



# Faith Connections

Bible Study Guide

*Fall*  
**25**

*Living into  
God's Promises*

# Bible Study Guide

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Mike L. Wonch  
Editor

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# Perspectives

## Going God's Direction

There is a funny scene in a popular comedy where the two main characters get turned around and are heading the wrong way down an interstate. They notice people trying to alert them. At first, they ignore these people, but eventually realize they are in fact going the opposite way down a one-way road. Heading in the wrong direction may be funny in this type of movie, but in real life, it is not.

The Hebrews were set free from Egyptian bondage by God. And, with Moses at the helm, they set out for the promised land. During their travels, there would be grumbling, failure, and discouragement. However, there would also be God's leading presence, covenant, and promises. They were headed somewhere, a place "flowing with milk and honey"—the promised land (Exodus 3:17). Despite the ups and downs—being led by God—they were going in the right direction.

Whether people realize it or not, their lives are heading in a direction. The question is, Who is determining the path they take? Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Being a disciple means forsaking our own direction and following God's direction on the journey of faith.

Following God's leading doesn't mean the path will be easy, free of pain and challenges. In following God's guidance and direction for our lives, we still encounter times on the mountaintop as well as in the valley. However, God promises His presence to those who follow His way. To Joshua God said, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9); to Isaiah, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). Jesus promised His disciples that He would be with them to "the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

As you go through this study, remember, when we travel the God-directed path, we are not alone. As God promised to be with those in the past, He promises to be with us as well: "Be strong and courageous...for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6).

May God bless you as you study His Word this quarter!

MIKE WONCH

Editor

September

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# THE PROMISE OF A PLACE

*God promises His people a place of intimate fellowship where He blesses His people and defeats their enemies.*

## THE WORD

DEUTERONOMY  
11:8-15

### KEY VERSES

**O**bserve therefore all the commands I am giving you today, so that you may have the strength to go in and take over the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess,<sup>9</sup> and so that you may live long in the land the LORD swore to your ancestors to give to them and their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey.<sup>10</sup> The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden.<sup>11</sup> But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven.<sup>12</sup> It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.

<sup>13</sup>So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul—<sup>14</sup>then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and olive oil.<sup>15</sup> I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.

22-28

<sup>22</sup>If you carefully observe all these commands I am giving you to follow—to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him and to hold fast to him—<sup>23</sup>then the LORD will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and stronger than you.<sup>24</sup> Every place where you set your foot will be yours: Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>25</sup> No one will be able to stand against you.

The LORD your God, as he promised you, will put the terror and fear of you on the whole land, wherever you go.

<sup>26</sup>See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—  
<sup>27</sup>the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; <sup>28</sup>the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.

## ENGAGE THE WORD

The teachings of Moses in the book of Deuteronomy functioned like a “theological” road map for the children of Israel to follow as they prepared to enter and live in the land God promised their ancestors. The exhortations contained within Deuteronomy outlined the various ways the people should act as a covenant community to enjoy the blessings God had in store for them. Deuteronomy also contained warnings about the dangers and pitfalls the Israelites should avoid so that their presence in the land would not be jeopardized. In our focus text, we learn how Moses urged the people to appropriate the good things God intended for them by making wise decisions.

## FOLLOW ATTENTIVELY

### Deuteronomy 11:8-15

The prospect of enjoying long life in the land inspired Moses’ admonition to observe the commandments he taught them. The urgency to heed them is captured by the Hebrew (*shamar*), which means to guard carefully or follow attentively. In this section, Moses highlighted two important truths about Israel’s life in the land which added to the weightiness of his words. First, Moses pointed out that the land belonged to God, and therefore, God gave or gifted the land to the Israelites in conjunction with the oath made to their ancestors (Genesis 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:18-20). Israel thus received the land as a gift from God and it was not something to be conquered or possessed. As a result, obedience to the covenant ensured their security and well-being in the land (i.e., so that you may live long in the land).

### Did You Know?

The word *Deuteronomy* is from the Greek and means “second law.” Deuteronomy represents a restatement of the laws by Moses found in Exodus 20—23 as he prepared the people to enter the land of Canaan.

When the Israelites violated God’s commands, however, they put their life in the land at risk (Joshua 23:11-13). Considered sacred space, the land could not tolerate sin as that would cause the land to “vomit” out those who defiled it by their disobedience (Leviticus 18:28).

Secondly, Moses reminded the Israelites that Canaan did not resemble the land of Egypt. In Egypt, the Nile River served as the main source of irrigation for plant and vegetation life. The Egyptians ably constructed a series of networks, channels, and basins to capture the water from the river which ensured consistent agricultural productivity. The situation in Canaan proved to be different, however. In Canaan, the land relied upon rain from the heavens to provide fertility for one’s crops and flocks. Periods of drought or famine, not uncommon to this part of the world, posed a serious risk to one’s personal and economic situation (1 Kings 17:8-16). It is not surprising then that the main deities of Canaan, such as Baal and Asherah, specialized in bringing fertility to the land. In fact, the god Baal was often depicted in physical representation with a lightning bolt in his hand, thus signifying his ability to cause thunder/lightning and bring rain upon the earth. Israel’s God on the other hand was associated with the desert, in the territory of Midian (Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4-5; Habakkuk 3:3), where Moses encountered God in the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-12). This God had led the Israelites through the wilderness and provided for their needs as they journeyed toward the land of Canaan (Exodus 15:22-25; 16:1-35; 17:1-7). The question remained, however, whether God could make it rain when the Israelites settled down in Canaan, the home of the fertility gods whom the Canaanites had worshiped for many generations. In verses 13-15, Moses stressed that God (and not Baal) would indeed bring both the (early) Spring and (later) Autumn rains which would produce a bountiful yield of grain, oil, and vegetation to sustain and satisfy them and their livestock. This would take place as the Israelites demonstrated

**Think About It**

The Israelites had to trust God to meet their needs by bringing fertility to the land. Do we, as the people of God, believe that God is able to provide our daily bread? Or do we doubt and fret whether God will be able to take care of us?

**GOD IS ON YOUR  
SIDE**

**BLESSING AND  
CURSE**

their trust in and faithfulness to God (the meaning of love in this context), who in turn would honor the covenant by abundantly supplying all their physical and material needs. Unfortunately, the Israelites would fail to trust God as they put their faith in Canaanite fertility deities to provide for them throughout various parts of their story (i.e., Judges 2:11-15).

**Deuteronomy 11:22-25**

Moses also emphasized that God would fight for them and give them victory over the nations that surrounded them and threatened the inheritance that God promised their ancestors. Like verse 13, God's reassurance to aid them depended on the people's obedience to God's instruction. As the Israelites intentionally followed the directions given by Moses, God would not only firmly plant them and make them stalwarts in the land, but God would expand their territory beyond Israel proper, a land stretching from the desert in the south of Israel all the way to the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia (v. 24).

**Deuteronomy 11:26-28**

Like any good preacher, Moses brought his message to a close by offering an invitation for the people to respond. He reminded them that there were two paths the people could take; one would lead to blessing, the other would lead to their own harm. Blessing would ensue as they heeded the instruction he offered them; cursing if they ignored his words and followed after the gods of the nations around them.

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**REFLECT** What promises of God are you leaning on today?

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**KEVIN MELLISH** is professor of Biblical Studies at Olivet Nazarene University. Dr Mellish is the author of *1 and 2 Samuel* in the *New Beacon Bible Commentary* series, and he is currently writing a volume in the *Reading and Interpreting the Bible* series.



September

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# KEEPING CLOSE TO GOD

*God provides ways for His people to maintain  
and strengthen fellowship with Him.*

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## THE WORD

### LEVITICUS 1:1-4

**T**he LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting. He said, <sup>2</sup>“Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When anyone among you brings an offering to the LORD, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock.

<sup>3</sup>“If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you are to offer a male without defect. You must present it at the entrance to the tent of meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD. <sup>4</sup>You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you.

### 3:1-5

<sup>1</sup>“If your offering is a fellowship offering, and you offer an animal from the herd, whether male or female, you are to present before the LORD an animal without defect. <sup>2</sup>You are to lay your hand on the head of your offering and slaughter it at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Then Aaron’s sons the priests shall splash the blood against the sides of the altar. <sup>3</sup>From the fellowship offering you are to bring a food offering to the LORD: the internal organs and all the fat that is connected to them, <sup>4</sup>both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the long lobe of the liver, which you will remove with the kidneys. <sup>5</sup>Then Aaron’s sons are to burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering that is lying on the burning wood; it is a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

### 6:1-7

<sup>1</sup>The LORD said to Moses: <sup>2</sup>“If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the LORD by deceiving a neighbor about something entrusted to them



or left in their care or about something stolen, or if they cheat their neighbor, <sup>3</sup>or if they find lost property and lie about it, or if they swear falsely about any such sin that people may commit—<sup>4</sup>when they sin in any of these ways and realize their guilt, they must return what they have stolen or taken by extortion, or what was entrusted to them, or the lost property they found, <sup>5</sup>or whatever it was they swore falsely about. They must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the owner on the day they present their guilt offering. <sup>6</sup>And as a penalty they must bring to the priest, that is, to the LORD, their guilt offering, a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. **<sup>7</sup>In this way the priest will make atonement for them before the LORD, and they will be forgiven for any of the things they did that made them guilty.”**

### KEY VERSE

## ENGAGE THE WORD

**P**aying close attention to the instructions God gave to the Israelites through Moses, we can learn important principles to help us strengthen our relationship with God and other believers.

