



EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Numbers, Deuteronomy Sermon Series

Supports Session 8: Remember

Sermon Title: “A Burning and Shining Light’: The Evangelistic Effect of Holiness” (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)

Connection to Session 8

In Deuteronomy 4, Moses underscored that Israel’s obedience to God’s law would lead to their entrance into the promised land and enjoyment of a long, blessed life within it. Moses also reminded his audience of their parents’ and grandparents’ idolatrous lapse to Baal of Peor (Num. 25), and of God’s formless voice that spoke to the congregation from Horeb (Ex. 19–20). With these memories in view, Moses admonished the wilderness generation to refrain from worshiping false gods or from falsely worshiping the Lord in the form of an idol (Deut. 4:2-4, 12-19). Israel was to worship the Lord as He commanded, distinct in both their worship’s form and its object (4:19-20). And, if they obeyed the Lord in this manner, as they carefully followed His statutes and ordinances, Moses promised that the peoples would come to inquire of God and His law (4:6-8).

Introduction/Opening

Jesus’s words are always right and wise—none fall to the ground or come back void. Our Lord famously said that God’s people “are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. . . . [a lamp] gives light for all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father” (Matt. 5:14-16). Our text from Deuteronomy proves these words true, for Moses promised that if the people carefully and wisely followed God’s commandments, then the people would see their good deeds and glorify God and His law. This promise still holds true for God’s people today.

Outline

1. Israel’s obedience to God’s law would lead to their blessing (vv. 1-5)

a) Moses reminded the people that God purposefully gave the law. They were God’s chosen people whom He brought forth from Egypt to make His inheritance and to whom He would give an inheritance (Deut. 4:20). God gave them His law that they would obey it in this land of inheritance (v. 1). Moses told the people to “listen to the statutes and ordinances,” “carefully follow” them, and “keep” them (vv. 1-6). Moses implored Israel to “be on your guard” and “diligently watch” themselves (v. 9). These phrases underscore the careful, complete nature of the people’s obedience. Moses then emphasized the specificity of their obedience to God’s law by telling them not to “add” or “take anything away” from it. They were not to obey anything less than all of God’s law, nor were they to add anything to God’s law. Moses clearly defined Israel’s obedience.

b) Israel’s obedience to the law would lead to their flourishing in the land. Moses promised them that if they obeyed they would “live, enter, and take possession of the land, the

LORD, the God of [their] ancestors” was going to give them (v. 1). Individuals, and the nation as a whole, would flourish if they were careful to obey the law God provided.

c) Moses cautiously reminded Israel, though, that if they did not obey God’s law, and worship Him as He has revealed, they would be cursed (vv. 2-4). Moses called his audience’s attention to the sins of their parents and grandparents who “followed Baal of Peor” (v. 3; see also Num. 25). This act of gross immorality and idolatry led to the deaths of 24,000 Israelites at God’s hand (Num. 25:9). Moses noted, though, that his audience had “remained faithful to the LORD [their] God and [were] all alive” that day, for they had not worshipped Baal then or since (Deut. 4:3-4). He ominously implied, however, that if they did not continue to “carefully follow” his instructions, remaining “faithful to the LORD,” but instead succumb to the alluring false worship of foreign gods, God would destroy every one of them as well (vv. 3-5). Israel’s fidelity to the Lord, His law, and revealed means of proper worship would be their safe and blessed haven in the land into which they would enter.

