

Sunday, October 22, 2017 Brad Barrett

## Deuteronomy 12-26 Week 10 Love the Word of God

If you've ever read the OT, you've come across some commands that you simply don't know what to do with.

*Deuteronomy 14:21 ESV* "You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk."

What? Why? Has anyone here ever disobeyed this command? No one? Surely someone has sinned. :)

*Deuteronomy 15:7 ESV* "If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother,

OK, we like this one. This makes sense.

*Deuteronomy 22:22 ESV* "If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel.

Capital punishment for adultery!! Umm, awkward pause. We're not sure what to do with this.

*Deuteronomy 19:15 ESV* "A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established."

OK, that makes sense. In fact, this one is all over the Bible, both OT and NT.

*Deuteronomy 14:3-4,7 ESV* "You shall not eat any abomination. These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat... Yet of those that chew the cud or have the hoof cloven you shall not eat these: the camel, the hare, and the rock badger..."

Israel was forbidden from eating certain foods. Are we? If not, why not?

What do we do with such commands? Some of them, we say, "Well, of course I don't need to avoid eating certain animals. Of course we're not going to exert capital punishment on adultery. And the cooking the goat in its mother's milk? Not a problem." But of other commands we think, "Well, yeah, that's OK. Two or three witnesses? That sounds good. Taking care of the poor? Obviously yes."

But why do we make such distinctions? Can we explain why? Are we really supposed to pick some and avoid others?

The broader question, though, is, "What do we do with the Old Testament?"

This Fall, we are going through a fascinating OT book called Deuteronomy. The title means, "Second law." That is, the second time Moses lays out God's laws for Israel. The first time was in Exodus.

We need to decide what we are to do with the OT. Do we pick and choose between commands? Should we do it all? Is it relevant at all? After this morning, I hope and pray you will understand the OT better. In a way, I'm going to give you a Bible Walk Thru. It's a tall order. Perhaps we're going to cover too much.

But I absolutely love what we're going to cover this morning. And I hope you'll understand the Bible better. And therefore love it more. And read it. And grow from it.

### Deuteronomy 12-26

So far in Deuteronomy, we've been covering a chapter or two each week. A nice pace, cruising along at 30 mph down the city street on a quiet Sunday morning. Today, however, we're punching the gas pedal down. We'll hit the speed of sound. We're covering 15 chapters!! Almost half the book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy is written in the form we could describe as three sermons. Today, we are in Moses' second sermon, the longest one. From Chapter 5 thru Chapter 26.

As I mentioned last week, in these first portion of this sermon, Moses does lay out some commands.

Those commands answer, "What is the Lord's will"... "What does He want"..... but mostly in general terms like love, serve, and obey the Lord, (e.g., Deut 10:12-13).

In the first portion of this sermon, Moses also reveals the *nature of the Lord*, "Who is the Lord", such as he is the God of gods, he is our praise, he is mighty and awesome.

But now here in chapters 12-26, Moses gets quite specific in the Lord's commands on a wide variety of topics. And he focuses mostly on, "What is his will," and not much on "Who is the Lord." And along with these many commands, Moses reveals many promises of blessing and warnings of curses. He is teaching them how they are to live in the promised land as God's loved, covenant people.

### Types of Commands in Ch. 12-16.

When you read through these 15 chapters, there is not an obvious organization to all this. To my mind, there is some randomness. But the Lord had his reasons, even if they are unknown to us. We already looked at five of those commands: *Don't boil a goat in its mother's milk. Help the poor.* Etc.

Here are some additional sample commands.

*Deuteronomy 14:22 ESV* “You shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year.

Israel was to give 1/10 to the Lord. It was for worship. And it was also to provide for the Levites and priests. And chapter 26 is entirely about firstfruits and tithes.

*Deuteronomy 16:18 ESV* “You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment.

They were to faithfully administer justice. The Lord is a righteous Judge!

*Deuteronomy 16:1 ESV* “Observe the month of Abib [A-bib] and keep the Passover to the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib [A-bib] the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night.

