



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for August 23, 2009
Released on Wednesday, August 19, 2009**

“Obeying God’s Commands”

Lesson Text: Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 20-24

Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:1-25

Devotional Reading: Proverbs 2:1-11

Deuteronomy 6:1–9, 20–24

1 Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it:

2 That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.

3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

9 And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

.....
20 And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you?

21 Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh’s bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand:

22 And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes:

23 And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore unto our fathers.

24 And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.

INTRODUCTION

If you have children, one of your greatest concerns is to help them realize the importance of spiritual things. You want them to value what is esteemed in God’s Word. You hope and pray that they will choose to follow Christ instead of the world.

What about those parents whose children have gone astray? What about those who were not Christians during their children’s formative years?

To be sure, there are no guarantees that following Christian child-rearing principles will always succeed in producing children who obey the Lord. Nor should all hope be abandoned when children do not turn out as anticipated.

While we cannot change the past, we can determine from this day forward to teach our children and grandchildren the way of the Lord. This, of course, must be done through both words and actions.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: about 1406 B.C.

Place: Plains of Moab, probably at Shittim

To gain the most understanding from today's lesson, we should come to grips with how the book of Deuteronomy functions within the Bible. Moses' speeches in this book were part of the formal covenant treaty between God and Israel. In the Ancient Near East, virtually all important agreements were sworn in oaths. Oaths that resulted in treaties and covenants were written down. This was especially true of treaties designed to set policy for many generations.

That's what Deuteronomy does as it outlines and regulates a conditional relationship between God and the people of Israel. God claimed absolute right of sovereignty, and He required total loyalty. In return, God pledged protection for His people.

The word *Deuteronomy* means "the second law." This can be a little misleading since the idea of a "second" law can be taken to mean "a different, additional" law. But the idea is really more along the lines of "a repetition of the law," referring to the law given on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19–31).

Deuteronomy's expression of the covenant can be outlined this way: (1) the preliminary introduction (1:1–5), which identifies some geographical and chronological information; (2) the historical prologue (1:6–3:29), where the relationship between the parties is reviewed; (3) the general covenant stipulations (chapters 4–11) and specific covenant stipulations (chapters 12–27); (4) the blessings and cursings section (chapter 28); (5) some summarization (chapters 29, 30); and (6) the witness section (chapter 31). The book wraps up with some facts about how Moses' life and ministry draw to a close.

If the Israelites were to be God's covenant people, then they were expected to keep the covenant stipulations (that is, the law). The laws of the covenant reflect something of the nature of God. By extension, when the Israelites kept the law they reflected God's nature to the world.

LESSON AIMS:

Facts: to observe how God demanded that the Israelites make a concerted effort to train their children in the law given at Mount Sinai, as summarized in the Ten Commandments.

Principle: to realize that the Ten Commandments continue to be part of the moral law to be kept by believers in all generations.

Application: to understand and pass on the teaching of Scripture to the next generation.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW (Deuteronomy 6:1-3)

1. Concerning the commandments, statutes, and judgments in the book of Deuteronomy, what was the Lord most concerned about? (Deut. 6:1)

Deuteronomy 6:1–3 introduces what is called *the shema*, which we will study beginning in verse 4 (below). Just prior to Deuteronomy 6, Moses restates the Ten Commandments (5:7–21). Along with that restatement comes a brief reminder of Israel's experience at Sinai, some 40 years in the past at this point (5:22–33; compare Exodus 20:18–26).

All this is important to note because it helps us see that the word *these* here in verse 1 refers collectively to all *the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments* that Moses has been commanded to teach as the mediator of the covenant (Deuteronomy 5:31).

While distinctions can be made between "commandments," "statutes," and "judgments" (Deut. 6:1), the gist of Moses' words is that Israel was to obey God's instructions in

whatever form they came. Vitally important was that they "do them." As James 1:22 says, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

Since Moses himself would not be permitted to enter the Land of Promise, Deuteronomy not only repeated the basic covenant stipulations but also served as a farewell address to Israel. The nation was about to enter a new phase in their history and needed to be solidly grounded in God's Word.

