

DEUTERONOMY

STUDY SEVEN | CHAPTER 26:1-19

REMEMBERING
JOYFULLY




 ST. JOHN'S
VANCOUVER

INTRODUCTION

In chapters 12-26 we get all of the specific stipulations that God requires in the covenant he is making with Israel. This section of the book is now drawing to a close, which makes these the final commandments that God gives to Israel in Deuteronomy, and it closes the way it began: with worship.

Deuteronomy 12 opened with an invitation to learn the new habits of true worship in the land God was giving them. Today's passage takes that same emphasis on worship and grounds it in the giving of firstfruits - the best of what is gathered at the beginning of the harvest. The cultures surrounding Israel gave their firstfruits in hope of appeasing their gods, always unsure about whether they had the deities on their side. In contrast, Israel is asked to give out of remembrance for what God has done in faithfully keeping his covenant and delivering Israel, a cause for great joy.

STUDY FRAMEWORK

-  Bible Passage
-  Study Notes + Study Questions
-  Prayer

Bible Passage

DEUT 26:1-19

- 1 When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance and have taken possession of it and live in it,
- 2 you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket, and you shall go to the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name to dwell there.
- 3 And you shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, 'I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.'
- 4 Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God.
- 5 And you shall make response before the LORD your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous.
- 6 And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor.
- 7 Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.
- 8 And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders.
- 9 And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.
- 10 And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me.' And you shall set it down before the LORD your God and worship before the LORD your God.
- 11 And you shall rejoice in all the good that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.
- 12 When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled,
- 13 then you shall say before the LORD your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion out of my house, and moreover, I have given it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all your commandment that you have commanded me. I have not transgressed any of your commandments, nor have I forgotten them.
- 14 I have not eaten of the tithe while I was mourning, or removed any of it while I was unclean, or offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the voice of the LORD my God. I have done according to all that you have commanded me.
- 15 Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel and the ground that you have given us, as you swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.'
- 16 This day the LORD your God commands you to do these statutes and rules. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul.
- 17 You have declared today that the LORD is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and his commandments and his rules, and will obey his voice.
- 18 And the LORD has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments,
- 19 and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people 'holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.'"



Study Notes

CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The idea of giving firstfruits to a deity was common in Iron Age Palestine. Israel's giving was distinct in at least two ways:

- The motivation to give was love rather than fear of reprisal (ancient pantheistic deities constantly needed appeasement).
- This love also expressed itself in the community, through generous care for the economically and socially disadvantaged.

The idea of firstfruits involves giving the first and best as an offering to the LORD, even before the harvest has been fully gathered. In ancient Israel, giving the best of your crop even before you knew what the harvest would be (and how much you would eat for the year) was a profound step of faith.

IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

- The final verses of this chapter (vv.16-19) are a summary statement, indicating that we've come to the end of Moses' second sermon (Deut 5.1-26.19).
- Immediately after this passage is the covenant renewal ceremony from our first study in Deut 27. Review your notes from that study.

IN DEUTORONOMY

- The phrase "mighty hand and outstretched arm" in v.8 is also found in Deut 4.34; 5.15; 7.19; 11.2; and 26.8.
- v.12 "the tithe of your produce in the third year" refers to a unique practice of setting resources aside for the needy. This

tithe is referred to as "the sacred portion" (v.13), and is also connected to the sabbatical year (Deut 15.4)

- v.12 "the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow" formed a unique group of disadvantaged peoples who would have had difficulty providing for themselves. God also commanded the wealthy to leave some of the crop for them (e.g. Deut 24.19-22).
- v.16 "With all your heart and with all your soul" is a phrase we've run into many times in Deuteronomy (e.g. Deut 4.29; 6.5; 11.13).

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- The phrase "a mighty hand and outstretched arm" in v.8 connects Deuteronomy to the book of Exodus where it is revealed that God, rather than Pharaoh, is the truly powerful one.
- v.14 "while I was unclean." Participating in a feast while ritually unclean was forbidden in Leviticus. The concept of purity is closely related to holiness, the act of setting apart, or being set apart, for service to God. Under this system, being unclean does not necessarily entail moral failure.
- v.18 "to be a people for his treasured possession" is a fairly rare, and specifically covenantal, phrase that God uses of His chosen people (e.g. Exod 19.5, Mal 3.17). The term "treasured possession" denotes special, private property, often of kings.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- v.2 is also picked up in 2 Thess 2.13, where Paul describes us as firstfruits, because of Christ who was the "firstfruit of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15.20-23).
- v.19 "A people holy to the LORD" is a common theme in Paul's writing, e.g., Eph 1.4-5, and we also get it in the famous passage from 1 Peter 2.9.

Study Questions

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Trace all the uses of the verb “give” or “given.”

We get something that looks a lot like a creed in vv.5-10. What are the main elements of this confession/testimony?

What are the different components for the offering of firstfruits?

What is the focus of Moses’ concluding words in vv.16-19?

STUDY TIPS

Ⓐ Pray

Ⓑ Look closely

- Commands
- Descriptions of God or His People
- Words and phrases
- Repetitions, Contrasts, Surprises
- Big Bible Words
- Characters
- Dialogue – who is talking to whom?
- Setting (timeline and place) – does it change?

Ⓒ Look at the context

- What kind of writing is this?
(eg. narrative, poetry, teaching)
- How does the dialogue progress?
- Divide the passage into its natural sections, looking for transitions in setting, speaker, or theme can help with this
- Create a heading for each section
- Summarize the section in your own words

Ⓓ Share

- In your small group share something you noticed



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Moses finishes his second (rather long!) sermon in this passage. After giving all these laws, why do you think he finishes with tithing?

This study has strong connections with last week's study in Deuteronomy 16. What is at the root of feasts like Passover and the giving of tithes?

Why does God want Israel to give firstfruits?

STUDY TIPS

Ⓐ Look at the context

- ▶ Read the passage immediately before and after
- ▶ How does the context help us understand the meaning of the text?
- ▶ Look up cross references.
- ▶ How do they help us better understand the passage?
- ▶ In your small group share how the context has added to your understanding of this week's passage.

Ⓑ Summarize the big idea

- ▶ So, what's the main idea of the passage? How would you title this passage?
- ▶ In your small group share the main idea

Ⓒ Stop to pray

- ▶ Thank God for all he has already revealed to you, and ask him to help you see Jesus more clearly, and love him more deeply, through the next steps of your study.

WHAT DOES IT REVEAL?

Why does God want his people to remember his deliverance when they give their gifts? What is the relationship between gratitude and generosity?

Why does the tithe go both to God and to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow? Refer back to Deut 15.4 for help.

What is the nature of Israel's mission in the land?

HOW WILL I RESPOND?

2 Corinthians 8: 9 “ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor...”

How does the generosity and grace of Christ to you help make you a joyful giver? In what areas of your life could you be more generous?

It is both comforting and challenging to know that God promises to make us a holy people (v.19), his treasured possession. How does his promise help you live for him?

Prayer

If time allows -try to put your own name and testimony in place of that of the “wandering Aramean” vv.5-10 and retell the account God's grace in your life and the response God is calling you to make to him.