

JUSTICE AND OBEDIENCE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Deuteronomy 5:1-3; 10:12-13; 28:1-2

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 5; 10; 27; 28:1-2

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 5:1b-3; 10:12-13; 27:1-10

I. Binding Covenant

Deuteronomy 5:1b-3

1 Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them.

2 The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb.

3 The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day.

1b. Throughout Deuteronomy, the command to *hear* draws the focus of *Israel* (see Deuteronomy 6:3-4; 9:1; 20:3). However, the command is more than a call to hear; it challenges the audience to live in obedience to that which is heard. God's *statutes and judgments* are what *Israel* is called to hear and, therefore, obey.

Obedience begins by hearing and continues through proper action. To *learn them, and keep, and do* God's laws communicates that *Israel* must accept God's commands, mediated through Moses, and make certain that those commands direct their behavior. Otherwise, true hearing had not occurred.

2. Elsewhere, Scripture uses the names *Horeb* and Mount Sinai interchangeably as the designation of this location (see Exodus 19:18; Deuteronomy 1:6; 4:10; etc.).

3. *This covenant* was *not* merely an event

for *Israel*'s previous generations (see Exodus 20:1-21); its stipulations also applied to their current and future generations. A communal component to God's commands transcends generations. All *Israel* was bound by the covenant, even those not yet alive when it was given.

II. Basic Duties

Deuteronomy 10:12-13

12 And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul,

13 To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?

12a. Having confronted the people with their record of idolatry and rebellion, Moses set before them a rhetorical question that forced self-reflection to determine how best to live as people of God.

The prophet Micah would ask the same question of *Israel*. For Micah, following God's law meant "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" (Micah 6:8). While Moses had a different focus, their respective answers were complementary. Following God's law implied a desire for justice and mercy.

12b. The Lord's requirements of His people are remarkably simple. *To fear the Lord* meant to possess a reverential respect for Him. Fearing God was at the heart of the covenant as God reminded Israel, "Thou shalt have none other gods before me" (Deuteronomy 5:7).

12c. *To walk in God's ways* translates the fear of the Lord into righteous conduct that honors His authority and His commands (Deuteronomy 5:33).

12d. Previously, Moses had expressed the centrality of *love* for the Lord, challenging Israel to "love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

12e. Love makes it a joy *to serve the Lord*. For ancient Israelites, the *heart* was regarded as the location of an individual's volition, while the *soul* implied the root of life.

13. Moses stressed the importance of obedience to *the Lord*. His *commandments* and *statutes* did not exist to frustrate God's people. Instead, they were graciously given to His people for their *good*.

III. Broader Instructions

Deuteronomy 27:1-10

1 And Moses with the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, Keep all the commandments which I command you this day.

2 And it shall be on the day when ye shall pass over Jordan unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, that thou shalt set thee up great stones, and plaster them with plaister:

3 And thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law, when thou art passed over, that thou mayest go in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, a land that floweth with milk and honey; as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee.

4 Therefore it shall be when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set up

these stones, which I command you this day, in mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaster them with plaister.

5 And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them.

6 Thou shalt build the altar of the LORD thy God of whole stones: and thou shalt offer burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD thy God:

7 And thou shalt offer peace offerings, and shalt eat there, and rejoice before the LORD thy God.

8 And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly.

9 And Moses and the priests the Levites spake unto all Israel, saying, Take heed, and hearken, O Israel; this day thou art become the people of the LORD thy God.

10 Thou shalt therefore obey the voice of the LORD thy God, and do his commandments and his statutes, which I command thee this day.

1. Moses would not be alive when the people of Israel entered the promised land. Therefore, this address sets the stage for him to transfer his leadership responsibilities. Israel would soon enter the promised land under Joshua's direction.

Moses reminded the people of the necessity of keeping God's *commands* (see commentary on Deuteronomy 27:9-10, below). The commands were binding not only in the immediate moment but also as Israel possessed the land.

