

Session 11: Deuteronomy 26

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This is Dr. Cynthia Parker and her teaching on the book of Deuteronomy. This is session 11, Deuteronomy 26.

Introduction: The Place God Chooses

So, for this lecture, we are looking at Deuteronomy chapter 26. Chapter 26 is going to close out for us the law code. And we will notice as we start reading chapter 26 that the chosen place is going to feature quite prominently in this chapter. We haven't seen the chosen place officially since chapter 18. But when we think about the whole law code as a cohesive unit, we see how with chapter 12 was the introduction of the chosen place, and now we're going to finish off the law code in chapter 26 with the chosen place again. So, it's really nice bookends. Chapter 26 contains two different liturgical celebrations or ceremonies that the Israelites are told to do once they go into the land. So, let's take a look at Deuteronomy 26.

Two Liturgical Ceremonies

So we're first going to notice the two different law codes; we're going to read through each of these, or not law codes, but liturgical ceremonies. Chapter 26 starts out this way. "Then it shall be when you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and live in it, then you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground, which you bring in from your land that the Lord your God gives you and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place where the Lord your God chooses to establish his name."

So, once more, you shall take produce from the land. We're focusing a lot on the fact that this land they are going into, they are not receiving it based on anything that they have done. They are receiving it as a gift from God, and they should take produce from that land.

Now, it doesn't say exactly what produce that would be, but we could probably guess it would be everything that is inclusive of the agricultural calendar. So, everything that we have talked about in previous lectures is the bounty of the land. "Put it in a basket and bring it to the chosen place."

In verse 3, "You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, 'I declare this day to the Lord, my God, that I have entered the land, which the Lord swore to our fathers to give to us.'"

Now, what's interesting is with this very first liturgical decree, what we're actually seeing is that everyone is required to recognize the day that they, as individuals have entered into the land that God has given them. So, they as an individual have received an inheritance from the actual landowner, from God. And so, there's this personal recognition that I am the one, I have come in.

The First Creed

And then, in verse 4, it says, "Then the priests of take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God." And as we start with verse 5, verses 5 to 10, we have what some people call a Creed. It is actually a recitation of the salvation history of the Israelites. But what I want you to do is as I read or as you read, and follow along with me, pay attention to the pronouns that are used in this Creed. So, this is not just a, remember the things your God has done, but we're actually finding that there is a written like vocabulary this is what you should be saying. Pay attention to the pronouns as we go, in verse 5, through verse 10.

"You shall answer and say before the Lord your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean.'" So, this is actually kind of a strange phrase. "My father was a wandering Aramean." So, who is this actually referring to? What most people say it's probably either Abraham or Jacob. Both of them came out of the Mesopotamian region at some point in time, hence the Aramean title. And other scholars have also noted to find pride in the fact that "my father was a wandering Aramean." That term Aramean much later in Israelite history, that Arameans were enemies of the Israelites. So, this Creed must be a pretty early document. It has to come from a very early source prior to when the Arameans were very staunch enemies of the Israelites for them to say, "My father was this wandering Aramean."

We're going to notice that whether it is Abraham or Jacob, this works in either way. It's basically referring to the patriarchs. So, it's a way of telling this story. And by saying "wandering Aramean" in the Creed, this farmer who has brought all of this produce from the ground is remembering that in the ancient past, they were landless. So, the wandering Aramean, the one who did not have lands, the foreigner, the wanderer, the landless one.

"So, my father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there few in number. But there, he became a great, mighty, and a populous nation. And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, imposed hard labor on us. Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers. The Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil, and our oppression. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. And with great terror and with signs and wonders. And he brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Now, behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which you, O Lord, have given me."

Now, that's not quite the end of verse 10. But did you notice those pronouns? So, in this Creed, when the farmer comes and gives the first fruits of the ground and tells the story. "It is my father," and then "we" and "our," "We were in Egypt, Egypt oppressed us, we cried out to the Lord." So, we are seeing again what Deuteronomy has been doing the whole time. The combination of you as an individual and you plural, the whole people group.

Deuteronomy makes sure that in this Creed, when people go in to celebrate the fact that they have received this gift from God, they as individuals are required to come, but they recognize that they, as a whole population, all of us, not just who are alive today, but all of us through the past are the ones who have received God's grace and God's work in order to bring us here.

And then the pronoun at the very end says. So "I have to come." So I, as an individual, am now also responding.

So, through this Creed or this is salvation history, we notice how the people recognize that their history, their story, is one of going from landless wandering Armean forefathers to being landed. So, they have been given the gift of this good land. They went from being enslaved to being redeemed. So, this Creed tells their whole story to the point where they've been given a great gift; they are now responding to God in love.

This Place and This Land

So, another kind of interesting thing that shows up is in verse 9. So, we already know from the beginning of this Creed that the farmer, the people, are required to go to the place that God chose. So, this ceremony is happening at the chosen place.

So, we know the general location, and in verse nine, we have, "And he has brought us to this place and has given us this land." So, we have two phrases that seem to be in parallel with each other. So, hamaqom hazeh, is "this place." So God has brought us to this place. And has given us haretz hazeh that is "this land."

Now, hamaqom is a word that is used quite a bit in the book of Deuteronomy. And part of the question is, what is "this place" that is meant in verse 9? Well, we could say we know the greater context is that they are standing at the chosen place. So, we could say that this verse means God has brought us, or I have now come to this place, to this chosen place, and God has also given us this land. And that would make total sense.

