



Deuteronomy - Chapter Twenty Six

III Deuteronomy 12:1-26:19 - Moses' Second Speech: Specific Covenant Stipulations (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Six

Moses concludes his second major address to the Israelites by instructing when to bring the first fruits offering and their tithes to the Lord and the purpose for them doing so, remembering that it was God who established their nation and brought them into the Promised Land. They are to understand that by doing so, they agree to obey the Lord and all his commands and statutes.

III.q Deuteronomy 26:1-15 - First Fruits and Tithes

The final section of specific laws deals with the offering of first fruits and tithes in the land. This is a fitting conclusion, as it focuses on responding to God's gracious gift of the land, a key theme in the book. As God gives the land, so Israel is to give back to him in response.

¹ When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, ² you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³ You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, 'Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us.'

Deuteronomy 26:1-3

When you have come into the land. The Promised Land lay just across the Jordan River, and though there were formidable obstacles, such as a Jordan River swollen by Spring floods and the mighty armies of Canaanites, God still assured them that they will come into the land.

The first of all the fruit. This law commands a regular offering of first fruits of the harvest, season by season. It acknowledges the goodness of the land promised by God and his faithfulness in keeping his promise. Numbers 18:12 also speaks of the first fruits that must be regularly brought to the priests, but the first fruits described here seem to be a special offering of first fruits, from the first of the harvest they gain in the Promised Land.

The place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. This place is unnamed, although centuries later it was clearly identified with Jerusalem. Until then, the place was where the tabernacle resided, which for much of that time was Shiloh.

⁴ When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, ⁵ you shall make this response before the Lord your God: ‘A wandering Aramæan was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶ When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, ⁷ we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸ The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and 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 So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.’ You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. ¹¹ Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.

Deuteronomy 26:4-11

When the priest takes the basket from your hand. Parts of the sacrifices and first fruits are for the upkeep of the Levites. Refer also to the comments made on Deuteronomy 18:3-4.

Sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God. First fruit giving obviously honoured the Lord, because it gave the Lord his portion off the top, before any was used for one's self. Whatever Christians decide to give to the church for the work of God today should similarly be given first and not just what, if anything, is left over at the end.

You shall make this response before the Lord your God. This wonderful confession of thanks remembered the history of Israel from the time of Jacob and his family in the land of Canaan, to the family's going down into Egypt and to the eventual deliverance and Exodus into the Promised Land. These verses are often regarded as an early Israelite creed, liturgically recounting God's faithfulness to his promises as the grounds of thanksgiving.

A wandering Aramæan. This refers to Jacob, who married the daughters of his uncle Laban, an Aramæan: <<*Thus Isaac sent Jacob away; and he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramæan, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother*>> (Genesis 28:5).

He went down into Egypt. Jacob took his family into Egypt to escape a famine. The resulting nation from Israel then spent some 430 years in Egypt. Yet in the course of God's eternal plan, it was nothing more than a sojourn, a period of rest and growth for the nation. People can often focus so much on their own time of trial or misery that they think that it defines their whole life; God saw Israel's experience in Egypt as a sojourn. Refer also to Exodus 1:1-7.

Few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. This was the major reason God had for sending Jacob and his family on their journey into Egypt. When they lived in Canaan, there was great risk of the family just assimilating with the wicked, pagan peoples around them. To prevent this, and to allow the nation to grow, God sent them down to Egypt, which was a very racist society, who would not intermarry with Israel but allow them to live generally in social isolation. Therefore, they could go down there few in number, around seventy people only; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous.

The Egyptians treated us harshly. Initially, the Pharaoh of Joseph's time treated the Hebrews well and gave them the best of the land for their flocks and herds. Later generations, however, saw them as a potential threat if they joined forces with an enemy and so they were brought into slavery. Refer to Exodus Chapters 1-2 for the details.

We cried to the Lord. This was the nations only hope in slavery: <<*After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*>> (Exodus 2:23-24). This would be the same for later generations as God

promises through his prophets: <<*Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls*>> (Joel 2:32), and the same applies today, for: <<*There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved*>> (Acts 4:12).

Signs and wonders refers to the plagues of Egypt as detailed in Exodus 7:14-12:32.

A land flowing with milk and honey. This description of the land is added incentive to obedience. God was giving his people a land that was fruitful which would sustain all their needs for generations to come: <<*On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands*>> (Ezekiel 20:6).

So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me. This initial giving of first fruits when Israel came into the Promised Land was an appropriate way to say 'thank you' to the Lord. This giving, and all giving done with the right heart, is a proper way to worship before the Lord your God.

The Levites and the aliens. These are the landless in the community of Israel and are to be included in the celebrations of the land; refer also to Deuteronomy 12:12 and the associated comments.

Celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house. When Christians receive from the Lord, and give back to him, it causes them to rejoice. It is the proper response of a creature to his creator, who has supplied him with all good things. Unlike other ancient religions, which attempted to win the gods' favour or to appease them, Israelite worship was marked by rejoicing in response to grace and blessing.

