

Bible Reading Schedule The Golden Thread

April 3 – Deuteronomy 11: 8 – 15

Israel was given the Promised Land by God as a free act of God's grace, that is they did nothing to earn the land in their own merit. But once God had shown them His grace and given them the land, God called them to come and obey Him by living under His laws. As you read this passage, it becomes clear that the path to receiving God's blessing in the Promised Land would lie in their willingness to obey God, and to love God with all of their hearts. After all that God had done for them it was really the only rational thing for them to do, but as humans we don't always behave in rational ways, do we?

God promised Israel that if they would live in obedience to Him and love Him, He would send the rains on the Promised Land at the right times, so that there would always be a bountiful harvest, and the land would truly flow with milk and honey. The land itself was a free gift of God's grace but the blessing the Israelites would enjoy in the land would be in direct proportion to their willingness to love, obey and serve God.

In the same way our salvation is a free gift of God's grace and not of works so that no man can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9), but the blessings we receive as a result of our salvation are directly tied to how we respond to the grace we have been shown. Jesus made it perfectly clear that the only rational response to the salvation we have been shown through the cross is for us to be willing to die to ourselves and willing follow (love, serve, obey) him.

Luke 9:23 *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*

Every day we are faced with a choice to either love ourselves, or deny ourselves and love the one who died for our sins. The path to blessing in our new life in Christ is to love, serve and obey Jesus with all of our lives. Jesus made it very clear that the only way we bear fruit in our lives (be blessed) is if we abide or remain in him.

John 15:5 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*

April 4 – Deuteronomy 11: 16 – 28

As God continues to prepare Israel for entry into the Promised Land, He lays out for them a series of blessing and curses. Blessings if they obey, and curses if they chose not to obey. Look at verses 16 and 17. In these verses God warns His people not to turn to the idolatry of the nations around them. He further warns them that if they do become idolatrous that there will be consequences—literally God will shut up the heavens so there is no rain, and their crops will fail.

On the other hand, in verses 22 – 25, God tells His people what will happen if they are faithful to Him, seeking to carefully observe His laws, loving God with all of their heart, and holding fast to Him. God will defeat their enemies, and enlarge their territory.

As you read this it all sounds very works oriented. Do what is right and God will bless you, do what is wrong and God will curse you. It sounds that way because in one sense it is. But let's not lose sight of the foundation upon which God calls His people to love and faithfulness. It is because of all that God has already done, and all that God has promised to do for them. God's grace came first, their obedience and love flow out of God's love and mercy.

1 John 4: 19 We love because He first loved us.

God does not love us because of the works we do for Him, He loves us simply because for reasons all His own, He chooses to.

Ephesians 1: 3 – 6 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

We are what we are, we do what we do, because God chose to love us, when we didn't deserve to be loved. That is the foundation then for why we are to live as God has called us to live.

Now if you think about it what God is saying here makes complete sense. Why did God choose Israel and bring them into the Promised

Land? In the book of Isaiah, God says that Israel was to be a light to the nations around them. Jesus echoed that theme in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5: 14 – 16 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

We take those words and apply them to ourselves and our church, and rightly so, but remember when Jesus spoke those words he was speaking to a Jewish audience, and in doing that he was reminding them of what God had called them to be. So, what does all of this have to do with the blessings and curses here in Deuteronomy 11? The reason why God would bless Israel for their obedience and worship was so that their light would shine brightly to the world around them. If Israel was to turn from God and worship idols like the nations around them, they would no longer be a light to the nations. If God blessed them in their idolatry, the other nations would begin think that Israel’s idolatry was the way to go.

So here is the application for our lives. We are saved by grace, but we are called to be salt and light to the world around us. God blesses us so that we can do that. If we look like the world around us, it is likely God will remove His blessing, so that the world won’t be deluded into thinking that their lives can be blessed if they continue to live in sin and rebellion against God.

The Book of Revelations actually gives us a very clear picture of this. Listen to what Jesus said, in speaking to the church of Ephesus.

Revelation 2: 4 – 5 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

If a church or a believer abandons their first love, Christ, then they begin to look like the world around them. Why should Christ bless them if that is the case? The phrase “remove your lampstand” literally mean that presence of Christ will leave. A Christian cannot lose their salvation, but a Christian and the church can lose the blessing of the daily presence

and power of Christ in their lives, because they turn away from Christ and their love for him.

