

June 24, 2018  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Deuteronomy  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
© 2018 David J. Whitcomb

*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Deuteronomy 10:1-11.

1. What is significant about the fact that the Law God gave to Moses was the basis of God's covenant with the people?
2. What is the basis, the foundation of God's covenant with us who trust Christ?
3. What is the significance of the Law being in the ark under the mercy seat?
4. What was the essential work of the priests and Levites, and why should they have considered God's choice of them to be special?
5. How did Moses's prayer change history?
6. Explain how God changed His mind in this situation.

### **EVIDENCE OF GOD'S GRACE Deuteronomy 10:1-11**

Moses was relating Israel's first generation of history to the people of the second generation. The record of his speech began in 4:44 and will run all the way to the end of chapter twenty-six. The essential tone of that history was the people's stubbornness and God's response to it. Moses had just related a few of the crucial events that evidenced that stubbornness so vividly. He spoke of events like the golden calf incident (9:13-21), the stubbornness revealed at Taberah, Massah, Kibroth-

hattavah, and finally at Kadesh-barnea when the people refused to enter the Promised Land.

These were crisis periods. Especially so was the incident of the golden calf when God tested Moses with the idea of destroying the whole nation, and the incident at Kadesh-barnea when God sentenced the first generation to death in the desert. Those would definitely be considered crises.

Crisis situations in our relationship with God are often times when we see the grace of God displayed for us in very real ways. Those are times like David's sin of adultery and murder. He should have been killed, but God showed him grace. A crisis was Job's period of testing which caused him to doubt God. Rather than punish Job's doubt, God interrogated him until Job conceded his sin. That was God's grace. Peter ran into a crisis every now and then, with the worst one possibly being his denial of any association with Christ. And Jesus graciously restored him.

You and I will experience crises similar to these in our walk with the Lord. Hopefully we will not fall into deep sin like David or deny our Lord like Peter. But we will have times when we doubt God's faithfulness, when we become full of ourselves, or when we stubbornly refuse to do what we know to be God's will.

The good news is that in times of such relational crises, God proves to be gracious to draw us back into fellowship with Him. Talk to Him about it. Express the problem. Be honest. Be painfully honest. Then open the Bible and remind yourself of God's gracious promises, and get back to enjoying fellowship with God as you serve Him. That is the picture Moses gave us as he picked up the pieces from the golden calf crisis.

### **God's Law – The Basis of His Covenant (vv.1-5).**

Moses related to the people how God commanded him after the people had sinned so grievously at the golden calf situation. The first two verses of our text relate that command in which we discover that God made Moses responsible to produce two stone tablets. *At that time the LORD said to me, "Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to me on the mountain and make an ark of wood" (v.1).* The phrase, "At that time," refers to some time in the context of the golden calf incident and Moses interceding for the people with God. We

cannot possibly be precise on the timing of events. But all of the actions were tied together by “at that time.”

What is important is the LORD’s command for Moses to replace the stone tablets. Though our text might not seem to say so, it appears that God must have given this command in response to Moses’s intercession for the people. It is an interesting contrast with the original case in which, according to Exodus 24:12; 31:18; 32:15; Deut. 9:9-11, God fashioned the original two tablets and wrote the commands on them. Read Exodus 32:16, *The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.*

This second time God commanded Moses to fashion the stone tablets himself and God would rewrite the laws on them. This command symbolized the very important reality that He was renewing the covenant with the people who sinned. The law of God was the basis of His covenant with the people. Moses shattered the original tablets containing the basis of God’s covenant to symbolize how the people had shattered the covenant with God. The stubborn people did not originate the covenant to begin with, and there was nothing they could do to restore it. God had to initiate the restoration.

This time also, God told Moses to build an ark (box) in which to place the tablets. There is debate whether this was the ark of the covenant. The same Hebrew word is used to identify both this box and the ark. God instructed Moses to use the same kind of wood. But, on the other hand, it seems likely that Bezalel and his people built the ark of the covenant after Moses returned with the new tablets. It is possible that we have a reference to a temporary ark and then a reference to the permanent ark of the covenant.

God told Moses that he was responsible to provide the stone tablets, but God took the responsibility to write His law on the tablets. *“And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets that you broke, and you shall put them in the ark”* (v.2). God promised to rewrite the law. We can be certain that it was exactly the wording of the original. The picture of shattering the basis of the covenant was sufficient. Now God desired to picture restoration to the covenant. God also instructed Moses to put the newly completed tablets in the ark. The word “ark” refers to a place of safe keeping. Like a safe where we would store the most important documents in our lives. There would be no more symbolism of God’s covenant shattered. It was to be protected as something most valuable.