The Passover was just one of three annual feasts for Israel listed in Deuteronomy. Basically these were national holidays. Literally, holy-days. These were noteworthy celebrations! At least two of them were week-long!!

I find it remarkable how much emphasis the Lord placed on worshiping him in community. Certainly they could worship individually in prayer and song, but he placed a high priority on community.

Other categories of commands in Deuteronomy:

- Worship the Lord only, not false gods like the Canaanites worshiped. (And like Israel herself had done.)
- Care for the Levites and priests. Provide financially for them, for they are Israel’s mediator with God.
- Treatment of slaves. He reminds them that they, too, were once slaves in Egypt. So show mercy.
- Justice. e.g., have two or three witnesses before a charge is brought against someone.
- Warfare.
- Marriage and divorce.
- Sexual purity.

And there are many, many more commands in Exodus and Leviticus.

### **WHY ALL THESE COMMANDS??**

Most commands are rather obvious as to why:

- Justice.
- Helping the poor.
- Caring for the Levites and priests so they can do their work for Israel.
- Loving the Lord first.

But some of the commands—probably a *small percentage*-- we don’t understand WHY the Lord gave them.

For example, the prohibition from cooking a goat in its mother’s milk may have been because the Canaanite people had a pagan religious rite that did just that. If so, the Lord wanted them to avoid such pagan practices and thus walk in holiness.

But honestly, we can’t be 100% certain.

Of this we can be sure:

1. All of the Lord’s commands were for Israel’s good.

We looked at this last week:

*Deuteronomy 10:13 ESV* “...keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good...”

The Lord is not some tyrant who recklessly and selfishly imposes his will on his people. The Lord loved his covenant people, and wanted to pour out goodness on them. His commands, including the Centerpiece of the Covenant, the Ten Commandments, were all for the well-being of the people.

2. He wanted his covenant people to walk in holiness. To glorify him. To love him with all their hearts.
3. Even if we don’t understand WHY the Lord gave some commands, be assured the Lord had reasons. Israel may have understood why. But even if they didn’t, the Lord had purposes in them all.

### **What is a Covenant?**

Before going further, we need to ask, “Why is there an Old Testament and a New Testament?”

First, what is a Testament? A testament is a covenant. The Bible has an Old Covenant and a New Covenant.

What is a Covenant? A covenant is an agreement. Like a contract. In this case, this is a covenant of relationship. God is establishing a covenant relationship with his people. I was at a wedding yesterday. A marriage between a man and a woman is a covenant. “I promise to be faithful to you always.... For better or for worse, in sickness and in health.” This is a covenant agreement.

So with Israel through Moses, God made a covenant. The Ten Commandments are the representation of that covenant. But it’s more than just Ten straightforward commands.

There are three conditions to this covenant.

1. Walk with me. Love me. Obey me. Then I will bless you. I will dump blessings on you. I long to bring you good. Just after delivering Israel out of Egypt, the Lord spoke these words to Moses for Israel.

*Exodus 19:5-6 ESV* “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

We can see that at its core, this covenant is a covenant for an intimate relationship between Almighty God and the descendants of Abraham and Jacob. It’s beautiful, glorious. The Lord loved them. And within that covenant relationship, he wants Israel to love him and obey him. To follow all the commandments—including the Ten Commandments—that he gives to them..

2. Rebel against me. Ignore me. Disobey me. Then I will bring curses upon you. And even send the nation into exile to distant countries. I will cast you out of my presence. I will send you out of this Promised Land into exile.
3. But if and when you repent and humble yourself....Then I will restore you to the land and to myself. I will show mercy.

If you understand these three conditions, you understand the history of Israel in the OT. This cycle happened over and over and over again. This is important we understand this.

## The New Covenant

So a Testament is a Covenant. So this 75% of my Bible is the Old Covenant. What is our relationship with it today? How should we treat it? This is a huge question. And we cannot cover everything this morning. Your bulletin insert gives an overview with numerous Scriptures. Study that.

### ***But let me state this rather plainly:***

We are not under the Old Covenant. The covenant to Israel. Particularly, the conditions to the Old Covenant are not for us. And the commands in the Old Covenant are not for us.