2-3. Moses described a yet-to-occur ceremony in which Israel would commemorate its covenant with God. After Israel *shall pass over the Jordan unto the land*, they were to remember God's covenant and renew their obligation to obey His commands. While it's possible the ceremony happened

on the exact day they crossed the river (see Joshua 4), more likely Moses was referring to a general time afterward.

The practice of using *stones* to record words of *law* was popularized by ancient Egyptians. Whereas other cultures would carve the words of their laws into wood, Egyptians would paint the words of the law onto whitewashed stones.

To write every line of the law would constitute a project too large to be of any practical value. One possibility is that the Ten Commandments, which provided a kind of “constitution” for Israel, were written on the stones. Others note that perhaps the law’s blessings and curses were written, reminding Israel of the consequences of obedience and disobedience (Deuteronomy 27:15–28:68).

Previously, *the Lord thy God* had promised to Moses that He would “bring [Israel] . . . unto a good *land* and a large, unto a land flowing *with milk and honey*” (Exodus 3:8). Now Israel would see the fulfillment of this promise.

4. With one exception, this verse repeats much of the information found previously. That exception is the inclusion of the location where this ceremony is to occur, *mount Ebal*. This mountain, located west of the Jordan River and north of Jerusalem, is mentioned in tandem with another nearby mountain, Mount Gerizim (Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:12-13; Joshua 8:33).

Later, Moses instructed that 6 of the 12 tribes of Israel were to stand on Mount Gerizim and proclaim the covenant blessings (Deuteronomy 27:12), while the remaining 6 tribes were to stand on Mount Ebal and announce the curses of covenant disobedience (27:13). The ceremony took place under the direction of Joshua (Joshua 8:30-33).

5. Israel was to *build an altar* made of *stones* for the worship of God. Previously, God told Israel that any tool used on an

altar would cause the altar to be “polluted” (Exodus 20:25). The prohibition of using an *iron tool* may be linked to the pagan religious practices of neighboring peoples.

6. As no iron tool could be used on the *stones of the altar*, they were whole and uncut (see Joshua 8:31). Upon the altar Israel presented their *burnt offerings*. During these offerings, an entire animal was burned on the altar, symbolizing the worshipper’s complete surrender to God.

7. *Peace offerings* burned only a portion of the sacrificial animal; remaining portions were to be used by the worshippers in what amounted to a fellowship-with-God meal (Leviticus 3:1-17).

This would provide a time for Israel to *rejoice before the Lord* as the meal reminded them of God’s presence and faithfulness. These acts of worship were to be acts of celebration!

8. The previous instructions are repeated, thereby stressing the importance of *the words of this law*.

The Hebrew phrase translated *very plainly* describes the act of engraving words on a stone. This act was to be completed with purpose, not haphazardly.

9. Moses’ exhortation focused the attention of the audience and drew them into a position of *silent* worship before God.

Those gathered before *Moses* were a generation removed from those who had experienced personally the establishment of God’s covenant. As such, this new generation needed to recognize the holiness of *this day* and affirm their commitment to be God’s covenant *people*.

10. As a covenant people, Israel was held to certain standards of obedience: *his commandments and his statutes*. The Israelites’ obedience did not cause them to be the people of God. Instead, their obedience was to be grounded in the fact that they were in covenant with God (Deuteronomy 8:1-6).

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

JUSTICE AND OBEDIENCE

Into the Lesson

Complete one of following prompts:

Children need to learn obedience because . . .

The biggest problem caused by disobedience is . . .

Here's what happened when I disobeyed . . .

Obviously, obedience is a big deal for people today. This was a challenge for God's people in ancient times too.

Into the Word

Read today's texts and list every reference that contains a command to obey. Be able to explain or paraphrase the admonition.

Why did Moses make each of the exhortations we find here?

List elements of the ceremony/worship described in Deuteronomy 27:1-10. List the purpose for each element.

Into Life

For each item in the worship ceremony described in Deuteronomy, list a comparable aspect or principle of worship today.

How prominent should God's Word be in our worship services?

How meaningful is the use of Scripture in our worship services?

Why is it important for us to know and reflect on Scripture?

How can we make the teaching of Scripture more central to daily living?

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Obedience to God must remain our top priority.