

Exposition of the Book of Deuteronomy

Sunset Bible Church Adult Sunday School 2021

Week 4: Israel's Covenant Relationship with YHWH (9-11)

“And now, Israel, what does YHWH your God require of you, but to fear YHWH your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of YHWH, which I am commanding you today for your good?”
– Deuteronomy 10:12-13

Outline of the Class/Book

- Week 4: Israel's Covenant Relationship with YHWH (9-11)
- Week 5: Celebrating and Demonstrating Covenant Relationship (12-15)
- Week 6: Judges, Kings, Levites, and Prophets (16-18)
- Week 7: Pursuing Covenant Relationship (19-25)
- Week 8: Blessings and Curses and Moses' Third Address (26-30)
- Week 9: The Death of Moses (31-34)

Opening Discussion: What did you notice or observe as you read that you had not noticed before? What stood out to you?

- How do these chapters describe God? What can we learn about God in these chapters? How is He portrayed?
- What questions do you still have about the text? What didn't make sense?

Moses' Second Speech and the 10 Commandments: Deuteronomy 6:1-26:15 (the bulk of Moses' second speech) can be understood as building upon the 10 Commandments given in Deuteronomy 5.¹

1. **Have no other gods before me:** Chapters 6-11: Commands to love YHWH, to clear out the nations so that they do not worship their gods and remembering YHWH's works
2. **No graven images** (12): Instructions to destroy all of the high places and altars in the land and to avoid eating the blood
3. **Do not take (or carry) YHWH's name in vain** (13:1-14:21): Laws on testing prophets and avoiding eating detestable things (on the basis that you belong to YHWH)
4. **Honor the Sabbath Day** (14:22-16:17): Laws on tithing, Sabbatical years, and feasts
5. **Honor your parents** (16:18-18:22): Laws for judges, laws for kings, laws for priests, laws for prophets
6. **Do not kill** (19-21): Instructions on cities of refuge, warfare, murder without witness
7. **Do not commit adultery** (22:1-23:14): Protecting others' property, purity laws, laws on marriage, laws governing sexual relations, keeping the camp holy
8. **Do not steal** (23:15-24:16): Laws on interest, eating from others' vineyards, kidnapping, paying wages immediately

¹ John H. Walton and Andrew E. Hill, *Old Testament Today, 2nd Edition: A Journey from Ancient Context to Contemporary Relevance*, Second edition. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2014).

9. **Do not bear false witness** (24:17-25:16): Do not pervert justice for the orphan, widow, do not have differing weights and measurements,
10. **Do not covet** (25:17-26:15): Offering of firstfruits, giving to the Levite and the poor.

**Moses' Second Address: Explaining the Grace of YHWH (4:44-29:1)²
Proclaiming the Privilege of Covenant Relationship (6:1-11:32)**

The Sheer Grace of Covenant Relationship (9:1-10:11)

- **Disputing False Claims to Divine Favor (9:1-24):**
 - **Not because of Righteousness:** As Israel is going into the land, to face nations greater and mightier than they and a people great and tall, they are to remember that it is YHWH who goes before them and drives out the nations before them. They are not to say in their heart that YHWH did this because of their own righteousness; rather it is because of the wickedness of the people of the land that He is driving them out.
 - **You are a Stubborn People:** Israel is not a righteous people but a stubborn people. They are called to remember how they provoked YHWH in the wilderness and YHWH's threat to destroy them. Moses reminds them of the incident of the Golden Calf and how they turned to worship a false god while Moses was on the mountain. Also at Kadesh-Barnea when they refused to take the land that YHWH was giving them. Moses sums up their performance, *"You have been rebellious against YHWH from the day I knew you."*
- **Pleading for the Renewal of Divine Favor (9:25-10:11):** Moses reminds Israel how he 'stood in the gap' for Israel and pleaded with YHWH to not destroy them based on His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the sake of His reputation (what will the peoples think?). So YHWH had Moses cut two new tablets of stone like the first and YHWH wrote on the tablets as He had before and these were put into the ark of the covenant. So YHWH listened to Moses and did not destroy Israel and sent him to lead them to possess the land.
- **Notes:**
 - **Sons of Anak:** The text does not seem to take the claim that there were giants in the land as mere hyperbole from fearful spies. Some have postulated that these people are left-over from Nephilim that were products of angel/human relations in Genesis 6.³ They are also reminiscent of the Tower of Babel with cities "reaching to the heavens."
 - **Reasons for the Overthrow of the Canaanites:** Israel is not to imagine that their success is due to their righteousness. It is, rather, judgment of the Canaanites who are being thrown out of the land. Inherent in this is a warning – if they were thrown out because of wickedness, so could you!

² Outline adapted (with minor alterations) from: Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy* (Zondervan Academic, 2012).

³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, Reprint edition. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019).

- **Stiff-necked people:** This represents word-play of sorts. Cows are stiff-necked and Israel, in worshipping a cow, has become like one.⁴
- **Renewal of the Covenant:** The renewal of the covenant parallels the position Israel is now in. They are the new generation and given a second chance to enter the land that their fathers' generation rejected. It also previews future failure and renewal. God does not give up on and reject His people forever when they sin. His "mercies are new every morning."