### TENT OF MEETING

#### Leviticus 1:1-4

The instruction God wanted Moses to deliver to the people emanated from the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (v. 2). After the exodus, God’s presence first appeared among the people as a column of smoke and a pillar of fire to lead the people to Mount Sinai (Exodus 13:21-22). When the people reached Sinai, God’s presence enveloped the mountain in smoke and fire, and was shrouded by various natural wonders (Exodus 19:9, 16). At this time, however, only Moses could draw near to God’s holy presence. After its completion (Exodus 35—40), the Tent of Meeting served as God’s earthly abode and the main place where the community, vis-à-vis the priesthood, could access God’s presence and proffer sacrifices and offerings (Exodus 33:15-17; 40:34-38).

From the Tent of Meeting God described in detail the various types of sacrifices and offerings that could atone for sin and maintain fellowship with God

### Did You Know?

The Hebrew word for atonement (*kaphar*) derives from ancient languages related to Hebrew meaning to cover or hide and to wash away. By extension, then, in atonement God not only covers our sin, but cleanses us as well.

and other members of the community. In verses 1-4, instructions regarding the burnt offering were given first. The burnt offering was a free-will offering that shared many characteristics or qualities with the sin/purification offering mentioned later in Leviticus (4:2-3). In the burnt offering, God required the entire animal to be consumed upon the altar (1:8). The fire turned the meat and other parts of the animal into smoke, which became a “pleasing odor to the LORD” (v. 9, see also Genesis 8:21).

Depending on the status of the individual in the community, different types of animals could be selected for this type of offering (a bull [v. 5], sheep/goat [v. 10], turtledove/pigeon [v. 14]). The only restrictions placed on the animal to be sacrifice included that the animal be a male and without defect. Since the sacrifice was considered a gift to God, the Israelites were required to offer their “best” to the Lord (see Malachi 1:8)

The act of presenting a burnt offering before God not only demonstrated the full, unconditional self-surrender of the one presenting the sacrifice, but it served as a vehicle for the atonement of sin as well (v. 4). The blood of the animal acted as a “ritual detergent” which purified the one who made the sacrifice and enabled them to stand in the holy presence of God. When worshipers laid their hands upon the animal, it signified ownership of the animal and the benefits of the sacrifice would thus accrue to the donor. Furthermore, the burnt offering cleansed the sanctuary from the contaminating residue of the sins of the people. For this reason, the priest applied the blood to the sides of the altar and to the mercy seat (on the Day of Atonement; Leviticus 16:15). Since the sanctuary served as God’s dwelling place on earth, God could not continue to inhabit the sanctuary if pollution from sin remained.

### FELLOWSHIP OFFERING

#### Leviticus 3:1-5

The second type of sacrifice mentioned in our

### Think About It

The system of sacrifices and offerings detailed in Leviticus accentuated both dimensions of God's covenant with Israel. They not only restored relationship between the Israelites and God, but they fostered communion among fellow Israelites as well.

session is the fellowship offering (*shelem* = meaning “peaceful relations”), also known as the peace offering. Unlike the burnt (sin/purification) offering, the animal to be offered could include a male or female (without defect), whether selected from the cattle (v. 1), sheep (v. 7), or goats (v. 12). While the internal organs, such as the kidneys and liver, were required to be burned up on the altar, various portions of the animal (such as the breast or right thigh [7:31-32]) could be set aside and consumed by the priest and worshipers, along with varieties of bread (7:12). The fellowship/peace offering did not function as an expiation for sin, rather it served to highlight and promote peaceful relations between the people before God and peaceable fellowship with one another.

### Leviticus 6:1-7

#### GUILT OFFERING

The third offering mentioned in our text includes the guilt offering (*asham* = meaning “guilt”). This offering was designed to address sins one committed against another person, whether through deceit, extortion, theft, or false statements. The “guilt” then does not refer to one’s conscience per se, but to the debt one owed to another as a result of dishonesty. Sometimes called the “trespass offering” or “reparation offering,” the purpose of this offering was to make amends or reparations for one’s sin against another member of the community. In addition to offering a ram as a sacrificial offering, the guilt offering required restitution whereby the guilty party had to restore what was stolen or acquired through fraud. Furthermore, an additional penalty of one-fifth of the value (20%) of what was stolen was assessed (see Exodus 22:1-2).

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**REFLECT** What practices help you in nurturing your relationship with God?

September

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# PROVIDING SPIRITUAL LEADERS

*God sets apart spiritual leaders  
to help His people worship Him.*

## THE WORD

### LEVITICUS 9:5-12

**T**hey took the things Moses commanded to the front of the tent of meeting, and the entire assembly came near and stood before the LORD. <sup>6</sup>Then Moses said, “This is what the LORD has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the LORD may appear to you.”

<sup>7</sup>Moses said to Aaron, “Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people; sacrifice the offering that is for the people and make atonement for them, as the LORD has commanded.”

<sup>8</sup>So Aaron came to the altar and slaughtered the calf as a sin offering for himself. <sup>9</sup>His sons brought the blood to him, and he dipped his finger into the blood and put it on the horns of the altar; the rest of the blood he poured out at the base of the altar. <sup>10</sup>On the altar he burned the fat, the kidneys and the long lobe of the liver from the sin offering, as the LORD commanded Moses; <sup>11</sup>the flesh and the hide he burned up outside the camp.

<sup>12</sup>Then he slaughtered the burnt offering. His sons handed him the blood, and he splashed it against the sides of the altar.

### 15-22

<sup>15</sup>Aaron then brought the offering that was for the people. He took the goat for the people’s sin offering and slaughtered it and offered it for a sin offering as he did with the first one.

<sup>16</sup>He brought the burnt offering and offered it in the prescribed way. <sup>17</sup>He also brought the grain offering, took a handful of it and burned it on the altar in addition to the morning’s burnt offering.

<sup>18</sup>He slaughtered the ox and the ram as the fellowship offering for the people. His sons handed him the blood, and he splashed it against

the sides of the altar. <sup>19</sup>But the fat portions of the ox and the ram—the fat tail, the layer of fat, the kidneys and the long lobe of the liver—  
<sup>20</sup>these they laid on the breasts, and then Aaron burned the fat on the altar. <sup>21</sup>Aaron waved the breasts and the right thigh before the Lord as a wave offering, as Moses commanded.

<sup>22</sup>Then Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them. And having sacrificed the sin offering, the burnt offering and the fellowship offering, he stepped down.

## NUMBERS

### 6:22-27

#### KEY VERSES

<sup>22</sup>The LORD said to Moses, <sup>23</sup>“Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

<sup>24</sup>“**“The LORD bless you and keep you;**

<sup>25</sup>**the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;**

<sup>26</sup>**the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”**”

<sup>27</sup>“So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.

## ENGAGE THE WORD

**I**n liberating the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage, God not only upheld the oath made to Israel's ancestor, but provided the religious foundation for the covenant established at Mount Sinai. An important component of covenant life included the role of the priesthood, who functioned as mediators between God and the people.

## AARON'S FAMILY

### Leviticus 9:5-12

God selected Aaron and his sons to serve as the main priests at the sacred site. Although God raised up Moses as the quintessential prophet, lawgiver, and mediator for the people during the exodus and wilderness period, God singled out Aaron and his family to serve as the priests for the community. When God gave instructions for the construction of the sanctuary, God specifically designated Aaron and his sons for this task (Exodus 28:1). As members of the Kohathite branch of the tribe of Levi, Aaron's family oversaw the care and operation of the interior portion of the

### Did You Know?

In addition to serving as the main priest of the community, Aaron was Moses' brother. He aided Moses by serving as his mouthpiece (Exodus 4:10-17) and assisting Moses in performing miracles in Egypt (Exodus 7:19).

sanctuary: the ark of the covenant, various religious utensils, lampstands, and other furnishings associated with the ministry at the sanctuary (Numbers 6:4:1-17). In addition, they were given exclusive rights and responsibilities to oversee the presentation offerings at the altar. Moses officially consecrated Aaron and his sons to carry out these important duties, including those of the high priest. As the main priests, they were also given control over the Urim and Thummim to discern God's will (Exodus 28:30), they taught divine Torah, and made determinations between the clean (sacred) and unclean (profane, see Leviticus 10:10-11).

Leviticus 9 details the ordination ceremony of Aaron and his sons before they functioned as priests for the community. The first order of business included a sin/purification offering on behalf of Aaron's family (vv. 8-12). It was essential that Aaron and his sons be cleansed first so that they could be in a state of ritual purity before officiating sacrifices on behalf of the people. Aaron offered a calf as a sin/purification offering with the internal organs, including the fat, kidneys, and liver of the animal, consumed on the altar and turned to smoke. Aaron then dipped his finger in the blood and daubed it on the horns of the altar. The smearing of blood served as purgation of the entire altar from the contaminating effects of sin. After the completion of the sin/purification offering, Aaron followed that up with a burnt offering, thus signifying the total surrender and consecration of the priesthood to God.

