

Bible Study – Deuteronomy Chapter 9 & 10 – The Authority Commandments

In the last study, we looked at the notions of “remembering” and “do not forget”: Remembering the things God did for the Israelites (and the Christian) and not forgetting His commands. The latter half was important as we looked at the carved images the Israelites encountered and how they were to destroy them so that they would not be led astray from God. Tonight, we will look at the state of the Israelite’s heart and the causes and dangers of living in this world while living for God.

Read Deuteronomy 9:1 – 6

Similar to chapter 7, where the Israelites were fearful of the inhabitants of the Promise Land, Moses singles out the Anakites, (one of the most feared people groups) who were to be devoted for destruction. This would be accomplished by God’s hand, while using the Israelites for this purpose. Moses warns the Israelites about self-righteousness and pride after this is accomplished. It is not because of the Israelites righteousness that they are to possess the land, but rather it is the wickedness of the nations that causes the inhabitants of the Promised Land to be driven out. He also adds that it is God confirming His promise to the patriarchs.

Q. Moses warns the Israelites not to think of themselves as more righteous than the people in the Promised Land, as they were not much better. What is the lesson or reminder that Moses is making here to the Israelites? Looking back, have there been times where you felt self righteous over others, especially over fellow brothers and sisters? How do we keep ourselves in check, to avoid self-righteousness or pride in our ‘holiness’ (Luke 18:9-14; Romans 12:3)?

- **Objective – God uses Israel for His purposes, not because of their righteousness, but because of His love for His people and his covenant with the patriarchs.**
- Any success the Israelites might enjoy in the coming conquest was not to be interpreted as a mark of divine approval for their own righteousness
- The lesson or reminder is that it wasn’t because of the Israel’s righteousness that they were taking the land, but rather it was the wickedness of the people in Canaan
- Therefore, Israel could not think it was their righteousness that merited God’s blessing
- In fact, they were credited as being ‘stubborn’ or ‘stiff-necked’, meaning they were unwilling to submit to God’s will for them
- It was also because of God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that they were to take possession of the Promised Land
- ** The second part of the question is meant for people to reflect in their own life and for them to share with the group, if they feel comfortable
 - The group leader can share their own experience in order to get people to share about their experience. If they cannot share one, they can cite an example that they have read about it
- **Luke 18:9-14** – The example of the Pharisee and the tax collector – We see the ‘self-righteousness’ of the Pharisee, saying how glad he was that he was not like the tax collector. However, the tax collector is the opposite, realizing he was a sinner and needed mercy in his life.
- Those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted
- We are making religion about ourselves and not about God
- **Romans 12:3** – We ought not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought
- We are all sinners and need God’s mercy and forgiveness in our lives
- God has chosen Christians, not because of our righteousness, but in spite of our sinfulness
- Excessive self-importance would erode Israel’s proper concept of God

Read Deuteronomy 9:7-29

Moses recounts Israel's rebellious nature towards God since the exodus from Egypt. He brings up the incidents at Taberah (Numbers 11:1-3), Massah (Exodus 17:1-7), Kibroth-hattaavah (Numbers 11:4-35), and Kadesh (Numbers 14). The incident that Moses focuses on is at Horeb (or Mount Sinai) and how the Israelites built themselves a golden calf, a little over one month since making the covenant with God (Exodus 32). This brought God's anger upon them, so much so that he was willing to wipe them out (v. 8, 14). It is only because of Moses intercession on their behalf that they were spared from annihilation.

Q. Moses focuses on the golden calf incident as this was a direct violation of the commands God gave to the Israelites concerning himself. We can see how the first two commandments are broken. How is the third commandment (Exodus 20:7) broken as well? What principle can you extract from this incident? How can you use that principle to govern how you observe this commandment?

- **Objective – To not attribute characteristics to God that would profane His name**
- The third commandment is broken when one attributes the name of God (and reputation) to something that is inconsistent with His character
- By calling the created image a "God" that lead Israel out of Egypt, which was made out of human hands, debases who God really was, thereby taking His name in vain or not attributing the true nature of God's name as intended
- The principle here is that the name of God should be held in high esteem and not to be attributed to anything else that would change its definition
- We must be careful on how we remember and attribute the name of God when we call on Him or refer to Him
- The qualities and character of God must match when we use his name (e.g. God is the ultimate Judge who judges according to his standards. He is not like those on earth, who may be swayed or easily bribed so to compare our earthly judges to Him would not be correct)
- If we don't attribute the character of God correctly, then He is longer the God that he claims to be, and therefore no longer a God to be worshipped

Q. When Moses broke the two tablets, it symbolized the broken covenant between God and Israel due to their sin. Moses' intercessory prayer (one that 'reminds' the Lord of His promises until they are fulfilled) to God on behalf of Israel can be a model for us. From verses 25-29, pick out the four key points of that prayer. Does Moses' reaction (e.g. fear for the people) give you pause to think how serious your disobedience towards God is affecting your relationship with Him?

