

Deuteronomy (Part 3)

Personal Leadership

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As I left off on the first day, I was speaking on *vision*. Yesterday, Mark Schindler picked right up on that and he showed us that what we are able to understand at this time is really just a glimpse into what is coming ["A Glimpse at the Family of God"]. Then his sermonette was followed by Martin, who showed us that our conduct towards our immediate environment has a role in our judgment ["Creation Stewardship"]. God Himself gets a glimpse into the way that we will take care of His creation in the Kingdom by the way that we take care of it today.

He showed us that we have a responsibility to follow always what must be one of the first commands that God ever gave to man—that we are *to dress* and *to keep* our environment. That means to beautify and to preserve. It means to embellish and to maintain. And so it means things like being clean, and being orderly, and being on time. There are all kinds of things that can go to this, but that is not an unimportant message in any way, that has to do with the vision of things that are going to come.

All of the time since our calling—and the testing and the trials—have only prepared us for where we are right at this moment, even as the children of Israel who stood that day (as Deuteronomy 1:8 says) ready to get into the land. They had been 40 years preparing for what was going to be the final dash to the finish line. They still did not possess the land; and history shows that it took them another 7 years until they finally did "possess the land." We might say that their gun-lap lasted 7 years.

There are some of us, I think, that our gun-lap has already lasted 30 or 40 years. Hoping that there might be a little bit of remission or letting off of that, but I am afraid that we cannot say that. I think that all of the messages so far are indicating that things are going to intensify, and I certainly believe that as well.

For those people in Deuteronomy, many a battle was yet to be waged against the people of the land. Those "people of the land" are symbolic of two things that we have to deal with. Ephesians 6 shows that we have to deal with *demonic spirits*, and that we have to make war against them. The second one is *sin that is dwelling within us*, as Romans 7 clearly shows. These must first be met and subdued before we can actually claim our land—the earth, our inheritance—as ours. It is going to take a burning vision. It is going to take perseverance. It is going to take deep-seated loyalty to Jesus Christ. And we cannot, in some cases, even see our enemies. But we know this:

Revelation 12:12 "Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has but a short time."

They are very angry! And they are a great deal more influential, stronger, and cleverer than the giants that the Israelites of old feared. This brings pressure upon us. It bears on us. It creates stresses in many, many instances. I want you to turn to another scripture that I used in my last sermon; but I want to touch on it as we continue laying the foundation for what we are discussing today.

Matthew 7:13-14 Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are who go in by it. Because narrow [or, difficult] is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

What Jesus is referring to here in Matthew 7 is that many actions in life confront us with moral and ethical choices. It is as though each one of these actions presents a crossroads. The consequences of our choice may be very great—and especially great to human nature, because its grip on us is being severely threatened and it is going to fight back (at the influence of Satan and his demons). If you literally stand at a crossroads, if you follow one then you are going to end up at one place. But if you follow the other, then you are going to end up somewhere else. That is so obvious.

Any of you who might have seen the movie, *Cast Away*, at the very end of the movie Tom Hanks was standing in the road, and the young lady that he had just spoken to was driving off in her pick-up truck. There he was. So, it left you with a "lady and the tiger" finish. Which way was he going to go? Was he going to get into his car, and follow the truck—and follow her home? Or was he going to go off in the other direction—to a different kind of life altogether? It was not answered. But, in a way, that is the way most moral and ethical choices are. We are faced with a crossroad.

There are many times when we reach one of those crossroads, and we feel that the best thing to do is to do nothing. That is, to avoid the confrontation of actually making a choice. But, brethren, what we have to learn eventually is that the making of a choice cannot be evaded. If we put off a difficult choice in the attempt to avoid it (hoping it will go away and we will never have to face it), I think that we can be sure—because God is faithful—that He will bring us around to face it again anyway. Maybe it will not be in exactly the same circumstance, but we will, in principle, face it again—because God is faithful to complete His creation.

A title of a book that was written back in the 1960s keeps coming back to me from time to time. It was titled, *If You Don't Know Where You Are Going, You Might End Up Some Place Else*. It is one of those titles that are rather catchy. And you start scratching your head—"What does the author mean by this?" But, eventually, you have to come to the conclusion that it was a pretty catching title—because that is exactly what happens in life.

