

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson One: The Concept of the Covenants**

Many of the difficult concepts of Christianity become much easier to understand when put in the context of the covenant that God has made with his people. We Christians are a covenant people. That is, while each of us has of course individually been called from the dying world and converted to the truth of Jesus, we have also been made part of a holy nation and priesthood, God's covenant people. As such, we incur both extra blessings and extra responsibilities.

God first made a covenant with Jacob's descendants, the people of Israel. These people were often unfaithful to it, and much of the Old Testament details the ups & downs in their relationship with God. This covenant, though not identical with the one God made with us, is still full of vital lessons and wisdom for Christians. It was a solid foundation for the better covenant that God made much later with us. Further, it was a covenant that was explained and illustrated in many literal and concrete ways, with the hope that God's people would find them easy to understand. Thus, careful study of the older covenant will lead quickly to an improved understanding of the ideas it involved - such concepts as faithfulness, loving God, choosing to follow God, holiness, cleanness, and many others. These ideas are of equal importance to believers today, even though the specific instructions and responsibilities that we have may be different (in the details) from the things God asked the Israelites to do.

In fact, there is nothing in the old covenant that does not have some significance in the new one. All important features of the old covenant are also found in the new. Thus, studying the old covenant, which is more concretely explained and illustrated, will help us better to understand the new covenant God made through Jesus. This was, in fact, God's plan - the history of Israel, the laws of Moses, the prophets, all of them were part of the old covenant but looked ahead to the new.

This series will use the book of Deuteronomy to study these important topics. Deuteronomy records the lessons taught by Moses shortly before the Israelites were to enter into the Promised Land, and also shortly before Moses' death. At this crucial occasion in the history of God's people, Moses gave an extended series of lessons expounding the covenant to them.

Correct study of the Scriptures involves first interpreting, then applying. It can seem easier to jump right to what may seem to be applications in our lives, but proper and fulfilling Bible study first takes time to interpret Scripture in its context. Thus, in studying Deuteronomy, we will first take note of the lessons Moses teaches as they applied to his original hearers, the first covenant people. Only then will we be ready to see clearly and completely how the same themes and ideas are applicable and valuable to us, the people of the new covenant. We'll begin next week with a brief summary of the background to the book.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Two: Background to Deuteronomy**

Much of the discussion in Deuteronomy refers to the previous four books, with which it forms a unit, making up the foundation for the rest of the Bible. The five books of Moses introduce all the important concepts in our relationship with God, and illustrates the most basic and most important questions and struggles that God's people will have in following him. So before getting to Deuteronomy, it is helpful first to make a quick summary of the main themes behind the four previous books.

In Genesis, after the account of the creation and the early history of humans & their relationship with God, we learn how God chooses his people. First with Abraham, then Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's family, God selects the people through whom he will reveal himself to the world. In Exodus, God must redeem his people from their servitude in Egypt, and he leads them into the desert to prepare them for their future. In Leviticus, God must sanctify his people before they can move forward in realizing his plans and promises for them. Then in Numbers, God directs his people by indicating when and how he wants them to proceed to the Promised Land. Unfortunately, the people choose not to follow his direction, and they end up being disciplined through years of aimless wandering. As Deuteronomy begins, God has determined that it is again time to direct them to enter the Promised Land. But before they enter, God has them stop in the plains of Moab so that he can teach his people.

It should be clear, from this brief overview, that this progression very closely parallels our growth as members of the new covenant people. Before we knew, understood, or cared about God, he chose to give us the opportunity for salvation. Israel was told to remember that they were chosen by grace and not by merit, and we also must remember this. Then, God redeemed and sanctified us when we were baptized in Christ - we were redeemed by having our sins forgiven, and sanctified by having the Holy Spirit to live in us, calling us to no longer live as part of this world. Then, God directs us in our lives, but he does not just want us to follow his direction without understanding, so he teaches us about him, about his covenant with us, and about ourselves.

The emphasis in Deuteronomy, then, is on understanding the past, present, and future. God wants us to understand how he chose us, how he redeemed us and sanctified us, and also why he directs us as he does. God never intended for any believer not to understand these concepts, and he has given us what we need to understand them, appreciate them, and be motivated by them.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Three: Outline of Deuteronomy**

Not only is Deuteronomy concerned with explaining the covenant that God made with his people, it is even written to imitate the design of a formal covenant. That is, it first explains the past history of God & the people, as they affect the present situation. Then, a lengthy section details the responsibilities involved in this covenant. The people have many general and specific responsibilities, and God himself takes on the responsibility of leading and taking care of his people. Finally, the book previews the future, calling the people to make a conscious choice to put the covenant into practice. As would a formal or legal covenant, the book details what will result from either choice.

In chapters 1-4, Moses recalls some crucial events from Israel's past, both recent and distant. He exhorts them to learn the lessons they teach. In chapters 5-26, Moses details the responsibilities involved in the covenant. He describes the foundations of the covenant and then explains how these foundations lead to responsibilities both general and specific. Then, in the remaining chapters, Moses talks about the future, telling the people that they are responsible for the future, because what it is like will depend on the choices they make. By dividing the book into sections on past, present, and future, God emphasizes that the people's history was an entirety. None of the past, the present, or the future should be considered in isolation.

Again, it should be clear how this principle applies also in our new covenant. We also must consider and appreciate how past, present and future interrelate. Too many believers do not want to look at their lives as a whole. Some live mainly in the past, either because they feel that past victories relieve them of present responsibilities, or because they feel that past sufferings excuse present sin. Others live only in the present, making irresponsible decisions based on short-term criteria, because they do not have the discipline to consider anything not right in front of their eyes. Finally, some believers live only in the future, always hoping and planning for unrealistic goals that God never meant them to set, because they are too lazy to learn from the past or to deal with mundane but important needs in the present.