The Fundamental Demands of Covenant Relationship (10:12-11:1): *And now, Israel, what does YHWH your God require of you, but to fear YHWH your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of YHWH, which I am commanding you today for your good? Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. For YHWH your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall fear YHWH your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen. Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now YHWH your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven. You shall therefore love YHWH your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always."*

- **Notes:**

- **Summary of the Law:** These verses can be seen as the law in miniature.
- **Monotheism and Election:** YHWH is God over all of the earth – He is not a local, regional God. But He has chosen Israel specially as His people. They are to be a people who reflect the one true God.
- **Circumcise the Foreskin of your Hearts:** The law was never meant to be only external and even such a physical covenantal act such as circumcision was meant to be reflective of the heart of the worshipper.
- **God of Gods and Lord of Lords:** God of gods and Lord of lords signifies his rule over all powers – spiritual and earthly. The claim that YHWH is the great and mighty God (El) can be seen as a polemic against Canaanite religion who was the head of the pantheon of gods. YHWH is the chief of gods, there is no other.⁵
- **Impartial and takes no Bribe, etc.** The Law reflects the nature of God. YHWH is a God who is impartial who cares for the widow, orphan, and sojourner (evidenced by His choice of Israel). This is to be reflected in the nature of Israelite society.
- **70 persons... numerous as the stars:** Reminiscent of the Abrahamic covenant. One aspect of the three-fold promise (numerous as the stars) has been realized.

⁴ Block, *Deuteronomy*. 253

⁵ Ibid. 272

They are about to receive the second (the Land) and the reception of the third (blessing) is contingent on their obedience.

The Importance of Covenant Relationship (11:2-28)

- **A Lesson from History: Reviewing the Mighty Acts of YHWH (11:2-7):** Moses calls on Israel to consider the discipline and greatness of YHWH in the signs He performed in Egypt, His parting of the Red Sea, how He opened up the ground to swallow up Dathan and Abiram. Their eyes have seen the great works that YHWH has done.
- **A Lesson from Geography: Recognizing the Provision of YHWH (11:8-28):**
 - **Results of Obedience and Disobedience:** They must therefore keep the whole commandment that he is giving them so that they will possess the land that YHWH swore to their fathers. The land that they are entering is a good land that YHWH cares for and that He will watch over. If they obey the commandments and serve and love YHWH, He will send the rains and their crops will prosper. If they serve other gods, He will shut up the heavens and stop the rains.
 - **Keep these words before your eyes:** Israel must keep these words in their heart and soul and put them as a sign on their hand and on between their eyes. They are to teach them to their children.
 - **Summary:** *See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of YHWH your God, which I command you today, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of YHWH your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known.*
- **Notes:**
 - **Mighty works of YHWH**
 - **For the sake of the Fathers and Moses:** In a sense, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were standing in the gap with Moses. For their sake, YHWH is implored to keep His covenant.
 - **Rains:** Again, there may be a polemic against Canaanite gods inherent here. Canaanites worshipped Ba'al, the rain and storm god. They will be tempted to go to him for fruitfulness, but it will result in barrenness. YHWH is the true sender of rain.
 - **Land Triangle:** The covenant here reflects the implied covenant made with Adam in the garden. God is ruler of all but set humanity to rule over the earth. Their failure in living up to their mandate resulted in the earth being cursed and humanity being expelled from the garden (set aside land). Israel is in a similar spot. They are humanity in microcosm. They have been given the land and if they obey, they will multiply and prosper, but if they disobey, they will be expelled.

Anticipating the Completion of the Covenantal Triangle: YHWH – Israel – Land (11:29-32): When YHWH brings them into the land, they are to set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. They are to cross over the Jordan and take possession of the land and keep all of the statutes and rules that Moses is setting before them.

- **Gerizim and Ebal:** Moses is setting the location for the ceremony in which Israel will formally accept the covenant and reaffirm their commitment to YHWH. The mountains will represent the rewards and penalties of keeping or forsaking the law.

Some Application and Theological Discussions:

- **Worship: “Love God” but hate His law (see Block pg 253)**
- **Grace and remembering the works of God**
- **External Reminders (not merely internal)**
- **Reminders of both success and failure from generation to generation**
- **Israel (and the Church) as a Model Community**

Reading Deuteronomy Together: You can certainly benefit from this class by attending and taking part in the discussions, but I believe you will benefit that much more by committing to reading through Deuteronomy along with the class. To the end, Nancy Strohm will be preparing reading guides every week with the goal of helping you to observe the text and be prepared to discuss the text the following week. You can choose to read each section in a single sitting, spread it out through the week, or just attend the class and continue with your current Bible reading plan. If you do choose to read with us, here is the reading for each week:

- Week of 10/17: Deuteronomy 12-15

Primary Sources:

- *Deuteronomy, NIV Application Commentary* by Daniel Block
- *Deuteronomy, New American Commentary* by Eugene Merrill
- *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* by Jeffrey Tigay
- *Deuteronomy, Interpretation Commentary* by Patrick Miller
- *Deuteronomy, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series* by Christopher Wright
- *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* by Robert Alter