

Remember Who You Are:

Passing on the Faith to the Next Generation of the Covenant

A Devotional Study through Deuteronomy for Covenant Parents

-- Grant Van Leuven

God's covenant people—Israel, who inherited and were the outworking in part of God's promise to the patriarchs in Genesis, were then delivered by God from Egypt in Exodus, and next were led by God through the wilderness in discipline for forty years, now find themselves standing on the precipice of the Promised Land. But only three of them had seen most of their national history first hand: Moses, Joshua, and Caleb. And only the latter two would enter into the land. A second generation of the Israelites who had inherited freedom from Egypt and the national covenant with God, both through the mediator Moses who would not be joining them beyond the Jordan River, now is ready to advance as God's chosen people. But they will be without much of the first-hand witness besides their wilderness wanderings as the first generation died off for not believing and taking this land four decades prior. Here in Deuteronomy, God prepares the next generation of national Israel for this pivotal step in the history of redeeming His people and settling them in the land flowing with milk and honey while maintaining their dependence on Him and His law and His mercy.

The lessons in Deuteronomy for God's people in the new administration of the Covenant of Grace (the church) on the importance of passing on the faith to our covenant children while preparing them for their own march onward are incredibly helpful. Let us observe how Moses addresses the next generation of God's people by telling them to remember how God has led them through redemptive history; to remember the Law God gave them as His peculiar people; to remember to ratify their national covenant with God; to keep the covenant; and to be comforted that, even in their rebellion, God will always be faithful to the covenant He made to the patriarchs on their descendants' behalf, and He will always offer mercy and blessing to His people for repentance and obedience.

Before we begin, following are some highlights of the purpose and theology of this closing book of the Pentateuch:

Deuteronomy's Theme:

“The theme of Deuteronomy is covenant renewal. On the plains of Moab, Moses led Israel in recommitting to God and his covenant” (Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 457).

“Moses led the people in a covenant renewal before they undertook the wars of conquest for the land promised to the fathers; he prepared the people for his imminent death” (Dillard and Longman, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 91).

Deuteronomy's Purpose:

“In addition to reiterating the covenant made earlier at Sinai (29:1), the book prepared Israel primarily for two major issues that the nation would soon face: (1) life without Moses and (2) the wars for the conquest of the land” (Dillard and Longman, 92).

“Its historical setting links the Sinai and wilderness experiences with the conquest of Canaan and provides a transition from Moses’ leadership to Joshua’s ... Its theological emphases set the tone for how Israel must live in the land they will inherit from the God who has chosen them” (House, *Old Testament Theology*, 169).

“History, covenant and transition dominate the book in a way that teaches the new generation to expect God to act decisively on their behalf because of similar acts in the past” (House, 170).

In large part, Deuteronomy is about remembering who we are as God’s people, and training our children to know and remember who they are and who they will be as God’s people while we journey toward the Promised Land of heaven.

Remember Your Covenantal History *Moses’ First Address, Deut. 1-4:40*

“The first speech of Moses ... constitutes the first four chapters of Deuteronomy. Clearly, it has two divisions: (1) chs. 1-3, which are a historical review of Israel’s odyssey, beginning with the departure from Sinai, followed by the wilderness wanderings; (2) ch. 4, which is primarily an exhortation” (Hamilton, 370).

First, note that Moses addresses “all Israel” in verse one. Everyone is assembled, as men, women, and children are all God’s people who need to know who they are and how they are to live for and represent themselves in the Promised Land, especially as they will be without Moses once they advance.

