

Sunday June 7, 2020
Lesson 1: Living as God's People
Scripture: Deuteronomy 8: 1-10

Context:

Our next series focuses on "Community." Each week we will look at how God forms community throughout scripture. As we learn more of how God calls for communities to form amidst our forbearers of the faith, we learn how God forms communities today.

The first lesson comes from the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is the final book of the Pentateuch; its name, Greek in origin, means "second law."¹ There is very little narrative in the book. Instead, the book reads as a lengthy sermon or speech given by Moses before he dies.² Moses gives the history of the people in the Exodus and recounts the summary of God's teachings.

While the sermon or speech given is attributed to Moses, most scholars contend someone else wrote the book as Moses's death is included in the book. The attributed writers are those who were an intellectual movement who had connections to the Levitical priesthood and hoped to help the people in exile and return from exile.³ This group of writers are called the Deuteronomists or the Deuteronomist school. Much like history writers of today, the Deuteronomic school sought to help the people understand a little better who they were and their relationship to God and the land.

In the chapter read today, we dive into the commandments and the prescriptions given to the people of God. Line by line, both the history of the exodus is given along with a theological explanation of why it was part of their history. Their history is to inform them of their future and what they are called to do.

The major caveat is how all this stems from the commandment to help the people enter the land God swore to their ancestors. God has already promised the land to the people and of course keeps God's promise. Now comes for the time for the people to fulfill their end of the deal.

With the breakdown of their history, they are reminded of their long road in the wilderness and all the time they spent wandering. They are reminded of all the many times they did not keep God's commandments and yet God provided. God was faithful even when they were not faithful.

Yet now is a new day. As they have traveled over forty years, they find themselves ready to enter the Promised Land. Their trials have made them stronger and they now are about to enter the land flowing with milk and honey. God will have them eat the bounty and they will praise God for what they've received.

¹ Michael D. Coogan, ed. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, (Oxford: University Press, 2011), 177.

² Ibid., 177.

³ Ibid., 185.

Application

The book of Deuteronomy might seem like a strange place to begin our series on community. Much of Deuteronomy reads like a long list of codes and foreign commandments, which hold no weight for life today. The sermon of an aging patriarch on the cusp of dying isn't what we actually think as instructional for life together today.

Yet the commandments and the history in this passage remind us of God's providence and goodness. We are reminded everything we have or think we possess actually belongs to God. God has continued to give things even when we fail God and one another.

It is no secret the Israelites were not some of the easiest people to get along beside. Nothing seemed good enough for them. They whined about no food and when God gave them manna, they tried to hoard it. They whined about the leadership of Moses and Aaron, leading coups behind their backs. God swallowed up a few to make a point and then the murmuring began again. When they started back up at full force, God sent venomous snakes in to take them out, they cried and God's heart softened. They were given a bronze serpent on a pole so they might see it and live. Later, they made the serpent a god and worshipped it. Some people never seem to learn.

Yet God still provided for them. They still had clothes and food in the desert. They made it through the desert, perhaps a little tired, but still intact and able to see the land they had dreamed of for years. The Promised Land was before them and God wanted them to have it. They were to praise God with their lives and for the goodness of the land.

I wonder too if we might learn a lesson from the Israelites who couldn't always see right. In many ways, we are similar to the Israelites. We are good at playing the game where we whine and complain even though there are great things in front of us.

We hoard our resources and complain we don't have enough. We whine in the midst of a pandemic about not getting to do what we want, when around us people are sick or people have lost their jobs. At times we might even complain about leadership in various segments without also simultaneously praying for those in leadership. Even if they are bad leaders, how do we take accountability for our own behaviors or actions?

God commands us to take a look at the blessings, which God has given to us. We didn't earn any of the things in our possession. They were given to us by God and they already belong to God. God has called us to be good stewards whether it is with our resources, our time, or the places where we live. God knows we will mess up and God will still be faithful. Yet we are given a choice about how we will live this life and respond to the blessings of our Lord.

As we start this section on community, we are reminded all we have already belongs to God. While we may like to think we are in control and we call the shots, that is not how God works. God has given us the things in this life as a gift.

As such, we would do well to honor the commandments God has given us. We are to be grateful for the resources we already possess, not complaining about what we do not possess. We are to look at the gifts and the relationships we have in this life through which God blesses us. We are to see the land where we live as gift to treasure and the people in it as precious in God's sight.

What speaks to you in this passage about God and community? Where do you see similarities between the world of the Israelites and the world of today? How do you "bless God" for the gifts you receive? How do your actions glorify our Lord?

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