

Love and Obedience Rewarded

HN 25/12/05pm

Reading: Deuteronomy 11:1-17, I Corinthians 10:1-22

Study Text: Deuteronomy 11:1-17

Sing Psalms: 122, 66:4-7, 36:5-9, 36:10-11

The people of God were camped by the Jordan. Across the river was the land of Canaan. It was a rich land, a land flowing with milk and honey. But there was a problem – it was inhabited by people mightier than them. There were giants living in walled cities. How would they conquer these nations? A number of times during their wanderings they were tempted to go back, back to the life they knew, even the life of bondage. They feared the unknown, which lay ahead.

We have come to the end of another year. We are poised to cross over into another year. What awaits us there? Will we encounter difficulties or disaster? Will we face opposition? What will happen to our families and how will we provide for them? Do you fear the future? Would you like to stay put with the today you know? Would you like to go back – back to what?

Would the people of God cross the Jordan, or would they refuse to obey the Lord as they had done forty years before? Would they spend another forty years in the wilderness? We must think about this both as individuals and as a fellowship.

The New Year is coming and there is nothing we can do to stop it – unless Jesus returns in the meantime. We can try to keep on living in the past and regret ‘all this change’. We can say ‘no, we are staying put, we are not moving on from here’. But the Lord commands us to move on, to cross over into the Promised Land, the land of rich blessings in Jesus Christ.

Divine Discipline

Remember your past and learn from it, but do not keep trying to return to it. This was Moses message in a nutshell. Most of the early chapters of Deuteronomy are historical review; review for the purpose of instruction, encouragement and for warning. And this chapter is no different.

Red Sea – Moses spoke to the men who were younger than twenty at the time of the Exodus. (Those older than twenty at that time had died in the wilderness.) They saw the mighty acts of the Lord in Egypt and especially that unforgettable sight of the waters of the Red Sea overwhelming the army of Egypt. Now around 45-60 years old these people had seen Moses stretch out his rod over the waters and the waters divide. They had passed through those waters, with the soldiers in hot pursuit. They looked back to see Pharaoh and his army, all drowning.

This was a deliverance they would never forget. This was a judgment of God they would always remember. The Egyptians who refused to listen to the word of the Lord and who opposed the people of God were destroyed by the Lord their God. God is powerful to save and he is powerful to judge.

Rebellion of Korah – Reviewing the past is not always uplifting. Along with encouragements come warnings. In addition to remembering God’s judgment upon Pharaoh and his army, Moses also reminded them of God’s judgment upon his own people. Rebellion within their ranks brought the heavy hand of discipline from the Lord.

‘We are just as holy as you. Who do you think you are to be telling us what to do?’ Korah, Dathan, Abiram and 250 other family leaders confronted Moses and Aaron in this attitude (Numbers 16). Moses took the matter to the Lord and the Lord pronounced judgment. These three men along with their families and all their possessions perished as the earth opened up and then closed over them. The earthy rather than the water swallowed them up – but again it was the punishment or discipline of the Lord.

Refusal to acknowledge the man whom God had appointed as leader was tantamount to refusing God himself. Not only Moses but also a whole line of prophets that the Lord sent after him were subject to the same rejection by the people. And God similarly judged the people. In the end it was his own Son whom the people rejected and who faced the judgment of God.

This tendency is universal and ongoing. Men are unwilling to accept instruction and leadership from those ordained by God. With proud hearts men continue to rise up against authority in the church of God. Pride has so overtaken some that they worship God at home- they are their own minister and congregation at the same time! What can we do? Moses called upon the Lord to judge.

With these divine judgments in mind Moses called upon the people to *keep every commandment which I command you this day that you may be strong and go in and possess the land* (11:8). They had a task to do, a war to win. We know that nothing brings defeat to an army faster than rebellion in the ranks. And nothing undermines the growth of the church more than internal division. Pride is the cause of most such division- even though it is often clothed in doctrinal respectability.

Love the Lord your God and obey his commandments (11:1). And love your neighbour as yourself. If we are looking to the Lord and to his kingdom, if we are praying ‘your kingdom come, your will be done’, then we will be less inclined to wanting our own will to be done and to rebel against leaders in the church of God.

Divine Care

From remembering the past Moses now turns to facing the future. Learn from the past and obey the commands of the Lord, and he will bless you in the future. Do not be afraid but press on in the strength of the Lord. A land flowing with milk and honey is yours for the taking. It is yours already by promise. Go in and possess it.

This new land will be different. You will have to trust in the Lord more than you did before. More trusting and less striving will mark life in Canaan. It will be more like Eden than Egypt.

Farming in Egypt was relatively secure. Crops were irrigated with water from the Nile. Egypt was like a desert but the mighty Nile brought abundant water over 6000km from the central highlands of Africa. Men built simple structures to lift water from the river and then divert it in canals to their fields. Water was always available but irrigation was very labour intensive.

By contrast Canaan was hilly land. Farming would be different – there would be no irrigation. Instead the Lord promised to send rain in season – the spring rains and autumn rains. Their crops, vines and grasslands would be productive. The Lord promised to watch over the land and care for it year in and year out. This was part of the covenant blessing. They would not lack food or anything. The Lord knew their needs and he would supply their needs according to his grace and power (Philippians 4:19).

How those people must have learned to depend upon the Lord for their survival. If there were no rain there would be famine and great distress. Remember how Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all had to go down to Egypt during famine in Canaan. The Lord promised to intervene though nature itself to care for his people. He is sovereign over all creation.

But- there was a condition. The Lord would send the rain but he would also withhold the rain if the people turned aside to other gods. If they stopped giving thanks to the Lord and started to worship other gods, then His *anger would be aroused and he would shut up the heavens* (11:17).

This was not an empty threat. In the time of King Ahab and his pagan wife Jezebel, there was no rain for three years and the people suffered greatly (I Kings 18). In the time of the prophet Haggai the people got so busy with their own affairs and building their own houses that they neglected the house of the Lord – so the Lord stopped the rain. Is the Lord not able to do the same today?

In our urban society food production is so far removed from us that we often fail to discern this sovereign act of God – although we may suffer a little with water restrictions. The food is always there in the supermarket whether it rains or not. But in other ways we must learn to depend on the Lord. We need money to buy that food. We need work to earn that money.

Beware of thinking that your life is secure and you do not need the blessing of the Lord. Let us be more aware of the Lord's care and daily provision, aware that his eyes are on us always. Do not think that praying for your daily bread, and giving thanks to the Lord at meal times is pointless. Princes still become paupers.

'If prosperity makes men forgetful, ungrateful and complacent, while the lack of natural and material blessings leads men to repentance, then these latter are a blessing in disguise.'
Remember *every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights* (James 1:17). *Take heed to yourselves lest your heart be deceived* and you turn away from the Lord (11:16). Will you be more thankful, and depend upon the Lord more in the coming year? Trust in the Lord and obey him and he will uphold you always.

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