Moses reminds them of eight past events (1:9-3:29):

1. 1:9-18: Moses’ burdens reduced by the appointment of judges who will function as assistants (cf. Exod. 18:13ff.; Num. 11:10ff.)
2. 1:19-46: The story of the spies sent out to gather data about the land of Canaan (cf. Num. 13-14)
3. 2:1-8a: Israel’s passage around the territory of Edom (cf. Num. 20:14-21)
4. 2:8b-25: Israel’s passage through the territory of Moab (cf. Num. 21:4-20)
5. 2:26-37: Israel’s victory over Sihon of Heshbon (cf. Num. 21:21-32)
6. 3:1-7: Israel’s victory over Og of Bashan (cf. Num. 21:33-35)
7. 3:8-22: The distribution of tribal territories east of the Jordan (cf. Numbers 32)

8. 3:23-29: Moses' request to enter Canaan and the denial of permission (cf. Num. 27:12-14, although the two are different incidents) (Hamilton, 379)

In verse 8, Moses says to go possess the land that the LORD promised to their forefathers “and their seed after them.” Moses emphasizes to the next generation of Israel that they are the embodiment of the next phase of God fulfilling His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is especially referenced in verse 10, where Moses says to Israel, “ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude.” The temporal aspect of God’s promise to the patriarchs is already obvious before they even possess the temporal Promised Land. This should be emphasized to our children today: “you are the seed of Abraham, children of the promise, an outworking of God’s covenant blessing.”

Still, while God has been faithful to His promise to the patriarchs, Moses reminds the next generation of all their parents’ unbelief and disobedience and the penalties that Israel faced as a result, surely as a warning of what not to repeat as they ready to enter the Promised Land: “The historical acts of Yahweh become a basic part of the book’s viewpoint, particularly as these acts relate to the claims Yahweh makes on the Israelites, both at that moment and after they entered the Land of Promise” (KJV Study Bible, 294). Hamilton points out that “Moses’ recall of the past is not merely repetitive; it is also interpretive” (380). There is a lesson to be learned from history, and much of the lesson is not to repeat disobedience. The other lesson is how God has remained faithful to them in spite of their lack of faithfulness.

Deuteronomy 4:1-40 Moses Commands Obedience

“With the Lord’s faithfulness illustrated by the facts of history, Moses proceeds to call the people to faithfulness in Deuteronomy 4:1-43” (House, 173).

In verse 1, Moses hearkens them to hear – we must listen to God to know how to obey Him. And he says obedience is required to possess the land and live in it. In verse 2, Moses commands them not to add or take away from what the LORD had commanded the Israelites through him. This is an important reminder of the regulative principle of worship while also providing implications for holy living and liberty of conscience. These are all areas that the first generation of national Israel failed with mightily. Yet verse 4 is a beautiful verse illustrating trust in God and faithful perseverance by His grace: “But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day.” When we hearken unto God in love and faithfulness, we live. God offers blessing to us. And verse 7 is a beautiful observation of the privilege of encamping around the temple of God, who abides with, judges for, and communicates with Israel: “For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is all things that we call upon him for?” We need to remember for ourselves and remember to impress upon our children that it is truly a privileged position that we are in as God’s chosen people, which should not be taken for granted as it was throughout the wilderness epoch.

And Moses in verse 20 reminds them as they ready to enter and possess Canaan that God took them out of the land of Egypt as His possession to be able to do so in the first place. They enter not as their own people, but as God's people. In verse 23, there is a reminder to "take heed unto yourselves" and remember the covenant which God made with them. It was a covenant that continues throughout generations and thus binds them to God. It is a covenant we either transgress or live by.

In verses 26–31, God warns that they will fall away and thus be scattered about the nations. However, there will always be room to repent. The reason is always the same: "For the LORD thy God is a merciful God" and especially, "He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which He swore unto them." This is incredibly comforting, and a glorious backdrop of redemptive history that serves as an important reference for all the chastisements and calls to repent from the prophets that would simply be a recapitulation of this promise here to the Israelites before they even enter Canaan: "God's people may 'forget' God and his precepts (v. 9), but God will never 'forget his people (v. 31)" (Hamilton, 383).

In verses 32-36, Moses encourages Israel to marvel at the incredible events and special inheritance that they have been given in the LORD. There has been nothing like it in all of history since creation. We should remember what a marvel this is, and why it is the theme of the rest of the Bible. And in verse 37, we are reminded that we are loved and chosen "... because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them ..." We are simply the seed of the promise to the fathers of the faith, and therefore in verse 39 there is an exhortation to know that the LORD alone is God of heaven and earth and there is no other god. Our children need to be told that they belong to generations of the seed of the promise—a promise made by the one and only God. And they should never forget it as they continue in life and look forward to eternal life where we join our covenant God and all His covenant people.

