

# Circumcise Your Hard Hearts (Deuteronomy 9-10)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Deuteronomy

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## I. Background / Review

- a. **Question:** Why should this part of the Scriptures matter to us? After all, Paul said that we are no longer under the Law of Moses. That was canceled at the cross (**Colossians 2:14-17**). Also, bear in mind that this material was written about 3,000 years ago, addressed to the Jews.
  - i. **Answer:** Paul said, “For whatever things were written before (after quoting from the Old Testament) was written *for our learning....*” (**Romans 15:4**).
    1. Paul also explained in **2 Corinthians 3** that we Christians, those who have turned to Christ, are the only ones who truly understand the significance of what we are reading in the Old Testament Scriptures. When the Jews who don’t believe in Christ read it, “a veil covers their hearts”. Their minds are blinded.
    2. The Old Testament Scriptures are filled with prophecies preparing the way for the coming of Christ. For Christians, those books, although originally entrusted to the Jews, have now become *ours*. As Justin Martyr (writing c. 160 AD) explained in his debate with Trypho, a Jew:
      - a. “For these words have neither been prepared by me, nor embellished by the art of man; but David sung them, Isaiah preached them, Zechariah proclaimed them, and Moses wrote them. Are you acquainted with them, Trypho? They are contained in your Scriptures, or rather *not yours, but ours*. For we believe them; but you, though you read them, do not catch the spirit that is in them.”
        - i. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 29; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 209)
        - ii. For the Christians, according to Justin, the Old Testament Scriptures have become *our books* now.

3. Furthermore, the chapters we are studying today (**Deuteronomy 9-10**) are in what many Christians *consider* ‘the very heart of the Old Testament’ (which some might consider being approximately **Deuteronomy 5-11**).
- b. The **Book of Deuteronomy** consists of a few speeches that Moses gave to the Israelites near the end of their 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness.
- c. The second of those begins in **Deuteronomy 5**, with Moses recounting the Lord giving the 10 Commandments at Mount Sinai. Thus far, in **chapters 5-8**, Moses has issued a number of warnings, admonitions and reminders, including:
  - i. Don’t forget God’s commandments.
  - ii. Don’t let future generations forget them either. Each generation will be responsible for passing this on to their children.
  - iii. When they enter Canaan, make no treaties with the Canaanites. Do not intermarry with them and thereby pick up their wicked ways and become corrupted and worthless.
  - iv. God had tested the people through their time in the Wilderness. God tests people through affliction, suffering and difficult times, to find out what is in their hearts. Expect more tests like these; don’t get discouraged or surprised when it happens. God’s people must stay faithful to the Lord, and persevere.
  - v. The lesson of being fed by manna for 40 years was to teach the people that “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”.
    1. Importance of the Scriptures as our spiritual food to sustain us in this Wilderness of life. We should be meditating on them every day.
  - vi. When prosperity comes in the future, do not fall into the temptation to pridefully take all the credit for it, and thereby forget the Lord and turn away from Him.
- d. In **Deuteronomy 9**, this speech by Moses to the Israelites continues.

## II. Two Challenges When They Enter Canaan and Face the People There

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 9:1-6**.
- b. The two challenges (temptations) they will face when fighting against the Canaanites:

- i. Don't be intimidated by their size and strength (sons of Anak, powerful race of giants, as alluded to in **Numbers 13**). The Lord can defeat them.
  - 1. Don't make the same mistake that their forefathers made about 38 years earlier at Kadesh Barnea, when the 12 spies were sent out to explore Canaan (**Numbers 13-14**).
- ii. On the other hand, when the Israelites do end up defeating the Canaanites, *they must not become prideful and arrogant* in the aftermath of their success. They must not forget the Lord, thinking that it was by their own power and might that they were victorious.
- c. Moses gives the Israelites a brutally honest '*reality check*' to keep them humble. He "has the receipts" from their 40 years in the Wilderness, and brings them out one by one in order to give them a sober estimate of themselves.
  - i. This has always been a problem for religious people: being out of touch with who they are, and thinking they are in much better spiritual condition than they really are.
    - 1. This was a problem with the Pharisees and Sadducees in the time of Jesus.
    - 2. In many cases, Jesus' statements to the Seven Churches of Asia were a reality check to explain that they were *out of touch*, and in much worse shape than they thought.
      - a. [To the church in Sardis] "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a *name* [ESV says: *a reputation*] that you are alive, but you are dead.'"" (**Revelation 3:1**, NKJV)
      - b. [To the church in Laodicea] "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—" (**Revelation 3:17**, NKJV)
    - 3. Likewise, many of Paul's letters to the churches were sobering reality checks to point out the sorry condition they were in.
    - 4. In *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas a Kempis (c. 1420-1427 AD), a Christian devotional classic:

- a. Chapter 1 establishes that the aim of our lives should be to meditate on the life of Christ, so that we can imitate it. We are called to shun the vanities of this world.
- b. Chapter 2 calls us to have a sober, realistic view of ourselves and our own spiritual weaknesses.
  - i. Even back in the 1400's, Thomas a Kempis was aware that many religious Christians viewed themselves as being much more spiritual than they actually were.
    - 1. In some cases that false confidence came out of pride where they saw themselves as being 'better' than others due to their knowledge, spiritual rank, academic achievements, etc.
  - ii. A key to spiritual humility is to see ourselves realistically, as God sees us, including our weaknesses and failings. Convicting words from chapter 2 of *The Imitation of Christ*:
    - 1. "Better, surely, is a humble laborer who serves God than a proud philosopher who, neglecting himself, studies the course of the heavens. Whoso knows himself well grows mean in his own conceit, and delights not in the praises of men.
    - 2. "...The deepest and most profitable lesson is this, the true knowledge and contempt of ourselves. It is great wisdom and high perfection to esteem nothing of ourselves, and to think always well and highly of others.
    - 3. ...all of us are frail, but you ought not to think anyone more frail than yourself."
  - iii. The challenge here is to *know ourselves*. To "know thyself" is not just a philosophical maxim. Having an accurate and appropriately humble view of oneself in relation to others is held up by Jesus and the apostles throughout the New Testament. Examples include:

1. **Luke 14:7-11, 18:9-14; Romans 12:9-16; Ephesians 4:1-2 and James 4:6-10.**
2. Peter and James both remind us that, "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." (from **Proverbs 3:34**, repeated in **James 4:6** and **1 Peter 5:5**)
5. Jesus says we need to take the plank *out of our own eye first*.
  - a. "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (**Matthew 7:1-5**, NKJV)
6. **James 1** speaks of a man who looks into the mirror and then forgets what he looks like.
  - a. "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." (**James 1:22-25**, NKJV)
    - i. It is hard to take an objective look at ourselves, to take a good, hard look at our own sins, flaws and shortcomings.
    - ii. And then, as James points out, once we have gotten a glimpse of that, many of us want to avoid thinking about such unpleasant things anymore!

### III. Moses Reminds the Israelites of Five Humbling Examples

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 9:7-21**.
  - i. **Example No. 1:** The golden calf incident at Mount Sinai. (**Exodus 33**)

1. The people became involved in gross idolatry while Moses was up on the mountain.
2. Even Aaron, the brother of Moses who was the high priest, was involved in this sin.
3. The people had become so wicked that the Lord was planning to wipe them off the face of the earth. Moses had to intercede on their behalf.

b. Read **Deuteronomy 9:22**.

- i. Three more examples of the people sinning against the Lord. In each case, the place where the notorious sin took place was given a special name to commemorate their sin.
- ii. **Example No. 2:** This happened at a place called “Burning” (from **Numbers 11:1-3**). There, the people had complained about the food, and the Lord sent down fire upon them.
- iii. **Example No. 3:** This happened at a place referred to as “Temptation” (from **Exodus 17:1-7**). There, the people complained about the lack of water.
- iv. **Example No. 4:** This rebellion occurred at a place that was given the name “Graves of Lust” (see **Numbers 11:4-34**). There many had complained about their food. The Lord sent them a huge flock of quail for meat to eat, followed by a plague that killed many of the Israelites who had complained.

c. Read **Deuteronomy 9:23-24**.