¹² When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year (which is the year of the tithe), giving it to the Levites, the aliens, the orphans, and the widows, so that they may eat their fill within your towns, ¹³ then you shall say before the Lord your God: 'I have removed the sacred portion from the house, and I have given it to the Levites, the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows, in accordance with your entire commandment that you commanded me; I have neither transgressed nor forgotten any of your commandments: ¹⁴ I have not eaten of it while in mourning; I have not removed any of it while I was unclean; and I have not offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the Lord my God, doing just as you 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 ancestors – a land flowing with milk and honey.’

Deuteronomy 26:12-15

In the third year (which is the year of the tithe). The tithe was required of Israel every year, but every third year, the tithe was given not only to the Levites for their support, as was instructed in Numbers 18:21-24, but was to be shared by the Levites, the aliens, the orphans, and the widows, so that they may eat their fill within your towns, so they may eat within your gates and be filled. Refer also to Deuteronomy 14:28-29 and the associated comments.

Then you shall say before the Lord your God. The prayer described here shows that the giving was done with the right kind of heart. God not only wants his people to give, but to give with the right heart: <<*So they came, both men and women; all who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and pendants, all sorts of gold objects, everyone bringing an offering of gold to the Lord*>> (Exodus 35:22), and: <<*Then Hezekiah said, ‘You have now consecrated yourselves to the Lord; come near, bring sacrifices and thank-offerings to the house of the Lord.’ The assembly brought sacrifices and thank-offerings; and all who were of a willing heart brought burnt-offerings*>> (2 Chronicles 29:31).

In accordance with your entire commandment that you commanded me. Right giving is done according to God’s Word.

I have neither transgressed nor forgotten any of your commandments. Right giving is done within the context of a whole life of obedience.

I have not, I have. The three disclaimers in this verse underscore the worshipper’s claim to have been fully obedient. Right giving genuinely sets aside what is to be given unto the Lord: <<*On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come*>> (1 Corinthians 16:2).

I have not offered any of it to the dead. Right giving is not done superstitiously; putting food in a grave with a dead body was a common Egyptian and Canaanite practice, which is most likely what the Israelites were not to emulate.

Look down from your holy habitation. God dwells in heaven, although on earth his name and presence also dwell in the central place of worship. This was originally the Tabernacle but later became Solomon’s Temple as he indicated in his prayer at its opening ceremony: <<*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Have regard to your servant’s prayer and his plea, O Lord my God,*

heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; that your eyes may be open night and day towards this house, the place of which you said, “My name shall be there”, that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays towards this place. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray towards this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling-place; heed and forgive>> (1 Kings 8:27-30).

Bless your people Israel and the ground that you have given us. Right giving and living is done with the expectation of blessing.

III.r Deuteronomy 26:16-19 - Concluding Exhortation

Moses final remarks in his second major speech to the nation are, in essence, a call for the people to reaffirm their part in God’s covenant agreement with the nation, calling them to be obedient to the will and commands of God.

¹⁶ This very day the Lord your God is commanding you to observe these statutes and ordinances; so observe them diligently with all your heart and with all your soul.

Deuteronomy 26:16

This very day the Lord your God is commanding you to observe these statutes and ordinances. Deuteronomy 4:1 began this long section with the words: <<*So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you>>. From Deuteronomy Chapter 4 through Chapter 26, Moses has reminded Israel of God’s commands. Now he exhorted them to keep the commands.*

So observe them diligently. Sometimes Christians need to be instructed regarding the law of God; sometimes they need to be reminded regarding the law of God. But most often, they need to be exhorted regarding the law of God. They know what to do, but they also need to be encouraged to actually do it.

With all your heart and with all your soul. In Deuteronomy 4:29 the people were instructed to seek God with their entire being; in Deuteronomy 6:5 they were instructed to love God with their heart, soul and might. Moses now states they should obey him in the same way.

¹⁷ Today you have obtained the Lord’s agreement: to be your God; and for you to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, his commandments, and his ordinances, and to obey him.

Deuteronomy 26:17

Today you have obtained the Lord's agreement: to be your God. Israel was to proclaim two things. First, that the Lord to be their God. Second, that they will walk in his ways and keep his statutes. The two go together, because the identity of their God is always demonstrated by the direction of their obedience: <<***that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God for ever and ever. He will be our guide for ever***>> (Psalm 48:13b-14).

¹⁸ Today the Lord has obtained your agreement: to be his treasured people, as he promised you, and to keep his commandments; ¹⁹ for him to set you high above all nations that he has made, in praise and in fame and in honour; and for you to be a people holy to the Lord your God, as he promised.

Deuteronomy 26:18-19

To be his treasured people, to be a people holy to the Lord. Israel's obedience to the Lord would be more than rewarded. God promised that he exalt an obedient Israel, to set them high above all nations that he has made, in praise and in fame and in honour. Israel was holy in their standing before God before they were holy in their conduct. They were set apart unto God by his choosing, and were then called to live as chosen people: <<***Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, 'Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you'***>> (Isaiah 49:7).