

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

GOD DELIVERS

GOD THE LAWGIVER

The Law's Blessing and Curse

Our final lesson for this quarter takes us to the book of Deuteronomy. Moses is near the end of his 120 years. He had spent the first 40 years of his life in the royal courts of Egypt, the next years 40 years as a shepherd in Midian and his final 40 years in the spiritual exercise of leading the Israelites to the edge of the land originally promised to the descendents of Abraham. Due to one act of disobedience over a period of 40 years, the LORD denied Moses entrance into the Promised Land. Although during his lifetime Moses had experienced a close relationship with the LORD, he was still accountable for all of his actions before God. Moses' experience of being denied entrance into the Promised Land is a warning for us today that we too are accountable to God for our disobedience. Scripture does not teach that after we have accepted God's great salvation, we will be denied entrance into heaven because of some sin we commit. All of our sins are covered by the ultimate once-for-all sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross. However, disobedience does often cause us to miss blessings we might have otherwise experienced.

Our personal 'family stories' are often retold when a family gets together for the sake of younger ones who have never heard the stories and for those who want to hear them again. Moses realized that his own death was approaching and he wanted to share God's Word with the Israelites again. The word Deuteronomy literally means a "retelling or repetition of the law." Deuteronomy contains his farewell talks to children and grandchildren of the families who came out of Egypt. It was God's law that the Jewish people pass on God's Word to the next generation. *Psalm 78:5-7 (ESV)* ⁵ *He established... a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children,* ⁶ *that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children,* ⁷ *so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.* As we consider how the keeping of the law would bless the Israelites and not keeping the law would bring them curses, let's be reminded of the consequences of our own obedience or disobedience.

Some people get the impression that there is a conflict between New Testament grace and the Old Testament law. There is no conflict. Jesus fulfilled the law so that we can do 'good works' by His grace. *Matthew 5:17 (ESV)* ¹⁷ *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.* Jesus kept the law completely. Because of our sin nature we are unable to ever perfectly keep the law and this is why we NEED GRACE! Not only was Jesus able to keep every law given by God, He fulfilled the Law by literally becoming The One and Only Sacrifice for our sins. He was the burnt offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering and as pictured in the grain offering He was sinless humanity!

There is no 'war' between law and grace. The LORD has always been full of grace and mercy. *Joel 2:13 (ESV)* ¹³ *and rend your hearts and not your garments."* *Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.* Even in the Old

Testament, people were saved by their faith in God not their works. We read of Abraham in **Genesis 15:6 (ESV)** ⁶ *And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

Moses wanted the people to remember that loving obedience to the LORD is the key to every blessing. In fact, the law is for our good.

Read Deuteronomy 10:12-13 (ESV) ¹² *“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,¹³ and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?”*

Under the Old Testament law the LORD revealed His desire that His children place Him at the center of their lives. Moses explained how this could be done. They were to **fear** the LORD, **walk** in His ways, **love** and **serve** Him with all their heart and **keep** His commandments.

Moses spoke of the grandeur and power of God and the magnificent way He loves us! Let’s think on these things as well.

Read Deuteronomy 10:14-20 (ESV) ¹⁴ *Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.¹⁵ Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.¹⁶ Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.¹⁷ For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.¹⁸ He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.¹⁹ Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.²⁰ You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear.*

Moses’ words beautifully remind generations then and now of the majesty of our Creator, the Lover of our Souls. When we grow in our fear and love for the LORD, we discover a greater understanding of His attributes. The heaven of heavens is the place Abraham, the father of faith, longed to see. **Hebrews 11:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ *For he [meaning Abraham] was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.* From His throne in the heaven of heavens, the God of gods and Lord of lords looked down and loved the children of Israel. But His did not stop there, He looks down and loves us as well! **John 3:16 (ESV)** ¹⁶ *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

Circumcision under the law served as a sign of God’s covenant relationship with His people. Paul spoke of the ‘circumcision of the heart’ in **Romans 2:29 (ESV)** ²⁹ *But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.* From the words of Moses we realize that the circumcision of the heart Paul mentioned began in the Old Testament. We also read in **Deuteronomy 30:6 (ESV)** ⁶ *And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.*

Read Deuteronomy 10:21-22 (ESV) ²¹ *He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen.* ²² *Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.*

Because of circumstances of life, we may feel that we have no reason to praise God. This my friends, is the devil's lie. Moses who literally saw the glory of God, tells us that *He is your praise*. Yes, he was speaking directly to the descendents of Abraham who went down to Egypt as a small family of 70 and came out Egypt as a great nation. I may not have seen the Red Sea parted or experienced the Presence of God in a pillar of cloud by night and a pillar of fire by day following over me. But, I have seen Him opening the pathways of my own life at every step and I know that His Holy Spirit not only follows me but dwells within me! He is MY God, who has done for ME these great and terrifying things that MY eyes have seen. And yes, even in the bad times, He is my praise! When I have nothing left in this life, I have eternal life – He is my praise!