### AARON'S MINISTRY **Leviticus 9:15-22**

With the consecration of the Aaronide priesthood completed, Aaron then turned his attention to the ministry to which he and his sons had been selected: facilitating atonement on behalf of the congregation. Aaron first offered a sin/purification offering for the people by presenting a goat according to the prescriptions set out for this type of sacrifice (Leviticus 4). After atoning for the sins of the people, he offered the burnt offering

**Think About It**

One thing we learn from reading about the Mosaic Covenant is that God not only invites us to enter a covenant relationship with Him, but God also provides the means of grace to cultivate a vibrant relationship as well.

**BLESSING**

on their behalf and then two non-purification offerings in the form of a grain offering (v. 17) and the offering of well-being (fellowship offering, v. 18). The last two offerings expressed the gratitude of the community towards God and the fellowship between God and the community and the people with one another.

**Numbers 6:22-27**

Not only did the priests provide instruction for the people, serve as intermediaries on their behalf, facilitate atonement and other types of ritual ceremonies in their stead, but they also offered words of blessing upon the community. In the poignant and well-known words in verses 24-27, this priestly blessing called upon God to confer many benefits upon the faithful. The benediction called for God's protection upon the people as God watched over them and God's countenance shined down upon them (see also Psalms 4:6; 31:16; 44:3; 80:3; 89:15; Deuteronomy 31:17-18). The benediction also called upon God to bestow divine favor upon the people as the phrase "the LORD turn his face toward you" in verse 26 indicates. The blessing concluded with the request for the people to experience God's peace, well-being, and goodness in their lives.

The reassurance that God would accomplish this blessing is realized in the promise of verse 27. The phrase, "they will put my name on the Israelites," implies divine ownership; that is, the people belonged to God. Scholars believe this promise may have been taken literally as the people may have worn the name of God on amulets. Archaeologists have even uncovered portions of this blessing written on two tiny silver scroll amulets found in a tomb in Jerusalem, dated to the sixth century BC.

**REFLECT**

**T**ake time to think about the important role spiritual leaders fulfill within the faith community.



September

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# ATONING FOR THE COMMUNITY

*God calls the entire community of believers to confess and receive atonement for their sin.*

## THE WORD

### LEVITICUS 16:2-7

**T**he LORD said to Moses: “Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.

<sup>3</sup>“This is how Aaron is to enter the Most Holy Place: He must first bring a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. <sup>4</sup>He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. <sup>5</sup>From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

<sup>6</sup>“Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. <sup>7</sup>Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

### 20-22

<sup>20</sup>“When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. <sup>21</sup>He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. <sup>22</sup>The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness.

29-31

## KEY VERSES

<sup>29</sup>“This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work—whether native-born or a foreigner residing among you—<sup>30</sup>because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins. <sup>31</sup>It is a day of sabbath rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance.

## ENGAGE THE WORD

Unlike modern American society, ancient Israelite culture emphasized the community over the individual and accentuated the corporate nature of human existence. This was especially true in terms of Israel's relationship with God. Although we read about important figures like Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph early in Israel's story, the text emphasizes the communal aspects of Israel's covenant with God in the Mosaic covenant and in Israel's subsequent history. In our focus text for this week, we learn how God even made provision to atone for corporate sin and guilt in God's instructions to Moses for the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16.

DAY OF ATONEMENT **Leviticus 16:2-7**

The Day of Atonement mentioned in our focus text for this week served as the holiest day in Israel's religious calendar. This day, which occurred annually on the tenth day in the seventh month (September/October), was designated for the express purpose of atoning the sins committed by the community throughout the year. Whereas the sin/purification offering addressed the sins of individuals (Leviticus 4—5), the Day of Atonement dealt with communal sin. Before the sins of the people could be addressed, however, the high priest, who represented the community and mediated on its behalf, had to undergo the requisite preparations to ensure he was in a state of moral and ritual purity before he accessed the holy presence of God. Failure to take the necessary precautions ensured God's wrath and resulted in death.

### Did You Know?

The high priest was called the “son of Adam,” and he resembled the first man in the primordial garden (Genesis 2—3) when he accessed the presence of God in the Holy of Holies and made intercession on behalf of the people.

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the most sacred part of the sanctuary to make intercession on behalf of the people: the Holy of Holies (Most Holy Place). Within the innermost part of the sanctuary the ark of the covenant resided. The ark of the covenant was covered by a lid known as the mercy seat on which two cherubim with outstretched wings were situated. The presence of God symbolically rested on the outstretched wings of the cherubim and thus served as God’s throne, also called God’s footstool or pedestal (Psalm 132:7-8).

To properly access the throne room of God, Aaron had to be in a state of physical and moral purity. He first had to take a ritual bath before he could don the traditional clothing of the priesthood: the tunic, linen garments, sash, and turban. Some interpreters have suggested that wearing linen vestments while entering the Holy of Holies was akin to being admitted into the heavenly council, whose angelic messengers were also clothed in linen as well (see Ezekiel 9:2-3, 11; 10:2; Daniel 10:5). In addition, the mandatory sacrifices had to be presented on behalf of the high priest before he could stand in the presence of God. God instructed that a bull be offered up as a sin offering on behalf of Aaron and his household, and the blood of the bull had to be applied to the mercy seat and before the mercy seat seven times (v. 14). Aaron then presented the two goats reserved for the sin offerings of the community at the entrance of the sanctuary.

## **TWO-STEP PROCESS**    **Leviticus 16:20-22**

Atonement on behalf of the community included a two-step process. In the initial offering, the blood from the first goat cleansed the sanctuary from the contamination of the people’s sin. Not only did the sin/purification offering of the first goat purify the sanctuary, but its effects also applied to the altar on which the animal was sacrificed, as well as the Holy of Holies. As mentioned in a previous session (Session

**Think About It**

The scapegoat that carried the sins of the people into the wilderness reminds us that when God forgives us, our sins are removed and never remembered again (see Isaiah 43:25; Psalm 103:12; and Hebrews 10:14–18).

2), the sin/purification offering not only acted as a source of purgation of human sin, but it also cleansed the sanctuary from the residue of sin that polluted it. Since the sanctuary represented God's physical dwelling place, God could not inhabit the structure if sin continued to permeate it.

After cleansing the sanctuary, Aaron directed his attention to the second goat. This goat symbolically took on the sins of the people—all their wickedness and rebellion (v. 21). The transfer of sin took place as Aaron placed both his hands on the goat's head and then confessed the sins of the people over it. As the goat took on the people's sin and disobedience, sometimes referred to as Azazel or the scapegoat, the animal was subsequently led out into the wilderness and released into the uninhabited, barren landscape, never to return. This symbolic gesture served as a tangible and powerful reminder that God had removed the sin of the people and cast it away permanently from their presence.

**HOLY DAY****Leviticus 16:29-31**

Atoning for the sins of the people constituted such an important element in God's relationship with the people that the Day of Atonement became a fixed holy day in Israel's liturgical calendar. God understood that to be in relationship with human beings there would have to be a mechanism in place to forgive human shortcomings and failure. This is no less true today. Thankfully, the book of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus served as our heavenly high priest, entered the eternal heavenly sanctuary, and made the perfect sacrifice on our behalf so that we can access the presence of God through Him and receive atonement whenever we confess our sin (Hebrews 8:1—9:27).

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**REFLECT** **T**oday, thank God for His loving forgiveness.

October

5

# SETTING BOUNDARIES FOR LIFE

*Holiness becomes practical in the way  
we live in relationship to others.*

## THE WORD

LEVITICUS  
19:1-5

KEY VERSE

**T**he LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup>**“Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.**

<sup>3</sup>**“Each of you must respect your mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the LORD your God.**

<sup>4</sup>**“Do not turn to idols or make metal gods for yourselves. I am the LORD your God.**

<sup>5</sup>**“When you sacrifice a fellowship offering to the LORD, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf.**

9-18

<sup>9</sup>**“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. <sup>10</sup>Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God.**

<sup>11</sup>**“Do not steal. <sup>12</sup>“Do not lie. <sup>13</sup>“Do not deceive one another. <sup>14</sup>“Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD. <sup>15</sup>“Do not defraud or rob your neighbor. <sup>16</sup>“Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight. <sup>17</sup>“Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the LORD.**

<sup>18</sup>**“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly. <sup>19</sup>“Do not go about spreading slander among your people. <sup>20</sup>“Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the LORD. <sup>21</sup>“Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not**

share in their guilt. <sup>18</sup>“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

## ENGAGE THE WORD

### LIVING AS PEOPLE OF GOD

#### Leviticus 19:1-2

The first two verses of this chapter introduce a list of various instructions that govern how the Israelites were to live as the people of God. The opening verses of this chapter are the same as the opening verses of most chapters in the book of Leviticus. Every time that God prompted Moses to speak to the Israelites, he gave Moses another part of His expectations for His people.