Remember Your Covenant with God by His Law

Moses' Second Address, Deuteronomy 4:44-26:19

"First is Moses' reminder to his audience that at Horeb (i.e., Sinai) the Lord made a covenant 'with us ... not with our ancestors' (5:2-3 NRSV) ... What Moses is appealing for is that his contemporaries fully appropriate that earlier covenant for themselves. God's word to the first generation is to be appropriated by the next generation ... Thus far we have encountered the recalling of history; now we encounter the recalling of Sinaitic law" (Hamilton, 391).

The Ten Commandments Recapitulated

In verse 2, the basis of revisiting the Ten Commandments is the covenant that God made with the Israelites in Horeb on Mt. Sinai, which established the national relationship of the organic Abrahamic seed by way of a solemn agreement to which they both gave verbal expression. Besides pointing to the promise to the patriarchs, the retelling of Israel's history as God's chosen people especially was relevant as it related to the inauguration of a more formal, national people who covenanted to keep God's law. It is still binding, and it is still what needs to be before them in living with and as God's people as they are about to no longer be a wandering people just freed from slavery and inaugurated as a nation, but a settled people with their own land that God is giving to them, and this is by way of the still binding and guiding covenant at Sinai – they have a history. “The people must understand that the Sinai covenant, which he now interprets, was made with them (5:2-3). It was a permanent, ‘once-for-all establishment of the covenant in history’ that links the audience with its ancestors” (House, 176).

In verse 15, we see that this time the commandment to remember the Sabbath is not connected with creation as it was in Exodus, but with deliverance out of Egypt. As the Israelites prepare to enter Canaan, which represents eternal rest, a type of heaven, they are reminded of the land of slavery that is now behind them. They have been given rest from temporal slavery in a new land of peace with God. And as a type of heaven, Canaan must point us and our children in union with Christ to the final reality that the LORD frees us from the slavery of sin to enjoy His rest on the Sabbath as a type of our eternal rest still waiting for us in heaven. Hebrews chapter 4 explains and warns us and our children to not follow the example of unbelief and disobedience by the first generation of national Israel in the wilderness who didn't get to enter, and it points us to the final resting place of God's people: ⁹ *There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.* ¹⁰ *For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.* ¹¹ *Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.*

This chapter in Deuteronomy is really a reminder of who Israel is as God's delivered people who covenanted with Him to be His holy people in the new land of which they are about to take and enjoy. “The repetition of the Decalogue had impressed on Israel the idea of one divine law. The theme of oneness is then continued into the second half of ch. 5. Not only is there *one law*, there also is only *one mediator* ... the idea of oneness, sounded in ch. 5 is perpetuated in ch. 6. The progression is *one law, one mediator, and now one Lord*” (Hamilton, 392, 3).

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 The Great Commandment and Its Application

Verse four begins with the very familiar “Shema” (meaning Hear!): “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one Lord.” While there is no doubt that God is one in substance, “In Deut. 6:4, Moses lifts monotheism and the nature of God beyond arithmetic and numbers and places them into the realm of ethics—a God who is always consistent with himself and with us. And that is true for any generation that chooses to follow him” (Hamilton, 395). And this is an encouragement to pass on to our children: “Because God possesses constant

character, the people may be sure that Yahweh is consistent, truthful, revelatory, and worthy of worship” (House, 178). God will be the God of our children because He never changes, and there is none like Him.

Verse 5 is the Great Commandment referred to by Jesus: “... thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” Love is the heart of the matter of keeping the law. And we show we love God by keeping His law: “It is as if Deuteronomy makes the case that one loves God by obeying and honoring him and by making a commitment to holy living” (Hamilton, 394). See also Deuteronomy 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 19:9; and 30:16 for examples of this call to obey. Jesus affirms the same to His disciples: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). “Love for God, if genuine, inevitably entails obedience to the word of God. One cannot love God with all one’s heart and be lukewarm toward God’s word” (Hamilton, 395). We must teach our children to love God, which is expressed by living for Him according to His law.