Believers with genuine faith will make none of these mistakes. We will study and meditate on the past, not emotionally but objectively, to learn the lessons it teaches. We will learn about and understand our present responsibilities, so that we can make good decisions and conduct ourselves in a godly manner, without needing someone to babysit us by constantly reminding us what we should be doing, or by giving us artificial reasons to do what we should do on our own. And we will think about the future in faithful terms, not having unreasonable expectations or goals, but by making the decision always to choose faithfulness and God's will, whatever that may be.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Four: Learning From the Past (Deut. 1:1-3:20)**

In Moses' first extended lesson, he reviews events from Israel's past, and exhorts Israel to learn from them. He draws on events from the distant past (when many of his hearers were not even alive) and on events that had just happened in the past year. The events in the distant past are a reminder to Israel of how easily they are victorious and joyful when they are faithful, and how miserably they are defeated and demoralized when they are faithless. The events of the recent past illustrate (in practical terms) the responsibilities and rewards that God is laying before them as part of his covenant.

Moses first recalls (Deut 1:6-2:1) the events surrounding the first attempt to enter the Promised Land. He reviews God's call and instructions, the sending of the spies, the people's doubt and grumbling, followed by 38 years of discipline in the form of aimless wandering. They did not want to live by God's direction, so God showed them what this was really like. Moses' reminder was intended to give the new generation of Israel the resolve not to shrink back. For those in the New Covenant, it is also a call to set aside our own agendas, our human-made goals and rating systems, and to embrace God's will. We will only be able clearly to see God's will when we have first made the decision to do away with our own. When believers think they are experiencing difficulty discerning what God is telling them, it is not because God is speaking too softly or obscurely - it is because they are allowing their own self-will scream out its wishes, making it hard to hear God.

Next, Moses recalls (Deut 2:2-3:20) some events that had just happened in the past year. He reminds them of their final approach to the Promised Land. Plotting their path on a map shows that God sent them on a winding tour of the borders of all the nations related to them. For many years, Edom, Moab, and Ammon had already been settled comfortably in the lands God gave them. They were in their lands long before Israel, because when God told them to take the land, they took it! After viewing their neighbors' lands (being told strictly not to enter them), Israel had its first battles, as God called them to defeat two kingdoms on the east of the Jordan (Heshbon and Bashan). These first victories showed that they were nearly ready to take Canaan, the main part of their inheritance.

New Covenant people should also accept what God gives them without hesitation, false modesty, or disputing. Too many believers say that they don't "feel" saved, or loved, or blessed, and it is usually because they have not simply taken what God offered. Too often we try to earn God's blessings, feeling that before we are allowed to feel blessed we ought first to accomplish some arbitrary tasks. Or, we denigrate the things God gives us because we want something else, more material. But Moses' history lesson teaches us that joy and victory both come from taking what God gives us - no more and no less - and realizing that God's chosen blessings are the best that we could possibly have.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Five: Learning From the Past (Deut. 3:21-4:49)**

Having reviewed some important events in Israel's past, Moses now makes some personal applications. First, he speaks on the very emotional subject of God's refusal to allow him to enter the Promised Land himself. With this in mind, he then gives the people some exhortations to make the best of their opportunity. Moses has given much of his life to the goal of seeing Israel come into its own, and even though he will not himself be a part of it, he does everything in his power to prepare the nation.

God prohibited Moses and his brother Aaron from entering the Promised Land, because of the incident described in Numbers 20:1-13, which took place less than a year before the speeches in Deuteronomy. Facing one more barrage of complaining and faithlessness from the people, this time Moses lost his self-control, and failed to glorify God in his actions and words. Psalm 106:32-33 explains that Moses' harsh words and actions were very displeasing to God. And Moses for once did not do exactly what God instructed him to. God's resulting prohibition was not arbitrary, but was necessary because of God's nature and the nature of his promises. Moses' self-pity and lack of self-control at a crucial time decided the issue. (Further Scriptures in Deuteronomy will come back to this topic.) Yet this in no way diminishes the greatness of Moses' overall faithfulness, character and achievements.

Moses is a touching and convincing example of continued service and faithfulness in the face of great disappointment. How many times do we humans respond to a disappointment by letting up in our devotion to ministry and service? It is easy to feel that "if I can't get what I want, why should I keep serving?" Moses' attitude has none of this. Even when he begs God to reconsider, there is never a suggestion that Moses might not do his job if God does not give him what he wants. Moses understood that the blessings given us by God do not necessarily correlate with the service we give to God.

With this in mind, Moses' exhortations (Deut 4:1-31) and praise of God's glory (4:32-40) are especially noteworthy. Moses gives the people a stirring warning to respect God and live as he says, for doing so is a sign of true wisdom. Moses shares from his heart what he has learned about his God, that God is alive and reigning. Moses has not served an abstract or distant God - he has served a living God, with whom he has had intimate communication. He wants Israel to have the same kind of meaningful, intimate relationship. In the moment of his greatest disappointment, Moses was comforted by knowing that his relationship with God was of far greater value than God's blessings. He knows that this same knowledge will be the best way for Israel (and for us) to get through the challenges and temptations in the days ahead.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997, 2013 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Six: The Heart of the Covenant (Deut. 5:1-6:9)**

This next section of Deuteronomy, 5:1-6:9, is the part on which the rest of the book builds. In this section, Moses describes and defines the heart of the covenant God has made with his people. Everything else that Moses has to say will flow out of the teachings that are at the heart of God's covenant. There are two equally important and vital foundations. There is the legal foundation, which is the list of crucial directives commonly called the Ten Commandments. Then there is the moral (or philosophical) foundation of the covenant, which is the basic teaching "Love the Lord your God".

Humans often discuss questions such as "is it more important to have sound teachings, or to live a good life?", or "is it more important to follow God's law, or to love God and other people?" These questions show a fundamental misunderstanding of God. The answer to these questions is that both are equally important. If you had to choose between your brain and your heart, which would you choose? A silly question, because you must have both to live. But it is equally silly when people dispute whether life or teaching is more important. As Paul told Timothy, we must watch both in order to save ourselves and our hearers. Thus the covenant that God makes has two different, but equally important, foundations.