The phrase *in the land whither ye go to possess it* reminds us once again that the Israelites are right on the verge of crossing the Jordan River to enter the promised land, about 1406 BC.

2. What does it mean to fear God? (v. 2)

Throughout Scripture, God's people are enjoined to fear the Lord their God. This does not mean to cower in fear as a slave might do before an angry master. It can mean instead to have a reverential awe for God. More precisely, it is to have such a high respect for the Lord that we obey Him without question.

Learning to fear God was to be passed onto the next generation, who in turn would teach their children to do the same. Obedience would assure Israel that her days on earth would be prolonged (Deut. 6:2). This was both a national promise concerning longevity in the land (11:8-15) and a personal promise to each person concerning length of life (5:16). Proverbs 3:1-2 says, "My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee."

3. What is hearing the Lord connected with? (v. 3)

Hear the Lord (Deut. 6:3). When Israel was called upon to "hear," it was to listen not just with the ears but also with the heart. Nor was hearing only for the purpose of meditating upon the words of the Lord. Hearing the Lord is usually connected with obeying the Lord; to hear God is to respond to Him.

Our text this week emphasizes the blessings of obedience. To be sure, obedience neither earns God's grace nor is ever carried out perfectly by sinful humans; yet that is no reason to take God's commands lightly. This was true for God's commands given to Israel in the Old Testament and is still true for Christ's commands given to Christians in the New Testament.

The commands under consideration in Deuteronomy had to do with inheriting the land promised to the nation's forefathers. This is a reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the patriarchs of Israel. The nation is reminded of this several times in Deuteronomy (6:10; 9:5, 27; 29:13; 30:20; 34:4). "God's gracious promise to the patriarchs gave Israel ownership of the land, but it was their own obedience to the Lord that guaranteed their possession and enjoyment of the land" (Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Cook).

4. What is the significance of the expression "land that floweth with milk and honey?"

Once again Canaan is described as a land flowing with milk and honey. This proverbial expression for prosperity and abundance is found frequently in the Mosaic law (Exod. 3:8; 33:3; Lev. 20:24; Num. 13:27; 14:8; Deut. 11:9; 26:9; 27:3; 31:20). Archaeology confirms that this phrase was also used by other peoples to describe Canaan. God had providentially prepared Canaan to be a bountiful land. To enjoy this blessing, however, Israel had to obey. Sadly, their disobedience would lead to frequent chastisement, culminating in their eventual removal from the land.

THE SPREADING OF THE LAW (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

5. What is the Shema? How did this distinguish Israel from other nations at that time? (v. 4)

In both Hebrew and English, Deuteronomy 6:4 begins with the word "hear." The Hebrew word is *shema'*. Hence, this section is referred to as the Shema. It represents the basic creed of

Israel which declared faith in one God. It was among the first verses memorized by Jewish children. Even today, strict Jews recite these verses every morning and evening.

The primary thing that distinguished Israel from other nations at this time was the Israelite belief in one God. While other monotheistic religions exist in today's world, that was not true in Moses' time.

The Israelites' unique call to worship one God perhaps made it difficult for them to resist the pervasive polytheism of their world. Both in Egypt and in Canaan they confronted many gods. For some, the temptation to succumb to false religions was too great. When they did so, however, they were certain to face God's judgment.

"The 'gods' of the ancient Near East rarely were thought of as acting in harmony. Each god was unpredictable and morally capricious. So a pagan worshiper could never be sure that his loyalty to one god would serve to protect him from the capricious wrath of another. The monotheistic doctrine of the Israelites lifted them out of this insecurity since they had to deal with only one God, who dealt with them by a revealed consistent righteous standard" (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Cook).

