

Deuteronomy 11:18-32

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“You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul [i.e., they were to take personal responsibility for their lives and plant the Word of God into their thinking so that it directed all aspects of their lives]; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand [picture of activity], and they shall be as frontals on your forehead [influencing perspective].¹⁹ “You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up [at all times; cf., Pro 6:20-23].²⁰ “You shall write them on the doorposts of your house [where they live] and on your gates [i.e., city gates, where elders met to discuss social and legal matters],²¹ so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens remain above the earth [so that God’s blessing would continue].²² “For if [conditional clause] you are careful to keep all this commandment which I am commanding you to do, to love the LORD your God [i.e., to commit to Him], to walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him [i.e., commit to His directives],²³ then [result clause] the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than you.²⁴ “Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours; your border will be from the wilderness to Lebanon, and from the river, the river Euphrates [in Babylon], as far as the western sea [Mediterranean Sea; cf. Gen 15:18].²⁵ “No man will be able to stand before you [in combat]; the LORD your God will lay the dread of you and the fear of you on all the land on which you set foot [God will instill dread into Israel’s enemies; cf. Josh 2:9-11; 5:1], as He has spoken to you [to keep His Word].²⁶ “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse [for the nation to choose]:²⁷ the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I am commanding you today;²⁸ and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known.²⁹ “It shall come about, when the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, that you shall place the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal [engage in antiphonal discourse].³⁰ “Are they not across the Jordan, west of the way toward the sunset, in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, beside the oaks of Moreh? [This was enacted when Joshua was in the land; see Josh 8:30-35]³¹ “For you are about to cross the Jordan to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall possess it and live in it,³² and you shall be careful to do all the statutes and the judgments which I am setting before you today.

Observations:

As Moses nears the end of his sermon to the second generation of Israelites, he calls for them to take personal responsibility for what he's giving to them and to make sure it's deeply seated in their minds. What Moses tells them in Deuteronomy 11:18-20 is similar to what he stated in Deuteronomy 6:4-6; albeit with slight variation. One would expect this sort of variation from someone who was speaking extemporaneously. Moses tells them:

You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 11:18-20)

Moses knew he would die soon and would not be present to help instruct and guide the nation into righteousness. He was faithfully communicating God's revelation to the nation, but it was their responsibility to take what was given and plant it into their minds so that it flowed in their stream of conscious thought and influenced their daily activities. Some Israelites took Moses' words literally and made phylacteries which they wore on their hands and foreheads (Matt 23:5), as well as mezuzahs they placed on doorposts, all of which contained Scripture. Here, the meaning is symbolic. God's commands were to be wrapped up in their daily activities (hand), and always in the forefront of their thinking (forehead). Moses' words were to impact the audience in front of him, that they might learn God's will and faithfully transmit it to their children, who will pass it along to their children, and so on. The activity of teaching one's children was to occur at all times and in all locations. *Sitting* suggests times of rest, and *walking* speaks of activity. When you *lie down* suggests evening time, and when you *rise up* suggests the morning hours. These form a double merism which encompass of all of life. God's Word was to permeate all aspects of society, starting with their homes (doorposts of your house), and influencing the activities of the leaders who met to discuss social and legal matters at the entrance of the city (gates). God's Word in the heart is the greatest deterrent to idolatry and sinful living.

Learning and living God's Word would yield benefits for the Israelite who followed God's directives. Moses specified the benefit, saying, "so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens *remain* above the earth" (Deut 11:21). God's Word learned and lived would benefit the immediate hearers and doers, and it would also benefit their children after them. Jack Deere states:

Only by letting God’s words invade every area of their lives and homes and by diligently teaching them to their children could the nation hope to escape the seduction of false worship and find permanent prosperity in the land of promise given by the LORD on oath to their forefathers. The same principle applies to Christians today. Commitment to know and obey the Scriptures keeps believers from contemporary forms of false worship (cf. 2 Tim 3:1–9 with 2 Tim 3:14–17). Therefore, Paul exhorted all Christians to “let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16).¹

Each generation of Israelites had the blessing and curse before them. It was up to them to continue in obedience to the Lord, or turn away from Him and serve other gods. Blessing and cursing were always on their horizon, and how they lived before God determined the state of the nation. Moses said, “For if you are careful to keep all this commandment which I am commanding you to do, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him,²³ then the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than you” (Deut 11:22-23). Their moral behavior before God would guarantee military victory over their enemies. Israel’s commitment-love to God and obedience to His directives would determine their future success, even though they faced great obstacles. Israel was not to fear the people in Canaan, for God was with His people and would guarantee their victory.

