our faith.

But Moses does more than remind Israel of their obligations and encourage them to trust and obey. In this section, exhortation is transformed into prophecy. It is no longer: "If you obey you will be blessed, but if you betray God you will be cursed." Instead, Moses foretells what will happen after all these things come to pass. Incidentally, this passage is strong evidence for the Reformed understanding of the compatibility of the certainty of the divine plan with the idea of human responsibility. God knows they will disobey; he has planned it in his sovereign decree! But this does not negate the role of exhortation, promise, and threat. Human responsibility is not negated by God's decree, but rather established by it (see Westminster Confession, III:1).

Israel's tragic history is thus set before them ahead of time: they will fail and come under God's judgment. The tragedy of the era of Moses is therefore not just a "false start" that will eventually improve for the nation with subsequent generations. It is a preview of "coming attractions." Although a remnant will be saved, the nation as a whole will come to destruction.

Although the chapter does have a strong emphasis on the portents of certain judgment, this is not where God leaves Israel. God will consign them over to disobedience and unbelief, but for a greater purpose by which he will manifest his glory in an unimaginably fuller way.

After they are in utter ruins, scattered among the nations, and in utter misery due to their hardness of heart, he will again intervene with grace. As he delivered them from slavery in Egypt, so he will work to deliver them from captivity among the nations. He will again bring them into the land with a circumcised heart to love and fear the Lord their God. The sovereign grace he was pleased to withhold from the larger part of the nation (recall Deut. 29:4) will be poured out in fullness. God is a God of justice: he will by no means clear the guilty. But he is also a God of superabounding grace. His mercy triumphs over judgment. Although he allows man to fall into sin, he does so for the purpose of magnifying his grace. As Paul states, the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more (Rom. 5:20).

The mystery hidden in Deuteronomy will be more fully revealed in Christ. The mystery is that not only will the elect Jews be reconciled to God through his grace and mercy, but also his people from all nations. We do see a hint of this in Deuteronomy 30, where the Song of Moses foretells a day of restoration that will include both Jews and Gentiles.

What is true redemptive-historically is also often true personally for each of us. Sometimes God allows his saints to fail miserably in ways that fill us with shame. This is true even of the greatest of God's servants. Recall how Peter fell asleep when Jesus asked him to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane—three times, no less! Our spirits are willing, but the flesh is weak. He also denied his Lord three times after vowing to go with him to prison and to death. Even after his restoration, he succumbed to his fears and compromised the Gospel under pressure from influential false teachers (See Galatians). These are not small failures. Satan sought to take advantage of them and desired to sift him as wheat. But through the prayers of Jesus, his faith did not fail.

So God is sometimes pleased to allow us to fall into sin. Sometimes we will do this face first in a public and embarrassing way. Sometimes the effects of those sins will be serious, causing hurt and harm to those closest to us. God has a greater purpose in permitting us to fall in this way. By humbling us, he creates a backdrop upon which to manifest the glory of his grace and the healing power of his love. The doctor's skill is best shown in his treatment of the sickest patients.

Recognizing this transforms the way we deal with sin in our lives and the lives of those closest to us. It compels us to put greater trust in the Lord. Rather than hiding our sins to avoid the guilt and shame they bring to our hearts, we openly confess them. Rather than nourishing our hurts and bitterness when we are sinned against, we ask for grace to forgive as God forgave us. In this way, God's grace triumphs over sin, and Christ receives the glory.

God has a purpose even for our sins and failures. Think of the story of Joseph. His brothers were filled with sin and did unspeakable evil against him. But God used it for a greater good. We see the same thing in Jesus, who suffered mistreatment and injustice. But it was through his wounds that we are healed. Through the injustice done to him, justice was satisfied so that we might obtain the forgiveness of our sins. This is the pattern of God's ways with us. By allowing sin he paves the way for a greater manifestation of his glorious grace. Even as we trust his provision for this grace in Jesus, let us trust him when he manifests it in our lives as well.

#31 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 31:1-29

In this chapter, we move beyond the rehearsal of the blessings and curses to a new section of Moses's covenant document. We have seen that ancient covenants generally consist of four key parts. These are reflected in the Mosaic covenant as well, which is summed up in the two tablets given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Here is a shorthand outline of those elements as we have described them previously:

Preamble: "I am the Lord Your God"

Historical Prologue: "Who brought you out of Egypt"

Stipulations: the Ten Commandments

Sanctions: Blessings and Curses

The entire book of Deuteronomy generally follows the flow of these elements of the covenant. We can pretty much outline the book using the covenant pattern.

