

# Deuteronomy 25-26: Justice in Israel

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Head on over to Deuteronomy chapter 25 and we're going to try our best to cover 2 chapters tonight because they're both fairly shortish. And chapter 26 is actually all about one particular thing. Now in 25 here, though, there's a multiplicity of topics so I'm going to put this again on the screen for you so you can see the outline of what we're going to be looking at tonight.

## Chapter 25 Outline

- Avoiding excessive punishment: 1-3
- The right to a fair wage: 4
- Protecting future generations: 5-10; 11-12
- Honesty and fairness: 13-16
- Remembering Amalek: 17-19

Verses 1 through 3, we're going to be talking about, avoiding excessive punishment. This is in the justice system of Israel, but I think you'll find some things apply elsewhere. The right to a fair wage is dealt with in verse 4. We'll talk about how that applies in just a bit.

And then there are two different sections in this chapter that deal with protecting Israel's future generations. First of all, it's in verses 5 through 10, and then verses 11 and 12.

Honesty and fairness will be addressed in verses 13 through 16. And then God's command to remember Amalek and all they did to Israel is going to be covered in verses 17 through 19 of this particular chapter.

I want to remind you of something. I want to remind you that the nation of Israel, while this is being spoken, is literally sitting on the doorstep of the promised land. They're on the other side of the Jordan.

They're gathering now and Moses is speaking to the people, his final message. He's now going over the things that they had learned during their time in the wilderness. He's reiterating these things for the people of Israel. He's talking to them about how God wants the Israelite society to operate in the promised land.

And they're literally just ready to go and so these are the reminders that he gives.

Now, the reason that we're, I want to remind you, that the reason we're studying through these things here, in the Book of Deuteronomy is because on the one hand, everything we study in God's Word helps us to understand God's character better. Okay. That's very important.

The other reason that we, well, I should say the benefit that we get from studying God's Word, is it establishes for us as something we talked about last week quite extensively. And that is a moral framework for understanding life and what God has called us to.

Even though you and I aren't called under the Mosaic Covenant, and honestly, I want to say praise God here that we don't live under the Mosaic Covenant. I would not want to live, to be completely honest with you, under the Mosaic Covenant.

I'm very happy, thank you very much, under the covenant that we have through Christ, which was established at the Last Supper through the bread, and the wine, and the whole element of our faith in the work; the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

But, just because we're not under the Mosaic Covenant today doesn't mean there aren't things that we can learn from it, understand from it, and gain a heart of understanding toward God, toward expectations that He has upon us as God's people, right? And everything that goes along with that. And I think you might even find some interesting tidbits to help you in some of the things that you could be facing as well. So let's pray as we get into this.

Father, we bow for just a moment before You, as we take time to dig into Your Word, we pray that the ministry of the Scripture, alive as it is, would touch our very hearts, to the very core of our being. And that You would speak to us, Lord, about our lives.

You know our lives. You understand the complexities of what's happening in our lives, our marriages, relationships, families, businesses, and it can get wearying sometimes, Lord, but yet You know what we need to hear tonight. You know what is important and I pray that you'd help us to look at these passages here and to look at the emphases that exist behind the words. Use this time to speak to your children, we pray. We ask it in the name of Jesus, amen.

All right, verses 1 through 3. He begins by saying, *“If there is a dispute between men and they come into court and the judges decide between them, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty, (obviously that's the hope every time something comes before a court of law) <sup>2</sup> then if the guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence with a number of stripes in proportion to his offense. <sup>3</sup> Forty stripes may be given him, but not more, lest, if one should go on to beat him with more stripes than these, your brother be degraded in your sight.”* (ESV) Alright, stop there for just a moment.

Now these first verses here in Deuteronomy chapter 25 were obviously intended to be within the context of the judicial framework of Israel to provide a place where fair limits on punishment are enacted whenever there is an act of wrongdoing, requires punishment. I want you to keep in mind something. There were no jails. There are no prisons. There's no lockup, right, for somebody who has done something wrong.

The three basic means of dealing with people were fines, they could be financial or material type fines. There were issues like this where corporal punishment was applied to the individual. And then obviously in extreme cases, there was loss of life that could come into play when it was a capital crime.