Vision tells us where we want to go. And we must continue honing ours if we want to end up in the Kingdom of God. Remember that vision is an insight, a perception, into a reality that the physical eye cannot see. I want to go back to Hebrews 11 again, and read those scriptures that apply to Abraham. And, of course, they apply to us.

Hebrews 11:10 For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

You know that place was invisible. It was something that was in his mind's eye that he looked to—in the same way that we look for the heavenly Jerusalem to come down out of heaven and be here on earth. That is going to be our dwelling place, our home, forever and ever. It is *in our mind's eye*. We have not seen it, any more than Abraham did.

Hebrews 11:13-16 These [the people mentioned in this chapter] all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off [again, in their mind's eye—in vision] were assured of them, and embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. [It is one they cannot see with their physical eye.] And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they came out [that one we can see], they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

People with vague goals, people who do not see the advantages of being in the Kingdom of God sharply and clearly, are easily turned aside. They drift from the heights of enthusiasm to the depths of ennui. It is those who have their goals firmly fixed and ever sharpened who will *rejoice* at the Lamb's wedding supper.

Our vision cannot be one that is of merely "being saved." That, standing all by itself, is essentially selfish. It would be like the Israelites coming out of Egypt, going across the Red Sea that God had opened up before them, and then when they get on the other side (after "baptism"—they are now saved from their slavery, they are now redeemed) they sit down and just wait things out. They never complete the journey. That is essentially what just wanting to be "saved" is. We get baptized. We are saved. We are redeemed. We are free from our sins. And then we just sit down and wait things out.

Our vision must include preparing to serve in order to be a blessing to those who follow. Vision is *a function of faith*. Vision is also *a fruit of faith*. And true spiritual faith builds from believing the gospel. Israel did not believe the "good news" given to them. And that, according to the apostle Paul (in Hebrews 4:1-2), was the chief cause of their failure. (1) They did not believe the gospel, and (2) they did not have any vision. They really had nowhere, in a sense, to go. But the revelation has been given to us, and it is time for each of us to *show our leadership* in submitting to God.

Now, there is something here that is interesting in several ways. It is something that you probably are not aware of—even though you may have read through the book of Deuteronomy many times. Maybe, especially, you read through the beginning of the book of Deuteronomy. But leadership is the very first subject Moses addresses. The very first one (in Deuteronomy 1)!

I said "leadership;" but, as we move through this, what we are going to find out is that he is more specifically referring to *the sharing* of leadership. But I want to touch on this, because the reality of this subject is that leadership involves every one of us! And I want to warn you, even as I begin this theme, to not let it get away from you, personally. I told a couple of our ladies down here this morning that, as far as I personally am concerned, this is the most difficult sermon for me to give—because it is the kind of subject that I know people's minds are going to kind of drift away from it.

There is hardly a one of us that thinks of himself as a leader. And so this subject does not seem to apply. Oh yes, it does! Every one of you is a leader in some area of life, and you should be a leader within the church of God as well. We sometimes think that leadership only takes place out in front. Oh, no! *Leadership should be everywhere*. It is shared by everybody who is called of God. Living up to the leadership potential that God opens up to us is *everybody's responsibility*.

In Deuteronomy 1, at the time that Israel was there, all they faced was an easy march into the Promised Land. But I am going to jump ahead in the story in order to pick up on an interesting way that Moses addresses the Israelites. And then I am going to get back to what I am beginning here. I am doing this because it has a bearing on this principle of leadership. First, I just want to set the time element.

Deuteronomy 1:6 "The LORD our God spoke to us in Horeb, saying: 'You have dwelt long enough at this mountain.'"

There Moses is reflecting back, for the benefit of the people, to what had happened within 3 to 5 months after they came out of Egypt. They were still at Horeb, after the giving of the law. So that sets the time element that begins this sequence of events.

Deuteronomy 1:9-10 "And I [Moses] spoke to you at that time, saying: 'I alone am not able to bear you. The LORD your God has multiplied you, and here you are today as the stars of heaven in multitude.'"

Do you know where this took place? This took place in Exodus 18.

