

A Present from the Past

March 12 — *Deuteronomy 1:1-3:20*

Day 71 — 294 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We started the book of *Deuteronomy*, which means “second law.” However, it is not a new set of laws but a restatement of the laws already given to Moses and the people of Israel. The book is primarily comprised of speeches that Moses gave just before the people entered into Canaan. His words, which are really the Lord’s words, were to be a guidebook for them when living in the Promised Land.

Before Moses restated the laws, he took time to recount Israel’s 40-year history, since leaving Mt. Sinai. He told of Israel’s coming to Canaan the first time and of its rejection of the Lord’s gift after hearing the discouraging reports from the scouting party. He reminded them why the previous generation had died in the desert because of their rebellion and lack of faith.

Finally, he shared how the Lord brought them into the land east of the Jordan River. Though God had given them instructions not to harm any of the people of that land, they had no choice but to defend themselves after they were attacked by Kings Sihon and Og. As a result of their defeating these two kingdoms, God gave Israel their land; and, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh would settle that land as their inheritance.

On the surface, this retelling of Israel’s history may seem unnecessary, but it is not. For many people in the crowd, especially children, this might have been the first time they had heard the story told, certainly by Moses himself. Furthermore, their story was written down here for future generations to know. It is typical of us over time, especially if we do not write it down, to lose what has transpired in the past. **The lessons of the past are good teachers for those living in the present.** Not only can we be reminded of what God has done for us, but

we can also learn from the mistakes of our predecessors. So much of knowing who we are and what we are to be about stems from having in mind where we’ve come from and what has brought us to this point in life. Thus, **it is a good practice to be familiar with those who have gone before us.**

Daily Reflection

What has been your experience with reading and reminding yourself of your history? Have you discovered the value of knowing the past?

Reminding yourself of the history of the world or of your nation is one thing, but what about the history of your family? Do you know much about what has happened with your relatives? Why or why not?

Consider documenting what God has done in your life, not only for your benefit but for the benefit of those to come.

Stay Focused

March 13 — *Deuteronomy 3:21-5:23*

Day 72 — 293 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Moses continued his retelling of the exodus journey, specifically Israel's experience at Mt. Sinai. Of the time spent there, he reminded the people of the covenant God made with them and the laws He gave them in the Ten Commandments.

In the process of repeating those statutes, Moses pointed out that this type of relationship with a god has never happened before, that Israel was privileged with a unique situation. "Search all of history, from the time God created people on the earth until now. Then search from one end of the heavens to the other. See if anything as great as this has ever happened before. Has any nation ever heard the voice of God? Has any other god taken a nation for Himself by rescuing it from another by means of trials, miraculous signs, wonders, war, awesome power, and terrifying acts? Yet that is what the Lord your God did for you in Egypt, right before your very eyes" (4:32-35).

In essence, Moses said that Israel had been given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and he was pleading with them not to mess up. But how could the Israelites possibly mess up? How could they forfeit this great opportunity? By getting distracted and failing to follow through with the commitment they made.

Moses warned them, "Watch out! Be very careful never to forget what you have seen the Lord do for you. Do not let these things escape from your mind as long as you live! You must obey all the commands of the Lord your God, following His instructions in every detail" (4:9; 5:32).

Our spiritual enemy would do everything in his power to distract them from faithfulness and obedience to God. He does the same in our lives, **whatever it takes to distract us from our devotion to Christ.** That's why obedience

is so important. It keeps us grounded. It keeps us anchored and doesn't allow for us to float away with every passing trend or so-called "truth." We must follow where the Lord leads and do what He says. **The difficulty lies in avoiding the many distractions that come our way.**

Daily Reflection

Besides being obedient to the words and ways of God, what are some things you can do to avoid the distractions that the Devil may send your way?

Have you fallen prey to distractions, or are you holding to your commitment to the Lord?

"I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 *Corinthians 11:3*). Don't let that happen to you! **Keep your focus and keep your faith.**

We Will Remember

March 14 — Deuteronomy 6:1-9:29

Day 73 — 292 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

God spoke through Moses to the people of Israel and offered some clear warnings before they entered into the Promised Land. They had come a long way with the Lord; yet, from the beginning, they had been prone to wander. God said to them, "You have been rebelling against the Lord as long as I have known you" (9:24).

His warnings boiled down to this — *Israel needed a good memory*. For God was about to bless them more than they could imagine, because of His love for them and their forefathers. However, **sometimes the results of God's favor can lead one to believe that he is responsible for his own success**. "The Lord humbled you in the wilderness so that you would never think that it was your own strength and energy that made you wealthy. *Always remember that it is the Lord your God who gives you power to become rich...*" (8:17, 18).

In short, **oftentimes with God's blessings comes a short memory**. "When you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live in, and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, that is the time to be careful. Do not become proud at that time and forget the Lord your God..." (8:12-14).