Now for you and I, the idea of corporal punishment is pretty bizarre. I mean, when we read something like this about, a man being beaten for something that he did wrong, we are taken aback by that because, why? We live in America in the day and age that we do, and we consider ourselves pretty compassionate. And this assaults our tender sensibilities a little bit as it relates to the dealing of any kind of a crime.

I mean, we've even, for the most part, as a culture, decided that corporal punishment is never appropriate even with children, even, though the Bible advises it.

But here's what's interesting. There are still places in the world where corporal punishment is still used for adults believe it or not. There are countries right now where if you're there and you commit a crime, you could be subject to some form of corporal punishment. And I'm just saying, in most cases, those countries have less crime than we do here in the United States of America.

But if we put that aside for just a moment, and we look at what this passage is saying, we're going to, I think, discover some good insights, and maybe even reminders for those of us who may be involved in some kind of, or I should say

this, who may be involved in meeting out some kind of disciplinary action toward other people.

Did you notice in the passage that we read that it says that if there's a dispute, they're brought before the court, and they're to determine, what the situation is. And it says in verse 2, that if the guilty man deserves some kind of corporal punishment, it needs to happen right there, right then, in front of the judge.

In other words, we're not going to, put this thing off for a long time. We're not going to say, well, this thing is, pending a hearing or pending. Not to say that those things can't come into play in a very realistic and useful way. But what they're basically saying here is, that it needs to be swift.

And I think that we've gotten into trouble a little bit in our system of jurisprudence here in the United States of America because somebody can commit a crime and a decade later, they haven't gotten around to punishing the person. They haven't gotten around to, saying, here's what the punishment is going to be. And meanwhile, they languish in prison and so forth.

And one of the things the Bible speaks of related to punishment, is that if the punishment is delayed, that people get a sense that it's okay. In other words, there's no deterrent that is communicated at large to society and people will tend to run amok. And so the first principle that we see here is that of a swift sort of a response to this thing.

The next thing is, he says, however many, however much this person should be punished, it should be in accordance with what they've done, right? That's the next principle that God lays down here.

And then finally, you'll notice that He says, the worst he could get is basically 40 stripes. Because anything more than that, and he talks about the fact that your brother is going to be degraded in your sight. Let me put these on the screen just so you can see them again.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Let punishment be swift</li><li>2. Let the punishment fit the crime</li><li>3. Use restraint and don't overdo it</li></ol> |
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Let the punishment be swift. Let the punishment fit the crime. And use restraint and don't overdo it. Those are the simple guidelines that God was establishing for justice in Israel. I think that those are pretty good principles. Frankly, even if

you're raising children, be careful not to let it just languish on and on. Make sure that you don't punish your children beyond what the situation requires.

Many times as parents, and I can tell you that I was guilty of this when my kids were little, but we respond out of frustration rather than a sense of correction and discipline. By the way, discipline means training. So that word doesn't just mean punishment, it refers to training. It's where we get our word disciple; someone who is trained, follows after, and so forth.

But many times what we do as parents is not discipline, it's frustrational hitting. And I don't think we should ever hit our kids in a frustrated way. I just don't think we ever should. And I don't think the Bible ever condones frustrational hitting.

The Bible condones discipline which is a very ordered and controlled sort of a thing that is done with ample explanation, and is meted out when the child has knowingly violated an understood barrier.

I remember getting angry at my kids when they did something, because kids are always doing something that is disruptive or dangerous or... I mean, you know right. Running through the house and knocking over a lamp, or something like that. Or getting wild at the dining room table and spilling their milk, which was an every night occurrence for us.

And we as parents, many times we'll discipline our kids or I shouldn't say that, we'll get frustrated at our kids because they're being kids. And that's the bottom line. We're angry just because we're frustrated. Or they've inconvenienced us or something like that. Or they've just been children.

I mean, kids are going to track mud in the house. They're not going to do the things you ask them to do from time to time. And that's not to say that we don't work with them and train and so forth. But so many times, boy, I tell you, we, the punishment does not fit the crime. Let's just put it that way. And we need to be very careful of that. And we need to use restraint.

