

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDY IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

### PART FOUR – CHAPTERS 12-15 – POSSESSING IN DAILY LIFE

So far we have seen the simple principles of possessing the Promised Land, in chapters 1-3. They needed to know the location of the land, and then walk in, one step at a time. We need to know what is promised us in Christ and by faith accept and enjoy Him. The next lesson was in how they could hold on to the land once they had possessed it, in chapters 4-7. The answer was to continue learning who God was and trusting Him alone. The same is true for us. We need to go on exploring the Word and thanking Him for all He tells us He is and wants to be in us. The third lesson was in understanding the meaning of the hard times they had gone through in the previous 40 years, in chapter 8-11. The provision of manna, water, victory over enemies and the near fatal disaster of the golden calf had been important steps in the discipline of God in their lives. The generation who came out of Egypt had been slow to get the message but their children wholeheartedly caught on. We too need to understand the meaning of the tough times God permits in which we have no sensible choice but to learn to trust Him.

Having spent the first third of the book looking back on the events and lessons of the last 40 years, Moses was now ready to explore what life would look like in the Promised Land. The first issues were whom they would worship and where they would do this. Their understanding of their Creator and Saviour, themselves, and their purpose in the world - in other words their worldview - was to come from God alone with no contamination from other gods. To be sure that no unconscious mixing took place with the ways of the world around them, they were to sacrifice in only one place. For the moment this was to be in the tabernacle, and later the temple. In the New Testament the temple would be within us.(I Cor.3:16) Worship was always going to start with sacrifice, which looks forward to the cross of Christ. All the significant events of their lives were to be celebrated with God. One tenth of their produce was to be sacrificed and then eaten by them as families. As they did so they were learning that the other nine tenths belonged to God also. They were to look after the Levites who ministered to them as we are to look after those who serve us.(I Cor.9:9-11) When they ate the sacrifices or their ordinary daily meat at home there was one restriction. They were not to eat the blood. Christ had not yet died so they could not yet take His life into them – until the Holy Spirit came to live within them. One more time they were warned not to look to the gods of the world around them for the answers to life. They were reminded of one of the horrific practices of the Canaanites, child sacrifice.(chapter 12)

As well as dealing with the heathen places and practices of the world they lived in, the Israelites had to confront the false teachers who tried to persuade them of the truth of other

religions. Some of these people would be dangerously convincing because of the seeming miracles they were able to perform. To impress on His people the seriousness of false teaching, God required the death penalty for those who taught this way. This was to include even family members who misled their relatives into following other gods. If false teachers persuaded a whole city to practise what they taught then the city and its people were to be utterly destroyed.(chapter 13) In the New Testament the real enemies of God were not the ordinary sinners but those who denied the gospel and drew people away from the Lord.(Matt.23; II Pet.2) There is no instruction to the church to execute or physically punish wrong teachers. We are simply told to 'Keep your eye on them and turn away from them.'(Rom.16:17), and to 'Reject a factious man.'(Tit.3:10) Among us everyone is to be welcome however badly they have failed in life, except the false teacher. At the same time if we are mature in our faith we are to be ready to give an answer.(I Pet.3:15) Jesus was silent when falsely accused but unashamed to speak out when His message was challenged.(L.k.22:67-71)

From the serious offence of false teaching Moses moved on to the seemingly ordinary issues of self care. First he urged the people to avoid the common practice of shaving the head in mourning for the dead. The Lord will comfort those who mourn to allow them to move on to meeting the needs of the living.(Matt.5:4) Food is a huge part of daily life. In Lev.11 God had given careful instructions about the food they could eat and what should be avoided. There were sound reasons behind the list of forbidden foods to do with animals carrying disease, nutritional value, danger to the hunter and rare species whose survival might be threatened. The reasons would have been unknown to the Israelites but not to the Creator. In the New Testament, Jesus 'declared all foods clean.'(Mark 7:19) as God's people spread out world wide and circumstances were different. Now He, living in us, is our guide to food which is good for us. Again there were instructions about God's tenth of the food and those who cared for them spiritually.(chapter 14)

After talking about food, the next topic concerns those who may totally lack the means to eat, the poor. Debt was to be completely written off at the end of every 7 years. Lending was to be based on need, not as so often today, on the borrower's capacity to repay. Moses anticipated the thinking of the lender who looked at the calendar and calculated how long it would be until he might have to forgive the debt. If as a people they trusted God in the Promised Land there was no reason for anyone to be poor. Lending was to be a way of showing grace to those who were struggling not, as so often today, a shrewd investment. Sometimes poverty was so extreme that the only way out seemed to be to sell yourself as a slave so that your debts were paid and you and your family had somewhere to live. Even debt of this kind was to be written off in the seventh year so that the slave could go free. Slaves were to be well cared for and then released with enough to start life again. Occasionally a slave might feel he had been so well treated that he chose to remain forever a slave. He was called a bond-slave, a title Paul often used to describe his willing relationship

with Jesus Christ.(Rom.1:1) The first born of each animal in their flocks was to be dedicated to God in sacrifice as Jesus,(Rev.1:5) would be God's 'first born from the dead.'(chapter 15)

## QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What according to chapter 12 is the basis of all temptation to sin?(Rom.14:23; Matt.7:24) Thinking again of the 'false gods' of today what might be the places where they are worshipped? How could they be a trap for believers? If we cannot destroy them as the Israelites were told to do, how can we avoid them?
2. How can we distinguish between a false teacher and someone with a different opinion from us on an issue which does not matter?(Jude 3,4) Give examples of false teaching today which are as damaging as the Israelites faced in Canaan. How are we to deal with false teachers in our own day?(chapter 13)
3. Why did God bother to give His people instructions on something as ordinary as food? In the New Testament,(Acts 10:9-16) are we now free to eat what we like, as much as we like?(chapter 14)
4. If chapter 15 were practised today how would it affect you borrowing from others? And how would it affect you lending to someone else? Is it realistic to follow such teaching in the modern world?(Acts 4:34) Was the kind of slavery allowed in Israel bad? How was it different from slavery in the present time?