However, there are additional themes and elements in ancient covenants that supplement the basic outline seen above. Two of these themes include the idea of covenant succession and covenant witness. The final chapters of Deuteronomy are taken up with outlining these ideas.

In chapter 31, we see some emphasis on the witnesses of the covenant. For example, the book of the law is to be set by the ark of the covenant "that it may be there for a witness against you" (31:26). Since these things will happen after Moses's death, he will no longer be able to personally testify against them when they break the covenant. The written words of Moses will serve that function in his stead. Likewise, the Song of Moses in the next chapter is here said to be a "witness for me [i.e. Moses] against the people of Israel" (31:19). As we shall see, this song prophetically foretells the rebellion of Israel. They will honor God with their lips, but their hearts will be far from him. What an irony that when Israel assembles for a mere external worship of God they will sing a song that condemns the very hypocrisy with which they are engaged! Every seven years the entire law was also to be read to the people (31:10). This ensured that even in times of the gross neglect of his word, the people would still be confronted with this witness of the covenant.

Christians today are no less vulnerable to falling into this kind of pattern. Many gather Sunday by Sunday singing songs that express love and passion for God with a desire to glorify him. The same can be said about the sermons that are preached, outlining Christian teaching and the way of salvation in Christ. They give their ears and voices to worship, but in their lives, they do not seek to honor him. The songs we sing that express our love and devotion to Christ are wonderful tools to encourage us in his promises and love for us. But if we have no true faith in God, they will only bear witness against us on the last day. May what is on our lips also be in our hearts! Indeed, as Paul says we must confess not only with our mouths that Jesus is Lord but believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead to be saved (cf. Rom. 10:9). It should be no surprise that in the immediate context of this passage in Romans, Paul is expounding the fulfillment of God's revelation from this very section of the book of Deuteronomy (Deut. 30:12-13). God's word ties together quite wonderfully.

In addition to the theme of covenant witness, this passage also develops the idea of covenant succession. This phrase refers to the fact that our faith is to be actively passed down from generation to generation. Throughout the book of Deuteronomy, a heavy emphasis is placed upon our obligation to

teach God's ways to our children that they may be nurtured in his grace and love. They are to make God's wonders known to their children's children (4:9-10). Their faithfulness will have a positive effect on their children through many generations, but their sins and unfaithfulness will have a negative one (5:9). They are to diligently teach their children the words of the law not only in formal times of worship and instruction but throughout all the activities of life (6:7). The book is filled with similar exhortations that are too numerous to outline here.

God's covenant promise is to be God to us and to our children after us. There is a shared, corporate responsibility that the church shares in this regard. But the primary responsibility for the Christian nurture of children lies upon parents. To be sure, the church is the most important institution in the life of every Christian. But in order of time, children first learn the Christian faith from the fathers and mothers in their homes. We do not make our children Christians by inherited genetics or even by diligent training. But God will use our loving, humble, and gentle covenant nurture to plant seeds that God's Holy Spirit will bless with growth in his good time.

But there is another level to this covenant succession. It takes place not only among the people but also among the leaders. Moses had a special role in the OT that was truly unique. While Joshua would succeed him as a faithful leader of Israel, he was not quite like Moses. Indeed, this book recognizes his uniqueness in that the future prophet to arise who will bring the fullness of God's word will be one like unto Moses (18:15-19).

Israel would have to wait for the coming of this final leader. For now, God's faithfulness would continue through Joshua. Just as God was present in Moses, so he would be with Joshua. Although Moses must pass away, God will not leave them or forsake them. They must be strong and courageous, knowing that his presence will go with them from generation to generation.

This covenant succession has come to its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is greater than Moses, even as a Son is greater than a servant (Heb. 3:1-6). He is greater than Joshua as he brings us to our final, heavenly inheritance. Through Joshua, God was with Israel. Jesus is Immanuel: God-with-us. This is true not only in his incarnation but through the power of his Spirit. In this, he is "with us always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

#32 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 32:1-52

Yesterday we noted the importance of two "sub-themes" of these final chapters of Deuteronomy. They are reflective of the covenantal form of the book. One theme is that of covenant succession. God desires that faith in him be handed down from generation to generation. This is true no less of the leaders than it is of the people. Joshua is to succeed Moses even as a new generation succeeds the one

that failed in the wilderness. This theme is revisited at the end of the chapter. It references the coming death of Moses and the passing of the baton from him to Joshua.

Likewise, we also see the theme of covenant witness. Just as we select friends to serve as witnesses to our wedding and the solemn vows made by the husband and wife, so God has witnesses to his covenant with his people. Moses serves as such a witness. When he passes, the book of the law which records his words will also serve this function. The event is so significant that even heaven and earth can be called as a witness against Israel.