And that's one of the reasons I tell parents, listen, if you're frustrated, if you're in an emotional kind of a fervor over what your child has done, that is not the time to meet out discipline. Now you use restraint in that situation and you can wait until you settle down because as an adult, there's a very real possibility that in your frustration and anger, you can employ too much of a punishment toward the child. So, these are great principles when you stop and think about it. Let punishment be swift, let it fit the crime, and don't overdo it, right? Use restraint.

Verse 4. This is a single verse, and it seems out of place, almost, within the context of everything else that he's covering. But he says here, "*You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.*" There you go. So, you guys who have an ox. Don't starve your ox. Okay. Let's move on. I'm just kidding.

Oxen were animals that people used regularly back in those days as beasts of burden, to do a myriad of tasks. But one of the things they would do is they'd work the thresher, the threshing floor, if you will. And they had a dual task. They would have this big huge millstone that the animal would walk around, and they'd hook up the animal by poles to this stone. And they would throw, first of all, the grain onto the floor, the threshing floor. And as the animal walked around, they would just simply, with their hooves, break up the grain to separate the husk from the fruit of the grain, if you will. And then at the same time the big millstone that they were pulling around in a circle would also grain, or excuse me, grind the grain into flour.

So there were two things going on. You got this ox who's doing work for you, and he's getting the job done. And basically this word says, hey, while your ox is doing the work for you, don't put a muzzle on him. Let him eat some of the grain so that, he's going to be strong for the task. And really it's a simple law commanding the humane treatment of a working animal. If the animal is working for you, make sure you're, giving something back to the animal. It's really a simple kind of a principle.

We don't use animals so much, for these sorts of things here in the United States any longer. Other countries still do, but what's really interesting about this verse is that the apostle Paul quotes it two times, not once, but twice in the New Testament. Once in 1 Corinthians and once later on in his first letter to Timothy. But in each of his quotations of this verse, he wasn't talking to farmers who owned an ox. He was talking to the church about people who were in full time ministry. Let me show you these examples, first from 1 Corinthians chapter 9. It says,

#### **1 Corinthians 9:7-10 (ESV)**

*Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.*

*Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.*

And if you read the context of that passage, it was the right of a full time servant of the Lord to receive a blessing from the ministry, from the work of the ministry, to support him or her in that case. And then 1 Timothy chapter 5, check out this passage. Paul writes and says,

**1 Timothy 5:17-18 (ESV)**

*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”*

*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, (what's the double honor that he's talking about? He's talking about just the honor you give someone, as well as remuneration or support. He says) especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”*

Again, Paul uses this passage two times in more of a spiritual sort of an application than the physical issue of simply taking care of your oxen. So there you go.

Now, beginning in verse 5, we're going to cover a couple of sections here that I showed you in the outline that are designed to protect future generations in Israel.

*And the first section here says, “If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. <sup>6</sup> And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. <sup>7</sup> And if the man does not wish to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, ‘My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.’ <sup>8</sup> Then the elders of his city shall*

*call him and speak to him, (obviously in a way of trying to convince him to do it) and if he persists, saying, 'I do not wish to take her,'<sup>9</sup> then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face. And she shall answer and say, 'So shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother's house.'<sup>10</sup> And the name of his house shall be called in Israel, 'The house of him who had his sandal pulled off.'"*

Aren't you glad we don't live under the law? I mean, if we just needed some clarification on that point, we just got it. Anyway, by the way, this is referred to this day as the Levirate marriage and the Jews, interestingly enough, weren't the only ones to practice this idea. And by the way, the word Levirate comes from the Latin word, lever, which means brother in law. And it was designed basically to protect the family in the case where no male heir had been produced to carry on the name of the deceased person. But let me just explain what's going on here so that you can understand a little better why the significance of this law.

You see, this law envisioned a situation where brothers, say you got two brothers, who are living in the family plot of land, this is our family plot. And one of them dies. He's married, but he dies without his wife having given him a son. And in such a case, it says, first of all, that this widow is not to marry outside of the family. Here's why. If she married someone outside of the family, that would be giving her new husband title to the property that belonged to her old, her first husband. And some of the original inheritance of the land would move from one family to another, contrary to the original inheritance rights that were given.

Instead, this law says that she must become the wife of her husband's brother, at least in at least until she produces a male heir for her deceased husband, who then would have the right to the property in the family, since the son that would be born would be the legal child of the deceased man, not the living brother. In other words, a brother would come together with his sister in law to produce a child for his dead brother. All right.

