

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDY IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

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PART THREE – CHAPTERS 8-11 – LESSONS BEFORE POSSESSIONS

The people of Israel would possess the Promised Land when by faith they walked in and claimed it, believing God to be bigger than the giants who lived there. We will begin to enjoy all we have inherited in Christ by unreservedly thanking Him for all He tells us He has given us, made available through the resurrection of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Israel would hold on to the land they possessed by consistently, for the rest of their lives, holding on to the Lord who revealed Himself in every part of His word. We will hold on to all we have in Christ, enjoying the abundant life in Him, by continuing to thank Him as we go on discovering who He is throughout the Bible and so letting Him possess His possession - us.

But still the question remained why had God kept them in the wilderness all those years when they could have been enjoying the good stuff in Canaan? And what is God's purpose in letting us struggle, often for years? Why does a loving God let us suffer? The next four chapters lift the veil on this vital question which understandably bothers so many people.

Hard times are not times for doubt or discouragement but for serious study of the word. Learning and trusting, learning and trusting, learning and trusting are to become a habit. Once the Israelites acknowledged that they were hungry God began to provide manna. But it was delivered daily, except Saturdays, outside every tent where each family had to collect it for themselves. Hunger would drive them out of bed to go looking for God's food. Day after day, year after year it became a habit. Any time they thought they could live on yesterday's food they were disappointed to find it was mouldy. Very simply they had no alternative and slowly they learned this. Moses makes it plain that the real lesson was not about food, but about God's provision of Truth to understand their circumstances and His plan. Jesus taught us the same lesson when He faced Satan, the giant who is bigger than any of us, and told him three times, "It is written".(Matt.4:4,6,10) Finally Satan got the message and went away for the moment.

In the same way, the Israelites headed into the wilderness with only the few old clothes they could carry. As time passed they would be looking in vain for a shopping mall to replace

their clothes and shoes, but to their surprise their old clothes and shoes did not wear out. We are clothed with the righteousness of Christ in the sight of God.(Col.3:9-11) This will never wear out and need to be replaced. We will still be well dressed before God in heaven, even though by not possessing His best day by day we will look rather ragged on earth.

These tough times are ‘the discipline of God’. The meaning of a ‘disciple’ is not someone being punished but ‘one who follows so as to learn’. Testing times taught them humility.(8:1-10)

When we experience good times with plenty of everything and no giants to trouble us there is an opposite problem in which the discipline of God needs to continue. Need teaches us humility and shows us what is in our hearts as we realise that the only sensible choice is to depend on Him. Plenty tempts us to pride when we start to think we have achieved this. Every day in affluence needs to be faced in continuing total dependence on Him where now we can ask a new question, ‘How can I help those still needy?’ In the wilderness, the lack of water was a constant reminder of God’s miraculous provision from the rock which was struck. Among the plentiful rivers of Canaan, the Spirit-given life should not be taken for granted.(8:11-20)

The chief giant, Satan, tells us two lies. Either he would convince us that the giants are no problem and that they are our friends. Or alternatively he would persuade us that we have to fight the giants ourselves because God won’t do it for us. If we believe the first lie we will tolerate our habits until they further enslave us. If we believe the second lie, we will fight, fail and then be tormented by guilt and failure. God wants to deal with all of them in all of us all of the time.(9:1-5)

Moses reminded them of how they quickly they had been defeated by the ‘giant’ of idolatry at Mt Sinai.(Exod.32) In the 40 days he was up the mountain they forgot what God was like and demanded that Aaron build them a god they could see to worship. The result was the golden calf, an old idol from their days in Egypt. God was going to judge them until Moses intervened to plead for them. All he achieved was a postponement until a new generation had arisen. When he ground the golden calf up and made the people drink it, he was forcing their idolatry down their throats. In his hands was a better solution he forgot to use, the Second Commandment about not making images. If they could not handle this giant away from the rest of humanity, how would they deal with idolatry once they were in Canaan surrounded by other gods?(9:6-29)

After the Israelites had slipped back into idolatry and Moses has smashed the tablets containing the commandments, God had every reason to give up on them and look for a more responsive nation to train in their place. But He did not. Patiently the Lord wrote the commandments all over again on new tablets and gave instructions to build the ark which would contain them in the tabernacle. Aaron, the idol maker and high priest, died and was replaced by his son, Eleazar. The Levites continued to be trained to look after the ark and teach its message to the people. They were to be an example of people who belonged to God. The message remained the same, 'Fear the Lord your God, walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.' This would show in their love for the needy.(10:1-22)

The generation who came out of Egypt would never be able to forget how God saved them. They would always remember the plagues and the other miracles God did through Moses. They would never forget how in a seemingly impossible situation with the Egyptian army in hot pursuit, the Lord had opened the Red Sea to allow them to cross but closed it again when the Egyptians tried to do the same thing. They would also remember how firmly God had dealt with Dathan and Abiram when they challenged Moses' God-given leadership. God was not to be messed with!(11:1-7) In contrast those who trusted God would be overwhelmingly blessed. For this to happen the word of God had to become part of them. They were responsible to teach the next generation. If they did, the future would be superb, but they had a clear choice. Two mountains in Canaan would for ever remind them of that choice.(11:8-32)

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What difficult circumstances did Moses remind the people of by which God had disciplined them? What does each one picture in our own lives? What did they learn from each of these situations? How do we and those we know learn from God in our wilderness experiences? What on the other hand can we learn from good, trouble-free times?(chap.8)
2. What 'giant' had Israel faced and been defeated by even before they got to the Promised Land? How did God teach them to deal with this giant? How did Moses help or hinder this lesson being learned? Who is the biggest giant in our Christian lives? How are we to deal with him?(chap.9)
3. Did God change His way of dealing with idolatry following the disaster of Exod.32? How does Moses continue to teach the secret of dealing with the giants in our lives? How will it show in our lives if we are learning this secret?(chap.10)
4. What further experiences on the journey from Egypt to Canaan did God use to discipline His people? How did the 2 stories described here and the 2 mountains remind them of the simple choice before them and us every moment of every day?(chap.11)

The people of Israel would possess the Promised Land when by faith they walked in and claimed it, believing God to be bigger than the giants who lived there. We will begin to enjoy all we have inherited in Christ by unreservedly thanking Him for all He tells us He has given us, made available through the resurrection of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Israel would hold on to the land they possessed by consistently, for the rest of their lives, holding on to the Lord who revealed Himself in every part of His word. We will hold on to all we have in Christ, enjoying the abundant life in Him, by continuing to thank Him as we go on discovering who He is throughout the Bible and so letting Him possess His possession - us.

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