

Israel Should Love and Obey

Deuteronomy 11:1–32

by Felton Spraggins

“You shall therefore love the Lord your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments. . . .” (11:1–32).

Throughout Deuteronomy, God repeated His commands to meet the childlike character and condition of Israel. In 11:1–32, Moses begins with special emphasis on the inseparability of love and obedience. This has been his theme throughout Deuteronomy (6:5, 6; 7:9; 10:12, 13; 11:13, 22; 19:9; 30:16–20). Observe the connection between obedience and love in verse 1: “You shall therefore love” and “and always keep His charge.”

Deuteronomy contains an evident purpose by exhibiting of God’s love to draw out love to Him in return. Obedience to God is the ultimate test of man’s love (John 14:15).

Moses in this text gives the reasons why Israel should obey God. Israel should obey Him because of what they had seen, what they would receive, their future families, their future victories, and the consequence of their choices.

BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY HAD SEEN

“And know this day that I am not speaking with your sons who have not known and who have not seen the discipline of the Lord your God—His greatness, His mighty hand, and His outstretched arm, . . . but your own eyes have seen all the great work of the Lord which He did” (11:2, 7).

Israel had known and seen “the discipline of Jehovah.” They had seen His greatness, His mighty hand, His outstretched arm, His signs and His works. All of Israel’s history had been

guided by the Lord for the purpose of motivating them to love Him totally. “The discipline of the Lord” refers to God’s spiritual and moral education of His people.

Israel had been in school in Egypt to learn of God’s power. Verses 3 and 4 display God’s judgment against their enemies, while verses 4 and 6 display His judgment against them. Verses 3 and 4 show God doing all the work, with no credit being given to Israel for what had been accomplished.

The Lord had also sent His children to school for forty years in the wilderness, where they had been further taught to completely depend upon Him. Even in the rebellion of Dathan and Abiram (11:6; Numbers 16), Israel learned about God’s holiness when the earth opened and swallowed them and their households. In the Exodus experience, the people learned of God’s grace and power through His providential care.

If we are not careful, life becomes only a series of ordinary events that seem to be of little value. With such an attitude we are unable or unwilling to learn. We must take note, “know this day,” and ascertain God’s purpose in our life. If we can see the purpose in His dealings with us and others, we will be less likely to murmur and complain. We will be filled with contentment and more thankful for all we possess. We sometimes quench the “light of life” by our “theory of life.” All processes of life point to the spiritual and moral development.

Moses exhorted the people to learn from their past, for God had constructed their history with a teaching purpose. “Your children . . . have not known and . . . have not seen . . . but your eyes

have seen" (11:2, 7). Duty must be measured by privilege. The lessons of our life must be taught to others, and embodied in our character and conduct. Hence, it was the parents' responsibility to model obedient living and pass on to their children the truths learned from past experiences.

BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY WOULD RECEIVE

"You shall therefore keep every commandment which I am commanding you today, so that you may be strong and go in and possess the land into which you are about to cross to possess it; . . . Or the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you" (11:8-17).

Moses wanted Israel to reach an important conclusion from his brief review of their history: receiving God's blessings depended upon their ability to keep His commandments. Therefore, their ability to "be strong and go in and possess the land" and "prolong your days on the land" (11:8, 9) was ultimately a question of their obedience to God, not of their military skill.

God had not taught Israel the art of war, how to draw a bow, use the sword, or how to keep ranks that they might be strong and go in and possess the land; He had taught them to keep His commandments. While they were true to His commands, they would be strong and secure in their success.

The reference in the phrase "that you may prolong your days on the land" is to Israel's continuance as a nation. National continuance depended on national obedience. This is the one truth most frequently named in the exhortations of Israel's lawgiver.

Moses contrasted Egypt with Canaan to point out Israel's need for obedience to the heavenly Father (11:10-17). The promised land had a greater potential for agriculture than Egypt. It "drinks water from the rain of heaven" (11:11) and enjoys the constant care of God, for His eyes are "always on it" (11:12). It was "a land for which the Lord your God cares." In Egypt the land had to be irrigated, and human ingenuity or skill was relied upon to provide water for the crops (11:10).

The fruitfulness of Egypt was the reward of human skill, but Canaan was dependent for its fruitfulness on the blessing of God. In that respect, Israel had to learn to depend upon God to bring the rains (11:13-15). If they rebelled, God would "shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit" and Israel would "perish quickly from the good land."