Now, this was very important in Israel. This was hugely important as it relates to the inheritance that God had given to Israel, the promise of the land, and so forth. And it was so serious if a brother refused to uphold this duty, that the widow could actually demand that he be brought before the city elders, which, was where they held court. And at that point he would have to publicly declare his refusal.



See, up to this point they would just be talking as a family. And she would go to him, or maybe some of the other family members would go to him and say, hey, your brother passed away. You need to take your brother's wife as your own and have a child in your brother's name so that this child would have the rights of, your brother's family. And so forth. And he would just say, I don't want to. Well, it hasn't become a public issue yet. He simply said, I don't want to do this.

Well, she has the right now to take this into the public arena. So she goes before the city elders and she says, here's this man and he refuses to fulfill this Levirate law sort of a thing. And the elders would go to the man and they talk and say, what is this we hear?

And if he continues to refuse, even in the face of their encouragement to do what's right, it says that the brother's widow was then to approach her brother in law, in the presence of all of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face, which was a way of expressing great disgust, and that she was to declare the offense verbally. She was to verbally and publicly then declare, this man is unwilling to do this.

And the shame was not just for the man, it was for his family ongoing because it says his household would be known as the family of the unsandled. How would you like to be in that family? No, thank you.

But you have to understand something that we don't get in our individualized, privatized, Americanized society. And that is the role of family. The role and understanding of what it means to be family. And to be in the community of family. And to maintain the community of family. And that's something that you and I have a hard time understanding. It sounds almost like a ridiculous law to you and I, because we're thinking of it from our American perspective. But this was a very serious issue and it was of the utmost importance for Israelite men not to lose their place in society, even by death.

In fact, the way a man perpetuated himself was to have offspring and they carry on his name. Right? So the Levirate marriage was one way of ensuring the ongoing legacy of an individual in Israel. Alright.

The next example I have to just flat out tell you is a little embarrassing. So let's just read this. *"When men fight with one another and the wife of the one draws near to rescue her husband from the hand of him who is beating him..."* That's the first thing that's embarrassing. Right? When your wife has to come to your aid, when you're in a... And you're duking it out with somebody. And your wife

has to come, that's embarrassing. It's like, honey, stay back. If I'm going to get pummeled, please let me just get pummeled.

*“...and puts out her hand and seizes him by the private parts, <sup>12</sup> then you shall cut off her hand. Your eye shall have no pity.”* I have my serious doubts whether or not this situation actually ever happened. More than likely it was a matter of case law if you know what that term means.

But it did establish a pretty graphic precedent for the protection of the right of a man to establish his family line and remember something. Remember we talked about this when we dealt with eunuchs? And we talked about how God did not look kindly or, approvingly upon the idea of men making eunuchs of other men. Why? Because God established the right among all men to procreate and wired it into his biological makeup. And we saw that when somebody has made a eunuch for political reasons or administrative reasons for a kingdom, that God didn't look kindly upon that necessarily.

Now we come to a situation where, once again, the right of a man to establish and perpetuate his family line is threatened in the most embarrassing of situations and circumstances.

But you'll notice that this law also establishes a punitive standard for anyone who would think to rob him of that right. I mean, think about it. Cutting her hand off. Woo! I mean, we just got the message here, didn't we? This is serious stuff. This is not a slap on the wrist. The wrist isn't there anymore, right? Because it's a serious offense. And once again, that I think under case law is really what is being communicated here related to this sort of a thing. So the word there is just women stand back.

Verse 13, *“You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small. <sup>14</sup> You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, a large and a small. <sup>15</sup> A full and fair weight you shall have, a full and fair measure you shall have, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. <sup>16</sup> For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the LORD your God.”*

What is he talking about here? Once again, you and I don't carry around weights and measures. We don't carry weights in our bag and we don't keep measures in our home, other than the things we measure flour and sugar and stuff like that with, that's not what he's talking about. He's talking about the things that were used to measure and to weigh elements like gold, or something else, or whatever for monetary transactions, for business transactions.