Deuteronomy 1:11-18 'May LORD God of your fathers make you a thousand times more numerous than you are, and bless you, as He has promised you! How can I alone bear your problems and your burden and your complaints? Choose wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you.' And you answered me, and said, 'The thing which you have told us to do is good.' So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and knowledgeable men, and made them heads over you, leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, leaders of tens, and officers for your tribes. Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger that is with him. You shall not show partiality in judgment; but you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.' And I commanded you at that time all the things which you should do.

First we are going to look at verse 18. Again, this is something that is so easily passed over. "And I commanded you at that time." It is the word *you*. Now look at verse 22:

Deuteronomy 1:22 And every one of you came near to me and said, 'Let us send men before us. . . ."

Again, the use of the word *you*.

Deuteronomy 1:26 "Nevertheless you would not go up. . ."

You would not go up.

Deuteronomy 1:27 "And you complained in your tents. . ."

Deuteronomy 1:29 Then I said to you, 'Do not be terrified, or afraid of them.'

One of the very interesting things here is that, as Moses recounts the events (in the first three chapters of Deuteronomy), the majority of the people who actually participated in them are dead. But Moses writes and speaks in the present tense—as though they were alive—by using the collective "you." The people, though, who actually did the things that Moses speaks of (especially those who were the leaders) were dead. We are speaking here of at least 38 years after most of the events that have already been referred to here in Deuteronomy 1.

What this means to you and me—in practical applications—is that there are times when God treats and judges us collectively (as a Body). It is as if He is saying, "If you had been there, you would have done the same thing." Given the fact that human nature never changes, the probability of that occurring is very high. A very high percentage!

Now, many of the people that Moses was speaking to here were born in the wilderness after the events that he is speaking of. And yet, he speaks to all of the people as if they were the ones who did what he recalls in the events. This is a very early usage in the Bible of, "If the shoe fits, wear it."

We in the church have come along at the end of a long stream of the history of the people of God. And yet, as God sees it (and I hope as you see it too), there is a direct connection between *us* and *Israel in the wilderness*. And it is not merely ethnically, but more importantly spiritually. It is as though we are all part of the same Body. And the challenge for us is whether we can take what Moses says *personally*—as if we were standing there, listening to him direct his admonitions to us. And what Moses reflects on is that, 38 years before, the Israelites stood on the border of the Promised Land. And that generation lost their nerve to go in and possess the Land. Thirty-eight years and a whole generation of people (including Moses, Aaron, and Miriam) were lost!

The challenge here is that these new generations not do the same. That is, the ones who were actually hearing Moses' voice. He is addressing them as though they made the mistakes. Some of them, undoubtedly, did but the majority of them did not. They were born afterwards. And what Moses is saying here is "*One generation and 38 years wasted is enough. Let's not repeat the same mistakes.*" Given the way that Moses began his address, I think he is showing that one of the major reasons for Israel's earlier failures was *a crisis of leadership*. So what Moses first addresses here, with these new generations, is that they not do the same.

It was in Exodus 18 that he appointed rulers, captains, elders, judges, or whatever. He set up a hierarchical system. And there were rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, and rulers of fifty, and rulers of ten. How often does God, in the recording of the history of Israel, focus on their kings? That is, on the leadership? I am sure that He does this in order to impress upon us *the importance of leadership*.

When a good king reigned, things generally went well. When an evil king reigned, things went into the pit. But even when a king of the stature of a David (or a Hezekiah, or a Jehoshaphat, or a Josiah) reigned, they were never able to get things completely turned around—because of the dearth of middle-level leadership under them. I am going to change that. They were never able to get things turned around because of the dearth of the level of *middle* and *lower-level* leadership under them.

Toward the end of the summer, we spent a great deal of time on Numbers 16-18 (which was one of Israel's more significant failures)—the rebellion of Dathan, Korah, and Abiram and the 250 men of renown ["Sanctification and Holiness (Parts 2-4)"]. These people were the local middle-level leadership under Moses and Aaron, and it points to a major area of Israel's problems.

I think you will agree with me that Moses is held up in the Bible as being one of the greatest leaders that ever walked on the face of the earth. Aaron had some early problems; but he seemed to have gotten himself turned around, straightened out, and he continued to grow in his responsibilities as the pilgrimage wore on. Those men had their problems, and God does not hide them from us. But Israel's major problem was not Moses, and Aaron, or Miriam. The major problem was under them. There simply were not enough Joshuas and Calebs to go around.

