

Family . . . An Endangered Species

Deuteronomy 6

Introduction – The Message of Moses

We are in the book of Deuteronomy today, as we continue through the Old Testament. The first few chapters of this book simply review what we have already studied, so we will begin in chapter 6.

Moses is speaking to the Israelites as the nation is perched like an eagle ready to soar into the promised land. He wants the people to take note of several very important things.

I will begin with the last few verses of chapter 6 as an introduction. Look at verse 24, where Moses concludes his second sermon in Deuteronomy.

So the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God for our good always and for our survival . . .

You should underline, “for our good always,” and note the words, “and for our survival”. Moses is, in effect, telling the Israelites what it will take for them to survive all that they will encounter in the promised land.

The promised land does not mean an easy road. It signifies, for the New Testament believer, all that we have in Christ. The bumps are not smoothed out. We will note today, that what it took for the Israelite to survive at that time, is the exact same thing it takes for us to survive in our time.

Now, this chapter could easily be divided into several sections. First, Moses will give the Israelites an introduction to all of the commandments and the statutes. Look back to verses 1 through 3 of chapter 6.

Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the Lord your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well

with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

A Three-fold Plan for Survival

After that introduction and review, Moses, secondly, begins his sermon.

First point – Develop a loving relationship with your God

1. The first point that Moses makes to the Israelites in his sermon, I believe, is that in order to survive in the promised land, they must develop a loving relationship with their God.

Look at Moses’ words in verse 4 of Deuteronomy, chapter 6.

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!

The “shema”

This is known as the “shema”. The “shema” is one of the things that the Israelite, even today, repeats, time and time again. This is the prayer of the Israelite.

This prayer could be divided into two great thoughts.

- The first thought is that the Lord is personal. Look at verse 4 again. It says,
. . . *The Lord is our God . . .*

He is not some great God up there that we cannot know personally. He can be known intimately; He can have a relationship developed with Him. He is a personal God.

- The second thought is that He is a unique God. Verse 4 also says,
. . . *the Lord is one! . . .*

The Hebrew word that is translated “one” in that verse is “echad”. This does not mean that God is one

numerically because, in fact, we know there is a Trinity. It means that God is, “one in uniqueness”.

Genesis, chapter 2, verse 24, in fact, uses this same word “echad,” when it talks of Adam and Eve becoming one flesh. This does not mean that they become one person. It means they became “one in uniqueness,” “one in purpose,” “one in design”.

So, God is not only a personal God, but He is a unique God. The Israelites needed to remember this theological truth because they were going into a land that was filled with many gods. They were being told by Moses, “Your God is one”; that is, He is unique, He is above all others. That is the “shema”.

I recently read a “Peanuts” cartoon that clearly illustrated the need for good theology. Charles Schulz captured great truth in the cartoon, as he did as a unique believer himself.

Linus and Lucy are looking out the window as it is pouring down rain. Lucy says, “Oh my, it’s raining so hard. Do you think it will flood the world?”

Linus, in his own inimitable, intellectual style, says, “No. In Genesis, chapter 9, God promised the world would never be flooded again. And that promise is signified by the rainbow.”

Lucy says, “Boy, that takes a great load off my mind.”

Linus then says, “Sound theology has a way of doing that.”

I love that.

The Israelite is about to go into a land and the accuser will come along and say, “Your God is not capable of helping you inherit what He has promised you. He’ll never pull this off.”

Yet God says, “I want to remind you, at the very beginning, of sound theology. I am personal; I can be known. I am unique; I am above all other gods. That should take a load off your minds.”

That should take a load off our minds now, as well.

The command

Moses then continues with his sermon to the Israelites and gives the command. Look at the verse 5.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

The “heart” represents the seed of emotion, will, mind. The “soul,” in the Hebrew thought, is the source of life or one’s being – it is very hard to translate. “Might” means, literally, “force or determination”. So, in this verse, Moses is really saying that you are to love your God with all of your heart, and then some.