6. What does it mean to love God with your "heart, soul, and might"? Where is this repeated in the New Testament? (vs. 5,6)

Since there was but one God, He was to have complete and absolute devotion from His people. Therefore, they were to love Him with their entire being: heart, soul, and might. While distinctions can be made between these three terms, the thrust of the command is to love God with all that one has and all that one is. In short, love God totally. "To love the Lord means to choose Him for an intimate relationship and to obey His commands" (Walvoord and Zuck).

This command is repeated in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28). When asked about the greatest of God's commandments, Christ did not offer new insight but simply reiterated what was already in the Mosaic law. In addition to the command to love God, Christ also quoted Leviticus 19:18: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Concerning loving God and one's neighbor, Jesus declared, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:40).

7. What was important with regard to the next generation in Israel? (v. 7)

While it was important for the generation of Israelites who were entering the Promised Land to obey God's Word, it was equally important that true godly devotion be passed on to succeeding generations.

Whether dealing with Old Testament Israel or the New Testament church, teaching is vitally important for the next generation. To fail to teach those who are coming after us is to be derelict in our duty as believers.

While we usually think of Christian teaching as occurring in a Sunday school, a youth meeting, or a Bible study session, this was not primarily what Moses had in mind. While formal teaching settings did occur in ancient Israel, what is envisioned here was to be done in the home (see v. 7).

While there might be times when Hebrew parents would formally teach their children, what is encouraged here is more informal in nature. As teachable moments came in the course of daily living, fathers were to seize these opportunities and teach spiritual truths. Modern parents would do well to look for opportunities each day to teach their children about God, His Word, and the moral standards He demands for His people. As pervasive as evil is in our culture, no opportunity to teach godly values should be neglected.

8. Should the binding and writing in verses 8 and 9 be taken literally, figuratively, or both? (vs. 8,9)

Verses 8 and 9 were likely to be understood metaphorically, not literally. "The commands are probably emphasizing symbolically the need for the continual teaching of the Law" (Walvoord and Zuck).

Later generations, however, did take them literally. Scriptures would be written on tiny scrolls, placed in leather boxes, and bound to the forehead and hand when the Shema was recited. The Scripture boxes are called phylacteries in Matthew 23:5. While Christ did not condemn this practice outright, He did call into question the motives of those wearing these ornaments.

9. What are some spiritual disciplines or habits we can teach our children to help them fill their hearts and minds with God's Word?

The culture of our day is toxic—degradation, destruction, and disobedience can be seen in popular TV shows, advertisements, the Internet, video games, etc. Three important spiritual disciplines or habits we can teach children and youth are summarized with the acronym *PRO*. This stands for Pray daily, Read the Word of God daily, and Obey the Word daily. Teaching children to follow these three disciplines habitually can do much to help them to grow strong in their faith.

The church should also be aware of things in our culture that compete for the attention of our youth and be equipped to counteract these things. We may immediately think of TV, music, video games, and the Internet. But before we launch into a blanket condemnation of these, we should make a careful distinction between *form* and *content*. TV sets, portable mp3 music players, video game consoles, and the Internet are morally neutral forms in and of themselves. They become tools for evil when they are used to communicate unholy content.

The church can counteract cultural influences by using modern forms of communication to promote holiness in youth.

FUTURE ANSWERS (Deuteronomy 6:20-24)

10. What kinds of things needed to be told to Hebrew children when they asked about certain practices? (vs. 20,21)

After telling Israel that they were to love God supremely and to instruct their children in the way of the Lord, Moses warned the people about forgetting the Lord and turning to other gods once they arrived in the Promised Land (vs. 10-19).

As already alluded to, each generation of believers has to be taught anew the importance of the Lord's commands. This was true with Israel, and it is also true with the church. Indeed, on a human level the church is only one generation away from extinction. Once in the Land of Promise, children would naturally ask the meaning of the rules and rituals of their faith, especially when they compared Israelite practices to those of the peoples around them. Any time a question is asked by a child is a teachable moment, and wise parents will take advantage of the opportunity.

Given the opening to answer the questions of his children, the wise Hebrew father would begin by telling them about their former slavery in Egypt and deliverance from that land.