April 5 – Deuteronomy 12: 1 – 14

What was God telling Israel about how to worship Him in these verses? Look again at verse 8.

Deuteronomy 12: 8 “You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes.

As Israel wandered in the Wilderness, people offered sacrifices to God wherever they saw fit, and in the land they were about to inherit, there were places of worship everywhere—on high hills, under trees. But God was telling Israel that once they came to the Promised Land, it would no longer be that way. There would be a place established by God, a place where God would put His name for His dwelling.

Because God is God and we are His creatures, God has the right to decide where and how we are to worship Him.

In John 4, Jesus meets a Samaritan women by a well. A conversation ensues about worship and the proper place of worship.

John 4: 19 – 24 The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

The Samaritans were a mixed race of people that partially descended from the 10 Northern Tribes of Israel. The 10 Northern Tribes of Israel became their own kingdom after Solomon died. Jeroboam became their king, and he did not want his people going to Jerusalem, the place God had designated to put His name to be worshipped, so Jeroboam set up two places of worship with golden calves in Dan and Bethel. After the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC, many from the that kingdom were taken into captivity. The Samaritans were the ones who

were not taken. They intermarried with other nations, but they continued to offer worship at a place known as Mt. Gerizim, which is the mountain the woman is referring to in this conversation.

Jesus' response to this woman is very interesting in view of what God has said here in Deuteronomy 12. A change was about to come in the way people worship. Worship would no longer center around a specific place where God had put His name. But God would still be dictating the terms of how He would be worshipped. It would be in spirit and in truth.

What does that mean for us?

We cannot come to Him however we see fit, we have to come to Him on His terms. Jesus made it clear what those terms are:

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Think about what Jesus is saying in that verse. We cannot come to God as we see fit. We have to come to God through Jesus. What does that mean? Think of the words to the hymn Rock of Ages. "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling." The only way to come to God and worship in a way that is pleasing and acceptable to Him is through Jesus. The only way to come to Jesus is with a broken and contrite heart.

Psalms 51: 16 – 17 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

But now think what Bible tells us happens to us when we come to God through Jesus with a broken and contrite heart.

Revelation 22: 3 – 5 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Think about that promise in light of what God says in Deuteronomy 12 about worship only taking place where God has put His name. If you

are a Christian, God has put His name on you. Your life, your being are the place where God is to be worshipped, in spirit and in truth.

April 6 - Deuteronomy 15: 1 – 11

As Israel settled in the Promised Land, God instituted two different, but related mechanisms to eliminate poverty while at the same time keeping others from becoming too wealthy. One of those ways is found here in Deuteronomy 15. Every seven years all debts between fellow Israelites were to be canceled and forgiven. This was a way to keep people from becoming chronic debtors with no hope of ever being able to be out of debt. But there is another interesting provision that God made to help ensure economic parity in Israel. This provision is found in Leviticus 25 and is known as the Year of Jubilee. As the Israelites took possession of the Promised Land, God gave each the 12 tribes of Israel their own territory within the Promised Land, and then each of the tribal territories were divided among the clans and families of that tribe. Each family's land was to be a lasting inheritance, in other words, it was always to belong to the family it had been given to. In the Year of Jubilee, all land was returned to the original family that owned the land.

These provisions gave every family in Israel hope for the future no matter what they might have experienced in their past or what their present circumstances were. Even if a debt could not be repaid, even if the family land was sold, there was always a way for a family to get out of debt, get their land back and get back on their feet again. Over the years, as the Israelites moved away from God and God's rule over them, these two practices were abandoned. There was no hope for the poor; there was no way out of debt.

But Jesus began his earthly ministry with these words:

Luke 4:16-21 *He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. ¹⁷ The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, ²¹ and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

Jesus came to restore hope to those who were poor and without hope. He came to give us back what we have lost. The Year of Jubilee and the year for cancelling debts were more than just ways of insuring economic stability and giving economic hope to the Israelites, they also serve as a picture of the debt we could never repay being cancelled forever.

Colossians 2:13-14 *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.*

And the hope of an eternal inheritance that can never be taken away from us and we can never lose.

