

Do Not Muzzle the Ox

Deuteronomy 25

Expository Lessons from the Book of Deuteronomy

I. Introduction

- a. 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.
- b. Now, in **Deuteronomy 25**, we continue in Moses' second address, which provides some interesting instructions for the Jews to follow after Moses dies and they move into Canaan, the Promised Land.
 - i. Benefits we can gain from considering the passages in this chapter, which most Christians today neglect or overlook, include:
 - 1. Details from the Law of Moses that can help us better understand some of the stories and teachings we find in the New Testament.
 - 2. A passage that Paul pointed to twice in the New Testament, regarding the Scriptural reasons for providing material support to those leading (including preaching and teaching) in the church.
 - 3. A classic example showing that we should expect to find spiritual truth hidden in *allegories and types* in the Old Testament, including in the Law of Moses.
 - 4. A key to understanding and explaining what may be the first 'apparent discrepancy' in the New Testament, something many Christians have wondered about over the centuries.
 - 5. A memorable and foundational teaching on honesty and integrity. Showing that God's people cannot show favoritism, including in our financial dealings with others.
 - 6. A reminder of a great spiritual battle of the past (that foreshadowed an even greater one that would come later).

II. No More than Forty Lashes

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 25:1-3**.
- b. For crimes where the wicked person involved merited physical punishment (less than stoning), there was a limit to the number of lashes that could be

inflicted with a whip.

- i. The limit was forty lashes. Not a single one more than that was allowed. This is another example in the Law of Moses where the Lord *put limits* on the cruelty that the Jews could show toward their brothers.
 1. Jesus would later amend this by teaching that we are not to strike even our enemies who strike us first. Discipline in the church would involve rebukes, and in severe cases, putting the guilty party out of the spiritual community.
- ii. Paul describes that he had received this form of punishment five different times from the Jews.
 1. “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.” (**2 Corinthians 11:24**, NKJV)
 2. Note that in Paul’s time, the Jews were following this part of the law strictly, even making a point to stop at 39 blows (so that if someone had miscounted by one, they still would not exceed the Scriptural limit of 40).

III. Do Not Muzzle the Ox

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 25:4**.
- b. How grain harvesting and processing were done in the ancient world (similar to the steps outlined in the famous children’s story, *The Little Red Hen*).
 - i. The first step was to *harvest* the grain by cutting down the stalks and gathering it up in sheaves (bundles of grain that included the stalks, edible grain kernels, and husks around the grain).
 - ii. The second step was to *thresh* the grain. Typically, sheaves were put on a “threshing floor” (think story of Boaz and Ruth, in **Ruth 3**), where large farm animals like oxen would pull heavy sledges over the sheaves, to crush them and release the grain from the inedible stalks and husks.
 - iii. The third step was to *winnow* the grain, a separation process typically using natural wind or fans to separate the wheat from the chaff by blowing away the lighter chaff and husks. That left the heavier kernels of edible grain behind.
 - iv. Then the grain would be stored in a barn, silo, or otherwise, until it was ready to be milled (ground into flour) between two millstones.

- c. Implication of this teaching from the Law of Moses.
 - i. While the oxen were doing this work of pulling the sledges to separate out the grain from the chaff, their owners were *not to muzzle them*.
 - 1. The farmers were prohibited from placing a physical guard over the mouth of an ox while it was threshing out the grain. (Such a guard would have prevented it from eating from some of the grain as they were threshing it out.)
 - 2. The owners were called to show kindness and appreciation for the labors of their farm animals. Since the animals were doing hard work, they were entitled to participate in some of the benefits of their labors.
 - ii. **Question:** What does this show about the nature of God?
 - 1. **Answer:** He is kind and thoughtful even toward the animals, and wants His followers to show the same consideration to them.
 - 2. This also shows a sense of justice and fairness that the Lord has. If the animals are doing the hard work, they should be able to share in some of the benefits of their work.
- d. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul quoted this passage twice, and applied this same principle toward leaders in the church.
 - i. Read **I Timothy 5:17-18**.
 - 1. “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, ‘*You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,*’ and, ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’” (**1 Timothy 5:17-18**, NKJV)
 - a. Note that the first quote Paul cites is from **Deuteronomy 25:4**, regarding muzzling the ox.
 - b. The second quote appears to be from something Jesus had said, as found in **Luke 10:7** (or possibly **Matthew 10:10**).
 - c. “Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road. But whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it

will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, *for the laborer is worthy of his wages*. Do not go from house to house. Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you.” (**Luke 10:3-8**, NKJV)

ii. Read **1 Corinthians 9:1-14**.