We have that same thought today. When we say that a man’s heart is in his work, what do we mean? We mean that he is totally given to that career or that job.

When your wife or your girlfriend asks you, “How much do you love me?” you could say, “Well, I love you with all of my head.” However, can you see her jumping for joy over that one? No, she is looking for a baseball bat to hit you over the head with! The way you would answer that question would be, “I love you with all of my heart.” That makes no more sense than head. Head is where you make up your mind. So what are we saying? We are saying that at the very center, the very core of our being, we love that individual.

God is giving them many commands, many statutes, but He wants them to know that it is based upon, not legalism, but love. He is saying, “I want the motivating factor of your obedience to Me to not be the thought that I will zap you from My heavenly throne. I want the motivator to be that you love Me with all of your heart and then some.”

That was God’s desire then, and it is now. He wants love to be the motivation for our obedience.

So, the first point is that you are to develop a loving relationship with a personal God, a powerful God.

Second point – Model a living reality

2. The second point that Moses makes to the Israelites in his sermon is that in order to survive in the promised land, they must model a living reality.

Look at the first part of verse 7,

You shall teach them . . .

What is “them”? The Israelites are to teach the statutes, the ordinances, the commandments, the judgments. Look at verse 7 again.

You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your

house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.

Let me give two thoughts, at the outset of verse 7, that strike me.

Truth must be received before it can be relayed

- First, truth must be received before it can be relayed.

The mom's and the dad's, the older generation, were to relay the truth, but first, they must have received it themselves. This is *their* commandment; this is *their* God, and *now* they will give it to the next generation.

I think one of the difficulties that we have is that we try to teach our children; the younger generation, truths that we have never really received; that we have never really bought into the thought of. Our children will not receive and believe them either. Those who live around us will know that it is *not* a sincere belief for us.

Truth is not automatically relayed from generation to generation

- Secondly, truth is not automatically relayed from generation to generation.

This is the reason the Israelites were commanded, "These things that you have received – now go and teach them."

Did you think they would have to be told? Did you think we would have to be told? Yes. Why? Because truth is not automatically relayed from generation to generation. There can be a breakdown in truth that we know and truth that we relay to someone else, so there is a necessity for this command.

I recently read a story by a preacher who was writing about his father, who was also a preacher. This was a classic and almost unbelievable illustration of the way in which truth can break down in being relayed from generation to generation. It was convicting to me.

This preacher, as a little boy, and his brother, who were close in age, came home from church one day and began to play in the backyard. Their mom and dad were settling in after lunch. Their dog, Mate, ran to the next yard, where they heard him thrashing around in the bushes. Then, all of the sudden, they

saw Mate run from underneath the bushes with an old black and white, lop-eared rabbit in his mouth. The rabbit belonged to Mrs. Clawson next door, and evidently, Mate had caught it and killed it. The boys thought, "Oh no, what are we going to do?"

Mrs. Clawson lived by herself next door and kept and loved rabbits. The boys said, "Let's go talk to Dad and see what he thinks."

So, they went and talked to their dad. It kind of shocked them, but he said, "Well, why don't you hose it down and clean it off with a towel and make it look as good as you can. Then, prop it up in the rabbit pen. And make sure you tie up Mate."

They did what their dad said and then, hid in the bushes to watch what happened when Mrs. Clawson came home. Soon, she came home from church and went to her backyard. She headed toward the rabbit pen and, all of the sudden, the boys heard this terrible shrieking and crying and wailing and they heard her asking God all kinds of questions. Their dad and mom came running out of the house and ran over to Mrs. Clawson's. They said, "Listen, it's okay. We'll buy you another one."

Mrs. Clawson said, between snuffles and sobs, "You don't understand. That rabbit died yesterday morning and I buried it yesterday afternoon."

I am glad I read that story because I could see myself telling my boys, "Just hose it down and stick it back over there."

