

APRIL 1

Deuteronomy 18-20

For many reasons, it looks like the reading today has drifted into randomness, but I think Moses and God are driving forward with a very strongly connected theme of keeping the land pure before the Lord and keeping its people strong in the Lord.

Deuteronomy 18

Vs. 1-8 So the king was to devote himself to the law under the guidance of the priests and Levites. Now God restates the provision for the Levites who live among the people, guiding the nation into the knowledge of God. The fact that this has been restated so often means that it was important, and that the people might have the tendency not to respect or value the importance of the Levites living among them. To see this importance read Deuteronomy 33:10 and 2 Chronicles 17:8-9. The people would desperately need the Levites.

V. 3 What were the *cheeks*, the rump? And I guess the *stomach* means the abdominal muscles. If not, I wouldn't have fought you for it at the table.

Vs. 9-14 It would be the Levites, by teaching and helping the people, who would keep the law before them. The Levites would supply guidance from God by teaching the people His Word. In contrast to the Levites, false prophets would rise among the people. That was a given.

V. 10 Notice that Moloch worship, the sacrificing of unwanted babies, was mentioned first. This worship took care of a social/personal need that came as a result of Baal worship.

V. 14 The next mention also took care of a social/personal need: ways to contact the spirit world to get guidance. God, through the Word and the ministry of the Levites, would supply that guidance.

Vs. 15-22 God said He would bring another prophet to guide Israel. Now God brought lots of prophets to Israel and Israel had lots of leaders and prophets; but this guy must have had a special meaning in the minds of the Jews, a meaning they understood even back then. Later, the Jews would come to John the Baptist and ask him if he was "the prophet." Jesus was that prophet. It apparently meant one man, like Moses, who would lead the entire nation before God. So, from this text you understand that God will send prophets to guide the people. From later texts (Isaiah, for example) and the NT, we understand that God is promising to one day send "The Prophet." And we know Him.

In the context of this message to Israel, Moses is telling the people that even in hard times and chaos, He will provide a leader for them.

Notice that they are told two ways to understand if a prophet were true. If he spoke for other gods, he was false. And if he made a prediction that didn't come true, he was false. Also remember, in really tough cases, they had local Levites and they could always go to the priest at the tabernacle who had the Urim and Thummim.

Deuteronomy 19

Vs. 1-13 Just as idolatry would contaminate the land and defile the nation, so would the shedding of blood of the innocent. Again, King Manasseh led his people to irrevocable judgment, first spiritually, and then by the guilt of all the innocent blood he spilled. Oddly enough, he reigned longer than any other king.

Along with the cities of the Levites, Moses had already given them three special levitical cities of refuge in Deuteronomy 4:41. Those cities were on the east side of the Jordan in the inheritance of Reuben, Gad and ½ Manasseh. These cities of refuge would be on the west side of the Jordan and they will be named in Joshua 20. Also, just by the fact these cities were present, they were a

visual reminder that the people were to make sure the innocent were protected and the laws were followed. In all questions like these, the people were to go to the Levites to protect the land and their blessing before God.

V. 8 Notice that Moses uses the words here that Jabez will later use in his prayer in 1 Chronicles 4:10. I think that Jabez was in this assembly listening to Moses.

V. 9 Notice too, that IF the people really obeyed, and God was able to give them all the land He had promised to Abraham, God would have added three more cities. This never happened.

Vs. 14-21 The other way to contaminate the land and to defile the nation was through injustice and theft. Notice that the first four of the Ten Commandments are in respect to living with God. The next six commandments are how to honor God in living with one another. Later in Israel's history, God and the prophets will lament that most of the people only dealt unjustly with one another.

Notice that the priests got involved in this too. Cases would go to the local officials. If those lying were too good and they didn't have enough proof of a thing, they went to the tabernacle. The high priest had the means for determining the truth of a matter. Too bad they really didn't use the Urim and Thummim. It was a long way to Jerusalem, and why bother when you could flip a coin or throw some sticks on the ground to get guidance?

Vs. 19-21 If Israel had done this, the report would have gone out and the good people would have had confidence in the Lord. The bad ones would have feared to do anything to their neighbor. It would have been a public testimony that would have kept the people and the land pure.

Deuteronomy 20

Vs. 1-9 God had made provisions to keep them secure in the land. Those same provisions would guide them in warfare.

V. 1 Notice that their confidence was in remembering how God had saved them and brought them out of Egypt.

Vs. 2-4 The priest was to be the primary motivator for the people. He would direct their thoughts to God.

Vs. 5-9 In looking at this list of who was to be excluded from battle, it sort of boils down to all those who were not fully focused and confident in the Lord. The issue was faith and dependence, not courage. Also, those who would breed fear or bitterness were not necessary. This was the lesson they had learned of how a few could have an adverse effect on the nation.

Vs. 10-15 Notice that these verses have to do with nations outside of Canaan. This would be in the far future for Israel. David received tribute from some nations and had some control of Damascus. Had the nation actually obeyed God, they would have had the borders promised to Abraham.