Moses told the Jews that it was not enough to follow all the laws - they also had to love God and love each other. Conversely, he told them that it was not enough just to love. They also had to learn, study, and follow the teachings he gave them. The same is true in the church. Some believers find it easy to love and serve others - but they still must learn the Scriptures, study sound teachings about God, and take these things seriously. Otherwise, they will not have a healthy relationship with God. Other believers find it easy to study the Scriptures and to learn the teachings of God. But they must learn to love, give, and serve, or they too will have an unhealthy void in their relationship with God.

These foundations are not in opposition; they are meant to work together. Loving God, if genuine, will lead us to study and appreciate God's teachings. Those who claim to love God, but who then fail to take seriously his Word, are fooling themselves. And, a genuine, open-minded study of the Scriptures in order better to understand God will lead also to a greater appreciation and love for him. In the next couple weeks, we will look more closely at the significance of the Ten Commandments, and of the meaning of "love the Lord your God." As we do, remember that all of it applies to every Christian. Mature believers accept God's call to make both our lives and our teachings pleasing and acceptable to God.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Seven: The Ten Commandments (Deut. 5:1-33)**

What we usually call "The Ten Commandments" form one of the two main foundations of the covenant. They are the legal (or written) foundation. These ten laws are not special only because they are laws of great practical importance in our lives. They are special because each of them goes to the heart of the kind of covenant God has made. Each Commandment reveals an essential feature of the covenant, and breaking them does not just break a law, it breaks the covenant itself.

The first commandment insists that we have no other "gods" except the living God. Many readers mistakenly think that "no other gods before me" means not to put any others 'ahead of' the living God. But "before me" here means "in my presence" (in the Hebrew, literally "in front of my face"). The same is true of the second commandment, regarding idols. The popular belief that an idol is 'something you put ahead of God' is a woefully inadequate description of idolatry. Many believers accept this definition so that they can continue to worship their idols of popularity, materialism, and the like. To God, an idol is anything a person looks to for things that only God is meant to supply, such as security, significance, or a sense of identity. If a person looks to anything besides God for these things, then they are idolaters, regardless of whether they put their idol 'ahead' of God.

These first two commandments involve much more than God staking out a claim. They show us that the covenant he makes with us is an exclusive one. He intends to supply every real need we have, not just to be one way of meeting those needs. His covenant demands our entire allegiance, not just a willingness to make God one major part of our lives.

The next two commandments are also often trivialized by individuals who are uncomfortable with their full, covenant implications. Many people have the silly belief that the third commandment (not misusing God's name) refers only to using God's name as a curse or swear word. But it really means never to use God's name carelessly or inappropriately, in any sense. For example, when people carelessly invoke God as supporting a personal agenda having nothing to do with God's real interests, they are breaking the third commandment. Similarly, the fourth commandment is often mis-taught as saying that our day of worship on Sunday has replaced the Sabbath, which thus can be ignored. That theory was never taught in the early church, which knew that Sunday is the Lord's Day, not the Sabbath. We must still observe a Sabbath in our relationship with God. Our Sabbath is not a day set aside not to do any work, but a regular, serious, genuine taking of time to sit back, to contemplate and appreciate what God has done, for us personally and for his covenant people.

These two commandments remind us that the covenant involves our giving God the utmost respect and consideration. We treat his name, his words, and his actions with reverence and awe. Next time we will look at the rest of the commandments.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997, 2013 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Eight: The Ten Commandments, continued (Deut. 5:1-33)**

The final six commandments shift in emphasis to our relations with each other, instead of dealing directly with our relationship with God. Yet despite this emphasis, they still have a covenant significance that is even more important than the ways that they are necessary for good human relationships.

Paul called the fifth commandment (honor your parents) "the first commandment with promise". One of the themes emphasized throughout Deuteronomy is the call for each generation to respect the others. We must respect past generations for what they have done, and must respect future generations for their hopes and needs. Those who do this receive the promise fully of enjoying God's covenant blessings. God's covenant people must never fall into the egomaniacal error of thinking that their generation, their situation, their agendas, their trials, are especially important or unique in God's plans for his universe. This is an essential feature of the covenant - we must not think our generation is more important than it is, because God's plans are long-term, eternal plans. God's covenant was not instituted only to solve our short-term problems.

The last five commandments, the short "Thou shalt not's", are of obvious importance in our personal relationships, but are even more significant in what they reveal about God's covenant. Killing (#6) not only aggressively violates human laws and ethics, it is an extreme claim that the murderer is more important than others, that other people are mere props or tools to be disposed of at will. God's covenant people will never feel this way. Committing adultery (#7) is not merely selfish and morally nauseating, it is a desecration of the holiness that God grants to his people through the presence of his Spirit. Stealing (#8) show not only selfishness and laziness, but a spirit of self-will that says God will not provide what I need, so I shall seize it for myself. Lying (#9) often seems expedient, even to believers. (For example, agreeing with something dubious or false, just to avoid a confrontation, or denying a sin one has committed, to avoid rebuke.) But Satan is the father of lies, and every time we tell a lie, we break our covenant ties with God in order to obey Satan. God is always truthful, never deceitful. Coveting (#10) is also easily rationalized when it does not produce overt action. But in itself, coveting causes a rupture of the covenant, because it shows distorted values. Anyone who really knows and appreciates God's covenant blessings will not look covetously at other humans' material goods.

Thus all of these Ten Commandments should be studied by believers, far beyond their surface meaning, or even their full practical significance. Make sure not to be so focused on outward obedience to the commandments that you miss the point of the commandments!

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Nine: Loving God (Deut. 6:1-9)**

The other foundation of the covenant is the moral (or philosophical) basis, which is the call to love our God. Specifically, Moses says to love God with all our heart, all our soul and all our strength. (In Mark 12, Jesus included "with all your mind".) Moses is saying that the legal foundation of the covenant, however comprehensive, however detailed, cannot by itself bring the covenant to life. Love must also be a foundation.