The first direction in this chapter is “Be holy.” This direction is unique because it comes with a reason, “Because I, the LORD your God, am holy.” When God made the covenant with the Israelites on Mount Sinai, He gave them the specific job title of “kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:6). This job title came with the expectation that the people would represent God’s character to the nations around them. Therefore, this law is rooted in the character of God. The people of God are called to be holy for no other reason than the fact that God is holy. If God is holy, then His representatives are to be holy too.

It is important to note that this command of holiness was not limited to any one group of people within Israel. Moses is told to “speak to the entire assembly of Israel.” Everyone who calls themselves part of the people of God is called to holiness. This call to holiness was not limited to the priests or Levites alone. The priests had some special responsibilities that they alone were required to do, but holiness was for everyone.

### SET APART

#### Leviticus 19:3-5

The term “holy” in the command to be holy in verse 2 means to be set apart. This initial command was somewhat vague. God told His people they were to be

### Did You Know?

The English words God, Lord, and LORD each represent different Hebrew words for God. LORD is unique among these options because it represents God's proper name, Yahweh, distinguishing Yahweh from the gods of other nations.

## LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

set apart, but this required some explanation. What does it mean to be set apart? How are they supposed to be set apart? The explanation comes through the rest of the commands in the chapter. The instructions that follow the command “be holy” are specific examples of what it means for the people to be set apart in their context.

The first two ways to be set apart were honoring their parents and keeping the Sabbath. This direction, like many of the others in this chapter, alludes to the Ten Commandments. In verses 4-5 the Israelites are also to set themselves apart by not making idols for themselves and making sure they offered their gifts to God in appropriate ways. This set of instructions states that their rhythm of life and worship practices made them holy, or set apart from their neighbors.

### Leviticus 19:9-18

This next set of directions states that the acts of gleaning, honesty, non-exploitative behavior, justice, and love are what God expected of His holy people. The main theme in this set of instructions is loving your neighbor as stated in verse 18: “love your neighbor as yourself.” Love of neighbor was the key to living as a holy people.

One detailed example of loving your neighbor in this set of instructions was through the act of gleaning. God tells His people that when they gather the harvest they are not to gather all of it, rather they are to leave some of the harvest behind in the field. This set God's people apart because they were told not to focus on their own gain when harvesting. They were to leave some of the harvest, and consequently some of their profits, behind. Then, the poor and foreigner were welcome to come and gather, or glean, for themselves from what was left.

In the ancient world, owning a field was critical to a family's survival. However, there were some people groups, like foreigners, widows, orphans, and



**Think About It**

In the ancient world foreigners, widows, and orphans were an at-risk population lacking the means to survive. God expects His people to care for the vulnerable. Who might be vulnerable in the modern world?

the poor, who did not own land and did not have the means to obtain food for themselves. The act of gleaning provided food and the dignity of work for these people groups who had neither. The book of Ruth provides an example of how this act of gleaning worked to provide for those in need. This instruction on gleaning ends in verse 10 with, “I am the LORD your God.” This repeated refrain served to remind the people that it was their God who gave this command. It also reminded them that the call to holiness was rooted in the character of their God who is holy. God expected His covenant people to reflect His character to the world and God’s holiness is best reflected by loving one’s neighbors.

God’s expectations of holiness for His covenant people in Leviticus are the foundation of His expectations for His new covenant people. Jesus echoed Leviticus 19:2 when He said, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Jesus quotes Leviticus 19:18 when He answered a question concerning the greatest commandment in Matthew 22:36-40. Through the new covenant, Jesus invites us into a relationship with the God who is holy. In that relationship, God expects that we will be transformed to reflect the character of God. Holiness is a key characteristic of God, and it is best reflected in how we love those around us. As a famous hymn title points out: “they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” How we love our neighbors is the best reflection of God’s holy character.

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**REFLECT** Think about what it means “to be holy” in your world.

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**ALISON HAWANCHAK** holds a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies from Asbury Theological Seminary. She is currently the assistant professor of Old Testament at Southern Nazarene University.

October

12

# REBELLING AGAINST GOD'S PLAN

*Fear and lack of trust keep us from experiencing  
God's best for our lives.*

## THE WORD

### NUMBERS 13:1-3

**T**he LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup>“Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders.”

<sup>3</sup>So at the LORD's command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites.

### 26-33

<sup>26</sup>They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. <sup>27</sup>They gave Moses this account: “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. <sup>28</sup>But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there.

<sup>29</sup>The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.”

### KEY VERSES

<sup>30</sup>**Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.”**

<sup>31</sup>**But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are.”** <sup>32</sup>And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. <sup>33</sup>We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

**14:1-3**

<sup>1</sup>That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. <sup>2</sup>All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! <sup>3</sup>Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?”

**26-30**

<sup>26</sup>The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: <sup>27</sup>“How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. <sup>28</sup>So tell them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say: <sup>29</sup>In this wilderness your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. <sup>30</sup>Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

**ENGAGE THE WORD****EXPLORATION OF  
CANAAN****Numbers 13:1-3**

**A**fter God made a covenant with Moses at Mount Sinai, He led the people through the wilderness to the land of Canaan, the promised land. God promised this land to Abraham and his descendants and now that promise was about to come to fruition. This was the moment the people had been waiting for. Imagine the anticipation and expectations the Israelites had at this moment when the promise was finally to be realized.

**THE REPORT****Numbers 13:26-29**

After the leaders went and explored the land, they brought a report with evidence back to the people. When they were in the land, they found that the promises of God were true. The land was a good land that did indeed flow with milk and honey. Their expectations of what the land would be like were fulfilled and even exceeded. However, they also encountered an unexpected difficulty in their explorations. The land was a good land, but it was also an inhabited land.

People already lived in the land of Canaan, and

### Did You Know?

The Anakim (descendants of Anak) were a people group known for their great height who lived in the city of Hebron. Their height gave them an advantage in battle, making them formidable adversaries.

### TWO PERSPECTIVES

those people were warriors. The Israelites were a group of people who had just fled from Egypt and had been traveling in the desert. They were not warriors. So, when the Israelites encountered the inhabitants of the land, they looked like a major threat that the Israelites would not be able to overcome. This unexpected discovery was an unexpected difficulty. The people found that God keeps His promises, but that does not mean those promises are always without struggle.

### Numbers 13:30-33

The leaders who went to explore the promised land had two different reactions to their findings. Caleb, along with Joshua, calmed the people's fear and anxieties by declaring that they should move into the land. However, the other 10 leaders felt that the challenge was too difficult, and they would not survive any attempt to move into the land. The torn opinions of the leaders generated a difference of opinion among the community as well. The difference in their reactions had to do with trust and fear.

These leaders were chosen to represent the people, to go before them, and to lead the way. These leaders had experienced the power of God to save His people when He defeated Pharaoh and his army and rescued the Israelites with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. This same God promised to bring them into the land. The God who defeated Pharaoh would have had no problem removing the inhabitants of the land to make room for His people. But it seems some of these leaders forgot whom they were following. They believed it was up to them to bring the people into the land, not God. They forgot that God was the one who would lead the way. God sent these leaders into the promised land so they could get a glimpse of the promise. The leaders were invited to taste and see that the Lord is good; but instead, they forgot God, they forgot about the power of the one who saved them. And so, they led the people into fear.

**Think About It**  
 God often tells His people to remember the past. By remembering the ways that God has provided and delivered us before, we are better prepared to trust God in the face of current fears.

### **Numbers 14:1-3**

In the conflict of opinions between trust and fear, fear won the day. Upon hearing the report about the land, the community responded with loud weeping. They were too afraid of the possible threat to trust the goodness God had in store for them. They decided it would be better to go back to Egypt. Even though the Egyptians oppressed them, they realized they had food and lived in relative security in Egypt. They longed for the security and comfort of the familiar. When they lived in Egypt, they knew what every day had in store for them. There was comfort in the familiar, even though the familiar was oppression.

### **OVERCOME BY FEAR**

In Canaan, God was leading them into the unknown where things were not familiar or comfortable or even safe at times, but it was going to lead to life and life abundant. God was calling them to a life of high risk, but also one of high reward. But fear kept them from trusting in the good promise.

### **TRUSTING GOD**

### **Numbers 14:26-30**

God forgave the people for their lack of trust. However, forgiveness and grace do not mean there are no consequences in life. God continually demonstrated to the people that He was trustworthy; however, the people were unable to fully put their trust in God's plan and because of that they would not get to see the promised land. Moving into the land was going to require the people to trust God even in the face of danger. Since they demonstrated they could not fully do that, God was not going to take them to the land. They would have to wander the wilderness for 40 years until a new generation arrived. Then, Joshua and Caleb would lead that generation into the promised land by trusting God.

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**REFLECT** | Is there a fear you need to release to God today?

October

19

# GRACE IN THE DESERT

*God provides grace and mercy,  
even when we have rebelled against Him.*

## THE WORD

### NUMBERS 20:2-11

**N**ow there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. <sup>3</sup>They quarreled with Moses and said, “If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the Lord! <sup>4</sup>Why did you bring the LORD’s community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? <sup>5</sup>Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!”

