

Message #32**Deuteronomy 26:1-19**

Every year for the past many years at Christmas time we watch three movies:

- 1) It Happened on 5th Avenue;
- 2) It's A Wonderful Life and
- 3) White Christmas.

We just like those stories. They are good stories with good endings.

Now in White Christmas there is a scene in which Bing Crosby and Rosemary Clooney sing a song by a fireplace that was written by Irving Berlin. Here are the lyrics:

“When I’m worried and I can’t sleep
I count my blessings instead of sheep
And I fall asleep counting my blessings.
When my bankroll is getting small
I think of when I had none at all.
And I fall asleep counting my blessings.”

Now that song was not written to be a hymn in the church, but it is a good song that well fits this chapter in Deuteronomy.

The problem with many of God’s people is that they count their troubles and problems instead of blessings. In fact, God’s own people can get into the habit of not only forgetting the blessings God has given to them, but they can focus on all their struggles to the point they don’t even remember the blessings.

God did not want His people in that Promised Land forgetting about all the blessings He had given to them. So in this chapter He specifically communicates:

GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE TO REMEMBER HOW HE BROUGHT THEM FROM NOTHING TO BLESSING BY HIS PEOPLE GIVING HIM AN OFFERING OF FIRST FRUITS.

God wants His people to remember when they didn’t have anything and how He gave them everything. He wanted them worshipping Him and bringing to Him their first fruit offerings. As J. Vernon McGee said, “Acknowledging that all the produce of the land came from God and as an expression of thankfulness for His goodness, the Israelites brought as an offering to Him a portion of the fruit that ripened first” (*Thru The Bible, Deuteronomy*, Vol. 1, p. 594).

God wants His people thinking about Him and worshipping Him for all of the blessings He has provided for them and given to them. There are three time frame areas that God wants them remembering:

TIME FRAME #1 – God wants His people remembering His blessings of the Past. **26:1-11**

When God’s people get into the Promised Land and receive everything God will give them, He wanted them to take some of the first fruits of produce from the land and bring them to the place where God chooses to have them bring them (**26:1-2**). This would include grain, new wine and oil (Deut. 18:4).

God would choose a central sanctuary place and they were to bring Him some of the first fruits of the land as an offering. God is very specific as to what His people were to do:

Regulation #1 - Take some of the first produce to the place God determined. **26:2**

God would establish a place where His people were to take their first fruit offerings with a thankful spirit for all God had done for them. They could not determine where these offerings were to be taken; God determined it.

In other words, they could not say, well I’ll give this offering to someone and we will call it good. They had to take this offering to the place God designated.

Now in this N.T. economy, the place God has designated is the local church (I Cor. 16:1-2). So when we bring our offerings to the Lord and put them in the offering basket, and when we do it with a thankful spirit for all God has given to us, we are truly doing that which has pleased God for centuries.

Regulation #2 - Go to the priest who is in office at the time and make a solemn declaration.
26:3

This specific first fruits past offering was to include the priest who was in office at the time. He was to be informed that this was the first fruit offering that was being given for all of the blessings that had been experienced.

This declaration was to be a one-time declaration that they are now officially in the land.

There was to be a personal acknowledgement that this was the land that God promised our forefathers that we would have and we are the ones who have the privilege of living in it.

God had fulfilled His promises and these very people were inheriting blessings promised many years ago. This was not the regular offering; this was a one-time special offering.

Regulation #3 - The priest was to take the first fruit basket and set it before the altar of God.
26:4

The God-appointed leader was to take this first fruit offering and set it down before the altar of “the LORD your God.” So the offering was to be given by God’s people, not the heathen world or heathen nations.

Regulation #4 - The worshipper was to declare his personal connection to what God did in past history. **26:5-9**

There are five specific memories one was to have:

(Memory #1) - He was to remember to acknowledge the history of His family. **26:5**

Jacob was a wandering Aramean, which is a reference to the fact that he left in a conflict with Esau and moved to live with relatives in Aram-Naharaim. When the story began there was a lack of stability and permanence.

He and his entire family eventually went down to Egypt where Joseph was ruling and there God's people became a great, mighty and prosperous nation.

(Memory #2) - He was to remember and acknowledge the mistreatment of His family. **26:6**

The Egyptians mistreated Israel for 400 years. They made them hurt and suffer. They even started killing their babies.

(Memory #3) - He was to remember and acknowledge their prayer to God. **26:7**

God's people cried out to Him. It wasn't their strength that would get them out of this misery, it was God and when they cried out to God and God heard them.

Remembering how God has answered prayers is a critical reason we should thank God and joyfully bring Him our offerings. When we consider the fact that Almighty, Sovereign, Eternal God has actually listened to us and has helped us, that is something for which we can praise God for the rest of our days.

(Memory #4) - He was to remember and acknowledge how God delivered His people. **26:8**

He was to remember how God brought them out of Egypt. He was to remember the plagues and the signs and wonders God performed. He brought Israel out and did terrifying things to the Egyptians.

As this offering was being given, the giver was to reflect on the amazing things God has done in the past.

(Memory #5) - He was to remember and acknowledge that God brought them to the land. **26:9**

God took them from their slavery and brought them to a land flowing with milk and honey. It was a good land, a beautiful land, a productive land.

One of the saddest things you will see are believers who lose sight of all God has given them.

Regulation #5 - He was to make a formal statement before God. **26:10-11**

As one would bring this offering, one was to make four statements:

(Statement #1) - He was to say to God that he has brought Him the first of his produce. **26:10a**

He was to acknowledge before God that this offering was a first fruit offering, not some left over offering.