Israel had a problem with loving God. The previous generation, those who died in the wilderness, never did appreciate or fully value who God was, or what he meant to them. Even when they would have a period of outward observance of God's laws, they did not develop a closeness to him, with the exception of a very few faithful believers (such as Joshua). Because they did not love God, they never trusted him. Thus every new situation caused a crisis in their faith. The times that God had saved them in the past meant nothing to them, so they were not able to draw encouragement and strength from past successes, that could have sustained them in present difficulties. Finally, when the plan to enter the Promised Land ran up against the apparent obstacle of the powerful peoples already living there, Israel's faith collapsed entirely, leading to that generation's final defeat. So this time, Moses exhorts them to develop a love and closeness to God, not through their leaders but individually, so that in the days and years ahead they will remain close to God, and will remain enthusiastic about following his will.

Many believers today have a similar struggle. Many Christians go through most of their lives and ministry working hard and making sincere efforts, without developing any lasting love for God. Often this becomes a source of frustration, and even hurt, as some believers come to feel that they are not capable of a real love for God. Because of this, many Christians try to take short cuts - trying to motivate each other with emotional manipulation, hokey pep talks, human-made performance standards, and the like. Such things are a pathetic and unnecessary substitute for a real love for God, but they are all too common in the church.

Any believer who thinks that it is not possible to develop a love for God, or who thinks that loving God is a mysterious or ethereal concept, or who thinks that you can develop love for God through the kinds of foolish tactics mentioned above, simply does not know what it means to love God, or perhaps simply does not know what it means to love. That is the real problem why some Christians try fruitlessly to love God - they don't know what that means. So many believers, and some whole churches, pour time and effort into an attempt to fulfill a false concept of what loving God means. Such a project clearly is doomed to failure.

So, next time we shall discuss what it does mean to love God.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Ten: Loving God, continued (Deut. 6:1-9)**

In order to make fruitful efforts to love God, we must first know what that means. Genuine love for God cannot be developed through emotional manipulation, pep talks, or performance standards. Instead, right in the text of Deuteronomy (as well as in the gospels, where Jesus quotes Moses), there is a practical and powerful guide to what loving God means. It comes down to understanding how to use your heart, soul, strength, and (since Jesus saw fit to include it) your mind, to love God. The very description should show us that loving God is far broader than most people's concept of love as primarily emotion based.

Emotions do not equal love. As a believer in Christ, do not buy into the idea, promoted by the world, that love merely means emotions. Emotions are the result of love, but they do not constitute love. And this is why many believers become frustrated in their efforts to love God - they are trying to produce emotions in themselves, instead of trying to produce genuine love, which will then nurture those emotions without any special effort. If most of what a church does is emotion-based, it is not being a New Testament church - it is caving in to the way our society around us runs on their emotions. And that is why churches are always in a cycle wherein they constantly feel a need to be emotionally recharged. If churches of Christ would take the time carefully to develop a genuine love for God amongst their members, the Spirit of God would be able to work in all his fullness, and there is no telling what long-term growth could occur.

In addition, you cannot force yourself to have emotions for very long. People who force themselves to display emotions are merely play-acting, and not developing genuine godly emotions that will please their Lord. When God calls us to love him, he is not saying "make yourself feel emotions towards me". Instead, he is saying "learn how to use your heart, soul, strength, and mind to show that you are completely devoted to me". That is a very different command, and also one very possible to fulfill.

Any of us can learn how to use our heart (what we want), our soul (our identity), our mind (thoughts and ideas), and our strength (time and abilities) to show our devotion to God. These practical ways of showing and fostering love will in turn lead to the kinds of permanent, genuine, positive emotions that we would never be able to create by direct effort. Next time, we will take a careful look at each of these four areas, so that you will have some practical ideas on how to grow in your love for God.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997, 2013 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Eleven: Heart, Soul, Mind & Strength (Deut. 6:1-9)**

Genuine love for God does not consist of attempting to create emotions, but rather of devoting our heart, soul, mind and strength to him, which in turn produces genuine emotions that enable us even more completely to love him. We will thus take a look at each of these four key areas in which we are called to love God. Though they may seem simple, most people have grave misunderstandings about one or more of them.

When the Bible refers to our hearts, it is generally not referring to emotions. Humans today often use "heart" in this way, but in the Bible, "heart" generally refers to our strongest and deepest desires and wishes - that is, what do you really want out of life? So, loving God with all our heart implies that we should orient the things we most want and desire around God. We are called to examine the many things we want, or would like to have, and to sort out the truly valuable from the perishable or ephemeral. If we do this honestly, we realize that the only guaranteed eternal, permanent possession we have is our relationship with God. Applying this to our daily thoughts and decisions is what it means to love God with all our heart.

Similarly, though humans now often use "soul" to refer exclusively to an eternal fate, the meaning of "soul" in Scripture is broader. It refers to our identity, that is, how we define ourselves and our worth. Most humans describe who they are in terms of things such as their career, marital or family status, race, age, sex, and so forth. These things have little meaning to God. We must learn to describe ourselves and others in terms of our relationship with the God who created us, not in terms of comparisons with the other creations. This is loving God with all our soul.

Loving God with our mind means to use the incredible brain that God created for each of us to show our devotion to him, not to aggrandize, promote, or enrich ourselves. Too many Christians are suspicious of their minds - but God created them! You don't have to be a scholar or an expert on anything, but you do have to develop your mind and to learn to center the ideas and thoughts you have around God.

Loving God with our strength includes not just our physical attributes, but our time and abilities as well. We have many choices each day how to use these things. Do we give the best of them to God, or to the perishable things of the world? Loving God with all our strength is made easier when we have seen these things for what they are.

