

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 15
Deuteronomy 20-34

Key Concepts: The key concept in this section is that the future of Israel is in their hands. If they listen to and obey God they will live and prosper. If they do not listen to God and disobey then things will not go well. They are headed to a new beginning and so must choose how to live.

Stories: Again in this section there are few narrative stories. Instead we encounter the second half of Moses final sermon to the people. This portion of the sermon includes rules for engaging in “holy” war (20), various laws (21-25), some religious liturgies (26), instructions for a religious ceremony upon entering the land (27:1-10), curses for violations of ethical commands (27:11-26), the conclusion to Moses second address (28), Moses’ third address (29-30), some final events in Moses’ life (31), Moses’ farewell song (32), the blessings of Moses on the tribes (33) and finally the death of Moses (34).

Brief Summary: There are several crucial concepts that we ought to be looking for in this section.

The first concept is that of holiness. The section opens with a chapter on holy war which to our ears sounds extraordinarily brutal and unloving. Remember however that the theological concept of holiness requires that God’s people be separate from anything or any people that might corrupt them. Thus they must rid the land of any who have been initiated into competing religions. This is also the reason that compassion can be given to lands that Israel might conquer outside of its territory.

The second concept is that of compassion. To be God’s people means to show compassion to everyone. Here are some examples: as war is brewing newly married men or those who are beginning their careers are allowed to stay home. Also note if a city surrenders, the people are to be spared; trees that bear fruit are not to be cut down when laying siege to a city; women will continue to have an opportunity for children even after their husband’s death; you shall not hold a man’s cloak overnight if it has been given in pledge of a debt; you shall not reap everything in your fields so that the poor may eat.

The third concept is justice. To be God’s people means to live in a just community. Here are some examples: a woman who cries out when raped in the city or a woman who is raped in the countryside is to be spared and her attacker put to death; husbands may not unjustly impugn the reputations of their wives; escaped slaves are not to be returned to their masters (certainly ignored in the Dred Scott decision); an Israelite shall be put to death for trying to steal and enslave another Israelite; children shall not be put to death for the sins of their parents nor parents for the sins of their children.

The fourth concept is possession. To be God’s people means to respect private property. Here are some examples: the eldest son has certain rights to inheritance; the owner of a vineyard or an orchard has the right to its produce, though he must also share some; wives belong to husbands (I know not the best example); landmarks demarcating property are not to be moved in order to steal land; a neighbor’s animal who wanders away or on to the property of another is to be returned.

The fifth concept is neighborliness. To be God’s people means to love your neighbor. Examples include watching out for a neighbor’s animals; helping a neighbor in need; not violating a neighbor’s wife; not loaning money at interest; sharing the margins of production (some grapes, wheat and olives) with poor neighbors; not taking a person’s means of production as a pledge.

The sixth concept is an orderly transition of power. To be the people of God is to share power from one generation to the next as Moses did with Joshua.

1. What rules would you use in considering whether or not to go to war?
2. In what ways do you share the margins of your goods with those in need?
3. How have you witnessed power being transferred within your own faith community?