This is something that is vivid to me because of something Herbert Armstrong said to the ministers assembled before him in the Ministerial Refreshing Program that Evelyn and I attended somewhere around 1983 and 1984. He said to the 40 or 50 men, and their wives, who were in front of him, "You men have let me down!" He knew that things were deteriorating, and I think that he put his finger on a major part of the problem surfacing in the church.

I have mentioned to you before what Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "Every institution is but the lengthened shadow of one man." It means that whether the institution is the state, the corporation, the church, the school, or the family, the leadership plays a major role in making the institution what it becomes. In a large institution, there are many leaders of departments, and each one of them is casting his (or her) shadow on what he (or she) is responsible for.

Are you beginning to get the drift here? There are multitudes of leaders. There might be one person on the top—but there is an echelon under him, and another echelon under them, and another echelon under them. Every echelon has its leadership. (And the numbers under those people get smaller and smaller.)

And so leadership is something that is not just in "the Moses position," but all the way up and down the line—including the individual who is at the bottom. He is responsible for taking leadership *to dress* and *to keep* what he is responsible for. So whether the job is sweeping the floor and cleaning out the toilets, or whether it is the man in the boardroom, everybody has their share of responsibility that they are supposed to show leadership in carrying out.

The problem Israel had was not Moses. It was not Aaron. It was not Miriam. It was not Caleb. It was not Joshua. It was those under them! That is where things broke down—which is very interesting. It shows you that the one casting the shadow—even though they may be giving excellent leadership (which Moses was)—his shadow does not cover the individual's responsibilities.

Everybody in the Body of Jesus Christ is a leader. And everybody has to carry out his or her part with the very highest quality of leadership that he (or she) can give. We are perceived in the Bible as part of a living Body. And each of us is responsible for performing to the best of our ability—for the well being of the whole. I mentioned earlier that there is *a sharing of leadership* that touches on each of us within the framework of the Body. And I know that very many of us do not think of ourselves as "leaders"—but we are.

Can you, then, say that you are exercising your leadership in order to support the work of Jesus Christ, our Head? Just as in the days of Moses—and as Herbert Armstrong indicated at that Ministerial Meeting—the breakdowns can come within the ranks of those under the head, even though the head is of the same quality as a Moses. That same principle applies to us. We read it in the Book, but it applies to us—only our "head" is not Moses. It is Jesus Christ. And every one of us knows that our leadership under Christ breaks down, does it not? We all sin, and our leadership is breaking down at that point.

So let us go back to Exodus 18, and we will begin to learn what God expects for us to provide in the way of leadership. The qualities are, undoubtedly, difficult at times to exercise; but they are not complicated to grasp.

Exodus 18:19-21 [Jethro is speaking to Moses, and he says:] "Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work that they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens."

Verses 19 and 20 are instructions to the mediator—Moses—as to what his personal responsibility was in this. Basically, it was to oversee the leadership under him by teaching them. *Teach them statutes and laws as to how they should walk* (that is, live their lives). Then think of our Mediator—Jesus Christ. Reflect upon what He is doing in regard to following through with the same basic instruction; but this time in regard, and in relation, to us.

He is doing the same thing. He is teaching us the way of God. The terminology is a little bit different, but the terminology could just as easily be that He is teaching us ordinances, laws, commandments, statutes, and judgments—because these define the way of God. So Jesus is following through with the very instructions that He gave to Moses then (but through Jethro). So we are being, essentially, taught the same thing.

In verse 21, let us take a look at the characteristics that Moses was advised to seek for in those that he would appoint as leaders. Just a little tiny inset here—when Deuteronomy 1:13 is compared with this chapter, it then becomes clear that Moses accepted recommendations from the people before he made the appointments. He could not have possibly known all the people well enough (amongst 2-2 1/2 million people) to do this on his own. And so he sought counsel from the people—recommending the qualifications about what to look for in those they wanted to represent and administer these laws. Thus, the people recommended those that they had experience with on much more intimate basis that Moses did.

I do not know whether you realize it or not, but you do the same thing to—and for—me. You *counsel* me, really, by who and the way you speak of others who are in your congregation. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." And that is very, very helpful to me in dealing with you and being able to ascertain who the leaders are within the congregation. And you are counseling me. You may be unaware, but you are.