You see that all these things have to do with being devoted, being committed, to God. Loving God is neither a display of emotions nor a level of activity. It means that we have made an irrevocable decision that we belong to him, and all of the most important things in our lives are now his.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Twelve: Remember (Deut. 6:10-10:11)**

We have spent several weeks on just a couple chapters in Deuteronomy, because they form the thematic heart of all that follows. If you have assimilated the ideas involved in the foundations of the covenant, you will be able to get most of the meaning out of the rest of Deuteronomy. From now on, our series will move through the book much more quickly.

The next few chapters deal with the importance of remembering. Memory is a notorious human failing. Whether from laziness, a willingness to forget, or neglect, even believers often fail to remember the things that would equip them for a spiritual life without having constantly to go back over the basics. We forget the lessons learned in the past, because they humble us too much for comfort. We forget the sacrifices others have made for us, because we don't want to feel any gratitude. We forget even the victories and good things, because we are hungry for more and newer ones. In this section of Deuteronomy, Moses focuses on three particularly important areas in which we must exercise our memories.

Moses tells the people they must always remember who they are, as God's chosen people (6:10-7:26). Like the church today, God's people constantly had to relearn the basics of their identity. Moses wanted them to learn once for all that they were chosen by grace (6:10-19), that each generation was part of a continuous history (6:20-6:25), that holiness incurs great responsibility (7:1-7:6), and that they were called to be completely dependent on God (7:7-7:26).

Moses next exhortation runs against much conventional wisdom in the church, which says that it is hardest to remember God in the tough times. Moses taught that it was far harder to remember God in times of blessing (8:1-20). Blessings tend to make us relax, to let down our guard against temptations, and to encourage us to "just have fun" instead of maintaining a spiritual focus. Moses tells Israel to combat these risks by always remembering the tough times (8:1-5, 15-18), by remembering the ways God had rescued and blessed them (v. 6-14), and to remember that earthly blessings will not last forever (v. 19-20).

Finally, Moses calls them always to remember the making of the covenant (9:1-10:11). The tense times surrounding the institution of the covenant illustrate many of the basic themes (positive and negative) that have been part of God's relations with his people ever since. God's people must always remember how quick they can be to violate God's covenant, and how serious a matter that is. At the same time, despite God's anger and hurt, he gave them a second chance. The covenant is precious to God; he values it more highly than we ever will understand, and he honors his responsibilities even when we neglect ours. As Christians, the cross teaches us similar lessons about the covenant God has made with us.

These and other lessons are at the heart of developing a long-term relationship with God, and enabling us to grow and learn without constantly needing to return to basics.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Thirteen: What Does The Lord Ask of You? (Deut. 10:12-13)**

Having established the heart of the covenant, and exhorting the people to remember what they have learned and seen, Moses now asks a fundamental question (10:12), "What does the Lord your God ask of you ... ?" This introduces the next large section of Deuteronomy, which deals with responsibility. As often is done in Scripture, first the general responsibilities are given, and then specific examples and instructions are given. Moses begins by establishing five general responsibilities that covenant people have. They are (i) fear God, (ii) walk in his ways, (iii) love God, (iv) serve God from the heart, (v) observe God's laws and decrees. Note that each of these comes directly from the principles at the heart of the covenant, and also that each of these is just as applicable under the New Covenant as it was in the Old.

Fearing God is often an unpopular topic, because it is generally misunderstood. God does not wish us to be terrified of him. But he does ask that we hold him in awe and respect, for who he is and for the power he has. When we have properly appreciated these qualities, we will stand back in awe, and it will keep us from being presumptuous or self-centered. In a healthy relationship with God, fear - of the right kind - and love will fit together, not conflict with each other. When people think that a relationship with God can only be based on fear or love, but not both, it shows that they do not understand what God means by these.

The other three general responsibilities may seem at first to say the same thing, but they are in fact three different responsibilities God calls for. Observing (or 'obeying') God's commands is necessary, and part of the respect we ought to show him, but it does not complete our external responsibility. We must not stop at doing only the things God specifically calls for, or at only avoiding the things God prohibits. We must also walk in his ways, that is, learn what God is like, follow him, emulate him. In the New Covenant, we do this by studying Jesus and attempting to be more like him. Then, we must look actively for ways to love God, or as Ephesians 5:10 tells us, to find out what pleases the Lord. In other words, our outward responsibilities are not just passive - we must actively seek both God and ways to minister that will please him. These responsibilities include not just the outward actions - God calls for the proper attitude as well.

These general responsibilities set forth the basics of our relationship with God - fear him and love him - and the basics of our ministry - obey, walk, and serve. Make sure to understand the full implications of these general responsibilities. Defining "what does the Lord your God ask of you" is a comprehensive and all-encompassing question. It is not legitimate to answer it in the overly simplistic ways that are so popular. Next, we will study the ways that Moses further develops these concepts of our responsibilities.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Fourteen: Covenant Responsibilities (Deut. 10:14-11:32)**

Moses has established the basic areas of responsibility for God's covenant people. In our relationship with God, we must both fear him and love him. In our ministry, we must observe his commands, walk in his ways, and serve him from the heart. Moses now goes on to make some comments on these responsibilities, then follows that up with an extensive list of applications, examples and specific commands. Moses' comments on the general covenant responsibilities in 10:14-11:32 are primarily meant to explain that these responsibilities are appropriate and reasonable. He is trying to use positive means to motivate the Israelites to take them seriously.

Moses first tells the people that it is reasonable for God to call them to love him, and to fulfill the other responsibilities, because God loved them first (10:14-22). God chose to love them, unconditionally and irrevocably, before they had ever done anything either to show love for him, or to show an understanding of who he is. Likewise, we Christians should be humbled and motivated by remembering that God and his son Jesus provided the means for our salvation long before we knew or cared for him. Every one of us had salvation full and free waiting for us, before we made the decision to turn from lives of selfishness and ignorance.

