

Israel's Obligations and Responsibilities

Deuteronomy 10

Deuteronomy 10:1-11 - *"At that time the Lord said to me, 'Hew for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to Me on the mountain and make yourself an ark of wood. ² And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke; and you shall put them in the ark.'*

³ "So I made an ark of acacia wood, hewed two tablets of stone like the first, and went up the mountain, having the two tablets in my hand. ⁴ And He wrote on the tablets according to the first writing, the Ten Commandments, which the Lord had spoken to you in the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly; and the Lord gave them to me. ⁵ Then I turned and came down from the mountain, and put the tablets in the ark which I had made; and there they are, just as the Lord commanded me."

⁶ (Now the children of Israel journeyed from the wells of Bene Jaakan to Moserah, where Aaron died, and where he was buried; and Eleazar his son ministered as priest in his stead. ⁷ From there they journeyed to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah to Jotbathah, a land of rivers of water. ⁸ At that time the Lord separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister to Him and to bless in His name, to this day. ⁹ Therefore Levi has no portion nor inheritance with his brethren; the Lord is his inheritance, just as the Lord your God promised him.)

¹⁰ "As at the first time, I stayed in the mountain forty days and forty nights; the Lord also heard me at that time, and the Lord chose not to destroy you. ¹¹ Then the Lord said to me, 'Arise, begin your journey before the people, that they may go in and possess the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.'"

Background Notes

In commentaries on the book of Deuteronomy, Old Testament scholars approach the structure of the book in two different ways. On the one hand, it can be shown that the arrangement of the content of Deuteronomy follows the typical form of an ancient treaty. Treaties between suzerain lords and their vassals were common in the ancient world of the Bible. These treaties followed a certain set structure or format: first a preamble, then an historical prologue, then the stipulations of the treaty, followed by the sanctions ("the blessings and the curses"). Finally, the arrangements for the continuation of the covenant were given.

The book of Deuteronomy can be shown to follow this treaty structure in general, with God as the "Suzerain Lord" and the children of Israel as the vassal nation. Two copies of these ancient treaties were always kept - one by the suzerain lord and one by the vassal people or nation. Thus God made two tablets of the Ten Commandments. All Ten Commandments were on both tablets, and both were to be kept in the Ark of the Covenant, the meeting place between God and His people. So the book of Deuteronomy can be seen as following the ancient treaty structure.

The other way to structure the book of Deuteronomy is the one we've been following - that it is three or four sermons or addresses that Moses gave to the children of Israel as they were preparing to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. Both of these approaches to the structure of Deuteronomy are valid, because the successive sermons of Moses to the people could certainly have followed the ancient treaty format.

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers should follow the example of the Levites.

The phrase "at that time" (v1) referred to Israel's time at Mt. Sinai. Specifically, it was the second "40 days and 40 nights" that Moses spent on the mountain - after the events of the golden calf and the smashing of the first set of stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. After these events, the Lord told Moses to come up Mt. Sinai again with two new stone tablets. In His grace, God again wrote the Ten Commandments of the Mosaic Covenant. Moses put these new tablets into the Ark of the Covenant, which had been constructed as God commanded.

Verses 6-9 are a parenthesis in the account. They tell us of the death of Aaron, the work of the priesthood, and the setting apart of the Levites. More details of the death of Aaron, the high priest, were given in Numbers 20:23-28: *"And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying: "Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up to Mount Hor; and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; for Aaron shall be gathered to his people and die there." So Moses did just as the Lord commanded, and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. Now when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days."* Eleazar, the new high priest, was Aaron's third son. Remember - Aaron's first two sons, Nadab and Abihu, died because they offered "strange fire" before the Lord (Leviticus 10).

Deuteronomy 10:8-9 gave the role of the Levites. They had a special place of service for the Lord. They assisted the priests in carrying out all the work associated with the Tabernacle, and later the Temple. The Levites were given this special role because they sided and stood with Moses at the time of the people's sinful worship of the golden calf (Exodus 32).

The Levites are a great example for us to follow! The Levites were not given a portion of the land of Israel because **the Lord was their portion** (v9). The Levites lived in 48 "Levitical cities." We might think the Levites were short-changed because they didn't get any land like the rest of the tribes. No! Having the Lord as your inheritance was - and is - the higher calling!

Many believers today have given up the material blessings of this life for the higher calling of greater service for the Lord. **All of us certainly should make serving the Lord a greater priority in our lives.** Believers should follow the example of the Levites.

2. Believers should follow the example of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 10:12-22 - *“And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good? ¹⁴ Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it. ¹⁵ The Lord delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. ¹⁶ Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer. ¹⁷ For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. ¹⁸ He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. ¹⁹ Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. ²⁰ You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name. ²¹ He is your praise, and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen. ²² Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now the Lord your God has made you as the stars of heaven in multitude.”*

The “seventy persons” of Jacob’s extended family (v20) can easily be harmonized with the 75 persons mentioned in Acts 7:14, where all the relatives are taken into account. Verses 17-18 demonstrate that the Lord does not play favorites and He cannot be bribed! He executes justice for the orphans and the widows who can’t afford lawyers. He provides for the poor and needy – and we should do the same (v19 - and the rest of the Bible!)! Think of it - the God who created and owns this universe (v14) cares for the least significant folks, the down-and-outers and the poor and needy. How can we do less? Believers should follow the Lord’s example!

Following the example of the Lord is not easy - and it’s not automatic because, like Israel, we are sinful people. Even though believers today have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, we still have sinful natures that are prone to disobedience and rebellion. So, like the children of Israel, we must “circumcise our hearts” and no longer “stiffen our necks” (v16). This is figurative language, meaning we must separate from sinful activities and stop our disobedience and rebellion against the Lord. These are the necessary “negative” steps that we must take in combating the sin in our lives, including secret sins.

But in a more “positive” response, we should revere the Lord, serve Him, cling to Him (v20), and thank Him for all the great and awesome things that we’ve seen Him do (v21). And don’t say you’ve not seen the Lord do anything awesome! Both the negative approach of what we shouldn’t do, and this positive approach of what we should do, should motivate us to follow the Lord more closely. Believers should follow the example of the Lord.

Practical Application

Do you know the ABCs of God's requirements for believers?

"And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good?"(v12-13).

These verses sound very much like Micah 6:8, don't they? *"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"*

These are the ABCs of God's requirements for believers. Look at Deuteronomy 10:12-13:

- A** - To "fear the Lord and walk in all His ways" means to revere and respect our God, and thus have a godly lifestyle.
- B** - To "love the Lord and serve Him." Love and service certainly go together.
- C** - To "keep the Lord's commandments" - to obey the Word of God.

Even though we may not appreciate the truth of verse 13 at the present time, notice that God's commands are not meant to hurt us or to take away from our joy in any way. They were given for our good!

So learn the basics of God's requirements for believers. Do you know the ABCs of God's requirements for believers?