<sup>6</sup>Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the tent of meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the LORD appeared to them. <sup>7</sup>The LORD said to Moses, <sup>8</sup>“Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.”

<sup>9</sup>So Moses took the staff from the LORD’s presence, just as he commanded him. <sup>10</sup>He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, “Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?” <sup>11</sup>Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

### 21:4-9

<sup>4</sup>They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; <sup>5</sup>they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!”

<sup>6</sup>Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the

people and many Israelites died. <sup>7</sup>The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.

### KEY VERSES

**<sup>8</sup>The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” <sup>9</sup>So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.**

## ENGAGE THE WORD

### UNDER PRESSURE

#### Numbers 20:2-5

**T**he Israelites learned firsthand that the desert is a hostile environment, but God asked that they trust Him even when the situation seemed bleak. Think about what the experience of traveling in the desert would have been like. Observe how Moses and the Israelites respond when under pressure. How does their response relate to how we often respond when under pressure?

### GOD PROVIDES

#### Numbers 20:6-11

As the community began to fall into despair, Moses and Aaron turned to God. God gave them the directions that would lead to a miraculous outpouring of water from a rock. God met the needs of the people.

This was not the first time that God provided for His people in a miraculous way, and it would not be the last. God provided for His people throughout their entire wilderness journey, even though it was their lack of trust that put them in the wilderness in the first place (see Session 6). God’s provisions defined the Israelites’ time in the wilderness. When they reached the end of the journey, Moses reflected upon the wilderness saying, “There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place” (Deuteronomy 1:31). God poured His lavish love and grace upon His people, even when they did not return that love (v. 3).

After they received the directions from God, Moses



### Did You Know?

The Israelites had to take the long way around Edom rather than the shorter path through. The Edomites did not permit the Israelites to travel through their territory. This likely intensified their impatience.

and Aaron returned to the people to produce the water. However, as Moses prepared to raise his staff, he chose to respond in his anger rather than in God's grace. God's directions for Moses were to speak to rock and it would provide water. The goal of this direction was to give glory to God, and God alone. God wanted to provide for the people, but He wanted the people to know where the water came from. God was training His people to trust in Him and give God the glory for His great grace. But Moses' grace had reached its limit. In his anger, Moses spoke out against the people and struck the rock.

However, God's grace had not run out. Even though Moses did not follow God's directions, and even though Moses did not acknowledge God as the source of the water (v. 12), the water still came. God still provided water for His people despite Moses' limited patience.

## IMPATIENCE

### Numbers 21:4-5

As the Israelites moved along the next part of their journey, they grew impatient once more. Like anyone on a long journey, the Israelites struggle with patience. However, this time their complaint was more than just hunger or thirst. The Israelites had become so impatient that they proclaimed, "We detest this miserable food!" This "miserable food" that they were referring to was the bread that God had provided for them. When it looked like they had no way to survive the wilderness due to lack of food, God gave them manna. It rained down on them daily to provide for their need. But their impatience took over their minds and they resented the grace God gave them.

God used the Israelites' 40 years in the wilderness as a time to train them to trust God. At the end of the 40 years, a new generation would have replaced the old one and God hoped this new generation would trust Him to lead them into an abundant life. However, this moment of impatience demonstrated once more that the people had trust issues.

**Think About It**

Just like everyone else, the Israelites struggled with fear, impatience, and doubt. However, God demonstrated that His grace was bigger than their struggles. We too can experience that God's grace is bigger than our struggles.

**PATH TO HEALING****Numbers 21:6-9**

God sent the poisonous snakes among the people in response to their resentment towards His grace. God is gracious and merciful, but He demands trust. God did not tolerate their resentment toward His provision, and He communicated that anger through the snakes.

The people realized what God was communicating to them and they returned to God in prayer. This was an important moment for the Israelites. They realized their impatience got the best of them and they confessed that before God. They not only confessed their sin against God, but they also confessed their sin against Moses too. Their impatience and resentment led them to lash out against both God and Moses, their leader. Therefore, their confession needed to be directed at God and Moses.

Even though Moses was probably hurt by the people's lack of trust, he still chose to forgive and pray on their behalf. He continued to lead them in a life directed toward God. In His lavish love and grace, God too forgave the people. God heard their prayer, but He did not answer in the way they asked. They asked God to send the snakes away and God did not do that. However, God gave them a path to healing. God gave them the means to be healed from the poisonous snakes. The people still had to face the consequences of their resentment and lack of trust in God. But God was with them in their pain and suffering, restored them to health, and demonstrated that He was worthy of their trust.

**REFLECT**

In what way do you need to experience God's mercy and grace today?

ALISON HAWANCHAK

October  
**26**

# THE GIFT OF GOD'S LAWS

*God's laws are a gracious gift to His people.*

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## THE WORD

**DEUTERONOMY 4:1-14** **N**ow, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. <sup>2</sup>Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.

<sup>3</sup>You saw with your own eyes what the LORD did at Baal Peor. The LORD your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal of Peor, <sup>4</sup>but all of you who held fast to the LORD your God are still alive today.

**KEY VERSES** <sup>5</sup>**See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>6</sup>Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.”** <sup>7</sup>What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? <sup>8</sup>And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

<sup>9</sup>Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. <sup>10</sup>Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when he said to me, “Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.” <sup>11</sup>You

came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness. <sup>12</sup>Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. <sup>13</sup>He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets. <sup>14</sup>And the LORD directed me at that time to teach you the decrees and laws you are to follow in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess.

## ENGAGE THE WORD

### Deuteronomy 4:1-4

#### DECREES AND LAWS

**M**oses has just recited the story of the Israelite people from Horeb to Beth-peor. As they get close to entering the promised land, the new generation of Israelites needed to know where they came from and be reminded of the providential care of God. Moses urges, “Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live” (4:1a). As they possess the land, obedience to God would be crucial for their inhabitants there. These statutes and judgments were to be taught to every generation as a gift of grace.

Today, believers (children, youth, and adults) learn around tables, in classrooms, in Bible study, and through worship. This constitutes some of the ways God’s commands are transmitted to each generation. The best way, however, is through the embodied lives of disciples.

Moses tells the people that it is essential to ensure that the law remains without addition or subtraction (v. 2). It is complete. If the law reflects the nature of God, it is never appropriate to augment or adjust it to accommodate personal and cultural factors. The interrelationship between the story of God and the law gives life to the commandments of the Lord. The law reveals the nature of God. The law was also to define the character of God’s people and reveal the intended life of Israel and all who will obediently follow it.

### Did You Know?

Baal-peor is the god of the Moabites. Baal is a local deity associated with Canaan and Phoenicia. Part of the temptation of Baal was its connection with sex and prostitution. The point is that Baal of Peor brought death, but God engenders life.

### DISCERNMENT AND WISDOM

#### Deuteronomy 4:5-8

Two vital words come into focus in the passage: wisdom and understanding. The law is not some inert body of teaching. Understanding and wisdom would come from the faithfulness of God as the people of God occupied the land. It made little difference to enter the promised land if the law was only a memory or even forgotten. This is true for every aspect of life as well. For example, it makes no difference if we have the latest version of the Bible if we do not read it and seek to obey what we know. It is in understanding the story of God and embodying the statutes and ordinances of God that one gains wisdom and can discern how to live, and God empowers us to follow Him as we embody His wisdom (James 1:5; Ephesians 1:16-17; 1 Corinthians 2:12-14).

This passage paints a picture after Moses leads the people of God to the threshold of Canaan. He wants them to know that the gracious gift of the law will require the hard work of discerning how to live. This speaks to the character produced by those who know and obey the law. Therefore, the people must endeavor to build character in their children by telling/teaching the story of God. The circumstances they will encounter in the new land will be complex and their faithfulness will require understanding and wisdom.

Deuteronomy 4:7-8 reads: "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?" God would be near them and, along with the gift of the law, distinguish this people from all other peoples. The people of God needed to hear this before entering Canaan.

### LISTEN!

#### Deuteronomy 4:9-14

This passage offers advice to those who will listen. Moses tells those who have assembled to be careful

### Think About It

"There was no other contemporary nation, not even the greatest, whose god was as near as the Lord was to Israel, near enough to hear her every call" (*Beacon Bible Commentary: Genesis through Deuteronomy* [Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1969], 526).

and watch themselves. He knows the law works when those who know it take it seriously. One of the ways they can take it seriously is to teach it to their children as an act of faith. Memory is essential in this process. The law is embedded within the story of God and, as such, we see the example of those who have embodied God's truth. No one knows how it will be tested, but all can be assured that as their forefathers testify, with God's help our faith can stand. The Christian faith is not a theory; it is a story filled with God's faithfulness and those who lived faithfully (Hebrews 11).

Moses reminds those assembled of how the law came to the people of God. It came as the Lord spoke out of the fire. The people are reminded that the law should be understood as a covenant. Moses said, "He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets. And the LORD directed me at that time to teach you the decrees and laws you are to follow in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess" (Deuteronomy 4:13-14).