Then, in one of the recurring themes in Deuteronomy, Moses tells them to remember the past (11:1-7), to recall both the miracles they have witnessed and the spectacles of destruction of those who showed contempt for God. Over and over in the book, Moses reminds them to learn from the past, because most humans are so quick to forget it in their anxiety over the future.

Third, since Moses was aware of their concerns for the future, he explains (in 11:8-15) that those who fulfill their responsibilities are able to look to the future with hope. When we fulfill the responsibilities that God gives us, and make them our focus and main concern, it frees us from most of the anxiety towards the future that comes from self-centeredness, materialism, and vanity. Moses explains that the future is uncertain for those who are not close to God, but certain for those who are close to him and who serve him for the right reasons.

Finally, Moses points out that fulfilling these responsibilities will not "just happen"; they must take care to remember, follow, and live. In a sense, he is saying that they are responsible for knowing and fulfilling their responsibilities. It is ironic that so many believers show scorn for the ways that pagans think they should let things "just happen", and then think that Christians can grow spiritually solely on good intentions, listening to church authorities, or simplistic slogans. Fulfilling responsibilities takes an active approach.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Fifteen: Worshiping Appropriately (Deut. 12:1-13:18)**

As Moses leaves the general responsibilities of covenant people and begins to discuss specifics, he first discusses one of the most crucial areas in which covenant people must take their responsibilities seriously - worship. Worship (as the word literally implies) is any act that demonstrates what we consider to have worth, to have value. In every era, God's people have struggled with worshiping appropriately, and in every era God's people have wanted worship to be centered around their own sensual enjoyment, rather than on glorifying God. Moses mentions four specific of worship, and all are highly appropriate for today's believers to study.

Moses begins by stating that worship of God is incompatible with worship of anything else (12:1-7). He calls the Israelites actively to avoid and reject the false gods that the pagans were worshiping. So too we must firmly reject the worship of materialism, popularity, worldly success, and the other idols around us. And be careful - these do not have to be put "ahead of God" to be an idol. As we have discussed, any time you look to career, popularity, or the like to acquire things that only God should provide, you have made it an idol.

Next, Moses stresses that worship of God himself is only appropriate if done in the way God has called us (12:8-14). It is inappropriate, self-centered, and foolish for God's people to make up their own ways of worshiping. Regardless of what popularity-seeking church leaders say, and regardless of whatever pointless analogies they can come up with, God has set forth clearly the ways he wants us to worship him, and is not pleased when we do or proclaim what gratifies us and then rationalize it by calling it "worship". That is what the pagan religions in Moses' time did, and that is what false religions do today.

Moses also discusses the offerings and sacrifices that the people were called to make as part of their worship (12:15-32). While we do not make animal sacrifices or the like in the church, we should still study and observe the general principles about sacrifice that are taught in the Old Testament. Sacrifice, whether under the Old Covenant or the New, is not an expression of the sacrificer's righteousness, but rather is an expression of the value of God. When we make sacrifices, we had better be doing it with the intention of showing God we value him, not with the expectation of being credited or rewarded for our righteous behavior.

Then, Moses warns severely against false prophets (13:1-18). The danger and discouragement from false teachers has plagued God's people in every age. We must take to heart Moses' teachings - above all we must search for the truth, not for success, feeling, or relationships. Every teaching must be compared to God's truth, and every false teaching must be rejected, no matter what advantage it may bring, no matter how well it "works", and no matter how much we may want to please the teacher himself. Pleasing God is more important.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997, 2013 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Sixteen: Perspectives on Covenant Commands (Deut. 14-25)**

Having laid out the general covenant responsibilities for God's people, Moses now gives numerous applications and examples. Many of these seem, on the surface, to have little to do with today's believers. But it is a monumental mistake to fail to study the detailed commands of Old Testament law. No command, no guideline, no instruction, was ever given solely for its own sake. Rather, they are all direct applications of covenant principles and responsibilities. They are thus worth careful study, because from them we can learn innumerable practical and edifying principles about how God wants us to deal with situations that may be different in their superficial details, but are the same in their spiritual essentials.

In studying the material in chapters 14-25, you should not attempt to make applications based on the literal command in isolation. Instead, there are three principles that can help you to understand the command's deeper significance, and its usefulness to today's believers. First, look at how the command applies &/or illustrates covenant principles. Then, consider how in particular it relates to the holiness of a covenant people. Finally, look to see how it helps us to appreciate or understand God's perspective and nature. One or more of these principles will be applicable to any command that you study.

The reason behind any command is always based on covenant principles. So look for this reason first, and avoid the mistake of trying first to figure out some practical reason. For example, the dietary restrictions in 14:1-21 are often mistakenly thought to be given because of health concerns. In fact, only a few of the prohibited forms of food would have been risky to eat, while many others could safely have been eaten even with the limited culinary methods available in Moses' day. The real reason for these commands is symbolic: they illustrate the covenant principles that God's people are different, clean & holy, they trust in him to provide, and do not eat just anything they find, or indulge in any convenient behavior. God's people must make efforts to be clean, and must make efforts to eat only "clean" food. Notice that some foods prohibited to God's people are explicitly allowed to be sold to outsiders.

One covenant principle of special importance is holiness, the quality of not being a part of this world. As examples, the instructions concerning the seventh year (15:1-18) and concerning firstborn animals (15:19-22) emphasize this by reminding the Israelites that they must not be preoccupied with their possessions in this world. Likewise, God's people were held to much higher standards of justice and morality than others, because of their holiness.

It is also very important to look for ways the commands teach us about God's own perspective. It is easy to be overly concerned with how commands would affect our earthly lives, and miss what God is telling us about himself. In particular, the commands teach us that God is compassionate (e.g. his concern for the poor - 24:14-15), righteous (e.g. his severe penalties for malicious lying - 19:16-21), and realistic (he knows we will get in messes, and wants to help rather than condemning us - e.g. 21:15-17).