Moses the servant obeyed (vv.3-5). He made the tablets and the ark. *So I made an ark of acacia wood, and cut two tablets of stone like the first, and went up the mountain with the two tablets in my hand* (v.3). Moses, the servant of the LORD, was the meek man who interceded with God who was ready to destroy the people. He was torn because He loved God and He also loved God’s people. He was the human instrument God used to convey His message to His people.

Now we are not surprised to see Moses carrying the tablets to God for God to “fill them out.” It is a picture like that of a pastor sitting down with an open Bible and an empty page, asking God to fill out the sermon for His people. It is like a teacher preparing Sunday’s lesson, asking God to fill out His message for His people.

Moses placed God’s law in the ark. It was the famous Ten Commandments. *And he wrote on the tablets, in the same writing as before, the Ten Commandments that the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. And the LORD gave them to me* (v.4). God wrote the same rules He had written before. Rules that reminded the people that He is holy and righteous. Rules that taught the people that being in His covenant required them to be holy and righteous like Him. Rules that the people shattered. But see the preciousness of Moses’s statement that the LORD gave those rules to “me.” That is how we should see our Bible. It is God’s treasure that He gave to me.

And so Moses could assure the people of the second generation that “they are in the box”! *Then I turned and came down from the mountain and put the tablets in the ark that I had made. And there they are, as the LORD commanded me* (v.5). Moses carried tablets that he had made according to God’s command. But now he carried tablets on which God placed His breathed-out message, His law. They were ordinary stone tablets when Moses carried them up the mountainside. But now they were supernaturally inspired law when Moses place them in the ark.

At this point in the story, it is possible that the term “ark” seems to refer to the final version of the ark of the covenant which Bezalel had build nearly 40 years before this speech. Because the ark contained the words of the covenant, it was the ark that represented God’s covenant. And on the box’s lid was the mercy seat where God accepted the blood of the annual sacrifice for the atonement of the people’s sins. No wonder God promised to meet with His people at that spot.

## God's Choice of Servants (vv.6-9).

Verses six through nine contain what is identified in English translations as parenthetical information. Here it becomes obvious that Moses was not giving a chronological play-by-play recounting of Israel's past activity. Rather, in this speech, Moses was showing how gracious God is to forgive His people's sins and restore them. Not only did God not wipe out His people for the golden calf incident, but in the process of restoring and continuing to use them, He chose the men of one particular tribe to be His special servants.

The LORD's chosen priests are identified in verse six by the man named Aaron who served God and died. *The people of Israel journeyed from Beeroth Bene-jaakan to Moserah. There Aaron died, and there he was buried (v.6a)*. None of these geographical locations are identifiable today and so they really don't matter. Though it appears there are conflicts between the account in Numbers and this account by Moses, it is likely that these are alternative names for places or general localities. But, unlike the account in Numbers 33, Deuteronomy is not an exact historical, chronological, geographical report. What we do know is that God was angry for Aaron leading the people in idolatry at the golden calf incident (Deut. 9:20) and God allowed Aaron to die at Mt. Hor (Deut. 32:50) as a consequence of his sin.

After Aaron died, Eleazar served God in the same way. *And his son Eleazar ministered as priest in his place (v.6b)*. Eleazar was Aaron's third oldest son. He served as priest because his two older brothers offered strange fire at God's altar and God killed them (Numbers 3:4). God did not choose Eleazar because he was more qualified, but because that was God's will.

Then there were the Levites (vv.7-9) whom the LORD chose to be His ministers. *From there they journeyed to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah to Jotbathah, a land with brooks of water. At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD to stand before the LORD to minister to him and to bless in his name, to this day (vv.7-8)*. The phrase *At that time* refers back to the event of verse one and the broader golden calf incident, not to the time of Aaron's death.

Obvious in these verses is the fact that God chose the descendants of Levi for special service. Moses and Aaron were Levi's descendants

through his son Kohath. The Kohathites were given special, particular duties of service. It is significant that these people who God chose for particular service proved to be loyal to God at the golden calf incident. *Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, "Who is on the LORD's side? Come to me." And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.'" And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell (Exodus 32:26-28)*.

Notice in verse eight that God gave the Levites a fourfold duty. *At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD to stand before the LORD to minister to him and to bless in his name, to this day (v.8)*. First, they were to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD. This means they were to serve as custodians of the tabernacle ministry. They were to protect the tabernacle, the ark, and the covenant tablets within the ark.

Second, they were to *stand before the LORD*. Daniel 1:4 uses this Hebrew word (*stand before*) to speak of the authorized entrance into the king's presence. Only the Levites were authorized to come before the LORD in the tabernacle.

Third, God chose the Levites *to minister to him*. That speaks of their responsibility of presenting sacrifices and offerings to the LORD. It refers to their duties to care for tabernacle ministry and service.

Fourth, they were *to bless in his name*. Probably that duty refers to the Levites pronouncing blessings on the people in the name of the Lord. This would probably be like the Aaronic blessings we see in Numbers 6:24-26 (cf. Lev. 9:22). *The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace (Numbers 6:24-26)*.