The consequences of forgetting the Lord's goodness are not so good. "I assure you of this — if you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods (like the god of self), worshipping and bowing down to them, you will certainly be destroyed" (8:19). These warnings were straight forward and serious. The people needed a good memory so as not to forget what the Lord had done for them. The word "remember" is used 227 times in the Bible. *It seems that the Lord wants us not to forget*.

Daily Reflection

When the Puritans escaped persecution in England and came to America (1630-1640), they experienced peace and prosperity. However, within two generations, their fervent faith had dissolved and, instead, self-reliance became common place. Pastor Cotton Mather wrote of them, "Religion begat prosperity, but the daughter devoured the mother." Their obedience to God's commands produced liberty and wealth, all of which they took for granted and credited their own strength and ingenuity.

Are we not the same today? When things are going well, we tend to forget the Lord and deceive ourselves in thinking that we are doing fine, that we've got everything under control. We too, like Israel, need a good memory, to remember that it is the Lord who is behind our success, granting His favor on all that we do.

What can you do to remember the Lord? What can you do to avoid forgetting all His benefits?

The answer for Israel was in these instructions: "Commit wholeheartedly these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house..." (6:6-9).

A forgetful memory reflects a proud heart.

A Blessing and a Curse

Today In Your Reading...

Moses set forth a stern warning: "Today I am giving you the choice between a blessing and a curse! You will be blessed if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today. You will receive a curse if you reject the commands of the Lord your God and turn from His way by worshipping false gods" (11:26-28). Moses then laid out specific blessings that Israel would experience for their national obedience, but he also prescribed destruction for the nation if it chose to be disobedient and rebellious. Here lies a lesson for us all.

From our passages today, from what happens later in the Bible, and from observing history, it seems that there is an undeniable truth pertaining to the life and longevity of nations, that **the stability of a nation is directly linked to the morality of that nation**. It is obvious from the beginning of time that nations have risen and fallen in a continuous cycle, but the constant between them all is the fact that *all of them have declined morally until their ultimate destruction* and disappearance.

Moral decline should not surprise us since nations are simply comprised of sinful men, and sinners, in their natural state, are bent towards immorality and evil. But God told Israel that if it wanted to survive and if it wanted to succeed, then it would need to obey His commandments. **His commandments, what He says is right, are the standards of morality, for Israel and for all nations.**

He is not just the God of the Israelites but the God of the earth. "The highest heavens and the earth and everything in it belongs to the Lord your God" (10:14). Perhaps, then, we should take note. For **our nation will be blessed or cursed depending on how well we adhere to the moral standards of God.**

Did you notice what God said about the nations that lived in Canaan already? "These nations have committed many detestable acts that the Lord hates, all in the name of their gods. They have even burned their sons and daughters as sacrifices to their gods" (12:31).

Later, God told the prophet Jeremiah, "At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it. If that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring upon it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it. If it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it" (18:7-10).

Daily Reflection

God is the God of all nations. He reigns over them all for He made them all, and they are accountable to Him for their ways. **They cannot do what they want. They must live by God's standards or face the penalties.**

How well is your nation following the commandments of God? Can you determine from your answer the nearness of its fall and eventual destruction?

Pray for your nation. Pray for God's patience. Pray for your leaders, that they will have the wisdom to choose the way of blessing — God's way — and not the way of the curse.

Spiritual Self-Defense

Today In Your Reading...

Moses reviewed God’s instructions pertaining to clean and unclean animals, the Sabbatical year, and the Feasts of Passover, Harvest, and Shelters. He also gave some very stern warnings against idolatry, saying “Suppose your brother, son, daughter, beloved wife, or closest friend comes to you secretly and says, ‘Let us go worship other gods,’ gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known... Do not give in or listen, and have no pity.” In fact, God says, “Do not spare or protect them. You must put them to death! You must be the one to initiate the execution” (13:6-9).

Clearly, we can see how serious a matter idolatry was to God, if He permitted taking another person’s life because of it. **He demanded holiness and faithfulness of His people, and idolatry crossed both of these lines.** A person who worshipped idols broke faith with God and, eventually, one’s pagan idolatry led him to unholy or forbidden acts.

I am certainly not suggesting that we treat people like this today, for the laws in our country are quite a bit different. We cannot kill people because we suspect them of idol worship. However, here’s a reasonable way to apply this warning to our lives today. The God of the Old Testament is still the same today. His nature and character have not changed, neither have His standards of holiness nor His attitude towards idolatry. Although we are not permitted to take another person’s life because of this “spiritual assault,” **we are obligated to protect our own lives from “spiritual assault.”**

As believers, it is so important that we surround ourselves with godly influences, people who are like-minded and who will build us up in Christ, education resources that are God-honoring, entertainment that is wholesome, and

media that does not tear down our faith. **Whatever and whomever attempts to distract or derail us from our devotion to Christ should be eliminated or disconnected.** We must protect our hearts and minds from the enemy. Otherwise, we may become like the ancient Israelites, prey to any and all ungodly, harmful influences that the world has to offer.