- i. **Example No. 5:** At Kadesh Barnea, when the 12 spies were sent out to explore Canaan (see **Numbers 13-14**). Ten of the spies were faithless, and returned with a bad report, leading to widespread rebellion against Moses and against the Lord.
- d. Moses has been laying out a rather discouraging picture of the spiritual condition of his people. It seems that they are always doing bad things.
- i. **Question:** Were the Israelites *all bad*?
  - ii. **Answer:** No; it seems that even in the worst episodes, there were a few (and sometimes it was very few indeed) who were following the Lord.
    1. For example, in the golden calf incident, Moses still had one man (Joshua) who remained faithful.

2. When the 12 spies were sent out from Kadesh Barnea, two of them (Joshua and Caleb) were faithful even if the other ten were not (two out of 12 works out to about 17% of the spies being 'good').
  3. Therefore, while most of the nation had been wicked, there were a few good people in there among them, as well.
- e. Moses has given the Israelites a rather sobering 'reality check' reminding them of who they are, and how they have been.
  - f. Next, in **Deuteronomy 9:25-10:11**, Moses continues the discussion by reminding them of the events that took place following the incident at Mount Sinai.

#### IV. What is God Looking For?

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 10:12-14**.
- b. Jesus said that the Greatest Commandment was found in **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**: that we are to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength.
  - i. "But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.'" (**Matthew 22:34-40**, NKJV)
  - ii. In my opinion, for many people, the challenge is to have an accurate understanding of what it really means, in God's eyes, to *love* Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.
  - iii. Many people today equate "love" with a warm, affectionate *feeling*. Unfortunately, few churches do a good job of providing a more accurate and complete explanation.
    1. The result is that many church services and Christian worship music are geared toward fostering and recreating a warm, 'loving' type of *experience*.
    2. However, feelings come and go. Consequently, the feelings can dissipate soon after the music stops!

- iv. In **Deuteronomy 10**, Moses provides a more complete, multi-faceted picture of what God is looking for in us when He calls us to “*love*” Him with our whole heart, soul, mind, etc. It is much more than a (transitory) feeling.
  - 1. “So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and His ordinances I command you today for your good?” (**Deuteronomy 10:12-13**, OSB)
  - 2. From this passage, we can learn *God’s perspective* on what it means for us to love Him. True *love for God* includes:
    - a. *Fearing God*.
    - b. *Walking in His ways* (ongoing lifestyle of obedience).
    - c. *Serving Him* with our whole heart, and soul (again, this is much more than having a feeling. It also involves what we do, action).
    - d. *Keeping His commandments*...something that is for our own good!
      - i. See God’s commandments as being for our own benefit, *whether or not we realize it at the time*.
      - ii. Even if they result in hardship in the short term, realize that He loves us and gave us His commandments to protect us, for our own good long-term. The Lord is looking out for us!
- c. **Question:** Is this passage just an ‘Old Testament concept’ of what God was looking for, or is He still looking for the very same thing from us today? Does He still insist that we fear Him, serve Him with our whole hearts, and obey His commands?
  - i. **Answer:** No, this is not just an Old Testament concept! Yes, He is still looking for the same kind of love from His people.
  - ii. We (Christians) still need to fear God.
    - 1. Jesus: “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. Peter: "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, *conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear....*" (**1 Peter 1:17**, NKJV)
  3. Peter: "Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. *Fear God. Honor the king.*" (**1 Peter 2:17**, NKJV)
  4. Paul: "You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.' 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. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off." (**Romans 11:19-22**, NKJV)
- iii. Loving God means obeying Him, walking in the ways of Jesus.
1. "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. *If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love,* just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." (**John 15:9-10**, NKJV)
  2. "For this is the love of God, *that we keep His commandments.* And His commandments are not burdensome." (**1 John 5:3**, NKJV)
  3. "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to *walk just as He walked.*" (**1 John 2:6**, NKJV)
- d. Love includes all that we have been asked to do (loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves). However, we must understand that this refers to love as God defines it (not as the world around us defines it).
- i. Real love for God has always involved much more than just a feeling.
  - ii. It also incorporates *keeping His commands*, and living with a *healthy fear* of Him.