We see in verse 6 that the words of the commandments need to be in our heart—it cannot just be outward acquiescence, but must be inward love for God that results in the fruit of obedience. And a vital part of passing on the faith for our children to remember is teaching them to obey God. In verses 7-9, we are instructed to be diligent about teaching the commandments to our children at home and on our way through life in every opportunity we have, morning and night. We need to make the effort to remind ourselves and our children of God’s laws in our house so that they stay fresh in our hearts. While the Word must be on our heart, spiritually speaking, we should notice that the activity of teaching our children requires diligence (vs. 7). And it really is important that the décor of our house and even what we wear, what we display, even in our cars, help to lead us and our children in thinking about God and His Word and thus loving and obeying Him. How do all the things that we engage with in our daily activities help or hinder our walk in love with God? What do we allow on our computer, on the television, on the radio, and in our DVD and MP3 players? Do we catechize our children to memorize the doctrine of Scriptures? Do we creatively display God’s Word through hangings on our walls? What about on the refrigerator? Our children notice these deliberate acts at witnessing. And they mimic them, or the lack thereof. They will think about what we teach them to think about, and much of this is inadvertently abandoned if we are not diligently using all our time along the way toward more formal activities with worship and life in the church.

Yahweh commands the people to internalize the covenant and teach their children to do the same (6:6-9). Each new member of the holy community must be taught by God’s ways. Faith does not occur automatically. It must be understood and owned (6:6), so each parent must teach his or her children, just as Moses has been teaching them. Instruction must be purposeful, even to the point of becoming public (6:9). The idea is to ‘impress, or inscribe’ truth on the heart, not simply to suggest it. Such careful teaching will help avoid forgetting Yahweh in prosperity (6:10-12), in new settings (6:13-19) or when new generations emerge, uncertain of what the old revelation means (6:20-25). (House, 178)

It is a fearful thing to consider what might happen to our children and the next generation of the church if we are not so diligently applying God's Word in the simplest and basic aspects of our daily family living. Consider the grief of King Hezekiah for the wrath that the people endured by virtue of ignorance for a lack of their forefathers in being careful to pass on the faith:

2 Kings 22:10-13 ¹⁰ And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. ¹¹ And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes. ¹² And the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying, ¹³ Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great *is* the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.

As well, how alarming that the one faithful generation with Joshua having advanced into Canaan, even with memorials and covenant renewals, apparently neglected teaching their children faith in their Redeemer. After Joshua and his generation dies, it is said early in Judges that their children did not know God and thus betrayed Him!

Judges 2:10-13 And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. ¹¹ And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: ¹² And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. ¹³ And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

How did they not know God, unless their parents neglected to teach their covenant children about their covenant God! Let us also heed the words of the Psalmist in our responsibility to follow the example and warning of Moses to teach our children the ways of our covenant God:

Psalm 78 ... ² I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: ³ Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. ⁴ We will not hide *them* from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. ⁵ For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: ⁶ That the generation to come might know *them*, *even* the children *which* should be born; *who* should arise and declare *them* to their children: ⁷ That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: ⁸ And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation *that* set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God ... ¹⁰ They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law; ¹¹ And forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them. ¹²

Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers ... ³⁷ For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant. ³⁸ But he, *being* full of compassion, forgave *their* iniquity, and destroyed *them* not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. ³⁹ For he remembered that they *were but* flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.