The law is a relationship between the Creator of the Universe and an otherwise insignificant people. Even today, as the new covenant (see Hebrews 9:15) is extended to those who will believe, Jew and Gentile, the offer looks the same. In His holiness, God reaches through eternity with a miraculous message of an empowered life and a redeeming relationship with all who would follow Him.

### REFLECT

**T**oday's passage opens with a proud affirmation that the law's statutes and ordinances bring life. What happens when we treasure and obey God's laws?

**HENRY SPAULDING II** is retired President of Mount Vernon Nazarene University. He currently serves as adjunct professor at Nazarene Bible College and Ashland University.

November

2

# WARNING ABOUT IDOLS

*God desires that we worship Him alone.*

## THE WORD

**DEUTERONOMY  
4:15-31**

**Y**ou saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, <sup>16</sup>so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, <sup>17</sup>or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, <sup>18</sup>or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below. <sup>19</sup>And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the LORD your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven. <sup>20</sup>But as for you, the LORD took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance, as you now are.

<sup>21</sup>The LORD was angry with me because of you, and he solemnly swore that I would not cross the Jordan and enter the good land the LORD your God is giving you as your inheritance. <sup>22</sup>I will die in this land; I will not cross the Jordan; but you are about to cross over and take possession of that good land. <sup>23</sup>Be careful not to forget the covenant of the LORD your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden. <sup>24</sup>For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

<sup>25</sup>After you have had children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time—if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God and arousing his anger, <sup>26</sup>I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you this day that you will quickly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You will not live there long but will certainly be



## KEY VERSE

destroyed. <sup>27</sup>The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive among the nations to which the LORD will drive you. <sup>28</sup>There you will worship man-made gods of wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or eat or smell. <sup>29</sup>**But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul.** <sup>30</sup>When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey him. <sup>31</sup>For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath.

## ENGAGE THE WORD

## IDOLS

## Deuteronomy 4:15-20

**D**euteronomy 4:15 reads, “You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore, watch yourselves very carefully.” God does not present himself in any form. No idol, created image, can hope to capture God.

For those who follow God, our behavior and character reveal God’s nature. However, Moses emphasizes that we must “watch carefully” to not substitute the work of our hands and imagination for the living God. The church—those who worship alongside us—offers a place for helping us *watch* our lives *carefully*. As an expression of grace, fellow believers can provide a mirror so that we might see ourselves more clearly. Even so, idols can creep into our minds and hearts in subtle ways. Moses warns that we should be vigilant in this regard.

The other warning is equally essential. Deuteronomy 4:16a reads, “So that you do not become corrupt.” Moses goes on to clarify how we might corrupt God’s meaning by attempting to represent Him in a physical form (vv. 16-19). For example, people might fashion God in the image of a human being, animal, bird, fish, or anything that creeps on the earth.

Genesis reminds us that God created the heavens and earth and all the creatures on the planet (Genesis 1). Even more, it reminds us that God called it good

### Did You Know?

The great eighth-century prophet Isaiah levels a devastating critique of idolatry. The prophet paints a vivid picture of the absurdity of idolatry (Isaiah 44:9-20). He indicates in this crucial passage that human beings make idols and then bow down to worship them. Isaiah points out that the same idols are burned in the fire to cook bread. The Scripture from Genesis to Revelation understands the pointlessness of bowing down to an idol.

### DO NOT FORGET

(v. 31). One should read this passage in Deuteronomy keeping in mind the goodness of creation. God created our world beautiful and complete, but it cannot reach its intended end without God's grace calling it to fullness. Human life and creation become corrupted when we worship the created rather than the Creator (v. 19). As a word of caution, we should keep in mind that although people are made (created) in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27), they are not to be worshiped. Worship is due to God only (Exodus 20:3-4), and not to any man or woman, in either person or likeness (vv. 16, 19). We must be careful not to idolize others.

The concluding verse of this section reads, "But as for you, the LORD took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance, as you now are" (v. 20). God's covenant people are to be the image of God on earth—displaying the holiness of God to the world (1 Peter 1:15). We should always keep in mind that we are not called to be God, but we are made in the "image" of God and are called to reflect God's image in our world (see Ephesians 5).

### Deuteronomy 4:21-31

Moses reminds his audience that most of those who left Egypt did not enter the good land that God intended. Instead, they wandered for a generation until those who obeyed entered Canaan. He warns, "Be careful not to forget the covenant of the LORD your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the LORD your God has forbidden. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God" (vv. 23-24).

Memory and covenant form the argument Moses makes. The problem for Moses is that he knows memories fade, making people complacent. Life in the promised land was not a license to do whatever (vv. 23a-25). They must remain faithful. In time, the people's faith will fail and they will return to idol wor-

## Think About It

“To forget the Creator is to also forget the Redeemer. Israel’s knowledge of God is established in her own story of rescue and redemption. To forget the exodus and to replace it by the worship of anything else is to betray the truth that Yahweh’s power is most truly seen in gaining freedom from oppression” (NBBC: *Deuteronomy* [Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2016], 65).

ship. As a result, God’s people will scatter among the nations (see 2 Chronicles 36, Jeremiah 29, and Ezra 1) and, according to Moses, “There you will worship man-made gods of wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or eat or smell.” Idols will inevitably fail the people, but God will redeem them if they seek Him with their heart and soul (vv. 28-29, see also Jeremiah 31:34-37).

Although the people would not deserve it, God will return them from exile to the good land He promised. Moses continues by suggesting why this will happen: “When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey him. For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath” (vv. 30-31). Israel “believed that Yahweh is not a God who abandons her forever. Mercy and covenant faithfulness are at the core of the character of her God. He will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant because he is full of mercy.”<sup>1</sup>

The underlying thought in this section is that following God is more than following a code that dictates specific behavior. Instead, it is about a covenantal relationship. Human beings are made whole through a gracious relationship with God. When we worship God alone, we open the door to a better life than we could ever imagine.

1. NBBC: *Deuteronomy*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2016), 68.

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**REFLECT** What are the idols of our time? How can our worship of God point out the futility of idols?

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HENRY SPAULDING II

November

9

# PASSING FAITH TO THE NEXT GENERATION

*Each generation must intentionally teach  
the next one to love the Lord.*

## THE WORD

**DEUTERONOMY 6:1-12** **T**hese are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, <sup>2</sup>so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. <sup>3</sup>Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

## KEY VERSES

<sup>4</sup>Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup>Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. **<sup>6</sup>These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. <sup>7</sup>Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup>Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup>Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.**

<sup>10</sup>When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, <sup>11</sup>houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, <sup>12</sup>be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

## ENGAGE THE WORD

**M**oses is telling the story of Israel to a new generation. A significant part of this story is the commands, decrees, and laws, which are excellent gifts from God to this generation and to all the generations that will follow, including Christians. (We might remember that Jesus said He came to fulfill the law. See Matthew 5:17.) This passage presents a well-crafted balance between the law's gift and its obligation. It reminds us that we must pay attention to passing God's commands/laws on to the next generation.

## PASSING IT ON

### Deuteronomy 6:1-3

The statutes and ordinances compose the law given to Moses and the Israelites. Moses is responsible for transmitting the law to this generation, and each succeeding generation carries the same obligation. Teaching expresses a critical aspect of the law, leading to obedience. Any parent understands that it is essential to lay out the boundaries of life for children. It is equally clear that this is a great gift. For example, we teach children not to touch the stove when it is hot. Even though it is glowing and “begs” little fingers to touch it, nothing good will result. God’s “commands, decrees, and laws” bathes life with possibility and blessing. They must be taught, but also lived out, among the people in order to be a blessing. Moses understood this, and so should we.

The law is taught “so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life” (v. 2). Fear of the Lord (awe and reverence) is the most fundamental building block for life. There is no true knowledge or understanding when the fear of the Lord is excluded (see Proverbs 9:10). This does not deny the importance of secular knowledge (i.e., scientific, psychological), but affirms that all our knowledge and understanding should be rooted in God. This goes

### Did You Know?

God's call for us to establish our personal faith in Him is only the beginning. We are also called to help others understand the Christian faith. One way to pass on our beliefs to the next generation is through teaching. Our teaching about God should permeate the entirety of our daily lives—the things we say and do.

### HEAR, O ISRAEL

back to Genesis, where the story of creation unfolds. Until God gets involved, there is nothing. Therefore, everything depends upon God.

Moses communicates the connection between knowing and doing in his message. Longevity (v. 2) in the land arises from knowing and obeying the law. In obedience they would find that the blessing of life would multiply in the great land that God promised (v. 3).

### Deuteronomy 6:4-9

This section includes one of the most well-known verses in Scripture: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). The affirmation that God is the trustworthy source of faith and life is central to Judeo-Christian heritage. Moses adds more depth to this statement by urging the people to, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (v. 5). Later in Israel's history the prophet Jeremiah promises that the covenant/law will one day be written on the heart instead of stone (Jeremiah 31:33; see also Romans 2:15 and Hebrews 8:10). Moses points out that this should already be a reality in the first days of life in Israel. Having the law on stone does no good if it is not in the heart (v. 6).