It seems to me here, too, the main point isn't war, but compassion. However, if I were a non-Israelite male and knew our army had been defeated on the field and now Israel was marching on our city and I'd be fighting Israel and knew about these laws, I'd relocate. For a city that decided to fight Israel, everyone was spared, but the guys. For a surrendering city, everyone was spared and was put to forced labor in Israel. This is what will happen to the Gibeonites after they trick Joshua, and it works out well for them. They worked with the Levites, close to the tabernacle, and they all became believing.

Vs. 16-18 Just for perspective on the law being given here, it's important to notice that the only land Israel was told to war against was Canaan, and there they were to take no prisoners for the reason mentioned in v. 18. This was God's punishment on the sickness of the people who lived

there. In order for Israel to become involved in any other conflict, the other cities and nations were the aggressors who attacked first. Most often, after Israel was attacked and defeated the army of the aggressor on the field, they went after the city the army came from.

Except for God's judgment on Canaan, Israel was never told to fight against anyone who didn't attack them first. Sihon and Og and the Midianites were examples of people who Israel tried to avoid and had no quarrel with, but who attacked Israel first. These lands became the possession of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh.

Vs. 19-20 I guess this fits into the compassion scenario. No wanton destruction was allowed. I think of Levi and Simeon when they destroyed Shechem. Even at the end of his life, Jacob condemned their uncontrolled, arrogant wrath and cruelty in wantonly laming the livestock in that city.

Luke 9:28-50

Vs. 28-36 Mark mentions that it was six days after Peter's confession of Jesus' identity (and Jesus' rebuke of Peter) when Jesus invites the guys up the mountain to pray. Then according to Luke, it was eight days after those events, while Jesus was praying that He was transfigured. Matthew and Mark mention this event too, but Luke is the only one who says what Jesus was doing when He began to glow. Kind of cool, huh?

Vs. 32 Apparently this must have happened near the evening, which would account for Peter and the boys being so tired.

As Jesus had predicted in 9:27, some standing there would see the glory of the Son before death.

Vs. 37-42 On the next day when they came down from the mountain, Luke mentions the story of healing the man's son. Now we see divine glory contrasted with human unbelief.

Vs. 43-45 In contrast to the glory of the transfiguration and to the majesty of Christ shown in healing the boy, Jesus strongly reminds them that things are not going to go the way the disciples think. This Son of Man would be rejected and killed. God's plan of redemption would lead Jesus to "defeat" and "disappointment," at least from the standpoint of the disciples' expectations. Isn't it funny that even the best of us, serving God in the harvest, still battle with our expectations in contrast to God's actions? We learn, too slowly, that He is wise beyond all of our thinking and does what is best for His purpose and plan. We simply follow, sometimes with no clue of what He's doing.

Vs. 46-48 As Jesus taught them of His coming death and resurrection, the only thing the disciples could grasp was the coming of the kingdom. They sort of had the right idea, but their motivation and expectations were all wrong. They would sit on thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel, but greatness was a matter of humility and service. Jesus used the example of a child and then said that the greatest was the one who was least among them.

Vs. 49-50 When Jesus said, *among you* (v. 48), John thought about someone they had seen when they went out preaching. They rebuked this other disciple because he was not "among" them. Jesus cautioned them. In the future they would be happy to see many new disciples of Jesus, even some who ate pork chops.

Psalm 73

This is an amazing psalm. Take your time here.

Vs. 1-3 Notice the conflict the writer has in all of what he humanly sees, feels and understands. Notice what it was doing to him personally, emotionally and spiritually.

Vs. 4-12 This block of verses is held together by the two “therefores.” Verse 6 talks about why they are so proud. Verse 10 talks about why people follow them. Apparently God allows them to prosper to test the hearts of men.

Vs. 13-15 This was the test to Asaph. What do you do when experience seems to contradict the Word of God?

Vs. 16-17 It is the seeking of God in this kind of situation, going to God, going to the Word, that saves the day. Notice that it wasn't until he went into the presence of God, in that quietness and closure, that he gained perspective on all of life and on all of the world. As disciples, this time and closure alone with the Lord is absolutely vital for us. We need to get alone with Him and the Word, and in that quietness we need time to pray and listen. Multitasking is not a spiritual discipline or virtue.

Vs. 18-22 It seems that Asaph is reflecting. Now that he knows the truth, he looks back at himself and how he almost gave up.

Vs. 23-24 But God continually held him even in this trial.

Vs. 25-26 are worth memorizing.

Vs. 27-28 Verse 27 is how he understands God will deal with the wicked. Notice that they are far from God. The contrast is in v. 28, and you are doing it now by drawing close to God in His Word. Even with His Spirit within us, finding His closeness in His Word is the only thing that truly helps and shields us from despair in this world.

Proverbs 12:10

Sounds like what we were talking about at the end of Deuteronomy 20, above. And I'll bet that they were even gentle with vegetation, for as J.R.R.R.R.R.R.R. Tolkien points out that only an orc wantonly cuts down trees.