Verses 11-12 serve as a good warning to not let the blessings God gives to His church to be forgotten so that our children forget Him and therefore disobey Him. Here is a good focus for teaching on Biblical stewardship as people of faith. Our children live in a prosperous country, and too many seem to drift away from the church for vain careers in particularly pagan areas away from home without a strong church to be rooted in. No doubt, families might seriously consider moving with a pastor to new areas to start church plants and witness to the world. And preparing for careers that allow for mobility and ample resources to do so would be wonderful. But sadly, this is not apparently a consideration for many of our youth who put themselves at danger of forsaking the faith of eternal life for temporal fortune. This is obviously a very serious problem to be wary of, as the concern is raised again in chapter eight. In verse 3, it is explained that God allowed hunger and fed the people only with manna that He “might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.” Here is another Scripture that Jesus quotes in defiance of the Devil’s tempting in His wilderness experience. Also, it harkens to John chapter four when Jesus tells His disciples that He has food to eat of which they know not when they were concerned that He eat something. And He calls that food “to do the will of God”. This should be Israel’s food, and ours and our children’s as well. And we need to remember we are journeying through a spiritual wilderness and need God’s Word and His people to sustain us.

In verse 5, the Israelites are encouraged to consider in their heart (reflect truthfully) that God chastens His children. There is a similar sentiment in Hebrews 12:6, that the Lord disciplines those whom He loves. As we pass on our faith to our children, we need to help them understand that God chastens the Israelites because they are His chosen children. And we are His chosen children, so He corrects us. Thus, not only are we commanded to discipline our own children in the Bible, but it is expected that we do so as parents who love them.

As well, “Love is also defined as remembering ... remembering will keep their commitments current (8:10-18)” (House, 179). So all our efforts to help our children remember the Lord and obey Him is an effort to help them love God. Again, this is Moses’ command in 6:5-6.

In 10:22, God reminds them that their fathers went to Egypt small, and that He has made them “as the stars of heaven for multitude.” He is fulfilling His promise to the patriarchs. But our beginnings are humble, not to mention we are born in sin (Psalm 51). As God prospers us and increases our numbers in church, let us always stay humble and reliant on God, lest he disperse us to refocus our attention. As well, “... Israel is to obey these laws not to *become* holy, but rather, because Israel *is* holy. The observance of law is a by-product of holiness, not a

means of attaining holiness” (Hamilton, 402). We equally need to remind our children that they are holy by virtue of God and His holiness. They are separated out from the world to live for and with God as a witness to Him before the watching world.

Among many general and specific stipulations of God’s law that Moses either reiterates or develops, important aspects of the Levitical law are revisited, things that particularly express the reciprocity of the covenant:

Deuteronomy 16:1 The Passover Reviewed

Deuteronomy 16:9 The Festival of Weeks Reviewed

Deuteronomy 16:13 The Festival of Booths Reviewed

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 Rebellious Children

Here parents take a rebellious son to the elders because he is unrepentant. He is unrelentingly breaking the fifth commandment and the severity is such that the elders are to stone him. God confirms this punishment upon being sought out through Moses. This is a sobering example of how important the family structure is to the order and faithfulness of the covenant community. We need to be earnest in our efforts to raise our children in the Lord. Women are commanded to be keepers of the home (Titus 2) as it is vitally important work and they are to be honored for it (Proverbs 31). And we should seek out the elders proactively to help us to do so through welcoming regular shepherding visits in our homes so that the children experience how important the covenant community is, as is our participation in it before God.

Hamilton notes Deuteronomy 24: “a deterrent to behavior that is inappropriate for those who bear the name of Yahweh is memory. Three times the chapter calls the reader to remember ...” (431). He points out other verses that call us to remember: 24:9, 18, 22; 25:17; 32:7. “The Israelites are to remember things about themselves about which they cannot boast, and things about Yahweh about which they cannot help but boast” (Hamilton, 432).

Deuteronomy 26:1- First Fruits and Tithes

Verse 13 connects us with confession of not forgetting to keep God’s commandments. Tithes and offerings are obligations and thanks that help us remember and obey God’s law. Teach your children to give to the church and its work from the earliest age, so that they are faithful in expressing their partnership in God’s work and the future generations of the church provide for such.