Let me repeat that: The commands written in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy are not commands to us.

We are under a new covenant. It is the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. This New Covenant replaced the Old Covenant to Israel. And this New Covenant applies not just to Israel but to the entire world.

The prophet Jeremiah in 600 B.C. told Israel of this coming New Covenant. This is very important! This is one of the most important prophecies in the Bible. It points to Jesus.

*Jeremiah 31:31–34 ESV* “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord.

Note the failure of Israel. The problem was not with God or the covenant. The problem was with the people.

<sup>33</sup> *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*

The Lord told Jeremiah, This covenant is unlike the one I made before. It is different. The premises of the covenant are not written on stone, like the Ten Commandments. God will do something new and special. He will write this decree on the hearts of his covenant people. This New Covenant was enacted when Jesus died and rose from the dead.

You see, God had a Master Plan. He had a Master Plan to send His Son into the world to reach the uttermost parts of the earth with his Mercy and his Salvation.

Now let’s look at the NT to see how all this ties together.

In one of the first great evangelical proclamations of this New Covenant, Peter said this:

*Acts 3:22–25 ESV* “Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’”

Peter quotes from Deuteronomy 18!! The Law points to Jesus Christ. Israel was told someone else was coming!

*“And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’”*

All the prophets of Israel have spoken in one way or another of this coming New Covenant and the Person of Jesus Christ.

And the last sentence is from Genesis: “All the families of the earth will be blessed through you.” The Great Descendant of Abraham who has brought blessing to the entire world is who? Jesus Christ.

I wish we had time to go back and talk about this glorious promise—a covenant—that the Lord made to Abraham. That covenant is actually foundational to both the old and the new covenants.

Then New Covenant of Jesus Christ to the whole world is founded upon the covenant to Abraham. It is foretold by Moses in Deuteronomy. It is foretold by the all the prophets.

## A New and Better Covenant

So let me say this again, and say it plainly: We are under a new and better covenant. The best single place I can send you in the NT to understand this better is in the Book of Hebrews. Read the Book of Hebrews, especially chapters 8,9,10. God didn't make a mistake.

### **Better mediator.**

I need to give some background. Within the tribe of Levi were the priests. Priests were mediators between God and man. The sacrifices they offered up to God first had to be offered for themselves. For their own sin. Plus, they were mere mortals, and they would die, and new priests would be raised up.

They were only temporary means.

*Hebrews 7:24–25 ESV* “...but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

But Jesus Christ is the Great High Priest. He rose from the dead and now lives forever in glory in heaven. And because of that, he offers his own blood up directly to God the Father in heaven. His sacrifice is good for all time.

He is the better mediator. Better than the priests of the Old Covenant. He is the perfect, eternal mediator.

The New Covenant also has....

### **Better sacrifice**

Israel was given a means of atonement by offering the blood of an animal in place of their own blood. This would atone for their sins. God was merciful in allowing a substitute. But that blood was just an animal, and it couldn't cleanse deep within the soul, and it wasn't permanent. Each year more blood needed to be offered.

### **But Jesus changed that.**

*Hebrews 9:13–14 ESV* For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Jesus Christ is God's Lamb. His blood—the Blood of the Innocent Son of God—was a one-time sacrifice that could cleanse deep within. And cleanse once for all time. Jesus Christ took the curse of God that we deserved for our sins. The New Covenant has a better sacrifice than the Old Covenant.

### **Failure of the people**

The reason God gave a new covenant was because the people failed in the old Covenant. God did not fail. The people did.

*Hebrews 8:8 ESV* “For he finds fault with them when he says: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...”

The Lord finds fault with the people. The failure was on their part. So he quotes Jeremiah 31 to prove God's eternal plan of salvation through his Son. Though the covenant through Moses was good and beautiful and glorious, man is simply too weak. Too sinful. This was no surprise to the Lord. He made no mistakes. He planned all along to send his Son.

The New Covenant is better in every way.

For example, Israel under the Old Covenant could be cast out of the Lord's presence. Through Jesus Christ and the New Covenant, we who belong to Christ will NEVER be cast from his presence.