2. Israel’s obedience to God’s law leads to the “peoples” blessing (vv. 6-8)

a) Israel’s loyalty to the Lord and his law was intended to catch the peoples’ attention traveling to and through Israel. Moses promised that if Israel “carefully follow[ed]” the “statutes and ordinances” that he had taught them, the people would see in the nation incomparable “wisdom and understanding” among the nations of the ancient world (Deut. 4:6). There was something unique about Israel’s law and how it structured their collective life as a people and robustly shaped individual and familial morality, which would cause the people to assert that they were truly a great nation. For Israel, in their full and faithful obedience to the law of the true God, would have shown that they know the truth (“understanding”) and how to live well in light of the truth (“wisdom”). Moses stated there are two aspects of Israel’s living the law that would catch the peoples’ eyes.

b) Moses informed the people, first, that when the peoples heard about all the “righteous statutes and ordinances” that are in Moses’ “entire law,” then they would call Israel a “great nation” who is “wise and understanding” (vv. 6,8). Moses believed there was something distinctly unique about the content of God’s law among the religious and moral codes of the ancient Near East that would lead to the peoples’ reverential awe. The law would, in the mere hearing of it, prove its own incomparable holiness as the tangible embodiment of the Giver of the law’s holiness among the ancient gods. For the law would prove that it distinctively and rightly apprehended and described the world and man’s place in it, in addition to elucidating shrewdly how man ought to live well in the world.

c) Moses told his hearers, secondly, that the people sojourning through Israel would marvel at the nearness of God when the people called to him (v. 7). This calling seems to have assumed two things: the calling out to God in prayer and the calling out to God in worship. The Lord was uniquely close to Israel in their collective and individual worship in a manner foreign to the gods of the ancient Near East. Most obviously, the Lord, unlike the gods of the ancient world, was the true God who could and in fact did respond to His people in worship. The Lord, as testified throughout Israel’s history, manifested His presence tangibly and physically in the tabernacle and temple in response to Israel’s worship. Just as, similarly, the nation’s history testified of many occasions in which God responded to the prayerful calls of His people. For it is the Lord, of whom Moses reminded the people in the story of Exodus, who “heard their groaning,” “remembered his covenant,” “saw the Israelites,” “knew,” and came down to rescue them (Ex. 2:24-25; 3:8). These divine acts, Moses informed his audience, had never been done before for “the LORD is God; there is no other besides him” (Deut. 4:35).

d) Moses's comments about the peoples' observance of Israel's corporate and individual life would not have been strange to his audience. For they knew that the land of Canaan was strategic and critically situated in the ancient Near East. It was the land-bridge that connected the continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa. If someone intended to travel between two of these continents, not by way of sea or across the perilous Arabian desert peninsula, then they must have traveled through Canaan. This meant Israel would have been a "fish-bowl" community whose odd way of life, orchestrated by their holy law, would have been on display for the watching world to observe. Israel's faithful obedience to this law, and the unique life it created, would have made them that city "set atop a hill" that would have cast its warm and welcoming light to the people living in the lands of pagan darkness (cf. Isa. 2:1-3; 60:1-3; Zech. 8:22-23)

Conclusion

Just as for Israel, our obedience to the law will lead to our blessing. Paul reminds us that the law and its commandments are "holy and just and good" (Rom. 7:12). He promises that our obedience to the commandments will be for our good "provided one uses it legitimately" (1 Tim. 1:8). For this reason, the apostle James describes the law as the "perfect law of freedom," which, if one is a perseverant "doer" of its commands, will lead to that individual being "blessed in what he does" (Jas. 1:25). This is why Jesus did not abolish the law. For it is a good, God-given tool that the Spirit-empowered disciple employs to live a wise, fruitful, and holy life. And, similarly to Israel, the Church of Christ, in our obedience to God's law, will cast an attractive light to those who walk in darkness, drawing them to our unique manner of life (Matt. 5:14-16). So that, as we "regard Christ the Lord as holy," being "holy in all [our] conduct" in imitation of our holy Lord, those who walk in darkness will ask "for the reason for the hope that is in [us]" as they "observe [our] good works" cognizant that we do not "join them in the same flood of wild living" (1 Pet. 1:15-16; 2:12; 3:15; 4:3-4).

Our holy obedience to God's law as the Church of God, therefore, is not optional (Heb. 12:14). We must pursue holiness for our own sake and the sake of others. Let us "pay careful attention, then, to how [we] walk—not as unwise people but as wise—making the most of the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15-16).

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