A final thing that will serve as such a witness against Israel is the Song of Moses. This was mentioned in 31:19-22 but is contained in full in this chapter.

The basic character of the Song is therefore that of a covenant witness against Israel. Moses had already started to move from a proclamation of God's law to a prophecy of Israel's future in chapter 31. In other words, he no longer simply warns them of what might happen if they disobey. He tells them what will happen when they reject the Lord.

The Song is therefore comprehensive in its historical scope. It contains the entire history of redemption insofar as it is directly relevant to Moses's purpose. The first lines of the Song recall the first book of Moses with the creation of the heavens and the earth. The Exodus event is also described in language reminiscent of the first creation, with Israel in a howling waste of the wilderness but hovering over them like a bird with its young. This is similar to the formless void of the universe in its initial state, with the Spirit of God hovering over the dark deep of primordial wilderness-chaos. As we shall it also foretells the gathering of the Gentiles in the fullness of time. Its reappearance in the book of Revelation means that its reach stretches all the way to the consummation. The entire history of redemption is therefore drawn into the witness character of the Song. Not only the whole cosmos but all of history will bear witness to God's mighty acts of redemption.

The poetry of the Song also reinforces the covenantal character of God's relationship with Israel. It is characterized by reciprocal love and mutual fellowship. Words come from God by which he holds out himself and all the blessedness within him. Israel's ears are to hear these words, receive them, and respond with a voice of praise. Their rebellion provokes him to jealousy like a jealous spouse, as their idolatry constitutes a betrayal of the marriage covenant of exclusive love and fidelity.

The poetry of the Psalm is quite beautiful and intricate. Unfortunately, we do not have the space in this devotional to outline this in detail.

As is the case with the Mosaic era in general, the accent is strongly on the note of judgment against Israel. In this it serves as a warning not just for Israel, but for all whom the Lord may call to himself. Human sin and blindness are so great that even those who directly see irrefutable signs of divine power in miraculous works will turn to evil and forsake God. How often do we hear from the atheist that if

they had evidence of miracles as the Bible stated they would believe in Jesus? We know from both the OT and NT that this is simply not true. OT Israel saw God's wonders and then turned immediately to the worship of a golden calf. The Jewish leaders of Jesus's day not only saw miracles but were providentially equipped with the revelation of the OT to help them identify the one who performed it as a messenger of the one true God. Yet they not only refused to believe in Christ, they sought to destroy him for it.

This aspect of the Bible's teaching is central to the Gospel. That is why the NT makes reference to it in several crucial places. The Apostle Paul appeals to it in its condemnatory witness character as he highlights Israel's rejection of its covenant redeemer (see Rom. 10:19, 12:19, and 15:10). Likewise, the writer to the Hebrews appeals to it when warning his readers against the deceitfulness of sin and the hardness of an unbelieving heart. The NT church stands in a situation like OT Israel under Moses. We are in the wilderness of this world. In our wandering our faith is being tried and tested.

But the Song is not only about judgment. It also foretells a day when God will again visit his people with mercy, grace, and redemption. This restoration will include not only the remnant of Israel but also his chosen people from among the Gentiles (Rom. 15:10).

Likewise, this Song will endure even until the consummation. The book of Revelation describes the triumphant saints in heaven singing both the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb (Rev. 15:3). Both the OT and the NT together testify to Christ, the faithful witness.

As we meditate on this Song we are both humbled and encouraged. It clearly reveals the depths and deceitfulness of our sinful hearts. Apart from his grace, we would run headlong into rebellion just as Israel did. Let us keep in mind that as we gather on this Lord's Day to sing to the Lord our words of praise have a witness character. If we come with hearts far from God that really only love the world, the songs of praise we take on our lips will only testify against us on the day of judgment. Let us then ask for the grace of Christ and his Spirit that what is spoken on our lips would be reflected in our hearts and a life of sincere faith before him.

#33 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 33:1-29

In these last chapters of Deuteronomy, we have seen Moses expound upon the sanctions of the covenant: blessings for faithfulness and curses for disloyalty. At first, these were presented as a hypothetical possibility: if you trust me and hold fast to me, you will be blessed. If you betray me and worship other gods, you will be cursed. But the proclamation of their obligations quickly turned into a prophecy of their future rebellion.