*Hebrews 13:5 ESV* “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

And related to that is that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our redemption. In Israel, the Holy Spirit would come and go. Not so for us in Jesus Christ.

## Some Things Have Not Changed

To clarify, let me state two things that have not changed from the OT to the NT.

FIRST, God's nature has not changed: he is great, mighty, holy, and merciful. We *looked at this last week*. The God of the OT is the same God of the NT.

SECOND, salvation—forgiveness and righteousness—is by faith in both the OT and NT. Israel was never saved simply by a strict adherence to all the Laws. Often when we're reading Deuteronomy and other OT books, it sounds like Israel was saved by her works. But salvation has always been by faith in God and his promises. Israel was saved by trusting in God and in the promises he gave them in their Covenant. Today, we are saved by trusting in God and in the promises he gives in Jesus Christ. Salvation is by faith, not by works. I don't have time to make the case this morning. READ ROMANS 4. The Apostle Paul makes the case.

Obedience to him is important, but it's because obedience is simply the natural outworking of true faith. If you believe God is God, that he is Holy and Just and Merciful, then you will walk with him in obedience. Not perfectly, but your general course of life is to do what God says.

## We Are Under a New and Better Covenant

Let me go back to an earlier point. In Jesus Christ, we are under a New and Better covenant. We are not under the Old Covenant. We are not bound by the Laws Moses gave to Israel.

We now follow the New Covenant and all it entails. We who are in Christ and forgiven by him are not bound by the OT law.

That doesn't mean we are now free from commands or restraints. NO!! Jesus Christ is our Lord, and we are to offer up our lives now in freedom and joy to him. He is Lord. We follow him and obey all that he says. And all that his followers—the APOSTLES—say.

We don't follow the OT commands. We look instead to the NT. Now, admittedly, many commands in the OT and the NT are the same. e.g., Love the Lord with all our hearts; Love your neighbor. Care for the poor.

But we look to the NT for our direction.

## How to Deal with OT Today

### *So how do we treat the OT today?*

Does all this mean the OT is worthless? Should we even read Deuteronomy?

We have just blazed through a Bible Walk Thru of sorts. What do we do now?

Although the new covenant is the active "contract" with God's people, the old covenant is still true, profitable (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Here are four ways the OT benefits us today.

First, from the Old Testament we learn about the nature of God, man, *creation*, sin, judgment, redemption, and more. We miss out on so much truth if we don't understand what the OT reveals.

Second, we can learn from examples in the Old Testament, whether warnings against disobedience or *inspiration from men and women of faith*. Hebrews 11 is a powerful example of this.

Third, we see how the entire Bible is one book. I read through the entire Bible every year, and I am never tired of seeing the UNITY of this book. God has this remarkable plan over centuries that all points to Jesus Christ.

Fourth, the OT contains *prophecies* that have not yet been fulfilled concerning the second coming of the Messiah so we eagerly study such prophecies to anticipate events to come.

## Why I Love the OT

Here's your application for today:

Read the OT. Love it. Learn from it. Grow because of it.

*Romans 15:4 ESV "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."*

As a young believer, I focused mostly on the NT for several years. I studied it. Dug into it. Outlined many of the epistles. Then as the years went on, I added the OT to my reading. It took a while to get a basic understanding of people, events, nations, timeframes. The more I understood, the more I valued it.

I love the OT. Along with the NT, I read it most mornings as part of my reading through the Bible each year for the past 25 years.

- I love learning about who God is, knowing him better. His power. Holiness. Compassion. He is the same God today as he was.
- I learn about his passion for good for his people. He wants their good. Deut 10:13 last week.
- I love the faith stories of people like Abraham, Moses, Ruth, and Nehemiah.
- I learn that God's plan has been to fulfill the covenant with Abraham by bringing his Son in a new and better covenant. I am amazed by God's wisdom and foresight to bring his Son for us.
- I learn how God is a covenant God who keeps his Word. He kept his promises to Abraham. He kept his promises to Moses and Israel. He will keep his promises through his Son, Jesus.

*God can be trusted.*