And what he's talking to them here in this passage about is honesty in their business dealings. That's the bottom line. If he was saying this today to you and I, he would say, be honest in your business dealings, don't cheat. Because it was cheating is what they were doing. They would use different weights when they were buying from when they were selling. They would try to get the advantage either way. And Moses reminds them here that dishonesty is an abomination to the Lord.

Now once again, this is one of those areas where, even in the Old Testament, you and I learn something about the character of God, how He feels about the actions of His children, and what kind of a moral standard He lays out.

And even though you and I are under the Mosaic Law, we still understand from this, that God wants honesty out of His people. He wants you and I to be honest. When we say something, He wants us to mean what we say and say what we mean. When we're filling out our taxes, He wants us to be honest the way we do it. When we're talking to our boss about how many hours we put in that week, He wants us to be honest about how we're doing those sorts of things. He wants honesty out of His children, and we can see that in this passage very clearly.

You may recall back when we were going through the Book of Leviticus that God spoke this, and so this is just by way of reminder. Let me put the original passage from Leviticus 19 up. He says,

**Leviticus 19:35-36 (ESV)**

*"You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt."*

*"You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. You shall have just balances, (that word, just means, fair) just (or fair) weights, a just (fair) ephah, and a just (fair) hin: (different measurements) I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt."*

And he would say to you and I, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of slavery to sin, now be honest with people. And one of the reasons why this is such an important matter for the Israelites is because, it's something that we understand today and that is honesty is a critical basis of character.

When we're talking to our children, and can I just encourage parents, those of you that have still have small kids, be careful that you don't goad your child into lying. We often know what answer we want out of our child, but instead of just

telling them what we know, we question them like we're interrogating them. And we try to, we actually force them into lying many times. We know they took that thing and so we say, did you take that? And so the child instantly is put into this position where I need to protect myself, and that's their initial thought I need to protect myself. Otherwise, I'm going to get it. Rather than just walking up to the child saying, I know what you did, I know what you took. Now let's talk about why you did it and let's talk about what we're going to do about it because you knew that was wrong.

Do you see the difference rather than saying, did you say something? Did you do that? Or did you call your sister or did you that this or whatever? Did you hit your sister? I mean, she's got blood coming off her head. No I didn't, she ran into it. She's just clumsy. I mean we do, we almost force our kids into saying things that are untrue so let's not teach them dishonesty. Let's teach them honesty.

Anyway, dishonesty is critical. Honesty is critical. And a dishonest—and what he's talking about here in this passage is dishonesty in business. And when dishonesty in business exists, it eventually rots the foundation of society itself. When there's corruption in business, society is ultimately affected.

Final exhortation of this chapter. *“<sup>17</sup> “Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, <sup>18</sup> how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, (now I'll explain, didn't, doesn't say that they had a tail) those who were lagging behind you, (that's what he means) and he did not fear God. <sup>19</sup> Therefore when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.””*

Let me just give you a little history. The Amalekites sprang from Esau's son, Eliphaz and his concubine, Timnah. And they were a nomadic people. They were a marauding people. They were a desert dwelling people. They lived in the Negev, south of Beersheba, in the upper Sinai. But you'll remember that when the Israelites had recently started their exodus; their journey from Egypt into the promised land, the Amalekites attacked Israel in the cruelest of fashions. By, the Amalekites—and by the way, very cowardly, I would have to say too.

By coming up behind them, and attacking where the group was the most weak, and the most vulnerable. Because whenever you have a bunch of people that are making their trek across, and there were like, we think there were somewhere between two and a half to three and a half million people, you're going to have

elderly, and women who are pregnant, and children, and stuff, who just can't keep up. And some of the animals that can't keep up have to be herded well behind and so forth. So there's a natural vulnerability that's built into this sort of a journey, a caravan, and that's where the Amalekites attacked. It was a very cowardly way. They didn't come through the front door. They attacked in the back.

And basically Moses said that this act showed that they had no fear of God. And so He commanded the Israelites to wipe them out. And by the way, interesting point here, the Amalekites are the only people who were singled out for judgment, who did not actually occupy the land of Canaan. The only other people that God visited judgment upon in this particular way, in a single sort of a way, who are not part of the land of Canaan.