(Statement #2) - He was to say to God that God gave him his produce. **26:10b**

He was to acknowledge that God had specifically given this blessing and this produce to him.

(Statement #3) - He was to set it down before God and worship God. **26:10c**

This worship would obviously include the idea that God had given His gracious blessings to His people.

(Statement #4) - He was to tell the Levite and alien to rejoice because God had given many blessings to them. **26:11**

It is significant to note that God's concern and blessings are given to "households." God expected His people to testify that they gave these offerings to God because He has blessed them.

Often times you will hear people say concerning offerings that all the church cares about is money. I am sure in some cases that is true. However, in a place that is operating Biblically, what the church really cares about is the blessing of God and part of getting the blessings of God in the church and in our own household is being thankful for all God has given to us and giving a portion back to Him.

TIME FRAME #2 – God wants His people acknowledging His blessings in the Present.
26:12-15

Now after His people took the first fruit offering and went and remembered the past, they were to every three years bring an offering and give it to the Levite, stranger, orphan and widow in their own towns so they could live a good life and be satisfied with life.

According to **verses 13-14** the Israelite was to make several official statements before the Lord:

(Statement #1) - They were to say I have removed this portion from my house. **26:13a**

This statement declares this came from my home and it is an offering I am giving to the Lord.

This did not come from someone else; this came specifically from me. Notice from this verse that this is a “sacred portion” to God. So when we set aside an offering from our home and bring it to God, it is sacred action to God.

(Statement #2) - They were to say I am giving this to the Levite. **26:13b**

Ezekiel wrote: “The first of all the first fruits of every kind and every contribution of every kind, from all your contributions, shall be for the priests; you shall also give to the priest the first of your dough **to cause a blessing to rest on your house.**” Ez. 44:30

(Statement #3) - They were to say I am giving this to the alien. **26:13c**

(Statement #4) - They were to say I am giving this to the orphan. **26:13d**

(Statement #5) - They were to say I am giving this to the widow. **26:13e**

We have already seen in Deuteronomy 14:28-30 that this support of a Levite, the alien, and orphan and widow was something that would not only prompt God to prosper them, but bless them in everything they did.

The idea that we help those who have needs is something that does bring the blessings of God.

(Statement #6) - They were to say I am giving this according to Your word. **26:13f**

This giving was giving done consistent with the word of God. Giving that is consistent with the word of God will always bring the blessings of God.

(Statement #7) - They were to say I have not transgressed or forsaken Your word. **26:13g**

Again the point is we are giving in accordance with God’s word. It is not just any giving that brings God’s blessings; it is giving consistent with the word of God that does this.

(Statement #8) - They were to say I have not eaten any of this offering even when in mourning times. **26:14a**

No matter how lean things became at times, he was faithful to give God this offering. God’s first fruits offering were to be set aside first. The idea is this is given to God upfront and first and not given if we don’t need it or use it.

(Statement #9) - They were to say I have not removed this offering when unclean. **26:14b**

The meaning is I have not used this for any unclean thing or from any unclean act.

(Statement #10) - They were to say I have not offered any of this offering for the dead. **26:14c**

God was very clear to point out that no offering was ever to be given to Him that had ever been offered to some cultic thing (Deut. 12:13).

(Statement #11) - They were to say I have obeyed God and followed His word with this offering. **26:14e**

Giving offerings is about obeying the word of God.

(Statement #12) - They were to pray to God and ask Him to continue to bless them. **26:15**

This is fascinating because the emphasis of this prayer is not that God should bless them because they were faithful here to obey His word; it is that God should bless them because that is what He promised to do to their forefathers. Naturally if they were not obeying God, they wouldn't be here to even pray this prayer, but it is interesting that they are not relying on their obedience but on God's faithfulness to His word.

TIME FRAME #3 – God wants His people anticipating His blessings in the Future. **26:16-19**

The final section is what God wanted His people to know about the future. Giving offerings is about being a holy, consecrated people.

Reality #1 - God's people need to be careful to obey God in their soul. **26:16**

It is one thing to obey God's word and give an offering physically. It is quite another to give out of your heart and soul.

Reality #2 - God's people need to remember they have declared to obey His word. **26:17**

They will walk in His ways and keep His statutes and His commandments and ordinances and listen to His voice. In the context, the people are saying they are committed to obeying God by giving offerings so when God showers with blessings, don't forget about this.

Reality #3 - God's people need to know that they are God's treasured people. **26:18**

God's people are His treasured people by His declaration. He treasures them and He will prosper them as long as they are focused on obeying Him.

Reality #4 - God's people need to know what God will do for them in the future. **26:19**

There are five future promises that God makes to His people.

(Future Promise #1) - God will set them above all the nations which He has made.

God has made all people and He promises He will raise His people to a higher level than all of them.

(Future Promise #2) - God will give His people praise.

(Future Promise #3) - God will give His people fame.

(Future Promise #4) - God will give His people honor.

(Future Promise #5) - God will consecrate His people.

God will set apart this nation unto Himself forever.

God has spoken it and He will do it. Now in view of all that God will give to His people and do for His people in the future, then why would we not want to obey God and give Him our offerings?

The wisest man to ever live, and also one of the richest men to ever live by God's classification was Solomon, and here is what Solomon taught his son:

“Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine.” **Proverbs 3:9-10**

Malachi wrote: “‘Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.’” **Malachi 3:10**

You take these words, you think about them, you pray about them and you apply them and see what God will do.