1 Peter 1:3-4 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you,*

April 7 – Deuteronomy 15: 12 – 18

In Old Testament Israel, an Israelite could become a slave by selling themselves into slavery to settle a debt. In a sense, this was a forced kind of slavery that was brought about by an inability to pay a debt that had been incurred. But even in this we can see God's mercy. The first thing we need to understand is that this form of slavery was very different from the Civil War era slavery in America. First, an Israelite could only enter into this arrangement voluntarily, so it was more like indentured servitude than it was slavery. Secondly, God placed limits on the term that this form of servitude could last. In the 7th year the slave was to be made free again, and notice what verse 13 says. The slave owner was not to send the slave away empty handed after their term of service. Just as God provided for the Israelites to leave Egypt with plunder from the Egyptians, a slave owner was to see to it that the newly freed slave had material goods to start life over again economically.

But there is one other provision that God made for a slave who had served his master for 6 years, and it is found in verses 16-17. If a slave wanted to, they could stay on as a slave to their master. Making this choice would mark them forever by having their ear lobe pierced. Why would a slave do this? The answer is found in verse 16—because they deeply love their master.

Understanding this Old Testament practice helps us to understand what Paul writes in:

Romans 6:14-18 *For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. ¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

At one time we were slaves to sin and had no choice but to serve our master Satan. But because of Jesus' death on the cross we have been set free from our slavery to sin. But how do we respond to one who gave so much to set us free? We willingly allow ourselves to once again become slaves—not to sin, but to righteousness—willing servants of Jesus Christ, the master we love.

April 8 – Deuteronomy 17: 14 – 20

God always intended for Israel to have a king. We can see that clearly as we read these verses. But Israel's king wasn't to be chosen as other countries chose their king, and Israel's king was not to behave like the kings of other lands. Israel's king was always to be humble, and dedicated to following the laws of God. In spite of his sinfulness, David, Israel's second king, was a picture of this ideal king that God describes in Deuteronomy 17. Ultimately these verses point us forward to Jesus, our eternal king. He is a picture of humility. Speaking about Jesus the prophet Isaiah said these words, which Matthew's gospel quotes as it describes Jesus' servant like kingship:

Matthew 12:17-21 *This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁸ "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. ¹⁹ He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. ²⁰ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. ²¹ In his name the nations will put their hope." (Isaiah 42:1-4).*

Paul also describes Jesus' humble kingship.

Philippians 2:5-8 *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to*

be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

Servant-like humility isn't a characteristic we would expect to find in a king. But Jesus isn't your ordinary king. Israel's king was also supposed to be dedicated to fully obeying God's law. Jesus did exactly that.

Matthew 5:17-18 *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.*

These words in Deuteronomy told the Israelites what kind of king they should seek to rule over them, but more importantly these words point us ahead to Jesus the true king.

Revelation 17:14 *the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings-- and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."*

Jesus, our king, is humble and gentle like a lamb, but he is also the Lion of Judah, our warrior king who rules us, defends us, and defeats our enemies—sin, death and Satan.

April 9 – Deuteronomy 18: 14 – 22

In the Old Testament there were three offices; the office of king, priest, and prophet. These offices were separate and distinct, and each was to be held by different men. The priests were responsible to be the mediators between God and man offering sacrifices to God on behalf of the people of God. The office of king was instituted by God to provide leadership and to rule over the people of God, and the office of prophet was instituted by God to speak for God, and communicate the will of God to the people of God. Each of these offices points us to Jesus. Jesus is our prophet, priest and king. It is easy to understand how the office of priest points us to Jesus as our priest making the sacrifice for our sin, and yesterday we saw that words written in the Book of Deuteronomy pointed the Israelites and ourselves to our true king, Jesus. Today in our reading, Moses describes the office of a true prophet and once again this office points us to Jesus. Moses tells the Israelites that a true prophet will speak for God. Peter, speaking in the

Book of Acts, quotes from this passage in Deuteronomy and tells his listeners that Jesus is the one whom Moses was speaking about.

Acts 3:18-26 *But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. ¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰ and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you-- even Jesus. ²¹ He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. ²² For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. ²³ Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.'* ²⁴ *"Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. ²⁵ And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.'* ²⁶ *When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."*

A true prophet didn't just predict the future, he spoke for God. He called people to repent and turn to God, and revealed the will of God to those who would listen. That is exactly what Jesus did as he ministered here on earth. He called people to repent.

Matthew 4:17 *From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."*

He tells people what God's will for them is:

John 6:37-40 *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."*

Jesus is the true prophet that Moses was speaking about in Deuteronomy 18, not because he foretold the future (although he did do that in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21), but because He spoke for God calling us to repent, and to know God's will. As the true prophet, Jesus reveals God to us.

John 14:7-9 *If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." ⁸ Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." ⁹ Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."*