God's commandments must be recited wherever God's people exist. Culture does a great job of shaping attitudes and life, and Moses knew the Israelites were entering a land of traditions and values. Because of this, Moses also knew the people entering the promised land would need to remember and practice their story with courage and resolve. Teaching is about repetition, so the children would need to hear the law over and over. They must “tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and gates” (vv. 8-9). Defining, remembering, rehearsing, and valuing the gift of the law takes deliberate

**Think About It**

"In the Hebrew language, the word for children is *banim*. In Judaism, children (*banim*) are thought to be the builders (*bonim*), not only of the future of the family, but likewise of the future of the community" (Abraham Cohen. *Everyone's Talmud* [New York: Schocken Books, 1949], 170).

**DO NOT FORGET**

effort. Deuteronomy is a great model for how the law and story of God should be raised to the essential level.

Augustine, a fifth-century theologian, advised, "Love God and do as you will." When we love God, we want to be like God. Children will embody what they are taught, but mostly what they see at home. This can be good news or not, depending on the house in which they reside. Moses urges those who listen to him to live up to the promises of a life "ruled" by the law.

The lives of God's obedient people would serve as a witness to the greatness of their God (vv. 7-8). Our ways and words, our lives and homes together serve as comprehensive and appealing expressions of our unique identity as the people of the one true God.

**Deuteronomy 6:10-12**

Moses instructs the people: "Be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (v. 12). This concluding verse pulls together the recitation of the story with the embodiment of the law. Every nation or family has its own story. God's people have a story that enriches life and blesses all who enter it. God intends to bless God's people (vv. 10-11). The picture painted in the closing words of this passage flow with grace.

It is difficult to get a full understanding of the commands, decrees, and laws apart from the stories that consume Deuteronomy. These narratives put flesh on the law by reminding us that the graciousness of the law enriches life. God and His commands were a story the people were not to forget (v. 12), but to remember. It was a story they were to tell over and over again to the next generation.

**REFLECT**

In what way are you passing the story of faith on to the next generation?

November

16

# STAYING DISTINCTIVE

*God calls His people to live by different values  
and priorities than the world around them.*

## THE WORD

**DEUTERONOMY**  
**9:1-6**

**H**ear, Israel: You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls up to the sky. <sup>2</sup>The people are strong and tall—Anakites! You know about them and have heard it said: “Who can stand up against the Anakites?” <sup>3</sup>But be assured today that the Lord your God is the one who goes across ahead of you like a devouring fire. He will destroy them; he will subdue them before you. And you will drive them out and annihilate them quickly, as the LORD has promised you.

<sup>4</sup>After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, “The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness.” No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. <sup>5</sup>It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. <sup>6</sup>Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.

**10:12-18**

**KEY VERSES**

<sup>12</sup>**And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup>and to observe the LORD’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?**



<sup>14</sup>To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. <sup>15</sup>Yet the LORD set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations—as it is today. <sup>16</sup>Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. <sup>17</sup>For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. <sup>18</sup>He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.

## ENGAGE THE WORD

### ANAKITES!?!

#### Deuteronomy 9:1-5

**M**oses offers sobering words to Israel as they prepare to enter Cannan. He reminds them “You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls up to the sky. The people are strong and tall—Anakites! You know about them and have heard it said: ‘Who can stand up against the Anakites?’” (vv. 1-2). He humbly urges them to enter the new land, knowing that success will not come from their physical, intellectual, or spiritual superiority.

These Anakites are associated with the Nephilim of Genesis 6:1-4. These giants were fearsome to the people who would enter the land. There is a lot of discussion about these Anakites/Nephilim, but the basic message is that God will clear the way for God’s people. God will go before the people with a devouring fire. Moses’ message is meant to encourage and direct those who enter the land. Whoever or whatever these Anakites are, God will defeat them. There is no need to focus on the enormous people. Instead, Moses wants his audience to remember the God who brought them to this place—the One who can deliver the land to Israel. They are to focus on the promise instead of the challenge.

The people should not think that those in Cannan will be thrust out because of Israel’s righteousness.

### Did You Know?

John Wesley preached a sermon on January 1, 1733 titled, *The Circumcision of the Heart*. This is one of the most critical sermons he ever preached. In it, he affirms that God alone works through His power to enable humans to do what is good. Later in the sermon, he defines circumcision of the heart as love fulfilling the law (*Wesley's Works*, vol. v: 202-212).

### STIFF-NECKED PEOPLE

### BE DISTINCT!

God is judging the Canaanites' wickedness. The not-so-subtle message is that Israel needs to remain in covenantal faithfulness with God. An important point needs to be stated here: righteousness comes by faith (see Genesis 15:6). The human tendency is to find pride in personal accomplishments. The sentiment can all too quickly become, "Look at what we have done. Aren't we special?" Gratitude dies in this scenario and honesty about who we are without God often follows. There needed to be more worry about the lack of humility than the Anakites. Israel should have remembered that God was honoring His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v. 5). Most importantly, those who will enter the land participate in the covenant. This is what makes them distinctive people.

#### Deuteronomy 9:6

One more time, Moses reminds those who will listen, "Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people" (v. 6). Stiff-necked people do need to listen. Their preoccupation with themselves will not allow them to look beyond themselves to see the God of the exodus/covenant. This verse should drive us to our knees: "Please, Lord, do not allow my stubbornness to hide your face amid the battle." The real struggle is to maintain a clear vision regarding the faithfulness of God and our obligation to reflect God in our attitude and behavior.

#### Deuteronomy 10:12-18

This section confronts what a distinctive lifestyle requires. The cornerstone of this is the fear of God. This fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). This means that we always recognize the reality of God in all that we do. As noted in the previous section, God expected Israel to remember that only God can provide victory. We may embody the law only

### Think About It

In his book *The Word Made Strange*, contemporary theologian John Milbank wonders in what ways have we domesticated Scripture to say what culture can live with. He poses the question: What would happen if we unleashed Scripture so that it might challenge those who read it to transform culture?

when we have utter respect for God. When we do this, we can walk in all His ways. Israel was called to love and serve God by keeping His commandments. After all, God brought them into this land and now they must reflect the distinctive values defined in the law and God's nature.

The image of circumcision of the heart was essential for understanding the flow of this argument. Circumcision, which is cutting the foreskin of males born in Israel beginning with Abraham, was the sign of the covenant. Every male in Israel was to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. This was always more than a physical sign. God intended it to be a call to live distinctively. This passage takes the argument even further. Unless our heart, an internal work of God, is circumcised, it does not matter if our flesh is circumcised. This is one way the holiness tradition has approached entire sanctification. Obeying the law in our hearts and lives is only possible when God has accomplished internal work.

The passage ends with these words, "For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing" (vv. 17-18). The covenant underlying this passage states one profound and irrefutable truth: a relationship with God (covenant) reaches out into the world to participate in the pain and hurt of the world. The distinctiveness of God's people inevitability changes the world through the love of God.

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**REFLECT** **W**hat does it mean to fear, obey, love, and serve God with all your heart, soul, and mind?

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HENRY SPAULDING II

November

23

# THANKING THE LORD

*God's people express their gratitude by honoring the Lord first, and giving to those in need.*

## THE WORD

**DEUTERONOMY 26:1-15** **W**hen you have entered the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, <sup>2</sup>take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the LORD your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name <sup>3</sup>and say to the priest in office at the time, "I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come to the land the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us." <sup>4</sup>The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD your God. <sup>5</sup>Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. <sup>6</sup>But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labor. <sup>7</sup>Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. <sup>8</sup>So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. <sup>9</sup>He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; <sup>10</sup>and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, LORD, have given me." Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him. **<sup>11</sup>Then you and the Levites and the foreigners residing among you shall rejoice in all the good things the LORD your God has given to you and your household.**

<sup>12</sup>When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may

eat in your towns and be satisfied. <sup>13</sup>Then say to the Lord your God: “I have removed from my house the sacred portion and have given it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, according to all you commanded. I have not turned aside from your commands nor have I forgotten any of them. <sup>14</sup>I have not eaten any of the sacred portion while I was in mourning, nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean, nor have I offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the LORD my God; I have done everything you commanded me. <sup>15</sup>Look down from heaven, your holy dwelling place, and bless your people Israel and the land you have given us as you promised on oath to our ancestors, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

## ENGAGE THE WORD

**G**od has rescued Israel from the clutches of the most powerful nation on earth—Egypt. He leads them through the Red Sea on dry ground. Then, Moses instructed a new generation so they would be prepared to occupy the land flowing with milk and honey. He wants them to know their story, and the instruction offered here intends to remind them of the importance of gratitude.

## GOD’S BLESSING

### Deuteronomy 26:1-11

In the story, Moses discourages the presumption they somehow earned their entrance to this promised land. God is giving this land to Israel to demonstrate God’s faithfulness. These people who have wandered from place to place (v. 5a) will now have a wonderful place to live. Accordingly, once they entered the land they were to “take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the LORD your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name” (v. 2).