There is, because we are human and made of clay and because we fail, the potential of allowing the passing of truth to the next generation to break down. So God tells the Israelites, "As you go into that land, make sure you relay all that you have learned to the next generation. If you do not, they may never get it."

I want you to notice some key words in verse 7. This may startle you a little, as it did me.

Teach

The word "teach," in this verse, literally means, "to sharpen". The idea behind that word is aggressiveness.

In the Jewish culture, this is the way in which they raised their children. One rabbi writes that when a boy turned twelve and was Bar Mitzvahed, the father, in a figurative way, would wipe the sweat from his brow because he was now finished. This was

symbolic of the fact that he, for twelve years, had so aggressively taught all that he could.

There is the idea of passion; of aggression behind that word “teach”. This is not a lackadaisical questioning of, “Did you go to Sunday school,” or “What do you think the Bible said”? No. This is a passionate desire between parent and child.

Talk

The word “talk,” in verse 7, is interesting. The Hebrews had a word for “lecture” and a word for “pronouncement,” but these are not the word that is used in this text. The word means, “to talk”. It does not mean a forced talk, but a spontaneous talk; it does not mean an unnatural talk, but a genuine one. It means to talk through the course of life.

Notice that Moses goes on to tell the Israelites how to talk. Look at verse 7b again.

. . . when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.

Moses is telling the Israelites something that we must remind ourselves of; that is, we do not teach well by what we say, but by how we live. Those underneath our authority and within our influence will learn much more by the behavior we model than by the messages we give. It is not by how well we lecture that they learn, but by how well we live – that is what they pick up.

So, when you are sitting down and see the sunset, your conversation should move to the power of God. When you are walking along and see something happen, the first thing out of your mouth should be how it relates to the scriptures or to Jesus Christ. It is a lifestyle, not a lecture that teaches.

This means the word “Yahweh,” in the Israelite mouth, should have been very close to expression, although out of reverence, they would never even say it. This means the words God, Jesus Christ, Bible, truth, for us, should be words that we wait for the opportunity to use as a way to model truth.

In my own life, I come from a wealth of having been raised by godly people. I know that I did not learn the truth about self-control by a little father-son chat. I learned self-control when my father and I went to the basketball court one afternoon. My father was playing with me and a man next to him challenged him, for some strange reason, to a fight. I saw my

father turn and walk away. I learned self-control when I saw him get hit by another man and, instead of striking him back, he walked away. That is when I learned self-control.

I did not learn honesty by my mother sitting down with me and telling me to be honest, although that might be a good thing to do. I learned honesty when I saw my mother return change to a cashier who had given her too much. That is when I learned to be honest.

We have it turned around. We think that teaching is just telling. Teaching is *not* telling, teaching is *living*.

Moses wants the Israelite to take note that we are to model a living reality. This makes sense in *life*, not just in some classroom.

I have parented long enough to have failed. Our twin boys are four and our little girl is almost three. Sometimes I wonder if they are picking up some of this stuff that I am teaching. They are, but they are picking up some of the wrong stuff too.

My wife and I both live very fast paced lives. I am worse than her – I hate to miss an elevator door or a yellow light. Now do not think of me like that – I know many of you live the same way!

Recently, our family was in Atlanta at my mother-in-law’s home. One of our boys was walking through the living room and he was in a hurry; he was going somewhere. Grandma said, “Son, just slow down; just wait a minute.”

He responded in a manner that was similar to the actor John Wayne. He sort of sauntered and said, “I’m not just a wait-a-minute kind of guy.”

Where did he learn that? I know where. He learned it at the red light when Dad was banging on the steering wheel and saying, “Man, I can’t wait. Let’s go!”

I am a little afraid to bring them to church and Sunday school now, knowing what they might say!

I was praying with the boys the other night. They are so different – one prays really fast and the other prays really long and kind of drawn out prayers. He starts his prayers with, “Heavenly Father . . .” – I am serious. We were kneeling at their bed and I said, “Son, do you want to pray?”

