

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDY IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

PART FIVE – CHAPTERS 16-19 – POSSESSING IN DAILY LIFE

In the previous section Moses began to address the principles of how life was to be lived in the Promised Land. The starting point always had to be ‘which God are we serving?’, so he dealt first with the places and people where false teaching occurred. These had to go. From there he moved to the very ordinary daily issues of what we eat and what we owe. Both are to be motivated by love. He does not want us to suffer unnecessary illness through abusing our bodies, His present temple,(I Cor.3:16) or the effects of poverty. Both concerns continue today though as Christians are now spread worldwide the means of accomplishing these ends will sometimes be different. They will be the result of a higher principle. No longer is it ‘what do the rules say?’ but ‘what will the Lord who lives in us do through us for the best for us and those around us?’

In chapter sixteen Moses reminded the people of God’s calendar which would be a constant review of what He had done and planned to do for them. First there was the Passover which looked back on their salvation from slavery in Egypt. Each family would offer a lamb which pictured Christ on the cross. They would then eat unleavened bread for a week, illustrating how once we are forgiven we can feed on Christ. Originally they had been told to do this at home but now the Passover would be celebrated at the tabernacle, God’s great visual aid to explain the whole gospel message. The week would end with a Sabbath, a day of rest, regardless of which day of the week it fell on, to remind them to relax in Christ.

Exactly seven weeks later, 50 days counting the one at each end, coinciding with the very beginning of the harvest they would celebrate the giving of the Law at Mt Sinai. They were anticipating Pentecost, literally ‘50 days’, when the Holy Spirit was to be given. At Sinai they learned how they should live but could not. At Pentecost the Spirit first made it possible to live God’s way in His strength. As such it would allow the very first harvest of people coming to Christ. They were to offer whatever they could freely to God in thanksgiving. It was no longer a percentage. This time they were to include the whole household together with strangers who could be from any race, the needy, the servants, and the Levites who led them spiritually.

At the conclusion of the harvest they were to celebrate the Feast of Booths, a final occasion for great joy because the work was done. The booths reminded them how they had lived in temporary tents for 40 years in the wilderness, anticipating the permanent homes they would have in Canaan. We are to celebrate our Christian lives in the temporary accommodation of our present bodies,(II Cor.5:1) anticipating Christ’s return and our new bodies which will never wear out. From Pentecost to Booths was a continual time of harvest as our Christian lives are to be a daily challenge to bring others to Christ. Again absolutely everyone was to be included. Once more everyone had something to give as all Christians have gifts from God to offer the rest.

There was no point in having a Law if it was not fairly and honestly administered. Another warning was given that corruption and idolatry usually go together. Neither was acceptable.

Chapter seventeen continues to explore the connection between idolatry and dishonesty. A defective sacrifice was cheating God. Idolatry deserved death but accusations were not to be made lightly. The Levites and the judges were to apply the Law faithfully and their role was to be respected otherwise there would be chaos. Honest godly leadership would be a powerful example to the people. When later they asked for one, God gave them a king. His example was to be outstanding in three ways – marriage, military and money. The king was to show in his family life how God planned marriage to be in Gen.2:24. David though in many respects a great

king, ignored the first instruction with tragic consequences for his children.(II Sam.11-19) Solomon though wonderfully wise was outstandingly foolish in all three ways, with even worse effects for the next generation.(I Kgs.11) The king was to have his own hand-written copy of the Law so that it would be part of his thinking and life. Josiah was a striking example of what happened when this instruction was followed.(II Kgs.22,23)

Chapter eighteen returns once more to the necessity of healthy spiritual leadership which would make all the difference to whether the people of Israel continued to possess their possessions. The tribe of Levi had been appointed to the task of drawing people into a relationship with God based on sacrifice for sin and the teaching of the word of God. As priests their inheritance was not of land but the Lord Himself. As Christians, we are all priests,(I Pet.2:9) and our inheritance is not in terms of real estate but of all the spiritual blessing which has been lavished upon us in Christ.(Eph.1:3) Those who were helped by their ministry were to make sure that the Levites were well cared with food and shelter.

God's people were to check very carefully from where the teaching they heard came. In those days as today the Devil would use all kinds of spiritist activity and disguises to try to mislead. In all its various forms it was satanic and destructive and to be totally avoided. In later years King Saul would ignore this warning and resort to a witch for guidance when he had already refused to listen to God.(I Sam.28) God promised that one day far into the future He would send a prophet like Moses, all of whose words would be from God. Peter confirmed that this referred to Jesus.(Acts 3:23) When they heard words which were claimed to come from God they were to check – were they true or false, were they from God or Satan, were they to be accepted or rejected? And so are we.(I Cor.14:29)

True justice is the theme of chapter nineteen. To prevent families taking the law into their own hands in anger, cities of refuge were to be provided for those who killed accidentally to allow time for cases to be properly heard. Apparently axeheads flying off their handles were as common as traffic accidents are today.(II Kings 6:1-7) However deliberate murder deserved the death penalty and the city of refuge would not protect the killer. Stealing someone else's possession was also important. Wrong teaching is the commonest way to do that today. With such serious consequences for murder, the role of witnesses was vital. A minimum of two were required. False testimony would be punished by exactly the penalty the witness had sought against the accused. God is absolutely just and He wants nothing less from us.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. To what key events in Israel's past did the annual feasts look back? And to what did each one look forward? How does such a timetable strengthen our faith for daily life and therefore encourage us to possess our possessions in Christ?(chapter 16)
2. What role would leadership play in the spiritual development of God's people? What special warnings were given about the temptations which damage leadership? How do the same problems ruin good leadership in the church today?(chapter 17)
3. Who are the priests of today? How can they expect their needs to be met? What should we do as Christian leaders if we lack the necessities of life? How were the Israelites to check out the teaching they received? How are we to do the same?(chapter 18)
4. What examples are used of how the justice system should operate in the Promised Land? Why were such principles so important? How do these ideas apply in our society? How should we respond as Christians when we see injustice in our world?(chapter 19)