It is essential to incorporate rituals of thanksgiving into our lives. As we do, our gratitude begins to pave the way toward remembering all that God has provided. Keep in mind, Israel’s entering the land was not about their persistence in following, but was a

### Did You Know?

The place the Israelites worshiped mattered. Deuteronomy 12:5 prescribes this and is further amplified in 26:2b, “Then go to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name.” Amid the new land the Israelites will soon enter, God raises the importance of place regarding worship. When God gives us a “place” to be, God also provides space and a place for worship.

testament to God’s faithfulness. It is appropriate to remember that without God the Israelites would only be an unremarkable people who once wandered the Middle East.

Since all comes from God, it was vital to take the “firstfruits” from the ground and place them before God, then bow in reverence. This simple practice will remind the people of the many blessings God has bestowed upon them. The dwelling place of God stands among the people as a constant reminder of God’s power, gratuity, and faithfulness. The physical presence of the providential care of God counteracts the human tendency to forget or presume. When the people remember and present it, it is tantamount to a declaration that God has faithfully provided as promised. At this point, the memory of ancestors who wandered the earth is replaced by a place flowing with milk and honey. It reminds the people that a people once oppressed now have the privilege of occupying a good land.

The dwelling is a reminder that God delivers and provides blessings. We read, “Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him. Then you, the Levites, and the foreigners residing among you shall rejoice in all the good things the LORD your God has given you and your household” (12:11b-12). Out of this act of praise comes a profound moral insight. Those who once wandered the earth stand alongside foreigners as people who recognize with gratitude the many gifts of God. Since we do not deserve blessing, we cannot hoard the good things that come our way. We are open to others as God is open to us. Gratitude allows us to see and propels us toward generosity.

This section of Scripture offers a structure for understanding and practicing gratitude. First, rehearse the faithfulness of God in our story. Second, praise God for His power to rescue and lead. Third, there must be a profound realization of the gift and a re-

**Think About It**

Gratitude is the open door to a fuller life that consciously accepts and shows grace. Entitlement is a closed door to a meaningful life. How does gratitude open doors to new understanding in your life?

**A TENTH**

fusal to live with presumption. If we follow this simple structure, we will experience and foster a thankful attitude toward God in our lives.

God's instructions for offering thanksgiving to Him are clear. We should bring a gift, tell of His gifts, and celebrate them together. As we do, we will show ourselves as truly thankful people.

**Deuteronomy 26:12-15**

The tithe is a visible reminder that even the things that fill our bank accounts or homes do not belong to us. While what we give is only a portion of what we have accumulated, it is sometimes challenging to let go. It is a mistake to interpret this passage as a purely public act of obedience. Instead, it is a privilege to acknowledge that God empowers us to act as people made in His image. It also reminds us that God's love reaches beyond our narrow vision to include others. With God, there is always enough when God's people are faithful and remember their blessings.

As God's people, an attitude of thanksgiving places us in a posture to praise the God "from whom all blessings flow." Gratitude opens our eyes to the many ways God's grace takes place. We can begin to understand that "the land that flows with milk and honey" is a gift from God intended to bless the world. We begin to see that it is both our obligation and privilege in passing that blessing on to others.

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**REFLECT** **W**hat can you thank God for today?

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HENRY SPAULDING II

November

30

# A CLEAR CHOICE

*God deeply desires for people to choose life over death.*

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## THE WORD

**DEUTERONOMY**  
**30:11-20**

**N**ow what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. <sup>12</sup>It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” <sup>13</sup>Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” <sup>14</sup>No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

<sup>15</sup>See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. <sup>16</sup>For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

<sup>17</sup>But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, <sup>18</sup>I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

## KEY VERSES

<sup>19</sup>**This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live** <sup>20</sup>**and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.**



## ENGAGE THE WORD

### SIMPLE TRUTH

#### Deuteronomy 30:11-14

**M**oses speaks with pinpoint clarity, “Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven so that you have to ask, ‘Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it’” (vv. 11-12). The attempt to complexify the meaning of the Scripture can often serve as a mechanism to avoid its simple truth, but Moses wants his listeners to know that the truth is in their mouths and hearts. It is not too difficult or too far away. He feels like the people in the camp have been told a powerful truth and thus are presented with a clear choice.

This passage focuses on three evident truths. First, God is not hidden and does not want to be hidden. The Judeo-Christian faith is not a puzzle to solve before the truth comes to light.

Second, God opens the truth to people who have been created with the ability and grace to understand. We are responsible for following the trail of faith via the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are not on our own in this endeavor. God chooses to bring us again and again to the place where the depths of faith await our response.

Third, we have all met people who seem to desire to confuse us with needless issues and concerns. However, God never seeks to frustrate us on the journey toward fullness. He is patient with those of us who get confused along the way.

This section of our passage is, in one sense, a description of salvation. Years ago, a student stopped me in a Systematic Theology class with a pointed question. He asked how he could believe that Jesus was both God and human: “I cannot understand it, and because of that, I cannot believe it.” I reminded him that he had it backward. Faith is first believing and then understanding. Faith seeking understanding describes the journey. Today, that student teaches

### Did You Know?

Moses reminded the Israelites that God's word is not a mystery; God has spoken clearly in terms that humans can understand. He has made plain what His will is. Believers today also have a permanent written record of God's word, the Bible. The most important thing about Scripture is not just that we read it or study it, but that we live it. God did not give us His Word just to inform us, but to change our lives.

### LIFE AND DEATH

theology as an exercise of faith. One of my first theology professors often reminded us there is a time to cut bait and a time to fish. Essentially, Moses is telling Israel it is time to fish. There was a choice that needed to be made.

#### Deuteronomy 30:15-20

One might call this section the "Gospel According to Moses." Deuteronomy reads, "See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction" (v. 15). He indicated that if they only obeyed God's commandments, statutes, and ordinances, life would be full of possibility.

According to the gospel of Moses, everything begins with loving God. Here, love means infinitely more than warm feelings. Instead, it means the rugged intent to actualize God's love by walking in His ways. Love is about the courage to overflow with God's love where we live. Loving and walking are joined in the life of the faithful. The promise comes through in this passage: if the people love and obey, God promises to increase them in the new land.

Life and death, blessings and curses are on the table. Moses is offering the assembled people nothing less than a life filled with blessings. He knows obedience will lead to life. Loving God and obeying God will become life for the people. This is how God will deliver the promise once made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is consistent with what Moses has been saying all along to Israel. The commandments of God are not obscure or too complex. Later, Jesus will refer to the narrow way that honors God's call (Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:28-34). When Jesus does this, He clarifies that the commandments should be understood as loving God and loving our fellow humans. The difficulty here is not its complexity, but in actualizing it.

The law is a gift to Israel shaped by God's profound love. The love referenced (vv. 16, 20) is a love for God expressed as obedience to His will and ways.\* It is

**Think About It**

This passage of Scripture raises the interesting question of the simplicity of complexity. We all know that Scripture holds many twists and turns. We also know that while the depth of Scripture and the story of Israel is deep, it comes down to one fundamental choice: Will we obey what we know and live in the mystery of God?

also the love that should inform all human relations. This love is not generated by human goodness; it comes from the gift of love we understand from the covenantal love of God. Love is never easy, but it is the path toward wholeness; it is being holy just as God is holy. A life defined by love places God's people at odds with those who choose other paths.

Our Scripture passage points out the tremendous consequences riding on our decision about life. The choice for life has its set of consequences. The choice for death has its own set as well. Moses said that the way of death leads to destruction and a short life in the land. The Israelites knew what it was like to be a people without a land. The way of death, then, is a path of aimlessness, wandering, and eventually destruction. The choice for life has far-reaching consequences as well. Moses also noted that the decision for life led to love for God, listening to His voice, and holding fast to Him. These three things picture the personal relationship which grows from the choice for life.

Some people today have convinced themselves that their choices have no particular consequences. Moses says this is untrue. Life ultimately pays us back for our choices, for both right and wrong. Moses' message is simple and direct: choose life, choose God.

*\*NBBC: Deuteronomy (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2016), 279.*

**REFLECT**

**W**hat have been the consequences you've experienced by choosing life with God?

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HENRY SPAULDING II

# Key Verse Memory

Committing God's Word to memory is an important goal for Christians of every age. To assist you in this worthy objective, we have suggested three key verses for memorization. Select one verse to memorize each month or memorize one verse of your choosing for the quarter.

Key verses for Fall 2025:

**Numbers 6:24-26**

**Leviticus 19:2**

**Deuteronomy 4:29**

## COMING NEXT QUARTER

**WINTER 2025-26**

### **Unit 1: Jesus: The Promised Messiah**

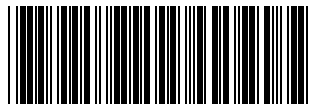
Many Old Testament prophets pointed to the time of the coming of the Messiah. In this unit, we will explore the fulfillment of this prophecy in the beginning hope-filled story of Jesus, the promised Messiah.

### **Unit 2: The Teachings of Jesus in Matthew**

Jesus came to show us, through His words and actions, what the kingdom of God is all about. During this study, we will examine some of Jesus' teachings from the book of Matthew.



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