But it seems likely that the tabernacle and furnishes were not yet created by Bezalel and company. Therefore, this fourfold duty must have been an assignment established within the scope of God's covenant. This pronouncement amounted to affirmation of the Levites' role in maintaining the covenant relationship between the two parties of the covenant – God and His people. It means that God

chose the Levites to keep the people walking in fellowship with God, reminding the people of God's covenant with them.

That is what the pastor/teacher is to you. He is to continually keep the stipulations of the "New Covenant" the gospel, before you. His duty is to continually remind us of what God has accomplished to bring us into this covenant of grace. He is responsible to continually remind us of how we should show our gratitude by living obediently in fellowship with Him. He should continually challenge us to tell this good news of the covenant to others.

The LORD gave the Levites a special assignment and He also gave them a special inheritance—Himself. *Therefore Levi has no portion or inheritance with his brothers. The LORD is his inheritance, as the LORD your God said to him (v.9).* Levi's posterity was the only group out of Jacob's twelve sons who did not receive allotments of land. Instead, God was their sufficient inheritance. Why did God bother to even use people who were associated with the stubborn sinners of the nation?

### **God's Grace (vv.10-11).**

Having communicated the parenthetical information about God's chosen servants, Moses went back to telling the story related to the golden calf incident. He told the people the good news that the LORD listened to him (v.10). He reminded them how he had sacrificed on behalf of their stubborn parents. *I myself stayed on the mountain, as at the first time, forty days and forty nights (v.10a).* Moses had already been on the mountain with God 40 days and nights when he received the law. Now he went back to God on the mountain and prayed and fasted another 40 days and nights. I do not know anyone personally who has ever interceded for anyone like that.

The good news is that the Lord was gracious. Moses went up the mountain to pray, *and the LORD listened to me that time also. The LORD was unwilling to destroy you (v.10b).* Moses was so intent on God restoring His sinning people that he offered his own life in exchange for the lives of God's people. *"But now, if you will forgive their sin – but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have*

*written" (Exodus 32:32).* It is interesting that Moses didn't mention that fact in this recounting of history.

Moses prayed for God to forgive the people (Exodus 32:32a). Moses prayed for God to maintain His covenant with His people. *And I prayed to the LORD, "O Lord GOD, destroy not your people and your heritage, whom you have redeemed through your greatness, whom you have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand" (Deuteronomy 9:26).* Moses prayed that God would keep His promise to the patriarchs. *Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Do not regard the stubbornness of this people, or their wickedness or their sin (Deuteronomy 9:27).* But in fact, Moses's real concern was not the people as much as God's reputation. He prayed, *lest the land from which you brought us say, "Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land that he promised them, and because he hated them, he has brought them out to put them to death in the wilderness." For they are your people and your heritage, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm (Deuteronomy 9:28-29).*

Moses certainly engaged in humble, self-sacrificing intercession. But the ultimate reason God listened to him was because God is gracious. The LORD recommissioned Moses by telling him that he was to keep being the chosen leader (v.11). *And the LORD said to me, "Arise, go on your journey at the head of the people" (v.11a).* The words *Arise, go* indicate the LORD's eagerness to get on with the task at hand. It indicates that in God's mind He restored the people and it was time to move on toward the Promised Land.

God listened to Moses and then told him that he was to continue to be an instrument in the LORD's hands to accomplish the LORD's will. God intended for him to lead His people, *so that they may go in and possess the land, which I swore to their fathers to give them (v.11b).* This was covenant renewal. God made a covenant with the nation of Israel and intends to keep it. It is a covenant based on God's word. God intends to keep His word.

Therefore, this is a covenant that insures Israel's renewal even after God's judgment. Listen to God's restatement of His covenant to the prophet Ezekiel even after He has sent Babylon to destroy Jerusalem and take the nation captive. *They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and*

*their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore (Ezekiel 37:25-28).*

God's loyalty to His covenant with His people Israel is a wonderful picture of His loyalty to His covenant with you and me. He has made a covenant with His chosen people founded on the blood of Jesus Christ. He has promised to save us ultimately for eternity. In life, along the way to the "Promised Land" God will chasten us because of sin. But along the way He also restores us for service.

In this process, we must see the importance of prayer in reaffirming the Lord's covenant, just like Moses showed us. We learn that sometimes prayer changes circumstances. We learn that sometimes prayer changes the hearts and will of God's people. Sometimes prayer changes the relationship between God and His people.

God loves to hear His people pray confessing our sins against Him. God loves to hear us pray asking for restoration. God loves to hear us pray interceding for those who are sinning with no apparent conviction. God loves to hear us pray asking for their repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. God loves to hear us pray—praying according to His covenant founded on the blood of Christ who bought us for Himself. God loves to hear us pray because God is gracious.