

ancient and modern, and their contributions to our knowledge of this region.

In conclusion, both of these books contain up-to-date knowledge about this important city and empire. One is scholarly and the other more popular. The Biblical records are supported and

enhanced by them both, despite the scepticism of men. We look for the day when men will no longer want to make a name for themselves (Gen. 11:4), but instead, "all flesh [will] bless [God's] holy name for ever and ever" (Ps. 145:21) in the Kingdom of God that will never pass away (Dan. 2:44).

Deuteronomy—

A stepping stone to Christ

3. Important words and phrases

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This part of the study considers some examples of words and phrases occurring in Deuteronomy that cause us to consider our personal lives in Christ, and the spiritual implications of so doing.

THE WORDS and phrases considered in this study either take our minds beyond the Law in some way, or add spiritual emphasis to help us understand the intention of the Law, from which we see clear lessons for our own discipleship.

Cleave

The word 'cleave' cannot be found in the Law (used here to mean the laws contained in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers), but it occurs four times in Deuteronomy (4:4; 10:20; 11:22; 13:4). It is a word that takes us right back to the formation of man and woman, and how one should cleave to the other (Gen. 2:24), setting the Divine ideal for marriage, which should not be broken, but rather be a continuing reflection of Christ and his ecclesia. We are exhorted to "cleave to that [him?] which is good" (Rom. 12:9).

Release

There is one occurrence of the word 'release' (Heb. *shamat*) in the Law, where it is translated "rest", the context being that the land should have rest. However, in Deuteronomy this word is picked up again and used seven times, not with respect to the *land* having rest, but *people being released*. The emphasis is shifted to relationships between people, and, in particular, how to show love to one's

neighbour (15:1,2 [three times],3,9; 31:10). It was a demonstration of the intents of the heart: "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be

evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought . . . Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him" (15:9,10). The latter phrase, regarding not being "grieved" when one gives, does not appear in the parallel account in Leviticus 25. So Deuteronomy again is focusing on the inward man; we must learn to give, but not grudgingly: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly [from a root word meaning 'to grieve'], or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).

Perfect

The word 'perfect' (Heb. *tamim*) is only used in the Law with respect to animals, and is usually translated "without blemish" (Lev. 1:3,10; 3:1,6, etc.). It is not until we come to Deuteronomy that the same word is used of people, indicating that *they* should be perfect or without blemish (18:13).¹ It was important for God's people to understand that He was seeking 'perfection' in people, not animals, and that this involved issues of the heart and mind, not just outward appearance.

1. The same word is also used of certain characters who lived before the Law: Noah (Gen. 6:9), Abraham (17:1) and Job (Job 1:1).

We are reminded that “the law made nothing perfect” (Heb. 7:19, *cf.* 10:1), but, by the offering of himself, Christ “hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (10:14). The chapter goes on to explain that the Law was something to be written on hearts and minds (v. 16). In our generation it is the Word of God that is able to help develop our hearts and minds unto perfection (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

Heaven of heavens

The expression “heaven of heavens” is first found in Deuteronomy 10:14, as if to encourage God’s people as they move to a new land to realise that His dwelling place was not ultimately to be in a tabernacle, or even a temple, though these were given by God for the time then present and made people aware of His existence and their responsibility of worship. It was Solomon who later exclaimed at the dedication of the temple, “will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee” (1 Kgs. 8:27, *cf.* Ps. 115:16). Rather, these things were a shadow of heavenly things, and spoke of a ‘spiritual household’ with Christ as the Corner Stone.

Circumcision

Circumcision was given as an outward sign of the covenant between God and Abraham (Gen. 17:10-14,23-27), and was continued, becoming an identifying feature of the Jewish people. It is only Deuteronomy, of the five books of Moses, that points to the real issue behind this outward token when it speaks of circumcising the *heart*: “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart” (10:16). This point is picked up by Paul when writing to the Romans: “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart” (Rom. 2:28,29).

A holy people

It is noteworthy that in Exodus God encourages the people, saying that “*ye shall* [imperfect tense] be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (19:6), but in Deuteronomy God says, “*For thou art* [present tense] an holy people unto the LORD thy God” (7:6; 14:2). Peter, in his first epistle, when speaking of those who made up the spiritual house on the basis of faith in Christ, quotes from Deuteronomy: “*ye are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood” (2:9).