Deuteronomy 26:16-19 Concluding Exhortation to Be God’s Holy, Peculiar People

Harkening back to Exodus 19 at Mount Sinai, Moses reminds the Israelites and Christians today that we are who we are by God choosing us, and He chooses us to be a separate, holy, particular people as a witness to His glory amidst the nations. We need to help our children establish this as their own self-identity if they are to remain faithful and yet not be proud and take it for granted, which was clearly a problem for the first generation of national Israel.

Renew and Remember

Moses' Third Address, Deuteronomy 27:1-29:1

Deuteronomy 27:1-10 The Inscribed Stones and Altar on Mount Ebal

The stones were to have all of the words of God's law on them. This is yet another way of serving the important purpose of reminding the Israelites each step of the way to be faithful to their covenant God. Especially now that they will have crossed the river into Canaan and would not look back. Especially as they will now face and be surrounded by many pagan temptations. So Moses calls them to obey all of God's words, and in great detail describes the blessings and curses associated with either being covenant keepers or breakers (notice there is not another category).

“The nation exists—it receives its national identity—as a people in covenant with Yahweh. It is a nation set apart and defined by its adherence to this covenant (Deut. 5:1-3; 6:1-25). It was to be an enduring relationship, regularly renewed in successive generations.” (Dillard and Longman, 102). It is really no different for us. Formally or informally, we need to ratify our covenant with God, even if simply by reiterating Joshua's proclamation in our family devotions, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” And we need to do this for and before our children and instruct them to do the same.

Remember to Keep the Covenant

Moses' Fourth Address, Deuteronomy 29:2-30:20

The Covenant Renewed in Moab

Chapter 29 verse 29 reads “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” Notice that this is in the context of all of God's covenant expectations that bind His people to Him with threats of curses for disobedience and promises of blessing for obedience. They are for us and for our children to do. God reveals things to us to know Him and obey Him in love. And this is expressed by way of His covenant law.

The Introduction to the *Testimony* of the RPCNA explains:

7. Israel frequently responded to God by covenanting with Him to live in faithfulness to the covenant given through Moses (Josh. 24), or to bring about reform after apostasy (2 Chron. 15:12; 29:10; 34:29-32; Neh. 9: 38). These were solemn agreements between the people and God that they would observe His revealed law in particular circumstances in their day (Neh. 9:38; 10:29). Though these are covenants, they are to be distinguished from the covenants given by God to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, David and from the new covenant. (A-3)

Alongside Chapter 22 of the *Westminster Confession: Of Lawful Oaths and Vows*, the *Testimony* further applies this to the church today:

9. Covenanting in the New Testament takes the form of confessing Christ and His Lordship. In view of the continued emphasis of the covenantal relationship of God to men in the New Testament, it is appropriate for churches and nations to covenant to be the Lord's and to serve Him. The statements or documents produced in these acts of covenant response are dependent upon the Covenant of Grace. They are statements of responsibility arising from the application of the Word of God to the times in which they are made. Such covenants have continuing validity in so far as they give true expression to the Word of God for the times and situations in which believers live. (A-69)

See the example of King Josiah later in this study as an example of national covenanting as a way of repenting as a people and ratifying allegiance to God as His chosen people.

Deuteronomy 30:1-10 God's Fidelity Assured

If the Israelites are cursed and dispersed among other nations anywhere under heaven and “call to mind” the blessings and curses Moses spoke to them, and return in their heart to do them, God Himself will go to get them and return them to the Promised Land. Moses encourages them to remember, even then, the LORD, and He will forgive. He will “circumcise their hearts” (vs. 6) that they may love Him and live, which becomes the background of Jeremiah 32:39 and Ezekiel 11:19 speaking of the New Testament church. We and our children need to be taught not only obedience, but repentance, and be set up to draw to mind God's mercy that we may cry out for it: “Limits of human ability are contrasted with the unlimited faithfulness and resources of God ... An Israel whose future is one under law is also an Israel whose future is one under grace” (Hamilton, 446). God is the Alpha and Omega, and He also is the beginning and end of our being His people through the Author and Finisher of our faith, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:2).