I want us especially to look right now at the word *able*. "And you shall provide out of all the people *able* men." We are going to compare this with another place where exactly the same Hebrew word appears, but it is not translated "able."

Proverbs 31:10 Who can find a virtuous wife? For her price is far above rubies.

That word *virtuous* is the exact same Hebrew word as that is translated *able* in Exodus 18. This word is very closely synonymous with the English word *strength*. The way that it is being used in the context of Proverbs 31 is that it is implying strength of character—meaning virtuous, honorable, noble, righteous, upright people. So that woman was a noble woman. She was an upright person. She

was virtuous. She was honorable. She was righteous. Then the rest of the chapter expounds upon some of what is implied in "virtuous" or "able."

It matters not that these terms are describing a woman. They apply to man or woman. And it is obvious, once you begin to understand this about the word "virtuous" or "able," that this woman was a leader. There is no doubt about it. And among some of the qualities that are mentioned regarding her are moral excellence and trustworthiness. She is a trustworthy person. She is stable. She is compassionate—because the rest of the chapter is describing what virtuous means. She has foresight. She is industrious, thrifty, self-starting, enterprising, hard working. She is kind and duty-conscious.

Back in Exodus 18, the rest of verse 21 breaks *able* down into three general areas. (1) Men such as fear God, (2) men of truth, and (3) hating covetousness. In more common terms, we could use godliness (instead of "fearing God"), honesty or integrity (rather than "men of truth"), and selflessness (rather than "[hating] covetousness").

One of the reasons that I chose to go into this aspect of Deuteronomy is because the Israelitish countries are experiencing a very great dearth of godly leadership. Look at the horrible, ungodly, immoral leadership given by the former administration there in Washington, D.C. Young people today are especially being deceived into thinking that notoriety is leadership; and they are following notorious people, like so many lemmings. And they need to understand that notoriety (and not real virtue) clings to attention-seeking entertainers, like egg yolk to a dish.

Immature people have a very strong tendency to follow the fads that these people promote. And so, our kids included, they love their music. They love their acting, or their athleticism. They try to talk, walk, and dress like them. Whether American and Canadian, young people consciously think of these people as "leaders" is moot. They are following them! The action speaks.

Exacerbating this is the corrupt leadership of a somewhat more mature portion of the population that follows the leaders of the world in politics, religion, business, and education. But in His Word, God calls these people "*blind guides*." But there is a question: Who else can these people follow?

Isaiah 3:1-12 For, behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stock and the store, the whole supply of bread and the whole supply of water; the mighty man and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, and the diviner and the elder, the captain of fifty and the honorable man, and the counselor and the skillful artisan, and the expert enchanter. "I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. The people shall be oppressed, every one by another and every one by his neighbor; the child shall be insolent toward the elder, and the base toward the honorable." When a man takes hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying, "You have clothing; you be our ruler, and let these ruins be under your power," in that day he will protest, saying, "I cannot cure your ills, for in my house is neither food nor clothing; do not make me a ruler of the people." For Jerusalem stumbled, and Judah is fallen, because their tongue and their doings are against the LORD, to provoke the eyes of His glory. The look on their countenance [the look on their face] witnesses against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to their soul! For they have brought evil upon themselves. "Say to the righteous, that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill

with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him. As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths."

That is happening in the United States and in Canada, and I am sure in South Africa, and Australia, and Britain as well. *Those who lead you cause you to err and to destroy the way.* In this nation, if one is a Democrat and the Republicans hold the seats of power (or, if one is a Republican and the Democrats holds the seats of power), each may argue at any time that there is a crisis of leadership—because the philosophical underpinnings of each party are so great. Therefore, their perspective of each other is really skewed along these philosophical lines—rather than of real virtue.

But these verses here in Isaiah 3 are describing a condition far different from that simple circumstance that I just described. This is a situation where leadership is lacking from the top to the bottom, regardless of party affiliation. This *corruption of leadership* has devastated every aspect of life—because the corrupt leadership is so overwhelming in numbers as to smother the leadership of those who are truly virtuous. You can see, right in the context, that God has to give comfort to those who truly are virtuous and trying to do the right thing—that they will be rewarded for their virtue.