## V. Circumcise Your Hard Hearts

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 10:15-16**.
  - i. From other modern translations of the LXX:
    1. "But the Lord chose your fathers to love them, and he chose their descendants with them, you, from all the nations according to this day. And you shall *circumcise your hardness of*

*heart, and you shall not harden your neck.” (Deuteronomy 10:15-16, LES)*

2. “And you shall *circumcise your hardheartedness* and shall not harden your neck any longer.” (**Deuteronomy 10:16**, NETS)
- b. Circumcision was a stumbling block for the Jews regarding accepting the Christian faith. This controversial issue shows up throughout the New Testament, in **Acts 15**, as well as in several of Paul’s letters (including **Romans, Galatians, Colossians** and **Ephesians**).
  - i. After all, the Jews understood the covenant of circumcision as being an eternal covenant, based on what God had said to Abraham in **Genesis 17**.
  - ii. However, Christians insisted that physical circumcision was given as a sign of the greater circumcision that would come later, the one God was really looking for: *circumcising (cutting away) the hardness of our hearts*.
    1. This was alluded to here by Moses, in the Law, in **Deuteronomy 10**.
    2. Jeremiah later (c. 600 BC, about 800 years after Moses) spoke of the same thing.
      - a. Read **Jeremiah 4:1-4**.
      - b. Read **Jeremiah 9:22-25**.
        - i. Again, God was looking for *circumcised hearts*. In the future, He would address His people, the Jews, who were only circumcised outwardly.
    3. Paul explains that Christians have been circumcised by “the circumcision of Christ”, in baptism.
      - a. Read **Colossians 2:8-17**.
        - i. The phrase “buried with Him” used here strikes me as an allusion to the passage at the end of Joshua in the LXX where it says the stone knives of the ‘second circumcision’ done by Joshua/Jesus were (literally) buried with him.
      - b. Read **Joshua 24:30-32**, from the LXX, [which contains a fascinating detail not found in the Masoretic Text].

- i. “Now it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten years. They buried him within the boundary lines of his inheritance at Timnah Serah, on Mount Ephraim on the north side of Mount Gaash. *In his grave they placed with him the stone knives with which he circumcised the sons of Israel* at Gilgal, when he brought them out of Egypt, as the Lord ordered them. They remain there to this very day.” (**Joshua 28:30-32**, LXX, OSB)
- ii. These stone knives buried with Joshua were the same ones described in **Joshua 5:2-8**, when Joshua (in Greek: *Jesus*) circumcised all of Israel with sharp *stone knives* (rather than with iron/metal ones) at Gilgal, shortly after the Israelites crossed the Jordan River.
  - 1. Throughout the Old Testament, *unusual stones* are used as types or symbols representing Christ. Early Christians such as Justin saw this reference to the knives made of stone (which accomplished the ‘*second circumcision*’ the one done by ‘Jesus’) as one more example of that.
  - 2. For more on the Old Testament prophecies where unusual stones represented types or foreshadowings of Christ, please see the lesson in the **1 Peter** series: ‘*Christ, the Living Stone*’ (**1 Peter 2:4-8**), December 13, 2020.
- c. The elements of the Law of Moses (like circumcision) were a shadow of things that would come with Christ.
- d. “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and *circumcision is that of the heart*, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.” (**Romans 2:28-29**, NKJV)
- e. “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh....” (**Philippians 3:3**, NKJV)

## 4. From Justin Martyr, writing c. 160 AD:

a. Blessed therefore are we who have been circumcised the second time with knives of stone. For your first circumcision was and is performed by iron instruments, for you remain hard-hearted; but our circumcision, which is the second, having been instituted after yours, circumcises us from idolatry and from absolutely every kind of wickedness by sharp stones, i.e., by the words [preached] by the apostles of the corner-stone cut out without hands. And our hearts are thus circumcised from evil, so that we are happy to die for the name of the good Rock, which causes living water to burst forth for the hearts of those who by Him have loved the Father of all, and which gives those who are willing to drink of the water of life."

i. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 114; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 156)

ii. See also another related quote in ANF vol. 1, p. 206.

c. Let us never lose sight of the fact that God is looking for tender, obedient hearts rather than just outward physical observances. *That has always been the case*, even going back to the time of Moses!

## VI. No Partiality with God / Consider the Resident Aliens

### a. Read **Deuteronomy 10:17-19**.

i. God does not show partiality toward the resident aliens (non-Jews), so the Jews should not either.