In God's providence, the era of Moses was characterized largely by rebellion and unbelief. This is, in part, why the Mosaic administration is called a "ministry of death" by the Apostle Paul (cf. 2 Cor. 3:7). God was pleased to give the "letter" of God's revelation with the "Spirit" of life and renewal (cf. Deut. 29:4). For this reason, and the certainty of their future rebellion, much greater space is given to the curses rather than the blessings (Deut. 28).

Although the era of Moses was, therefore, characterized by a curse, its ultimate end for Israel would be a blessing. Repentance would follow after rebellion, faith after unbelief, and return after exile. God will consign them over to disobedience to order that he might ultimately show mercy to all nations (Rom. 11:32).

How fitting, then, that Moses would end his last words to Israel with a prophetic blessing on God's beloved nation. It is a reminder that God's goodness will triumph over evil even as mercy triumphs over judgment.

Many of the blessings relate to their future prosperity in the Promised Land or to the special station that he grants to the most blessed tribes. But the song begins and ends with the key blessing that will characterize this nation: that they are loved and blessed by the Lord. This blessedness transcends the earth. Even as the Lord came down from heaven to save them (33:2), so God will send a Savior from there. Note the parallel reference to God's coming down from heavenly glory in 32:26 which makes this an *inclusio* for the passage. He is the dwelling place of Israel. They can take refuge in his everlasting arms. Their enemies may triumph temporarily as instruments of God's discipline, but they will ultimately perish under the power of his might. He is the shield of his people, protecting them from harm, and the sword of might that gives them victory in battle (29).

The final words of Moses thus remind Israel and us of the ultimate source of their blessedness: God himself. There is no one like him. His love is as eternal as his infinite being and glory. Their history is characterized by change and decay, but their ultimate end will be eternal life through him and his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

#34 - Devotional Meditations on Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Many often cite this passage as proof that Moses did not write Deuteronomy. After all, who would be able to record the details of their own death? To answer this objection, some resort to the idea that a later editor (perhaps Joshua) added this as an appendix to the book to round out and bring closure to the story. While this is not impossible, it is also unnecessary. The idea that Moses's record of his own death is evidence at all against his authorship (much less its divine inspiration) is the height of utter folly. Shall the God who revealed future millennia to Moses (just prophesied in the preceding chapters) now be unable to reveal what will happen tomorrow? We do not even need to speculate on this point. In

Deuteronomy 32:48-52, we read that God chose to reveal these exact details to him just prior to his death. The fact that this even continues to be mentioned as a modestly strong point against Mosaic authorship is puzzling to me. Of all the mighty acts that God performed through Moses and in his day, surely revealing the details of his death ahead of time is among the easiest works of the LORD.

The fact that it is written in the third person is also weak evidence against Mosaic authorship. This is how the book began, and this is how it now ends. Moses knew quite well that he wasn't writing a private diary, but a public testimony for generations to come. He appropriately blends the first and third-person perspective, mixing the personal aspect of his testimony with the historical and objective.

In fact, it is this intersection between the personal and the historical that gives the conclusion its great power. Moses was not permitted to enter the Promised Land due to his failure at the waters of Meribah. God had told Moses to speak to a rock so that water might flow out of it for the people. Instead, Moses (in anger and frustration) struck the rock twice. This may seem like a small mistake, especially given Moses's patience with them over a forty-year period. Yet the decision to strike in anger rather than speak in peace distracted from the glory that was due to God alone for his miraculous work. It also manifested a lack of trust in his own strength through works rather than his faith in God's word. The power of Moses came not through his person or even his reputation in the eyes of Israel. Indeed, he was often despised and the subject of Israel's criticism. Moses's power lay in the word of God that came through him.

Hebrews 11 tells us that many of our spiritual forefathers among the Israelites died in faith. Although they died without having received the promises, they saw them and greeted them from afar (Heb. 11:13). Moses is certainly among them. After he ascended Mount Nebo from its summit, he beheld the entire Promised Land. The destination to which he had journeyed for 40 years was now before his eyes. It was within reach but still very far away.

Although this was the case in terms of his proximity to the earthly shadow, it was not true of the heavenly reality to which it pointed. As his eyes of flesh finally gazed upon the land of Promise, as his breath expired, he was immediately translated to a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

As great as Moses was, he was not God's final deliverer. Like all the sons of Adam, he too lived out his years and perished. His body returned to the ground, and his spirit returned to God who gave it. Moses, the servant of God, would give way to Jesus, his eternal Son. Moses foresaw his day and testified to his coming in word and in deed. Although Christ died, he now lives on high. He has gone into heaven as our forerunner. One day all the tribes of the spiritual Israel will be gathered there in body and soul, never to die again. He is indeed not the God of the dead but of the living!