- **Objective – To remember God's faithfulness to Israel (and to us) and to hold onto them when pleading for God's forgiveness**
- Moses asked for mercy upon Israel because of God's past faithfulness to them
- Moses asked for mercy upon Israel because of God's past faithfulness to the patriarchs
- Moses asked for mercy upon Israel because of concern for the glory of God's own name and His reputation among the nation
- Moses asked for mercy upon Israel because they were God's people
- We can seek the mercy and power of God through prayer by praying with the same heart and by pleading the same reasons before the LORD
 - Prayer on solid reasons like these is far more effective than merely casting wishes up towards heaven
 - Because of God's past faithfulness to us
 - Because of His past faithfulness to our forefathers
 - Because of His own glory and reputation among the nations
 - Because we are His people

- Keeping these things in mind is also a way to refine our prayers. When we pray only for the things consistent with God's glory, we have our hearts set on the right things.
- With the second part of the question, it is meant for people to reflect upon their own life and to understand the seriousness of their sin and what 'harm' it causes
- The picture to convey is how Jesus (and the Holy Spirit) intercedes on our behalf with God, pleading for our lives.
- Or, thinking of someone who loves you and steps in to prevent you from being punished (e.g. one parent stepping in to prevent the other parent from punishing you for your disobedience)
- Moses here is a type of Christ, interceding on behalf of Israel with God, so that they may be spared from punishment for their disobedience

Read Deuteronomy 10:1 – 11

Moses shows how God is renewing the covenant with Israel by 'recreating' the ten commandments on a set of new tablets (Exodus 34:27-28), which were to be placed in a wooden ark (Exodus 25:10-22, 37:1-9). Moses also shows how God is still merciful and bestows grace upon His chosen people in light of their blatant idolatry. The main reason for this is His love for them, which is evidenced in how God raises up another high priest for Israel, the appointment of the Levites to minister and pronounce blessings, and to allow the Israelites to continue onwards to the Promised Land, despite their blatant disobedience to God.

Q. In this portion of scripture, we are shown evidence of God's grace and mercy to the Israelites as a result of Moses' prayer. How have you experienced God's grace in your life after failing to obey or love Him like you should? Have you been grateful for the mercy and grace that was shown to you?

- **Objective – For people to reflect on God's mercy in their life**
- It is good for people to remember against ourselves, with sorrow and shame, our former sins, and to review the records our conscience keeps of them, that we may see how much we are indebted to free grace, and may humbly own that we never merited at God's hand any thing but wrath and the curse.
- We should be grateful for His mercy and grace in our lives as this is evidence of His love for His people. If we are ungrateful, then we may attribute all the good that comes in our lives to our own works and ability.

Read Deuteronomy 10:12 – 22

Moses concludes his recital of the events of Mount Sinai by imploring the Israelites to fear the Lord as a way to live out their life. They are to do specific acts, such as walk in obedience, serve Him wholeheartedly, and to observe the commands and decrees. He goes on to show how much God loves the Israelites, by choosing them out of all nations to be the recipients of His affection. He also commands them to circumcise their hearts and to no longer be a stubborn and rebellious people because of who God is, the supreme being and one of justice. Moses concludes with the call to fear the Lord, giving the reasons of the wonderful and mighty acts He has performed to save Israel and the continuing fulfillment of his promise to the patriarchs, citing the growth of this numerous nation.

Q. Moses calls for the Israelites to "Circumcise their hearts". How would you explain that term in your own words (Romans 2:25-29)? Why was it a necessary first step for the Israelites (and believers) to take (Jeremiah 4:4)? What does this say about salvation and sanctification? How does this practically look in the Christian's life?

- Circumcise Your Hearts – It refers to having a pure heart, separated unto God (**Romans 2:29**)
- Using circumcision as a metaphor, Paul says that only the Holy Spirit can purify a heart and set us apart to God
- Following the law could not make a person right with God. Rather a person's heart must change.
- In this context, God wanted more from His people than just external conformity to a set of rules. He always wanted them to possess a heart to love, know, and follow Him.
- **Jeremiah 4:4** – God's priority was a spiritual circumcision of the heart
- Regarding salvation and sanctification, there is a need for repentance and inward change in order to be right with God. In Jesus, the Law has been fulfilled (Matthew 5:17). Through Him, a person can be made right with God and receive eternal life.
- True circumcision is a matter of the heart, performed by the Spirit of God
- For the Christian, we need to depend on God for our salvation and sanctification, asking for His strength to live each day. There is a need to rely on Him for everything and not by our own strength and knowledge.

Moses warns Israel to no longer be a stubborn people and to yield to the commandments and ordinances that God gave them so that they could live according to the way God intended for them. Moses also warns the Israelites not to think of themselves as righteous, that they made themselves acceptable in God's eyes, thereby lessen the need for God's mercy and grace, ultimately diminishing His name. This is something that Christians should be mindful of. We are all sinners, but by the grace of God, have been saved and now can live the life He intended for us. We are to be merciful and patient with those who are struggling to live a holy life. We should not think of ourselves higher than we ought (Romans 12:3), but to live in humility and know that it is only by the blood of Jesus Christ that makes us holy and righteous before God.