Daily Reflection

God is serious about your faithfulness to Him, but are you? How are you proactively protecting yourself from “spiritual assault”? Who or what are you allowing to influence your heart and mind?

What is the most difficult thing to ward off? Set up your strongest defenses there.

“Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

Godly Influence

Today In Your Reading...

Moses continued giving instructions before Israel's invasion of the Promised Land. He covered several important topics, such as organizing a justice system, the inheritance of the Levites, abstaining from the demonic activities of Canaan, cities of refuge, laws of landmarks and warfare, and, finally, how to deal with mysterious murders.

Also in Moses' message, there were included two prophecies. First, Moses mentioned a day in Israel's future when it would be led by kings. He alluded to prideful sins kings should not do (which will be done by future kings of Israel, namely Solomon). Second, Moses foreshadowed the coming of a great Prophet whom God would raise up from among the people, a prophet in whose mouth would be the very words of God. Of course, this prophecy is about Christ, who, in the New Testament, is linked to Moses' description (*Luke 7:16; Acts 3:22*).

As I considered today's passage, I was tempted to follow several leads; but the verses that challenged me most were those related to kings and their knowledge of the Scriptures. "When he sits on the throne as king," God said, "he must copy these laws on a scroll for himself in the presence of the Levitical priests. He must always keep this copy of the law with him and read it daily as long as he lives. That way he will learn to fear the Lord his God by obeying all the terms of the law. This regular reading will prevent him from becoming proud and acting as if he is above his fellow citizens. It will also prevent him from turning away from these commands in the smallest way..." (*17:18-20*).

It is clear that God expects leaders to know His Word, so that they might fear Him, follow His instructions, and influence others to do likewise. In a sense, *everyone is a leader*. Leader-

ship is influence, and everyone has influence. Therefore, everyone is a leader. Each of us influences or leads in some way, positively or negatively. We lead our families, our churches, our workplaces, and our relationships with friends.

Whatever the case, here is the formula for successful leadership: **read and know the Scriptures, fear the Lord, and influence others to do likewise**. Years ago, I discovered this to be one of God's purposes for my life. I was challenged by the example of Ezra, the High Priest, who "set his heart to study the law of the Lord, to practice it, and to teach it among the people" (*7:10*). **Christ-centered influence and life-changing leadership begin with God's Word**. *Read it, know it, and live it*. Others will take notice and follow your lead.

Daily Reflection

Who are some of the people or groups whom you lead or influence? List them here.

You have influence. How do you wish to use it?

Do This So That

March 18 — Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19

Day 77 — 288 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We continued the Lord's list of rules and regulations for living in the land of Canaan. For several days now, Moses has been touching on different topics, but today was like no other. He mentioned at least three dozen issues, including some humdingers like transgender cross-dressing, sex changes, adultery, divorce, rape, usury (charging interest for loaned money), and kidnapping. You name it, we covered it!

In the midst of this mixture of laws, Moses did manage to throw in a prophecy or two. First, he foreshadowed Jesus' death on the cross by telling Israel that "if someone has committed a crime worthy of death and is executed and, then, hanged on a tree, the body must never remain on the tree overnight. You must bury the body that same day, for anyone hanging on a tree is cursed by God" (21:22, 23). Paul alluded to this prophecy in *Galatians 3:13*, explaining that Jesus "became the curse of the Law for us" and died on a tree in our place.

Second, Moses instructed the Israelites to eliminate the Amalekites for their unnecessary attack during their exodus from Egypt. This command was fulfilled through King Saul and the Amalekites were destroyed (1 *Samuel 15:1-3*).

As I read the multitude of laws today, I must admit that I lost focus. They all ran together and became one big blur. So many rules and so specific! Perhaps like you, I began asking myself, "Why am I reading these? What's the purpose for all of this stuff? That's when I hunted down the reason why it was all recorded in the first place. Then, it all made sense.

"Be careful to obey every command I am giving you today, *so that* you may have strength to go in and occupy the land..., *so that* you will enjoy a long life in the land..., *so that* the Lord will

send the rains in their proper seasons..., *so that* your children may flourish in the land..., and *so that* the Lord will drive out all the nations in your land..." (11:8, 9, 14, 21, 23).

What I found was that all of these commandments, however strange to us, were given *so that* God could bless His people for their obedience. In other words, **God's laws were given for their good.**

We must never get caught up in all that we are asked to do (or not do), but rather we must remember that *God's Word is for our good.* **He commands so that we might follow, so that He might bless.**

Daily Reflection

Jesus said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is He who loves Me; and He who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and I will disclose Myself to Him" (*John 14:21 NASB*). What is the "so that" mentioned here? Why is it important to obey the Lord?

Remember, the Christian life is not about following a set of rules. **We obey the Lord because we love the Lord**, not to earn His favor. However, there are expectations that He has for His followers. Do you know what they are? Have you been quick to do them? Your love for Christ is reflected in your obedience to Him. **Can you truly say that you love Him and live a life that honors His commands?**