As Israel advanced in God’s will, He would give them every bit of land which they walked on, saying, “Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours; your border will be from the wilderness to Lebanon, *and* from the river, the river Euphrates, as far as the western sea” (Deut 11:24). Here, Moses included the boundaries of the land which God had promised earlier to Abraham (Gen 15:18). Concerning this section of land, William MacDonald states:

Those who walked in the ways of the Lord would drive out the heathen Canaanites and possess all the land their feet walked on. The rule of possession is given in verse 24. All the land was theirs by promise, but they had to go in and make it their own, just as we have to appropriate the promises of God. The boundaries given in verse 24 have never been realized historically by Israel. It is true that Solomon’s kingdom extended from the river (Euphrates) to the border of Egypt (1 Kgs 4:21), but the Israelites did not actually possess all that territory. Rather, it included states that *paid tribute* to Solomon but maintained their own internal government. Verse

¹ Jack S. Deere, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 283.

24, along with many others, will find its fulfillment in the Millennial Reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.²

Concerning the residents of the land of Canaan, Moses explained that God would instill fear into their hearts, saying, “No man will be able to stand before you; the LORD your God will lay the dread of you and the fear of you on all the land on which you set foot, as He has spoken to you” (Deut 11:25). Here was an example of divinely induced psychological warfare, in which God Himself would instill fear into the minds of Israel’s enemies, thus neutralizing the threat (cf. Deut 2:25). Israelites found this to be true as they advanced into the land under the leadership of Joshua (Josh 2:9; 5:1).

All Moses communicated to God’s people was intended to educate and encourage them to love the Lord and to walk in His directives. Moses placed God’s Word before the people, but it was up to them to lay hold of it and walk in it. However, being the covenant people of God, bound in a contract relationship with the Lord, they were not free to walk away from it without consequence. To obey would result in God’s blessing, but to disobey would result in God’s cursing. Moses said, “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: ²⁷ the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I am commanding you today; ²⁸ and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known” (Deut 11:26-28). Through Moses, God gave them only two possible futures. If they accepted God’s present offer, they would cross the Jordan River and enter into the land. However, once they entered Canaan, the Israelites would find themselves on a battlefield, and only their continued walk with the Lord would determine the outcome of each battle. Today’s decisions touch tomorrow’s victories.

Once in the land, Israel was to mark the occasion by a special event in which they would gather at a specific location and read aloud the blessings and cursings. Moses wrote, “It shall come about, when the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, that you shall place the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal” (Deut 11:29). This was a specific location where the nation would renew the covenant with God. Moses stated, “Are they not across the Jordan, west of the way toward the sunset, in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, beside the oaks of Moreh?” (Deut 11:30). In antiphonal chorus, half the tribes would stand on Mount Gerizim and shout the blessings, and the other half would stand on Mount Ebal and shout the curses. This was done under the leadership of Joshua (Josh 8:30-35). Moses also stated this location was “beside the oaks of Moreh” which were in Shechem (Deut

² William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 211.

11:30b). Abraham stopped at the oaks of Moreh as he traveled through Canaan (Gen 12:6), and it was also the place where Jacob buried the family idols and devoted himself wholly to the Lord (Gen 35:1-4). Eugene Merrill comments on the importance of the location of Shechem, saying:

The reason for the selection of Shechem and its vicinity was clearly the association of this holy place with the patriarchs to whom the Lord had first appeared and made covenant promises concerning the land. It was there that Abraham had built his first altar (Gen 12:6-7); there Jacob had bought a piece of property (Gen 33:19), where he built an altar (Gen 33:20) and dug a well (John 4:6); and there his son Joseph was buried (Josh 24:32). From those ancient days onward Shechem was closely associated with covenant making of all kinds, both legitimate and illegitimate (cf. Josh 24:1-28; Judg 9:1-21).³

Israel's love for God and obedient behavior determined her national and historical success, not only in the moment, but for future generations that would follow in righteousness. Moses said, "For you are about to cross the Jordan to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall possess it and live in it,³² and you shall be careful to do all the statutes and the judgments which I am setting before you today" (Deut 11:31-32). God was about to bless the nation with victory and possession of the land of Canaan; however, they were to be careful to follow the Lord's directives.

As Christians living in the dispensation of the Church Age, we are not under the Mosaic Law, which refers to "the statutes and ordinances and laws which the LORD established between Himself and the sons of Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai" (Lev 26:46). For the Christian, the New Testament speaks of "the perfect law of liberty" (Jam 1:25), "the royal law" (Jam 2:8), the "Law of Christ" (Gal 6:2), and "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2). The body of Scripture that sets forth God's directives for the Christian is found in Romans chapter one through Revelation chapter three. And just like Israel, God desires to bless us, but we must learn His Word and walk in His ways (2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:2), and pursue a life of righteousness and good works (Gal 6:10; Tit 2:11-14). Obedience is rewarded by the Lord (Rom 14:10; 1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10), and disobedience results in discipline (1 Cor 11:32; Heb 12:5-11; Rev 3:19).

³ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 214.