He said, “Yes.”

So, he began his prayer and said, “Heavenly Father, I pray for Daddy and all of his problems.”

What a challenge!

Do you know what Moses is telling the Israelites? He is saying, “I want you to live your life in such a way that you have a relationship with those around you; with those under your authority. Then, when something happens or something comes up, you can share truth.”

We are not to say, “Now I am going to teach you, my child, the subject of honesty. Now the lectures begin.”

No. It is through our life that they learn.

Now, look at verse 8.

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.

The word “frontals” could be transliterated “phylacteries”. A phylactery was a small leather pouch.

When Jesus Christ came along, by the way, the hypocrites; the religious zealots who did not live it, but talked it, had taken this verse literally. They would place inside the phylactery, or pouch, scriptures from the Old Testament Law that they had written out in longhand. They would roll these scriptures up, put them in the phylactery, and then, wrap it about their heads or about their arms when they stood and prayed. Jesus Christ condemned them when He saw their phylacteries. He said, “You honor Me with your lips, but not with your lives.”

Look at verse 9, which gives another thought that was not to be taken literally. It says,

You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The Israelites also took this verse literally. They did not have anything to do with God in the home, but yet, they would take a larger pouch with a leather strap and put in it some Old Testament commands that they had written on paper and rolled up, and then, attach it to the “mezuzah,” in Hebrew, or the doorposts. They had taken literally, I believe, a verse that was to be taken figuratively.

This verse is saying, in other words, that when you walk through the door, truth lives here. In your relationships, when people hear your words and when they see your life, they know that you follow God.

They may not believe as you do, but they know that there is genuineness in your life. What a challenge.

Third point – Accept a lasting reminder

3. Now Moses will give the Israelites the third point in his sermon and that is to accept a lasting reminder.

Look at verses 10 through 12. Note these verses carefully.

Then it shall come about when the Lord your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns [wells] which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied, then watch yourself, that you do not forget the Lord who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Let me give a principle from this:

- indulgence may lead to indifference;
- indifference may lead to independence;
- independence ultimately, leads to idolatry.

God knew that when the Israelites entered the land flowing with milk and honey, they had it made, so to speak. Their children would grow up and live in homes that they did not build and drink water from wells they did not dig.

This is the same problem with my generation. We are living in a free country that we never fought for; we are experiencing the abundance that we did not lay our lives on the line for – our parents did.

The Israelite parents would conquer the Amorite and the Hittite and the Canaanite. Then, the sons and daughters would grow up in affluence.

Moses says, “In this affluent society, watch yourself. Affluence tends to lead to indifference, which leads to independence.”

In America today, we have sixty-seven percent of the world’s wealth, eighty percent of the world’s automobiles, half the world’s telephones, as if we needed another one. We live in affluent days. I think the challenge to these Israelite parents is a challenge that needs to be leveled today more than any other

day, “Be careful, lest in all that we have, we forget God, who gave it all to us.”

Conclusion of the Message of Moses

Now there are some implications that I want to cover. Let us skip to verse 20. Moses is concluding his sermon and he gives a very powerful thought.

When your son asks you in time to come, saying, “What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the Lord our God commanded you?”

Before we go any further, I want to point out some things that startled me in this verse. There are two profound implications. This verse says,

When your son asks you in time to come . . .

This is literally saying, “When your child comes to you and asks you all about the promised land.”

Implications of the conclusion of Moses’s sermon

Do you realize that statement gives two incredible implications?

- The first is that your child can assume you have an answer.

Think about this implication. Moses is assuming that the mom’s and dad’s will have mastered the material and will be modeling a reality. Then, when the child asks his dad or mom, with the assumption that he or she knows, they have an answer. They may not like it, but they have an answer. Isn’t that a powerful thought?

- This statement also implies, secondly, that the mom’s and dad’s not only have an answer, but they are available.