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Seventeen: Examples of Covenant Commands (Deut. 14-25)**

Last week we established three main principles to remember in studying the many specific commands in Old Testament law - to look for how they illustrate or apply covenant principles, to notice how they relate to the holiness of God's people, and to use them to understand and appreciate God's perspective. We will not go through each command specifically in these chapters. Last time, we looked at a few of them to illustrate the main principles, and this time we will look at a few more examples from chapters 14-25, before moving on.

One of the most well known characteristics of the Israelites' religion was their observance of the special "feast" days, as outlined in 16:1-17. The Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles all illustrate how God's instructions to the Israelites combine several principles at once. These observances illustrate an important covenant principle, the timelessness of the covenant. The special days recalled past events of spiritual significance, and involved the community in a time of remembering who they were. At the same time, it emphasized their holiness by the solemnity of the occasions, the implicit seriousness of observing them properly. God's holy people did not have the option of taking these times lightly, unlike pagan holidays, which were (and are) centered on sensual enjoyment and irresponsible behavior. Finally, the special days illustrate God's perspective, in reminding them of the ways God had cared for them and provided for them at crucial times in the past, and would do the same in the future.

Likewise, God's directives for establishing leaders (17:8-18:8, 18:14-22) show us several things. It is a covenant principle that God's people should be organized; "God is not a God of disorder but a God of peace". The criteria for leaders of God's people, though different in details between the two covenants, both come down to selecting holy individuals worthy to accept responsibilities in a holy community. The ways God presents leadership also illustrate his perspective - while individuals given worldly leadership positions look at them in terms of the authority and privileges they get, God's leaders should never be preoccupied with these things, but with serving the people to whom they are responsible.

As a final example, notice the directives God gives for loans made between covenant individuals (23:19-20, 24:6, 24:10-13). God specifically prohibits profiting from them, illustrating the basic covenant principle that no covenant believer should look at another as a source of profit or gain, which shows a lack of appreciation for what God has already given, but instead should be pleased to have an opportunity to help. The holiness of God's people demands that the lender must even trust the borrower to the extent of returning collateral if it is needed to preserve the lender's health or livelihood. God emphasizes also his perspective of compassion, in that his main concern is that his people's needs be met, not that they find ways of making extra profits.

These examples, and many others we did not study, show us that the Old Testament laws are just as important for us to study as they were for Moses' listeners. Your understanding of God's Word will be strengthened by studying them.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Eighteen: Accepting the Covenant (Deut. 26)**

Moses has spent much time establishing the covenant people's responsibilities, both general and specific. Now, he looks from the present to the future. Moses is not going to be with the people when they cross over into the Promised Land, but God has told him a good deal of what will happen, and he wants them to have the wisdom God has given him. It is characteristic of Moses that he is even more concerned with the people than with his own impending fate.

In chapter 26, Moses indicates two ceremonies that they are to follow - not right away, but after they enter the Promised Land - that both show a formal acceptance of the covenant in their new home. The two ceremonies are the giving of the first-fruits of the new land back to God, and the practice of giving a tenth (tithe) at the appropriate times. These practices are both ceremonial and practical. On one hand, they indicate, through a simple procedure, a formal re-acceptance of the covenant terms. On the other hand, they are a practical living out of some of the most important terms of the covenant, in that the people will be making sacrifices that show their faith in God.

God wants us to show our faith and our acceptance of his terms in outward ways. This demonstration is not really for his benefit, as if he were insecure of who he were, and needed reinforcement. Rather, they are of primary value to us, in that they give us a visible reminder of who we are, and to what we have been called. Moreover, the ceremonies that God selects are never arbitrary or devoid of meaning in themselves. These two ceremonies in Deuteronomy 26 are loaded with meaning, and the ceremonies we participate in today are also far from arbitrary. Baptism is a literal enactment of being buried and then raised with Christ, a natural response to learning the good news of his death and resurrection. The weekly Lord's Supper reminds us of the powerful events that took place the last time Jesus shared a meal with his friends before his death.

Secondly, the Israelites were to show God more than acceptance of the covenant - they were to show him they would live out the terms of that covenant. As they entered the Promised Land, seeing for the first time the riches God had provided them in their new home, instead of sitting down immediately to enjoy the land's fruits, they were to give back these first-fruits. They would find this easy to do, as long as they truly trusted God to provide an abundance. If they did not trust God, they would find it difficult not to cling to those first-fruits, fearing that God may not give them more. Similarly, the directions for tithing would give the people a chance to live out their faith in God's providence, as well as their concerns for others.

We who have entered a spiritual Promised Land can live out these same principles. The right attitudes towards the blessings we have received (and in our covenant, this applies to spiritual blessings, not just material ones) will show God the confidence we have in him, and will strengthen our hearts in deepening our appreciation of what we have.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Nineteen: Perspective on the Future (Deut. 27-28)**

After Moses gives the people the directions for the covenant acceptance ceremonies in their new land, he moves on to direct them to carry out a rather different ritual, after they have entered the Promised Land. He names for them two mountains in the middle of Canaan. They are to send half of the people on top of each of these mountains, one of which is designated the mountain of blessings and the other the mountain of curses. (You can read about how the people fulfilled this in Joshua 8:30-35.)

This ritual is to dramatize the choice the people will need to make. They can choose, in the future, either to follow God, and be blessed, or to abandon God, and be cursed. Moses goes on at great length to say that if they remain faithful, they will "be blessed in the city, ... in the country, ... your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed, ..." Whereas, if they do not obey God, they will "be cursed in the city and ... in the country, ... You will build a house, but will not live in it, ... In the morning you will say, 'if only it were evening!' and in the evening, 'if only it were morning!'" Reading Moses' blessings and curses in their entirety presents a vivid picture, and it is not hard to see his point.