BECAUSE OF THEIR FUTURE FAMILIES

"You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. And you shall teach them to your sons, . . . so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens remain above the earth" (11:18-21).

Verses 18 through 21 are a slight variation of the verses found in 6:6-9. Moses wanted to make sure that each and every family member continually had the law in their heart. The continual reading, teaching, and discussion of God's Word would bring God's blessings. Moses again stressed the importance of visual symbols of God's commands.

In commenting on the duty of parents to teach their children the truth, Adam Clarke says,

A most injurious and destructive maxim has lately been advanced by a few individuals, which it is to be hoped is disowned by the class of Christians to which they belong, though the authors affect to be thought Christians, and rational ones, too; the sum of the maxim is this: "Children ought not to be taught religion for fear of having their minds biased to some particular creed, but they are capable of making a choice, and choose to make one." This maxim is in flat opposition to the command of God, and those who teach it show how little they are affected by the religion they profess. If they felt it to be good for any thing, they would certainly wish their children to possess it; but they do not teach religion to their children, because they feel it to be of no use to themselves. Now the Christian religion properly applied saves the soul, and fills the heart with love to God and man; for the love of God is shed abroad in the heart of a genuine believer, by the Holy Ghost given to him. These persons have no such love, because they have not the religion that inspires it; and the spurious religion which admits of the maxim above mentioned, is not the religion of God, and consequently better untaught than taught.

But what can be said to those parents who, possessing a better faith, equally neglect the instruction of their children in the things of God! They are highly criminal; and if their children perish through neglect, which is very probable, what a dreadful account must they give in the great day! PARENTS! hear what the Lord saith unto you: Ye shall diligently teach your children that there is one Lord, Jehovah, Elohim; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: and that they must love him with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their might.¹

BECAUSE OF THEIR FUTURE VICTORIES

“For if you are careful to keep all this commandment which I am commanding you, to do it, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him; . . . There shall no man be able to stand before you; the Lord your God shall lay the dread of you and the fear of you on all the land on which you set foot, as He has spoken to you” (11:22–25).

Moses next turned to their successful conquest of the land. If Israel was obedient, the Lord would grant her supernatural success against superior enemies. No nation among the peoples of Canaan could withstand the children of Israel, as long as they walked according to His commandments. Nations would be afraid, be unable to touch them, if they loved Him. Their conquest would be easy and their possessions secure and permanent.

The promise was to enlarge Israel’s borders to “every place on which the sole of your foot shall tread” (11:24). The promise was again repeated to Joshua before Israel crossed the Jordan (Joshua 1:3). Only during the days of Solomon did Israel ever control anything like the area promised to Abraham in Genesis 15:18–21.

Without strength there can be no effort, and without obedience there can be no strength. Paul said, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Christians are to “be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might” (Ephesians 6:10).

BECAUSE OF THE CONSEQUENCE OF THEIR CHOICE

“See, I am setting before you today a

blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I am commanding you today; and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, . . .” (11:26–32).

Israel was to make a decision. Her choice would determine whether she would receive the blessings of the Lord or His curses. Moses stated, “I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse.” God demands a decision, for there is no reason, no excuse, whatever the decision.

Jehovah appointed a public and solemn proclamation to be made of the blessing and curse which he had set before them, upon the two mountains of Gerizim and Ebal. These mountains are discussed in chapters 27 and 28.

Israel lacked neither illustration of God’s power nor motivation to do what was right. They had sufficient information available to make the right choice. Their challenge was not in knowing the right decision, but in doing it.

CONCLUSION

The blessing was before Israel: “For you are about to cross the Jordan to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall possess it and live in it” (11:31). There they would have perfect security, undisturbed rest, and everlasting joy in the presence, friendship, and service of Jehovah. The choice was up to them. God’s blessings awaited them if they would listen and obey, but God’s curse was theirs if they ignored Him.

For the Christian, the inheritance is the eternal promise of bliss. It will be given to all who trust and obey Jesus Christ, the King of kings. He is “the way” to heaven, “the truth” to direct in the way, and “the life” to help us walk in the way when it is found (John 14:6).

Which is it? Life or death, God or sin, heaven or hell? The choice is not education or profession. A more solemn and momentous choice must be made.

Endnote

¹Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible With a Commentary and Critical Notes*, vol. 1, *Genesis to Deuteronomy* (New York: Abingdon Press, n.d.), 734.