Deuteronomy 30:11-20 Exhortation to Choose Life

In verses 11-13, the people are told not to make excuses that God's word is too far away to hear and obey. They are responsible to remember. We are responsible to remember, and we are responsible to set up our children to remember. And we are to remember so that we do God's Word: "But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it" (verse 14).

In verses 15–20, the choice for life in obedience or curse and death in disobedience is held out for them to make a moral choice about and act accordingly. The same choice is held out to us today through Christ, who tells us to show our love for Him by keeping His commandments.

Verse 19 reads, "...choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live." Our choices have a covenantal impact on our children, our seed. While they will be responsible for their own choices in the next generation of the Church, we impact the faithful or faithless context that our children will find themselves in. We must choose to give them a context of belief and obedience. And this context by God's providence matters greatly.

God Will Remember His Covenant

God Addresses Moses, Joshua, and the Israelites, Deuteronomy 31:1-34:10-12

What will you and I do to set up our children to be people of faith living out their faith in love? Hamilton summarizes this last book of the Pentateuch in the following way, "... Deuteronomy begins with reflection on a past of which Moses was a part, and it ends with reflection on a future in which Moses will have no part" (453). We must always have before our minds that we will not be holding our children's hands all the way to glory. They will, Lord willing, leave our homes in marriage and need to be able to walk with God without us after we die. An important element of setting our children up for a life of faith and obedience is giving them something to remember. Teaching them God's Word, and teaching them to constantly be reading God's Word. Moses sets such an example up for the next generation of the church.

Deuteronomy 31:9-13 The Law to Be Read Every Seventh Year

"The written word replaces Moses, the covenant's mediator, as God's recorder of deeds and commands" (House, 194).

In verses 10-13, Moses says that every seven years the priests are to read the law Moses wrote before the assembled people. The men, women, and children are to gather to hear and learn and fear the LORD so as to observe all the words of the law. This is a constant, deliberate review of God's law to live and keep it as a covenant community and to teach it to the children who will not have heard it originally. It is a

call to learn and remember. It is a call to not forget. One of the few good kings of Judah, Josiah, gives us an example of seeking the Lord in His Word as a people, and responding to it appropriately in renewal of national covenanting.

2 Kings 23:2-3 ² And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. ³ And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all *their* heart and all *their* soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.

We see a similar situation with Ezra the priest reestablishing the nation that God brings back from exile. They must establish themselves once again with their covenant God through ratifying their commitment corporately to His covenant law, based on the promise to the Patriarchs and established in national Israel. And doing so was a blessing and joy.

Nehemiah 8:1-10 And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that *was* before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. ² And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. ³ And he read therein before the street that *was* before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* unto the book of the law. ⁴ And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, *and* Meshullam. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: ⁶ And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground. ⁷ Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people *stood* in their place. ⁸ So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused *them* to understand the reading. ⁹ And Nehemiah, which *is* the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day *is* holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. ¹⁰ Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for *this* day *is* holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

Notice that the joy of the Lord always is the strength of His people, and that it is to be had in faith and love expressed through obedience. It would seem that such a corporate renewal would merit consideration for our churches, following the example of Reformed

Presbyterians who repented before God as a people and covenanted before Him to endeavor after better obedience in faith and by His grace to His law, together as a people. See the covenant of 1871 in the back of the RP Testimony as an example. Spend time internalizing the repentance and committing of themselves to God anew, together. Can this become a real expression of your posture before God and your commitment to better serve Him? Might it serve as a good devotion for your family, followed by your own covenanting before Him that you and your house will serve the Lord?

Deuteronomy 31:30-32: The Song of Moses

“The purpose of this beautiful psalm is to contrast the faithful dealings of the Lord with the faithlessness of the nation” (E. J. Young, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 102). With all the calls to repentance, even proactively, it is clear that the people will only survive by God and His gracious impositions. All His merciful acts of old are important to always have in mind to prick our hearts to turn to him. Our children need to have that same covenant mercy always held out before them, with the expectation that they will always need God’s mercy in the covenant.