Here in the United States and the other Israelitish counties, it effects families and institutions all the way to the highest halls of government, business, education, labor, agriculture, religion, and social life. It spans every social and economic stratum—from the very poor to the very rich. Very few people are providing an adequate quality and quantity of the right of leadership.

There are still some upright people around. They might not be righteous—carrying the righteousness of Christ. But they are still, nonetheless, upright; and they are moral. But they are being overwhelmed and smothered in a sea of corrupt leadership. And a family, institution, or nation is merely the mass of many individual parts. It is the sum of many, many people. And if the majority is given to a weakness, then the nation will reflect it. Reflect it right at the top of the government in these past 4 years. Was that not one of the arguments that people used? "Well, everybody's doing it."

In regard to the church's crash into division, God says (in Matthew 25) that *all* the virgins went to *sleep*—meaning that we were insensitive to responsibility. When one is asleep, he is unaware of what is going on. You are not aware of what is going on when you are asleep, are you? That is what that parable means.

I am here to tell you that it was not just the ministry—as some claimed, while pointing the finger of scorn. Undoubtedly, some were more deeply asleep than others, but the fact remains that we were all tainted to some degree by the leaven of whatever the dominant sins were that motivated God to move as He did and let Satan do his evil work against the church. And we all have very much to repent of. And this section in Isaiah 3 is best seen when it is approached by going all the way back to Isaiah 1:4.

Isaiah 1:4 Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity [The whole nation is laden with iniquity!]; a brood of evildoers, children that are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward.

Was God angry at the church when He scattered it? I think that there was a measure of anger there, and His anger was expressed in order to wake us up to our responsibilities. We are reading about Judah, specifically, here. But let us go on.

Isaiah 1:5-6 Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. [Notice how God is describing this.] From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.

This is what leads up to what He describes more specifically in Isaiah 3. There was leadership lacking from the top to the bottom! It was spread through the entire nation. It was not just isolated—in the highest halls of government, or the Senate, or the Representatives, or down to the state level, or all the way down to the hamlet level, all the way into the families. So what God is doing here is describing the entire nation by personifying it as one person (one man) laden with iniquity—so that the entire nation is full of putrefying, ulcerous sores.

The breakdown in Judah that God is describing was much more advanced than ours is. And the burden of their sins was so great that it was oppressive to the spirit of the people, and that can easily happen to us as well. We begin to get caught up in the spirit of the times. The nation is being described as being *corrupted from within* by its own people, in much the same manner as an invading army of the enemy would do if it came into the country. Only it is not an invading army—it is ourselves!

Verses 5 and 6 describe what Judah was doing as totally irrational because every part of the body was covered by bruises and sores inflicted by their own sin. Yet nothing that God did had turned them away from their course toward destruction. And by the middle of the chapter is more graphic description of their conduct and pain; but nonetheless, even though they had not repented, by the end of the chapter God calls upon them to repent. When we go into Isaiah 2, we find the story continuing; but it is advancing in time, and it becomes a prophecy.

Isaiah 2:12-16 For the day of the LORD of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, and upon everything lifted up—and he shall be brought low—upon all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan; upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up; upon every high tower, and upon every fortified wall; upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all the beautiful sloops.

God says that He is going to bring it all down! And so it leads right into the Day of the Lord. A time of severe judgment is not very far off from what God is saying right here. Chapter 3 continues the same thought, but it describes in greater detail one of the major causes of the bruises and sores of chapter 1. And what he describes here is actually, in terms of time, a prelude to the Day of the Lord. When things get like this, you will know that the end is right at hand.

I think that the former administration of this nation's government—and especially its President—are a clear illustration of the main theme of the first part of this chapter. God seems to have given us, I think, a bit of a breather with the present administration—at least, in the area of sexual immorality.

Despite the unity being expressed at the time—in the wake of the September 11 attacks—a great deal more internal confusion, stalemated government, immorality in office, and rancorous division is headed our way. What we see here is the continuing corruption of society, as Isaiah piles horror upon horror.

The reason that I am going through all of this is so that the Church of the Great God, at least, will avoid this. I am dumping back on you the responsibility of governing yourself! You cannot wait for

the ministry to do something. You are to be the leader where you are—in carrying out the responsibilities given to you.