One man wrote that our children so desperately need models and the pedestals are empty. I would add to that – the pedestals are absent.

We live in a day when the average father spends six minutes a week with his children. That is less than sixty seconds a day in intimate conversation, other than, “Do your homework. Go to bed. Pass the butter.” Six minutes a day. It is not much better between husbands and wives.

I read a tragic thing last week. Bob Keeshan, the man who played Captain Kangaroo on television, was hired by Marriott Corporation to give seminars to their employees at lunchtime. Do you know what the

topic of his seminar was? He told the parents that building the self-esteem of their children did not take a responsible effort; did not take a measure of time from the mom’s and dad’s.

I have to tell you, the Israelite telling their son or daughter to go to the rabbi or us telling our son or daughter to go to the pastor is not enough. I, as a pastor, am available and they will come to me. However, having worked with young people in four different churches, I have seen that the worst thing is when the mom and dad are either not available or do not have the answer.

Moses is applying both of these implications. Look at verse 20 again. He says, “When they come to you in time, saying,”

. . . What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the Lord our God commanded you?

I love Moses’ next statement in verse 21a,
then you shall say to your son, . . .

Does he say to reply, “Because God said so.”?

No. Continue to verses 21b through 23. He begins by telling them to say, “Son, sit down. This is going to take some time. Have a seat. . . .”

. . . We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt; and the Lord brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand. Moreover, the Lord showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household; He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers.

In this answer, Moses is beginning by declaring God’s provision before giving them God’s commands. He follows that by telling them, in verse 24, that on the basis of God’s goodness and His deliverance,

So the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God for our good always and for our survival, as it is today.

I like that this says, “Mom and Dad, don’t hit them over the head for asking or tell them, ‘Because God said so.’”

They begin from a positive vantage point of sharing with their children all that God has done for them. That enthusiasm can be caught; can be sensed. You cannot lecture that, they can see that.

Then, Mom and Dad are to say, “On the basis of what our great personal God has done for us, can we do anything other than obey Him? It makes sense, doesn’t it, son or daughter?”

“Yeah, it does.”

Timeless truth

Let me give a timeless truth: the generation that follows us today, desperately needs reality, not religion; needs models instead of messages.

What your lips say will never outweigh what your lives say. We cannot compare what we do with what we say. There must be an agreement between those two or the first people to pick it up are those under our authority.

By the way, before we leave this, it is great news for the church. This plan works in the physical home and it works in the spiritual home. Do you know how we can survive and do much more than survive? By:

- Developing a loving relationship of worship with our God;
- Modeling to one another a reality that Jesus Christ is alive and thus, encouraging one another in that model;
- Remembering, during the good days, the prosperous days, the freedom days, where it is all coming from – the hand of God.

I have news for all of us. We will do much more than survive; we will do much more, if we follow this plan, than exist. We will excel in all that God has for us. Teaching is modeling the point given.

I love the story of Ben Franklin, who was trying to talk his town into using street lighting. Benjamin Franklin got nowhere with the town council until he decided upon another plan. He got a large lantern and hung it on a long bracket outside his home. He kept the glass highly polished and every evening, at dusk, he went out and lit the wick. It was not long before people would take comfort from that light as they walked down that cobblestone sidewalk. The people could avoid the sharp stones, as they came to just within eye shot of the warm bathing light that Franklin’s lantern gave. Soon, other people began to follow his example and put lanterns out in front of their homes. It was not long after this that the city of Philadelphia recognized the benefit of lighted streets.

When I look at Deuteronomy, chapter 6, do you know what I think Moses is telling them and us? Get

a lantern, polish it highly, and in the dark culture that we live in, let us light the wick before our children so that they can understand the benefit of light; they can understand the privilege of walking with Jesus Christ because they see it when it is dark. As a church, to our culture, they also benefit from the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world.

Teaching is example. Leading is influencing.

One man wrote that teaching does not just involve influencing; teaching’s greatest essential ingredient is – influence. May God help it to be.