1. Keep that in mind regarding the current conflict in the Middle East, which could easily escalate into World War III.

2. God does not want his people to show favoritism. We should not fall into that trap either, especially in view of what Paul taught in **Romans 11** and elsewhere in his letters.

a. The Jews have been cut off from God's kingdom. We Christians are the circumcision.

b. They are welcome to be grafted back in if they repent and believe in Jesus.

3. Many evangelicals in the U.S. with strong conservative political leanings, tend to advocate strong allegiance to the state of Israel in the current situation.
  - a. Those who still view the Jews as “God’s chosen people” often insist that the U.S. government support the state of Israel today, including militarily. However, I do not believe that is what God is looking for from Christians!
  - b. For more on how the early Christians viewed Israel and the Jews, see *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, article on ‘Israel of God’.
- ii. Moses reminds his people that they also had been aliens once, back in Egypt.
- iii. This is a reminder that the Lord wants us also to love those who are in difficult circumstances around us, including aliens and refugees.
  1. Despite current political turmoil regarding U.S. border and immigration issues (which do appear to be serious problems), we still need to show kindness toward the aliens among us.
  2. We may be there ourselves, one day.
- b. Read **Deuteronomy 10:20-22**.
  - i. *In the OSB translation* I just read from, which is based on the LXX, it says their fathers went down to Egypt with “*seventy-five souls*” (**Deuteronomy 10:22**).
    1. The number “*seventy-five*” here agrees with:
      - a. **Genesis 46:27** in the LXX;
      - b. **Exodus 1:5** in the LXX; and
      - c. **Acts 7:14** in the New Testament, where Stephen recounts this detail from Israel’s history.
        - i. “Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, *seventy-five people*.” (**Acts 7:14**, NKJV)
        - ii. In Greek, literally: “*seventy-five souls*”.
    2. However, in the Masoretic Text, it says “*seventy*” (rather than *seventy-five*) in **Genesis 47:27**, **Exodus 1:5** and **Deuteronomy 10:22**.

### 3. *Technical Point Regarding Text of the LXX Here:*

- a. Actually, while the various Greek texts of the LXX agree on the number in **Genesis 46:27** and **Exodus 1:5** (being seventy-five), there are differences in the manuscripts regarding the number indicated in **Deuteronomy 10:22**.
  - b. On the one hand, the OSB (which is based on the LXX) says “seventy-five” in **Deuteronomy 10:22**. On the other hand, several other translations of the LXX read “seventy” in the same passage.
  - c. The reason for that discrepancy is explained in the apparatus notes for the Sweete’s and Rahlfs editions of the LXX.
    - i. In the Alexandrinus and Ambrosianus texts of the LXX, it reads “*seventy-five*”.
    - ii. However, in all the other major codices of the LXX, it reads “*seventy*”.
4. Therefore, what Stephen recounts is consistent with several texts of the LXX but does not agree with the Masoretic Text.
- a. Keep in mind that Stephen was giving this speech to the Sanhedrin, a hostile audience of religious Jewish leaders.
  - b. **Question:** How likely is it that he would be quoting to them from a text that they could have considered corrupted or inferior?
  - c. **Question:** What does this indicate regarding the reliability of the LXX to first-century Christians and Jews?
    - a. **Question:** How likely is it that he would be quoting to them from a text that they could have considered corrupted or inferior?

## VII. Conclusions

- a. Let us always have a sober estimate of ourselves, staying aware of our own weaknesses and our need for the Lord to deliver us from all the trials we will face in this life.

- b. Loving God is the most important thing. However, true love of God is much more than a feeling we have. It also incorporates fear of God, walking with Him, and keeping His commandments.
- c. From the beginning, even in the Law of Moses, the circumcision that God was looking for was, first and foremost, a circumcision of our hard hearts. This is more important than the outward things.
- d. God does not want us to show partiality. He even cares about the aliens, and He wants His people to care about them as well.
- e. The Septuagint, which was the Old Testament of the Christians in the beginning, includes some details not in the Masoretic Text that are good to be aware of, as highlighted in this study, including:
  - i. The “seventy-five souls” referred to by Stephen in **Acts 7:14**, and
  - ii. The stone knives of the second circumcision, the one done by “Jesus (= *Joshua*)” that were “buried with Jesus” (**Joshua 24**), shedding light on what Paul was likely referring to in **Colossians 2:12**.