Or you could say because these phrases are in parallel with each other. Maybe hamaqom here is also haaretz. So it could be that God has brought us to this place, that is, this land flowing with milk and honey. Or maybe the ambiguity is on purpose. What we have seen as we have talked about the chosen place and all the distributed cities, we've been looking throughout all of this law code about how the cities are connected to the chosen place, how there are leaders that are functioning in both places, how there are activities that happened in both locations, how not only the Levites and the priests who are at the chosen place, but all of the people are called to be holy before God. They're all eating in a way that shows that they're holy and designated as separate and set aside.

Their behavior in their cities is marked with these words, just as these words are placed in the chosen place.

So, Deuteronomy has, although recognizably, setting aside a chosen place that holds God's name. That it is his place of residence, which is sacred because the Levites are there ministering before him. It is sacred because it is the only

place they can bring their sacrifices. But Deuteronomy has spent a lot of time saying holiness is not relegated only to one place. So just because God's name is at the chosen place and sacrifices are at the chosen place, and Levites are at the chosen place doesn't mean that the whole rest of the land is not sacred. All of it is sacred because it all falls under God's law.

So, hear the ambiguity; God has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. "This place" could refer to the chosen place, or it could refer to the land. But either way, there's kind of a blurring of the lines again of what is sacred and not sacred. And it seems to be that even in this Creed that the Israelites are quoting while they are at the chosen place, there's a recognition that the sacredness flows out of the chosen place to the very edges of their nation, all the way through the land, that is flowing with milk and honey.

The Second Creed – The Tithe for the Poor

So, after this very first Creed, then we get to the second Creed in chapter 26. So, the second Creed is considered "The Poor Tithe." So, it is again another tithe, but this is a unique tithe to it; it's not the normal tithe that the people give every year to the chosen place.

So, we will start with verse 11. Well, I'll start with the very tail end of verse 10. "And you shall set it down before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God. And you, and the Levite, and the alien, who is among you shall rejoice in the good which the Lord your God has given you and your household." that actually belongs to the first one.

So, verse 12, "When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan, and to the widow that they may eat in your towns and be

satisfied. You shall say before the Lord your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion from my house and also have given it to the Levite, and the alien, the orphan, and the widow, according to all of your commandments which you have commanded me. I have not transgressed or forgotten any of your commandments.'"

So, before we go any further, we're going to notice this is the third year. And it's the third year of tithing. So, year's one tithe goes to the chosen place; year two tithe goes to the chosen place. Year 3 does not go to the chosen place but is distributed among themselves in their city gates.

And who are the recipients of this tithe? Well, in years one and two, when it goes to the chosen place, the Levites are the recipients. It is a very active demonstration of recognizing God is the owner of the land, and you are tithing back to him. But in this third year, you are recognizing that this time you are taking responsibility to feed and care for the people who are marginalized within the community.

Now, what's interesting is throughout all of Deuteronomy, there is a verb, Shabbat, that is used, which means "to satisfy." And throughout all of Deuteronomy, God is the one who is said to satisfy the needs of his people. So repeated over and over, and over throughout Deuteronomy, God satisfies every need Israelites have. And now, with this particular festival, the people are satisfying the needs of those who are needy within their town.

So, I'll read verse 12 again, "When you have finished, paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan, and to the widow." All people who don't own land, the people were typically the poorest and the most marginalized.

"That they may eat in your towns and be satisfied." So, within this festival, when you come and promise God, I have been very careful to make sure that I have taken the sacred portion out of my house and am giving it to the poor and the needy who are around me. It is a way for the Israelites to say, "God, I recognize you have satisfied all of our needs, and I will now mimic your actions and return in respond and do the same."

It has a connotation that this acting out is just as sacred as taking tithes to the chosen place. So, this sacred action is not just what you do towards God but also how you choose to act with others who are around you.

The Rest of the Festival

So, we'll read the rest of that particular festival in verse 14. "I have not eaten of it while mourning, nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean, nor offered any of it to the dead. I've listened to the voice of the Lord my God. I have done according to all that you have commanded me." So, "I have not gathered this together" means I have not tainted this tithe, but it is a sacred tithe. Even though it's not being offered at the chosen place, it is being offered to the people in the city gates.

Verse 15, "Look down from your holy habitation from heaven and bless your people Israel from the ground, which you have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey, as you swore to our fathers. This day, the Lord your God commands you to do these statutes and ordinances. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all of your heart and all of your soul."

Close of the Law Code

Now, the last three verses don't really fit into either one of these celebrations, but they do act very well to close out the whole entirety of the law

code. So, we're going to find that we start with the declaration, the audience, and the action.

So, verse 17, as we close out everything related to the law code. "You have today declared before the Lord." So, you, "the Israelites have declared before the Lord your God," who is the audience. "That you would walk in his ways, keep his statute, his commandments, and his ordinances, and listen to his voice. The Lord has declared today." So, we had the Israelites declaring to the Lord what they would do. And now we have the Lord declaring to the people what he will do. "The Lord has today declared you to be his people, a treasured possession, as he's promised you, that you should keep all of his commandments and that he will set you high above all nations, which he has made, for praise, fame, and honor that you shall be a consecrated people to the Lord your God as he has spoken."

And then we end out the law code. So, we ended up with this agreement between God and his people. And God, saying, as long as the people obey his voice and fulfill his commandments and his law, he will set them up, and they will be an example to all of the nations, and then the law code closes.

Preview of Deuteronomy 27-29

So, when we enter into chapters 27, 28, and 29, now we move back to the recognition that the Israelites are standing with Moses on the outside of the land looking in. So, we've had this chance throughout the law code for 12-26 to say, how do we act? What does it mean to follow God? What does it look like to eat, to establish leadership, to have a social structure and social ethics? How do we do this in the land?

We've been discussing that, and now we stand back again with the Israelites outside of the land. And we return to a little bit like what we saw at the

very beginning of Deuteronomy in chapters 1-3. So, we will engage that in the next lecture.

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