Chapter 32 verse 7 reads, “Remember the days of old.” Remembering through the generations is an important aspect of this book. It manifests our failures and God’s faithfulness. And hopefully it motivates us to love God more and serve Him better to glorify Him in our lives and establish covenant families that pass on His good things from strength to strength (read Psalm 84). Verses 8-14 further call for remembering God’s faithful care of His people. And verses 15-38 call for a sobering remembering in advance of how the people will become rich and forsake God, turn to idols, and will have “forgotten” God (Vs. 18) with the result that God the fount of blessings will have hid from them and send perils upon them. This lack of remembering of God is called a lack of faith (Vs. 20). And if they do not repent, they will in fact not be remembered (Vs. 26). Yet even with this foreseen rebellion, verses 39-43 show that the LORD displays His power in coming back to the aid of His people when they are humbled. We must always combine a remembering of sin with a reminder of mercy from our covenant God as we teach our children to walk with Him. And they can be encouraged that the Lord manifests His glory in providing mercy to His people.

In verse 46, Moses commands the people to speak all of the words of the law to their children and teach them to observe them. The song he just sang will bear witness for the children to do so. They are told to set their hearts upon the words. It is a call yet again to remembrance to thus obey and live: “... Moses’ ‘swan song,’ [is] one that combines the legal dimensions of a covenant lawsuit and the didactic elements of the wisdom tradition” (Hamilton, 457). Hamilton also says of the song in chapter 32, “... the timelessness of the poem ‘exhorts to reflection: every generation in Israel (and then, every reader willing to imagine himself in that position) is here made conscious of

their elected status...and of the accompanying pitfalls of...moral laziness...and hence of their own responsibility in the face of God” (Quoting Fokkelman, 458).

And our motivation once again for remembering the covenant and returning to God is beautifully expressed in verse 10, “He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.” “The phrase is particularly pregnant. The Hebrew reads literally, ‘He kept them as the little man ... of his eye.’ How close do you have to get to another person before you see yourself reflected, diminutively, in that person’s eyes? God has gotten that close to Israel. Israel too he has known face-to-face” (Hamilton, 458). While God’s holiness and our sin are always emphasized in the need for our constant covenant renewal, the entire redemptive stage is that of mercy and intimacy with the one true God. This ought to give us goose bumps of wonder in addition to fearful love.

Deuteronomy 33:1ff Moses' Final Blessing on Israel

In verses 2-28, the blessing begins with another account of the history of the people of God and God’s love for them. It continues with a redemptive historical outlook as it blesses each of the twelve tribes of Israel, which is a lovely connection back to the patriarchs (and Jacob’s blessing at the end of Genesis), and thus God’s covenant to them that is the basis of national Israel’s existence. And Moses expresses this special privilege not to be taken for granted by the generation about to enter the Promised Land and the generations to come out of them:

“Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! And thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.” What an incredible summary of what it is to be God’s chosen, peculiar, holy people entering the land before the pagans who do not have the blessing of having been saved by God and have Him as their shield and sword. (Vs. 29)

Finally, the end of chapter 34 is a moving eulogy of Moses as a prophet like no other who the LORD knew face to face, who showed many signs and wonders in Egypt. It is a tool to guide us in remembering Moses and all that he did for God. He is the primary type of Jesus Christ (see the book of Hebrews, chapter three), who will deliver His people ultimately, speak to them as God Himself (see the prophecy by Moses of Jesus the final prophet in Deuteronomy 18), meet with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration, and give His life up for His people while entering in before them through His resurrection and ascension. Remember Moses the mediator with your children so that we remember to look to the Messiah, our eternal mediator! And remember that this final mediator takes us to our final resting place in glory, the eternal Promised Land: “ ... the Pentateuch ends both realistically (“You are not yet where God wants you to be”) and hopefully (Soon you will be where God wants you to be”). Wilderness is where you are, but wilderness is not where you will remain” (Hamilton, 461) Teach your children to remember that they are not yet where God wants them to be, but they soon will be. Jesus has gone ahead and will lead us

into the Promised Land of heaven on the Last Day. Don't forget to teach this so that you and your children's children live for this promise in faith and expectant obedience!

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