So God said the very last thing was don't forget. Well, guess what? They forgot. It took a long time. After they got into the land, we went through that whole period of the Judges. And then we come to the period of the Kings. Who is the first king? Saul, right? Saul was told to go wipe out the Amalekites. Samuel told him to go do it. Well, the Lord told him to go do it through Samuel. And you'll remember that Saul's pride got in the way, and he didn't completely wipe out the Amalekites. In fact, it wasn't until the reign of king Hezekiah, which is almost the end of the period of the Kings, that we read that the last of the Amalekites were finally wiped out. So it took them a long time to get around to it. All right.

Chapter 26 is really a singular read here so we're going to get through this pretty rapidly. And it's all about, essentially one thing and God's telling them when you come into the land, there's going to be a time of rejoicing, and here's how we're going to do it.

He says, *"When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance and have taken possession of it and live in it, <sup>2</sup> you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket, and you shall go to the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name to dwell there."* In other words, wherever the tabernacle is, that's where they were to go.

*"<sup>3</sup> And you shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, (here's what they wanted him to say) 'I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.' (and) <sup>4</sup> Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God.*

<sup>5</sup> “*And you shall make response before the LORD your God, (and here's what they're to say. And they were supposed to recite their history and they would say) ‘A wandering Aramean was my father. (and this is a reference to Jacob, who of course was later renamed Israel) And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. <sup>6</sup> And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. <sup>7</sup> Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. <sup>8</sup> And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. <sup>9</sup> And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. <sup>10</sup> And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me.’ And you shall set it down before the LORD your God and worship before the LORD your God. <sup>11</sup> And you shall rejoice in all the good that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.”* Stop there for just a moment if you would please.

This is really a very cool ceremony where the nation of Israel was commanded to come into the land and He says, you guys are going to plant, crops. And when you start harvesting those crops, I want you to take the first fruits, okay? Not the last bit you pick, the very first of the pick, and I want you to put it in a basket. And I want you to bring it to the presence of the Lord, wherever the tabernacle has been set up, and go to the high priest. And I want you to recite this thing.

And so, they begin to recite this thing. The Lord, my father was a wandering Aramean, and he tells the story, sort of a thing. But it's this ceremony where essentially what the person is saying before the Lord is, You were good to your promise. You gave us the land, You told us You'd bless us. Here's the blessing. Isn't that cool? I mean, stop and think about that for a minute.

What if you and I were commanded to go through a ceremony every time we had an answer to prayer? Or every time we saw a promise of God that was established and fulfilled in our lives? What if we had a little thing we had to go through, where we had to appear at a certain place, and recite something that just reiterated?

Hey, God was faithful. He brought us, He started with my family, and He brought us through Egypt, and then He delivered us from Egypt, and He brought us to this land with a mighty outstretched arm, and He said, I'm going to bless you in the land, and He did. He blessed me in the land, and here it is. Here's the proof of the blessing, and here I stand, and now...

And then the last thing He tells them is that, in verse 11, “...*you shall rejoice in all the good that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house*, (and you notice He talks about the good that was also given to) ...*the Levite, and the sojourner...*” and so forth and so on. Because some of that was also to be given to them as well. So, this is the tithe that is required, but the first fruits of it. Remember that. First fruits. The very beginning.

Verse 12. “*When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled,*<sup>13</sup> *then you shall say before the LORD your God, (here’s something else they have to say) ‘I have removed the sacred portion out of my house, and moreover, I have given it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all your commandment that you have commanded me. I have not transgressed any of your commandments, nor have I forgotten them.’*”

By the way, let me just explain that the tithe was required every year. What they're talking about initially in this passage is that first fruits of their very first harvest when they come into the land. But they were to bring the tithe every year. But every third year, they were to bring a special tithe, which would then be distributed not just among the Levites to take care of the Levites in their full time ministry to the Lord, but they were also to give some of that to the traveler, to the widow, and to the orphan, or, as it says here, the fatherless.

And so, that happened every three years, where they would bring this abundance of a tithe, if you will, but every year they were required to bring a tithe for the Levites. And you'll notice that when he brings this tithe, he comes before the Lord and he makes a statement saying, “*I have removed the sacred portion out of my house.*” Isn't that cool?

