

Instructions to Future Rulers

(Special Lesson from Deuteronomy 17:14-20)

I. Introduction to This Lesson

- a. After Moses died, Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land.
- b. The people were led by judges whom the Lord raised up from time to time, and by priests. However, they did not have a king, unlike the nations around them.
- c. After the Lord defeats the vast Midianite army with Gideon and only 300 men, the people want to make Gideon their ruler.
 - i. “Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, ‘Rule over us, both you and your sons for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.’ But Gideon said to them, ‘I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you. The Lord shall rule over you.” (**Judges 8:22-23, LXX, OSB**)
- d. Years later, the Israelites are facing another challenge. Samuel, the priest and judge, is old and his sons are corrupt. The people ask for a king, to have a leader to fight their battles. That is how all the other nations around them are led, and they are looking to them for an example to lead them out of their crisis.
 - i. Read **1 Samuel 8** (designated **1 Kingdoms 8** in the LXX).
 - ii. God considers this a rejection of Himself as their king. It will not go well for them, looking to the nations around them as examples to follow.
- e. However, even though this is a sinful response, the Lord had anticipated this would happen, and made provision for it about 350 years prior.
 - i. This was in the instructions Moses gave in **Deuteronomy 17**, shortly before his death.
- f. Many consider the book of **Deuteronomy** to be the ‘heart of the Old Testament’.
 - i. It presents Moses’ ‘Farewell Address’ to the Jews, given shortly before he dies and before they enter Canaan.
 - ii. It includes what Jesus referred to as “the greatest commandment” (**Matthew 22:36-38**, pointing back to **Deuteronomy 6:5**).

- iii. It retells the story of the Lord giving the 10 Commandments at Mount Sinai (first told in **Exodus 19-20**).
- iv. It includes many wonderful promises and warnings, and provides the roadmap of much of what follows (depending on whether the people followed the Lord, abandoned Him, or repented and returned to Him).
- v. It also includes instructions for future rulers, when the time comes that the Israelites ask for a king, to be “like the nations around them”.

II. Instructions Regarding Future Rulers: Overview

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 17:14-20**.
 - i. First, we will read this from the Orthodox Study Bible (OSB) translation of the Septuagint (LXX), which most of the members of our local congregation use.
- b. Why these instructions should matter to us.
 - i. It explains future events, especially related to the fall of King Solomon and the resulting division of the nation of Israel into two kingdoms.
 - ii. It reveals some things about the character of God, as well as the sinful tendencies of people.
 - iii. There are some great practical lessons for all of us in these simple instructions.
- c. Now, let us read the same passage from another translation, also based on the LXX. Here is the passage from the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS):
 - i. “Now if you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you and take possession of it and live in it and you say, ‘I will set a ruler over me, like the rest of the nations that are around me,’ by appointing, you shall appoint over you a ruler, him whom the Lord your God may choose. One of your own brothers you shall appoint as ruler over you; you shall not have power to appoint a strange person over you, because he is not your brother.
 - ii. “For he shall not multiply cavalry for himself or return the people to Egypt in order to multiply cavalry for himself, but the Lord has said to you, ‘You shall never add to return that way’. And he shall not multiply wives for himself, neither shall his heart turn away; also silver and gold he shall not multiply exceedingly for himself.
 - iii. “And it shall be, when he has sat upon the seat of his rule, that he shall write for himself this second law in a book from the priests, the

Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read from it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all these commandments and statutes to do them, so that his heart may not be exalted above his brothers so that he not turn aside from the commandments, right or left, in order that he be long-lived in his rule, he and his sons among the sons of Israel.” (**Deuteronomy 17:14-20**, LXX, NETS)

- d. The name we know this book by, **Deuteronomy** (Greek for “second law”), is found in the text we just read. In the LXX Greek, this is the book that the king was to write down, keep with him, and read all the days of his life.

III. Specific Instructions

- a. The ruler must not be a foreigner. He must be from among the sons of Israel.
- i. Significance regarding **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** prophecy that the future prophet whom the Lord will “raise up”, who will be “like Moses”, whom all must heed... also must be from among their brothers.
 1. Therefore, this prophet (like the king) must be an Israelite.
 2. Therefore, this prophecy about the prophet to come cannot possibly apply to Mohammad (who was an Arab, not an Israelite).
 3. Peter and Stephen apply this prophecy to Jesus in **Acts 3** and **Acts 7**.
- b. The ruler cannot multiply horses nor send his people back to Egypt for horses.
- i. Solomon did this.
 1. “And Solomon had horses imported from Egypt and Keveh; the king’s merchants bought them in Keveh at the current price.” (**2 Chronicles 1:16**, NKJV)
 2. “And they brought horses to Solomon from Egypt and from all lands.” (**2 Chronicles 9:28**, NKJV)
 - ii. **Question:** The Lord told them they should never go back to Egypt. Why not? If you need horses or anything else, why not go back there to purchase some?
 1. Consider the ‘exodus map’ that Paul used in **1 Corinthians 10:1-13** as foreshadowing the Christian life.

