

Deuteronomy 11: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Deuteronomy chapter 11 He made the water of the Red Sea flow over them as they pursued after you, and how the Lord has destroyed them to this day, and what he did to you in the wilderness, until you came to this place, and what he did to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, son of Reuben, how the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households, their tents, and every living thing that followed them, in the midst of all Israel.

For your eyes have seen all the great work of the Lord that he did. You shall therefore keep the whole commandment that I command you today, that you may be strong, and go in and take possession of the land that you are going over to possess, and that you may live long in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give to them, and to their offspring, a land flowing with milk and honey.

For the land that you are entering to take possession of it is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and irrigated it, like a garden of vegetables.

But the land that you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the Lord your God cares for. The eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart, and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil.

[1 : 5 6] And he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you shall eat and be full. Take care, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them.

Then 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 land will yield no fruit, and you will perish quickly off the good land that the Lord has given you.

You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give to them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.

For if you will be careful to do all this commandment that I command you to do, loving the Lord your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him, then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than you.

[3 : 0 7] Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours. Your territory shall be from the wilderness to the Lebanon, and from the river, the river Euphrates, to the western sea.

No one shall be able to stand against you. The Lord your God will lay the fear of you and the dread of you on all the land that you shall tread, as he promised you. See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse.

The blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known.

And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim, and the curse on Mount Ebal. Are they not beyond the Jordan, west of the road, toward the going down of the sun, in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, beside the oak of Moreh?

For you are to cross over the Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving you. And when you possess it, and live in it, you shall be careful to do all the statutes and the rules that I am setting before you today.

[4 : 21] Deuteronomy chapter 11 is the final chapter in the exhortation of Moses. It leads into discussion of the commandments and rules in the chapters that follow. And a lot of the teaching of this chapter concerns the land that they are about to enter into.

They're called to love the Lord, and to keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always. This is how their future well-being as a nation in the land will be secured.

The people Moses is speaking to still remember the events of the plagues in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea. While many of the younger people in the nation will not have experienced the events of the exodus firsthand, it is a living memory for the people as a whole.

And it is in reflecting upon this memory that Israel will be best served in their calling to be faithful to the Lord going forward. They remember the plagues in Egypt. They remember the crossing of the Red Sea and the judgment upon Pharaoh and his men there.

They remember the judgments of the Lord upon the rebels in the wilderness, upon Dathan and Abiram and Korah. They know the power of the Lord's deliverance and judgment, and so they should live accordingly. Their first-hand experience puts them in the best possible position to understand.

[5 : 30] Teaching and remembrance are so important for Israel, because of the primacy of historical event as testimony to the Lord's character and power. And as they reflect upon these events and keep returning to these events, they will find that they are spurs to trust and to faithfulness.

When the exodus generation passes, obedience will be much harder, because there will not be that immediate sense of this is who the Lord is, this is what he has done. A people will arise who forget the Lord their God.

They have not had that first-hand experience. And so it is imperative that they remember and that they teach their children after them. Among other things that Israel should learn from the lessons of the destruction of the Egyptians at the Red Sea and of the swallowing of Dathan and Abiram in the wilderness, is the Lord's power over sea and land.

Issues that Moses will reflect upon within this chapter. Within this chapter, Moses often returns to the same sort of charge. Verse 1. You shall therefore love the Lord your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules and his commandments always.

Verse 13. And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul. And in verse 22.

[6 : 43] For if you will be careful to do all this commandment that I command you to do, loving the Lord your God, walking in all his ways and holding fast to him. To this point, Moses has spent a lot of time reflecting upon the lessons learnt from past disobedience.

He's also taught them that they don't enjoy their possession in the land as an entitlement or as a result of their own righteousness. So the question is, how are they to live in it? For Moses, the answer to that question is loving obedience.

As they devote themselves to the Lord their God and obey God accordingly, they will find that they prosper within the land. Moses stresses that in the land they will have a much more obvious dependence upon the Lord, as opposed to the life in Egypt.