1. Here, Paul makes the case that he was entitled to financial support from the churches to meet his basic needs.
2. He uses logic and examples from everyday life (soldiers, farmers, shepherds), as well as the passage from **Deuteronomy 25:4**.
3. He seems to be saying that this is the general practice among the apostles (with the exception of himself and Barnabas, who must “work for a living”, supporting themselves while they were spreading the gospel). Recall that Paul was a tentmaker by trade (**Acts 18:3**).
4. Paul intentionally declined financial support from others, although he was entitled to that support, because he did not want to do anything that could hinder the gospel. He also used his life as a convicting example of hard work.
5. Paul cites this passage from the Law regarding “do not muzzle the ox” to make his case that even in the Law of Moses, the Lord was showing that we should financially support those who are working in ministry in the church.
 - a. “Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.’ Is it oxen God is concerned about?” (**1 Corinthians 9:8-9**, NKJV)

e. Practical takeaways for Christians today.

- i. Financial support for elders and preachers was based on both the teaching of Jesus, as well as the application of the **Deuteronomy 25:4** passage about not muzzling the ox.
 1. Paul challenges Christians with the rhetorical question: “Is it oxen God is concerned about?” (**1 Corinthians 9:9**).
 2. Obviously, God is much more concerned about people who are made in His image than about farm animals!

- ii. At this time, those leading in our local church have chosen not to receive financial support from the church. However, based on both the New and Old Testaments, there is nothing wrong with having church leaders who are financially supported by their congregations. We must never look down on others who are hard workers for the gospel and are financially supported by others.
 - 1. Don't ever look down on those people or those churches.
 - 2. If you find yourself in a church that supports its ministers financially, please do so with a willing heart.
- f. May this example impact how we read the Scriptures, including especially the Old Testament.
 - i. **Reminder:** the Christian faith came out of Asia, and is more of an eastern than a western religion.
 - 1. History tells us that it spread eastward (into Syria, Parthia, India, and beyond) before it came to Rome.
 - 2. Many passages use parables, allegories, riddles, and types/antitypes to teach us about spiritual truths, more typical for *eastern* than western type thinking and teaching. Whenever we read the Scriptures, let us open our eyes to consider that the Lord may be communicating to us in this way.
 - a. After all, the Christian faith started in Asia (not in Europe). It is an Eastern religion!
 - b. Therefore, if we want to get the most out of the Scriptures, let us strive to think more like "easterners", seeing important things that may be communicated to us via allegories and typology.
 - 3. This passage about muzzling the ox is one example of that. Others we have seen that reflect this 'eastern' type of reasoning using allegories and parables, include:
 - a. Jesus' favored teaching style: relying heavily on parables that many initially struggled to understand.
 - b. All the Old Testament prophecies about unusual "rocks/stones" that foreshadow Christ, including the three Peter refers to in **1 Peter 2**.
 - c. The story of the Passover Lamb, which was followed immediately by the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. Paul

explained, "...For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (**1 Corinthians 5:7-8**, NKJV)

- d. **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** prophecy about one whom the Lord would raise up who would be "like Moses".
- e. **1 Corinthians 6:14** "Do not be yoked with unbelievers" (pointing back to **Deuteronomy 22:10** on not plowing with a bull and donkey together).

IV. Marrying a Deceased Brother's Wife

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 25:5-10**.
- b. What this required the brother-in-law of a childless widow to do.
 - i. If your brother died childless, you were required to marry your brother's widow.
 - 1. Keep in mind that polygamy was allowed at that time, so if you were already married, that did not give you an 'out' from this requirement!
 - ii. Children from your union with your deceased brother's wife would be considered your brother's offspring (rather than yours).
- c. Consider how this practice was referred to by the Sadducees, who tried to trap Jesus with a test question in **Matthew 22**.
 - i. "The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, saying: "Teacher, *Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother*. Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her.'" (**Matthew 22:23-28**, NKJV)
- d. Understanding this rule from the Law of Moses can help us resolve a famous Bible difficulty that has puzzled many Christians over the centuries.
 - i. Many astute Christian readers have noticed, over the centuries, that the two genealogies of Jesus provided in the gospels (**Matthew 1** and **Luke 3**) don't match each other.