2. Crossing the Red Sea represented baptism, and the Wilderness wandering period foreshadowed the Christian life (a time of testing for God's people). Therefore, it follows logically that Egypt in that story represented the old life in slavery, the time before the people were 'baptized'.
 3. If Egypt represented the old life of spiritual slavery in a dark kingdom where the evil ruler (Pharaoh / Satan) would not "let God's people go", perhaps we can appreciate the lesson the Lord is giving here. He does not want His people to go back to the old land they had escaped (the worldly life of spiritual enslavement) when facing challenges.
 - a. Recall how the people longingly looked back upon the food they had enjoyed in Egypt and wanted to return, angering the Lord. (**Numbers 11:4-6**)
- c. The ruler must not '*multiply*' wives for himself. Also, he must not multiply gold and silver '*exceedingly*'.
- i. **Question:** How many wives does one need to have before they have crossed the line here is "multiply"? Recall that polygamy was allowed under the Law of Moses. Did David 'cross the line' in having several wives?
 1. Regardless of where that 'line' is, clearly King Solomon crossed it by having hundreds of wives!
 - ii. Read **1 Kings 10:14-22** and **11:1-10** (this book is designated **3 Kingdoms** in the LXX).
 1. After the return from captivity in Babylon, the example of Solomon's sin with foreign wives was used to teach the Israelites a lesson about the dangers of this sin. If someone as great and wise as King Solomon could fall in this way, what does that say about the rest of us? (See **Nehemiah 13:23-27**)
 - iii. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 47:12-21**.
 1. This book is included in the Old Testament in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles, and was included in the King James Version until around the late 1800s. In some Bibles, this book is named **Ecclesiasticus**.
 2. Solomon was "enslaved by his body"!

- a. Think about that. Despite all his power, wealth and wisdom, this famous king is described as being *enslaved* by the desires of his flesh!
3. This story of Solomon's wives influencing him is another reminder of how we need to be careful in choosing our closest friends. That especially applies to selecting one's spouse!
 - a. "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'" (1 Corinthians 15:33, NKJV)
- d. The ruler is instructed to write down the **Book of Deuteronomy**, keep it with him, and read it all the days of his life.
 - i. **Question:** Do you think *Solomon*, the third king, did that?
 1. **Plausible Answer:** It is hard for me to imagine that Solomon did this, in view of how his life ended.
 - ii. **Question:** Why were the future rulers called to *write these words down themselves* in their own hands?
 1. **Plausible Answer:** After writing it down in his own hand (and then reading it in his own writing), there would be no way the king could claim ignorance of the commands of God.
 - iii. **Question:** Why were the future rulers instructed to write down the words of *this particular book (Deuteronomy)*, of all books in the Old Testament?
 1. **Plausible Answer:** Perhaps because this book included the most important things for a ruler to know, especially regarding the commands of God and the consequences of obedience vs. disobedience.
 - a. This book also reveals the heart of God in a wonderful way and provides a roadmap for what will follow for centuries to come.
 - iv. **Question:** *Why* did the Lord tell the ruler to *do this unusual thing*?
 1. So that the future king would not forget the commands of God.
 2. So that he would not lose his *fear of God*.
 - a. While many Christians today consider fear of God to be only an Old Testament value, it is held up by Jesus and

the apostles throughout the New Testament. For example:

i. Jesus on the fear of God:

1. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather *fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*” (**Matthew 10:28**, NKJV)
2. “But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!” (**Luke 12:5**, NKJV)

ii. Peter on the fear of God:

1. “But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.” (**Acts 10:35**, NKJV)
2. “Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.” (**1 Peter 2:17**, NKJV)

iii. Paul on the fear of God:

1. “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” (**2 Corinthians 7:1**, NKJV)
2. “Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.” (**Romans 11:20-21**, NKJV)

iv. From the author of **Hebrews**, on the fear of God:

1. “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.” (**Hebrews 12:28-29**, NKJV)

3. So that the ruler would not think he was better than other people. Reading the word of God would help to keep him humble.
4. So that he would not turn aside from God's commands "to the right or to the left".
 - a. Similar to what the Lord had said: "...do not *add to* nor *take away from*" His instructions. (**Deuteronomy 4:2** and **12:32**)
- v. **Question:** Is there anything for us to learn from this last command to the future ruler?
 1. We need to be devoted to the Word of God, meditating on it every day, for all the same reasons!
 - a. To not forget nor stray from the Lord and His commands.
 - b. To help us avoid falling into sins of the flesh, as well as pride and arrogance.
 - c. To maintain a healthy fear of God.
 - d. To not stray to the right or left.
 - e. So that we have a sober estimate of ourselves, so that we will not think we are better than other people.

IV. Concluding Thoughts

- a. God is aware of our weaknesses and even provides a way out for us.
- b. He is thinking and planning way in advance.
- c. Both the king (**Deuteronomy 17**) and the great prophet who would be like Moses (**Deuteronomy 18**) had to be Jews.
- d. Lessons for us in the instructions.
 - i. Don't go back to the old pre-Christian life of spiritual slavery, no matter what challenges we are facing in life. Don't go back to Egypt!
 - ii. Recognize the dangers of the flesh and the dangers that can come with wealth.
 - iii. Keep in mind that who we marry can have an enormous impact on our lives and on our eternal reward.

- iv. Be devoted to the word of God. Let us keep it with us and read it all the days of our lives so that it may go well with us in the end!