In other words, here's what he's saying. I've taken what belongs to You God and I've gotten it out of my hands and I've put it into Yours. In other words, God you're not going to catch me with any of Your money in my hands because remember they were commanded to give a tenth. And that was that command from God was such that if you kept the tenth, what does it say in Malachi? They were robbing from God, right? (Malachi 3:8) They were literally robbing from the Lord.

So this person is coming and bringing the tithe and saying I'm not robbing You, in fact, I've been obedient to You, and I'm bringing the whole tithe. I've got it out of my house, and I'm bringing it to You, right? I haven't been saving it up and thinking, well, I'll get around to it one day. I've gotten it out of my home, I like that idea, and I'm bringing it to You.

And, furthermore, he says in verse 14, he says, *“I have not eaten of the tithe while I was mourning, (in other words, after somebody died in my home) or removed any of it while I was unclean, or offered any of it to the dead.”* That’s something the Egyptians would do. The Egyptians were weird. They buried things with people all the time to take them on their way in the journey of the dead. To get to their afterlife, location. So they'd stick food in the coffin. Yeah, good waste of good food. This guy isn’t eating. I got news for you. But, they would do all kinds of stuff like that.

And so the person would even say, I haven't given any of it to the dead and so forth. He goes on to say here in the middle of verse 14, *“I have obeyed the voice of the LORD my God. I have done according to all that you have commanded me.”* And then he says this, *“<sup>15</sup> Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel and the ground that you have given us, (notice that, praying a blessing upon the people and a blessing upon the land) as you swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.”*

What is this prayer doing essentially? It's basically calling upon God to make good on his promise. I like that. I like the audacity of it because it really isn't audacity that's required. But it's basically telling God, you promised, now make good on it. I like that, so Moses goes on.

He says, *“<sup>16</sup> “This day the LORD your God commands you to do these statutes and rules. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>17</sup> You have declared today that the LORD is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and his commandments and his rules, and will obey his voice. <sup>18</sup> And the LORD has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments, <sup>19</sup> and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people holy to the LORD your God, (look at these last three words) as he promised.”*”

The one thing I love about this is that the Jews were constantly reminded to revisit the blessings of God. And I don't think we do that nearly enough. I'll be honest with you. I think as Christians, we don't talk about them enough. I don't think we think about them enough in terms of just replaying in our hearts and minds how God has blessed us.

And we end up, focusing on the areas in our life where we've got struggles that are going on, and maybe we haven't had answers to prayer, and we focus so much on those things, pretty soon, we slip into a pity party of frustration and disappointment and then we've lost our joy, we've lost any sense of praise and



stuff. And then we wonder why we come to church and we just don't really want to lift our hands or sing those songs they're singing because, I don't really feel like it because I've been focusing on all my other issues.

I like that Israel was told to go through this process to remind themselves, even to recite, if you will, how good God had been, how faithful God had been, and how He had kept to His promises.

Can I just encourage you? In fact, let me challenge you. When you go home tonight, before you go to bed, take out a piece of paper and write down 10 blessings that God has given to you in your life. Ten things. Number it from 1 to 10 and work on it until you get them. And then lay it there maybe next to your bed and think about those.

And thank Him for those and maybe get into a habit more often about thinking about and focusing on the blessings because you know what guys, there's always going to be challenges. There's always going to be struggles, there's always going to be something in our life that just isn't quite up to snuff, you know why? We live in a fallen world For heaven's sakes. Don't expect heaven, this side of heaven, don't expect it.

We have expectations that are just, way too high sometimes. I think for, Jesus said, in this world, you will have trouble. But He told us to be of good cheer because He's the overcomer of all that this world has. (John 16:33) And that we can enter into that victory that is in Christ, but that doesn't mean our problems magically go away or evaporate.

It just means that by faith we are following the victor, the One who overcomes. But in this life, you will have trouble, you will have tribulation, you will have difficulty. Right, so stop pounding your fist every time something happens You and understand that this is something God told you ahead of time was going to happen. But, that doesn't mean you and I can't rejoice, that we can't learn to give thanks. And to be thankful for the blessings that He's bestowed upon us in our lives.

There, I know that you have enough blessings to fill numbers 1 through 10. And some of you could probably go on beyond that without any problem. And that doesn't mean your life is a cakewalk. Your life is probably just as challenging and troublesome as everyone else's. And yet we need to learn. We need to learn how to be thankful.