1. Both trace Jesus' genealogy through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David. And both also discuss Joseph, his adoptive father (Mary's husband). However, there are some key differences between the two lists.
 2. Matthew traces that line, after David, through David's son Solomon. However, Luke traces it back through a different son of David, Nathan.
 3. Matthew says that the father of Joseph (the husband of Mary) was a man named *Jacob*. However, Luke points to a completely different line to Joseph, where Joseph's father was a man named *Heli*, or *Eli*. The two genealogies refer to two different people as Joseph's father (as opposed to a situation where one man had two different names).
- ii. **Question:** Can a man have more than one father?
1. **Answer:** Under the Law of Moses, yes.
 - a. His biological father, and
 - b. His legal father (who could be a deceased brother of his biological father, in a situation where a man had to marry his brother's widow).
- iii. Note that the question about the two differing genealogies came up as a question to Eusebius, who answered it c 320 AD in *Gospel Problems and Solutions*, pp. 36-39, in his Response No. 4 to Stephanus. Eusebius explained:
1. "In Israel, the names of descendants were enumerated either by natural or by legal descent. 'Natural' denotes succession by legitimate birth; 'legal' means succession from a different father, in the name of a brother who had died childless. Because, at that stage, they had not yet been given the clear hope of resurrection, they used to represent the forthcoming promise by a mortal 'resurrection', to keep the departed man's name from dying out. Some of those included in that line of descent, therefore, were succeeding in the regular way, father to son, while others had two different fathers; their actual father, and the man whose sons they were called. That being so, the record contains both actual fathers and so-called fathers. Thus neither of the gospels is wrong in giving both natural and legal descent."
 2. "...When Eli died childless, Jacob 'raised up seed' for him by fathering Joseph, who was his own son by nature but Eli's in

law. Thus, Joseph is the son of them both.”

- a. This explains why the two genealogies are different, referring specifically to the following two passages.
 - i. From Luke’s account: “...Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli [*or Eli*],” (**Luke 3:23**, NKJV)
 - ii. From Matthew’s account: “...And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.” (**Matthew 1:16**, NKJV)
- 3. In his response, Eusebius indicated that his explanation of the apparent discrepancies between the two genealogies in the gospels followed an earlier explanation provided by Julius Africanus (who wrote c. 245 AD).
 - a. For that earlier explanation, see Julius Africanus, *Epistle to Aristides*; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 6, pp. 125-127.

V. Don’t Have Different Weights and Measures

- e. Read **Deuteronomy 25:13-16**.
- f. The concept of having two different sets of weights or measures refer to the (dishonest) practice of having one set for buying and another different one for selling. This was a way to cheat others in transactions.
- g. The issue here is showing honesty and justice toward all. Applications in our relationships include:
 - i. Treating the powerful and vulnerable the same.
 - ii. Treating the rich and poor with the same measure.
 - iii. Always being absolutely honest.
 - iv. Treating others as we ourselves wish to be treated.
- h. Honesty is the foundation for all morality.
 - i. Money-related matters are, for many, the ultimate test of the heart.

VI. Never Forget What Amalek Did to Us

- i. Read **Deuteronomy 25:17-18**.

- j. This referred to a battle 40 years before, which the Israelites won.
 - i. See the story that Moses here is referring to, which can be found in **Exodus 17:8-16**.
 - 1. Moses was told that in order for God's people to be victorious against their enemy, he must hold up his hands all day long, holding his wooden staff.
 - a. He would sit on a rock. (Note that 'rocks' in the Old Testament are used many times in prophecies to represent Christ.)
 - b. He would have to maintain that posture all day long, with one man located on each side of him.
 - c. The battle would be led by Joshua, who was born with the name Hoshea. However, **Numbers 13:16** explains that Hoshea's name was changed to Joshua (= 'Jesus' in the Greek LXX, the same name later given to the son of Mary, in **Luke 1:32**).
 - k. **Question:** Why was it *so important* to never forget *that particular battle*?
 - i. It foreshadowed Christ, the cross, and the battle against God's enemies.
 - 1. In Moses' holding his hands up all day between two men to attain the victory, early Christians saw a foreshadowing of the crucifixion of Jesus on the wooden cross.
 - 2. [For further explanation of this, see notes from the lesson '*Exodus 17: Water from a Rock and Victory over the Amalekites*', 5/3/2020, in the **Exodus** expository teaching series.]
 - ii. Perhaps Amalek here represents Satan (similar to Pharaoh or Goliath in other Old Testament stories). The devil is the eternal enemy of God's people. The only way to defeat him would involve an intense battle featuring one man on the cross all day.
 - 1. "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." (**1 John 3:8**, NKJV)
 - 2. "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers,

against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (**Ephesians 6:11-12**, NKJV)

3. Like Amalek, Satan will try to cut off all the stragglers, those who have become weary. He and his forces have no fear of God.
 - a. They will be defeated in the end. In your time of temptation and trial, remember this, and persevere!