Understanding

Apart from two occurrences in connection with Joseph (Gen. 41:33,39, translated “discreet”), the next occurrences of the word “understanding” (Heb. *bene*) occur in Deuteronomy 1:13; 4:6; 32:7 (“consider”), 10 (“instructed”) and 29 (“consider”). The Law is bypassed as far as this Hebrew word is concerned.² When Jesus was opening the Scriptures to his disciples during a meal, he opened their understanding in terms of seeing Christ in the Scriptures (Lk. 24:45). It is Deuteronomy that particularly helps us to understand how the Law does indeed point to Christ.

Forget

After three occurrences in Genesis, the word ‘forget’ re-appears thirteen times in Deuteronomy (4:9,23,31; 6:12; 8:11,14,19; 9:7; 24:19; 25:19; 26:13; 31:21; 32:18). Clearly it had particular relevance to their new lives within the Land, where they would not have the daily reminder of God’s presence constantly before them in the form of the tabernacle, and where they would face many distractions. The inspired commentary of Psalm 106:13,21 indicates how Israel tragically forgot God their Saviour. This exhortation must not be lost on us in our own generation, when there is so much to distract us and our children, causing us to forget God and turn to the vanities of our age. Rather we should “Bless the LORD . . . and *forget not* all His benefits” (Ps. 103:2).

Seek

The word ‘to seek’ (Heb. *darash*) occurs twice in the Law, once in Exodus in the context of people coming to Moses to “enquire” of God (18:15), and once in Leviticus, where Moses is seeking the goat of the sin offering (10:16). However, in Deuteronomy it is used to highlight the responsibility of *every* individual to seek God directly, being translated ‘seek’ or ‘enquire’ (4:29; 13:14; 17:4,9). Jesus emphasised the importance of each individual seeking the things of God when he appealed to his audience, “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness” (Mt. 6:33).

Prolong thy days

This is an expression that first occurs in Deuteronomy (4:26,40; 5:33; 11:9; 17:20; 22:7; 30:18; 32:47),

2. This is the common Hebrew word translated ‘understanding’. Though the word ‘understanding’ in the English does occur in the Law, these are translations from other Hebrew words.

and is clearly connected, at least initially, with their entering the Land. Eight out of the twelve occurrences of this phrase occur in Deuteronomy, and the series ends in Isaiah 53:10, where the context is the promised 'seed' prolonging their days because of Christ's sacrifice. The proverb, "The fear of the LORD prolongeth days" (Prov. 10:27), seems to be a clear reference not only to Israel entering the Land but also to God's people entering the Kingdom.

The sabbath

When the commandment regarding keeping the sabbath (Ex. 20:10) is repeated in Deuteronomy 5:14, the additional statement, "that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou", is made. This was to emphasise the responsibility that the children of Israel should have towards their servants, remembering that they had been delivered from such service to the Egyptians by God. Whereas God connects the keeping of the sabbath in the Exodus account with His resting on the seventh day after Creation, in Deuteronomy God connects its keeping with the fact that they were servants in Egypt but have now

been redeemed through a 'mighty hand'. Both, of course, are true, but Deuteronomy perhaps takes us a step nearer the consideration of Christ, for their redemption from Egypt is compared and contrasted by Peter with our redemption in Christ (1 Pet. 1:18,19), and as the redeemed we can therefore look forward to "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away" (1:4), in the sabbath rest to come.

Honour thy father and mother

When the command, "Honour thy father and thy mother" (Ex. 20:12) is repeated in Deuteronomy, the words "that it may go well with thee" (5:16) are added. It is this specific phrase that Paul quotes in Ephesians 6:3, and further adds under inspiration that it is the first commandment with promise, causing us to think of the day when 'it might go well with us' in God's promised Kingdom. Jesus, in discourse with the Pharisees, illustrated how 'doing those things that please Him', 'continuing in His Word', 'abiding in the truth' and 'seeking not our own glory' are all examples of how to honour the Father (Jno. 8:29,31,44,50), as demonstrated in his own life (v. 49).

[\(To be concluded\)](#)