11. What was the goal of such teaching? (vs. 22-24)

While all of us like to hear stories, children are especially attuned to this method of teaching and learning. That Jesus used parables was no accident.

Besides telling their children about the hard times in Egyptian bondage, the fathers were told to emphasize their deliverance at the Lord's hand. The miraculous signs and wonders would have included the various plagues visited upon Egypt along with the destruction of Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea. Such vivid accounts of God's power would have been listened to again and again by children on their father's knee.

Equally important would have been the accounts of being brought into the Promised Land. Recountings of the ten unfaithful spies, the murmurings in the wilderness, and the fall of Jericho would have been welcomed by little listening ears. Of course, these events are still taught to children in Sunday school today.

Having reiterated the blessings of obedience and the dangers of disobedience, fathers could encourage children to obey all the laws of God and to fear the Lord their God in the

proper way. As with them, obeying the Lord always promotes our own well-being. Indeed, obeying God should be a joy, not a burden (cf. 1 John 5:3).

12. Why is it important to teach, guide, and train people in the ways of the Lord while they are young?

Several years ago, Barna research made a sobering discovery: the percentage of people who accept Christ drops very sharply when crossing from the preteen into the teenage years. Children go through developmental stages, both mentally and physically. This means that children change their outlook on life as they grow. By the time they become adults, certain thinking patterns have a tendency to become "set," for good or for ill (compare Proverbs 22:6, and 1 Corinthians 13:11). The existence of developmental stages means that thinking patterns are much more easily shaped and molded in the younger years. It is not manipulative or unethical to recognize that fact and use it to teach godliness.

PRACTICAL POINTS:

- 1.** Obedience to the Lord pleases Him and is in our best interests (Deut. 6:1-3).
- 2.** The most important command in the Bible is based on the fundamental truth about who God is (vs. 4,5).
- 3.** God's Word should be as much apart of our lives as eating, sleeping, and breathing (vs. 6-7).
- 4.** We should keep reminders of God's declared will constantly in front of us (vs. 8,9).
- 5.** Our children should be taught the reasons for biblical standards of conduct as well as their content (vs. 20-24).

CONCLUSION

The ancient Israelites were to understand that God's law was to be both heard and obeyed. One can readily see this in passages such as Deuteronomy 4:1, 5, 6, 13, and 14. This requirement is no less important in the New Testament era: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). At issue in this passage is obedience to "the perfect law of liberty" that we have in Christ (v. 25).

God brought ancient Israel out of a physical bondage. This was part of His longer-term plan to usher in the Messiah, who would make it possible for all to be redeemed out of spiritual slavery to sin. Committing our lives to Him should include daily obedience to His commandments so that sin may not regain a foothold in our lives. We also remember that Jesus said "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

PRAYER

Lord God, some people are neither hearers nor doers. Others hear but do not do. Others, out of misguided zeal, attempt to be doers without really being hearers first. But we need to be both hearers and doers!

We ask for the strength of Your Holy Spirit to be both. Help us to comprehend Your Word as we hear it. Give us courage to implement Your requirements. As we do, may we reap a harvest of souls for eternity, in Jesus' name. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Be both a hearer and a doer of God's Word.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is "***The Promise of Life***" and describes when God's people will be regathered from the ends of the earth with changed hearts and enjoy sweet communion with Him. Study Deuteronomy 30:1-20.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY:

Renee Little
Jesus Is All Ministries
www.jesusisall.com

WORKS CITED:

Summary and commentary derived from Standard Lesson Commentary Copyright© 2009 by permission of Standard Publishing.

Reprinted by permission of The Incorporated Trustees of the Gospel Worker Society, Union Gospel Press, P.O. Box 6059, Cleveland, Ohio 44101. (Web site: <http://www.uniongospelpress.com/>)

The Pulpit Commentary, Spence-Jones, H. D. M. (Hrsg.), Bellingham, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc.

The KJV Parallel Bible Commentary, by Nelson Books

Holman Bible Dictionary, Holman Bible Publishers