Egypt depends for its irrigation upon the Nile and a human irrigation system. The promised land, by contrast, depends upon the rains, and it can't be irrigated by the people themselves.

Rather, they would have to look to the Lord for his provision of rain. And the Lord must tend to the land and they must depend upon him. If he does not give the rain, the land will be parched.

[7 : 50] But if he does give the rain, the land will be fruitful like almost no other. The feast of tabernacles is associated with the provision of rain. Coming before the early rains, Zechariah chapter 14 verses 17 to 18 describes it in this way.

Within the feast of booths, among other things, there was a water pouring ceremony, something that's mentioned in the background of John chapter 7.

And this would involve pouring water on the altar, the water representing the rain, and the altar representing the land of Israel. Rain is a symbol of divine blessing. The water cycle establishes communion between the heavens and the earth.

There was no rain in the original creation when it was first created. It seems to have been irrigated with a mist or a surge, maybe similar to the way that Egypt was irrigated, with a surge of water coming up.

Rain in Israel was more seasonal. It's very important that the rains come at the right times for the agriculture to work. Whereas most temperate countries have rain spread out over a long period of time, for Israel it's far more condensed.

[9 : 10] It happens within about a 7 or 8 month period, and there are about 40 to 60 days with rain. The first rains would occur in October to November. These would enable farmers to plough and sow, as it would soften the soil, which would otherwise be parched and hard.

After this, the rains would increase during December to February, where most of the rains fell. And then in April and May, just as the grain was reaching its full maturity, you would have the later rains, and it would enable the grain to reach its full height.

The dependence upon the Lord for rains coming in their right times, and in their proper measures, was a very important spur for Israel. Their dependence upon the rain forced them to look to the Lord, to be dependent upon him as the giver of rain.

In the story of the prophet Elijah, there is a drought declared upon the land, a judgment brought by the Lord upon an unfaithful people. The heavens, from which rain comes, are shut up, a natural symbol of the breaking of communion between God and his people.

As his people have not called to the heavens, the heavens are not opened to them, and rain is not given. The description of Egypt as a vegetable garden here is an interesting one. It may make us think of the story of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings chapter 21.

[10 : 24] There, King Ahab wants to take Naboth's vineyard and turn it into a vegetable garden. He's taking the symbol of Israel, a vineyard, and turning it into a symbol of Egypt. In verses 18 to 21, Moses returns to instructions from the beginning of his sermon in chapter 6.

He's given this charge at the very beginning, but now it's obvious why this is so important, why remembrance is absolutely imperative. And so he charges them once again to remember in these particular ways, these very physical ways, by binding things onto yourself, and also by constantly teaching your children and those who come after you.

Observing the commandment would also lead to them being successful in the conquest and possession of the land. Everywhere that they set foot would become theirs, as in the case of Abraham in Genesis chapter 13.

The Lord would go before them and strike fear into the hearts of all of their enemies. And Moses juxtaposes blessing and curse. Ultimately, what they have is a choice between life and death.

They have a choice between the way of the Lord and the way of their own rebellion. All depends on whether they will love and obey the Lord, or whether they will reject and rebel against him.

[11 : 37] When they enter into the land, they will have to perform a ceremony at two mountains facing each other near Shechem. This will be a very powerful and visual representation of the choice that faces them, the choice between life and death.

A choice that we find on many occasions in scripture, this juxtaposition of the way of foolishness and the way of wisdom, the juxtaposition of the way of obedience and the way of disobedience, and then those things being connected with blessedness and judgment, with beatitudes and woes.

This ceremony gets returned to in chapter 27 of this book. In Joshua chapter 8 verses 30 to 35, the actual performance of the ceremony is described. At that time Joshua built an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, just as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of uncut stones upon which no man has wielded an iron tool.

And they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord and sacrificed peace offerings. And there in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written.

And all Israel, sojourner as well as native-born, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim, and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded at the first to bless the people of Israel.

[13 : 07] And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.

A question to consider. What are some of the other symbolic associations and connotations that rain has in scripture?