The law requires perfection. I may not have made it clear in previous lessons, but I would be remiss if I do not make it known that God gave the law to the people He **had already redeemed** out of Israel. The commands of God were never intended as a way for mankind to gain entrance into heaven. The LORD knew that humans would never be able to earn salvation due to the inborn sin nature. The law was given for the purpose of being a guide. However, along the way people came to believe that law-keeping was the way to relate to God. Notice how Moses put LOVE first.

Read Deuteronomy 11:1 (ESV) ¹ *“You shall therefore love the LORD your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always.*

God loves us. That is what the Bible tells us. The Bible also tells us the way to show our love for Him is through our obedience. **1 Samuel 15:22 (ESV)** ²² *And Samuel said, “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.”*

But notice the *always* in the verse! You and I both know that as much as we may love the LORD and keep His commandments we just don't do it *always*. That “old sin nature” is going to rear its ugly head sooner or later and for most of us it's sooner. Someone comes along that we just can't bring ourselves to *love*. We know we should *serve* Him but some days we would rather take the easy way out and serve ourselves. *Obedient*? Well, maybe sometimes but not all the time! We say we *fear* Him but we still “take our chances” and tend to swerve off the narrow way. *Walk in his ways*? For believers, walking in His ways can be an “off again/on again” journey.

God asks for complete obedience, which is why we desperately need His grace. The truth is on this side of eternity we cannot be completely obedient – just the moment we think we are on the road to obedience – Satan will hit us with a new problem – a new temptation – something designed to come between God and us and/or our mission for Him. The only thing that really changes are the ways that Satan uses to tempt us. As one of the inmates at the Max explained: higher levels – bigger devils. He commented how the things that used to tempt him were no longer an issue – but as he walked on the narrow way, new stumbling blocks were kicked out in

front of his path constantly. Thinking of our continual bent to sinning I am reminded of **Romans 5:8 (ESV)**⁸ *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

The law brings a blessing or a curse.

Read Deuteronomy 11:26-28 (ESV)²⁶ *“See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse:²⁷ the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today,²⁸ and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known.*

The nation had to make a choice whether to obey God and enjoy His blessings or disobey Him and experience His curses. They could enjoy the land, endure chastening in the land (which is recorded in the Book of Judges), or be evicted from the land (their 70 years of captivity in Babylon). You would think that the choice would be an easy one. But, like so many of us they tended to ‘tempt’ God to discover how far they could go in getting their own way.

In **Deuteronomy 27** Moses commanded what they should do when they came into the land of Canaan.

Deuteronomy 27:12-13 (ESV)¹² *“When you have crossed over the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin.¹³ And these shall stand on Mount Ebal for the curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.*

The list of tribes composing the two groups is interesting. Those on Mount Ebal, the mount of cursing, are the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. With the exception of Reuben, these are the, sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, slave women of Jacob’s two lawful wives. Those on Mount Gerizim, the mount of blessing, are Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. These are children of Jacob’s lawful wives, Leah and Rachel. Reuben, though he was one of Leah’s sons, was cursed because he had sexual relations with Bilhah, his father’s concubine. They were to write the blessings and cursings on stones and then proclaim the blessings and cursings from the mountains.

When the Israelites first went to Canaan they were blessed to experience victory at Jericho. However, one individual, Achan, stole part of the spoil at Jericho. His theft caused the Israelites to experience the curse of defeat at Ai. After Joshua dealt with the sin, he had the people do what Moses had commanded them to do – declare the cursings of God on Ebal and declare the blessings of God from Gerizim.

We are cursed people because of our disobedience. None of our ‘good works’ can save us. **Galatians 3:10 (ESV)**¹⁰ *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”*

Like the tribes on Mount Ebal, we are slaves of sin; however, Jesus’ perfect sacrifice removes the curse from us. **Galatians 3:13 (ESV)**¹³ *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”. At Mount Calvary the Son of God was cursed for us so that all who accept His sacrifice will be blessed. Our God delivers! Our God saves!*