But it is hard for us to understand these correctly. These, and similar Scriptures, are often misinterpreted as if they promised that things will always go well when we are faithful, and that we will have bad things happen when we are faithless. But, in practice, we see that faithful people have both very good and very bad things happen in their lives, while faithless, god-hating people also experience about the same mixture of good and bad things. This confuses many believers, because they do not understand what God actually promised.

What Moses is really saying is that to the faithful, everything is a blessing, regardless of how it looks from a worldly viewpoint. And to the faithless, everything is a curse, regardless of how good it may be from a worldly viewpoint. The faithful know that good things are doubly blessings as a sign of God's love, and that bad things are opportunities for God to work (maybe NOT for our own benefit, but in some positive way nonetheless). The faithless do not understand God's love, so any blessings they receive mean little except for temporary enjoyment, and to them bad things are utterly without a positive side, since they look at them from a shortsighted and selfish viewpoint.

In the church, we will do ourselves and God an immense favor if we try to understand this principle. We are not meant to expect everything to go in our favor, nor to expect God to punish every act of evil that unbelievers commit. We must not envy the faithless, because they truly do not enjoy the blessings they have, and to them every negative happening is a complete curse, because they do not have the hope that God will deliver them to something better. We know that even minor blessings are a sign of God's deep love for us, and we know that when things do go badly, it will provide God an opportunity to show his love and power.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Twenty: Moses' Final Exhortations (Deut. 29:1-32:47)**

As Moses' death approaches, he gives his final exhortations to the people. In several emotional passages, he leaves them with the thoughts that best could prepare them for the next steps they were to take, at the same time knowing that nothing he alone could do would be able to make their decisions for them. Moses is not going to be there for their next times of testing and temptation, so instead of trying to control the people by his own wisdom and will, he points them in the direction they will need to go to remain faithful. In this section, Moses first walks the people through the terms of renewal of the covenant (ch. 29), exhorts them to make the right choices (ch. 30), turns the leadership of the people over to Joshua, giving him and the people direction for the future (ch. 31), and finally recites a song of praise to God in front of the community (32:1-47).

In chapter 29, one more time, Moses goes over the terms of the covenant. He again reminds them to remember the past, to remember the call to be distinct from the other nations, and to be careful not to deceive themselves by being over-confident. There is never a time when we can feel we "have it all down", and do not need to review the foundations of our faith. In constantly reminding the Israelites of the basics of the covenant, Moses was doing more than emphasizing the specific teachings - he was getting them in the habit of constantly re-examining their faith and beliefs. We need to do the same.

Similarly, Moses once more reminds them of the rewards of faithfulness and the penalties of faithlessness. We too must constantly remind ourselves of the benefits of being faithful Christians. And we must help each other to remember that the greatest spiritual benefits are not the crass material or earthly things that may sometimes be foremost in our desires. We must, like Moses, constantly pull our attention back to the more enduring spiritual blessings.

When Moses turns to Joshua as his successor in leadership, he does not detail to Joshua all the privileges and power he will have as Israel's leader. Rather, Moses stresses the responsibilities of spiritual leadership. Joshua is going to have to be even stronger and braver than he has been so far, and will now have the primary responsibility for responding to the people's struggles and disobedience. Spiritual leadership is not a privilege, and is not an authority-laden role. The spiritual leader must be the servant of all, and the humblest of all. The leader must respond to sin not with frustration, but with wisdom and spiritual direction.

Finally, Moses recites a song of praise. Despite his own disappointment at not being able to enter the Promised Land, Moses' feelings towards God and his plans are full of praise and contentment. He knows his end is near, but he also realizes that he has been part of something that is far greater than any plans God could have had for him personally.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.

## **A Covenant People: Lessons From Deuteronomy**

### **Lesson Twenty-One: End of An Era (Deut. 32:48-34)**

Now that Moses has completed his ministry, it is time for him to go, and for the people to move on. Moses is done with his exhortations and teaching, and his last public speech consists of pronouncing blessings on each of Israel's tribes, looking at the positive things about God's people and asking God to take care of them all. Then Moses finally gets to look at the land he spent his life to get to. In a solitary meeting with God, he is allowed to see it from Mount Pisgah, and then dies. It is the end of a great era in the history of God's people, but the beginning of another.

It is characteristic of Moses that he knows his own words and wisdom will not by themselves keep the people faithful. Nor will any further warnings help to prevent them from making mistakes in the future. Moses did not repeat the lessons he gave in the hope that these lessons would prevent the people from sinning, but rather in the hope that when they did fall, the lessons they had heard would give them what they needed to bounce back. Moses had learned God's perspective, of being more concerned with keeping people faithful in the long run, than with wanting to prevent any single sin or punish it when it occurred. Moses also knows that if the people are to remain faithful, it will not be because of his words, or even Joshua's leadership. It is only by committing the people to God's care that Moses can feel confident that they will have the best chance of remaining faithful. So he blesses the tribes one-by-one, leaving them as his last words not an admonition but a blessing, not words of warning but words of hope.

Finally, if only for a short time, Moses is able to see the Promised Land. He has devoted most of his life to leading his people to their own land, and though he will not get to go in himself, God graciously allows him to see it with his own eyes before he dies. Moses accepts this with appreciation. Moses knew that he was only one part of God's plan. His time was over, but God's plans and the history of his people would go on. Moses never over-estimated his own importance. His joy was never in his own position or privileges, but in knowing that all he did would be used by God as part of a plan greater than himself. His humility and perception is of great value to us. We can rejoice in knowing that we are always a part of God's plans, whether or not our own temporary ministries show any tangible results. We never know when our own lives are a link in a chain that may be completed long after our own time.

The Israelites mourned Moses for thirty days, and then moved on. They too knew, because of Moses' own teachings, that it was time to continue a new era. Without looking back, they moved ahead under Joshua to face the new blessings and challenges that God had in store for them.

*- Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 1997*

© 1997 by Mark Garner - Congregations and individuals may make or print copies of these notes for home, class, or small group study, without further permission, provided that the author and congregation are credited. Any other use requires the permission of the author.