There is a very interesting verse in Psalm 11 that asks a cogent question.

Psalm 11:3-5 If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? The LORD is in His holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, his eyelids test the sons of men. [God is judging. God is evaluating.] The LORD tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates.

The kind of test that God is describing there is coming. And, even now, we are living through a time without proper leadership; and it is going to get worse. A society without proper leadership eventually becomes only a semi-organized mob. It is everybody for himself! And we are going in that direction.

What do you think that the government's reaction is going to be? When things get like that, the government reacts by becoming more stringent and we move towards a dictatorship in order to bring a measure of control. Now, which do you want? Would you rather have the liberties that we have enjoyed in this country for several hundred years now? Or would you rather have the government take control of everything, just so that we can be secure?

The answer lies in the subject of this sermon! We have to *govern ourselves* according to the law of God; and we have to, individually and personally, show the "leadership." I do not mean show me, the leader. I mean each of us actively be leading—by doing the commands of God.

There is coming a time when hunger for virtually any desire (whether it be retribution and vengeance, whether it be sexual, whether it be food, or whatever) will have to be satisfied. It is coming! The spirit of the time—the *zeitgeist*—is moving in that direction. And you are going to have to control yourself! This is where your leadership is going to rise to the full, because lack of proper leadership makes people desperate. And the decencies and civilities of life go by the boards, responsibility evaporates, and life becomes a matter of "every man for himself."

Now look at what the movies, television, music, and stage plays are serving up. They pander to the worst expressions of the public, to give people their desire. It is being satisfied through those means. Ever increasing and graphic violence, sexual immorality, and in some cases outright demonism are going to come right into your living room. It is already happening. We are just seeing the front wave of it.

I remember reading in the paper, just a couple of months ago, where they made a statement in the Charlotte papers, "You think that television is raunchy now. You wait until fall!" The "F" word and others are going to be heard on public television. And it is not just going to be sexual profanity like that. It is going to reach into all the bodily organs and bodily functions. Where is your leadership in the home? What are you going to do about it?

When a nation falls to pieces, the corruption is usually first clearly noticeable at the top of the leadership—especially in the political, religious, and business areas. But it is almost never limited there. Remember, and never forget, that graphic portrayal there in Isaiah 1. The whole body is sick. The reason it shows up in leadership so quickly is because the leadership is under such close scrutiny. They can hardly turn around without it being reported in the paper. So everybody sees what they are

doing, all of the time. Each person sees it in their own little prism, and each person puts his own color on it; but, over all, you are seeing what everybody in effect is doing. And every aspect of our culture is affected, but some aspects are less noticeable to public view.

Let us go back to the book of Amos. Amos describes cultural and social behavior better, I think, than anybody else in the Bible; and, boy, sometimes he is pretty graphic. How more graphic can you get than to call the women of his nation *cows*?

Amos 4:1 Hear this word, you cows of Bashan. . .

Do you know what Bashan was? That was part of Manasseh. And along with Jezreel, it was probably the best land in all of ancient Israel.

Amos 4:1 Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, "Bring wine, let us drink!"

What kind of leadership is that? Their minds are completely on themselves.

Amos 4:2 The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness: "Behold, the days shall come upon you when He will take you away with fishhooks, . . .

Just think of a fish with a hook through its jaws—and the degradation, and the shame, and the embarrassment that would go with something like that. That is, going into captivity.

Amos 4:2-3 . . . and your posterity with fishhooks. You will go out through broken walls, each one straight ahead of her [All tied together, in slavery now.], and you will be cast into the Harmon," says the LORD.

Amos 6:1 Woe to you who are at ease [really comfortable] in Zion, and trust in Mount [the strength, the power, the glory] Samaria [Israel], notable persons in the chief nation, . . .

We are the world's policemen, are we not? "The chief of the nations"—We are the world's superpower, number 1. Nobody can challenge us.

Amos 6:1-3 . . . to whom the house of Israel comes! Go over to Calneh and see; and from there go you to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory? Woe to you who put far off the day of doom, who cause the seat of violence to come near; . . .

What behavior! Where is the leadership? All up and down the line, people are avoiding what is coming. They see it, but they want to put it off to the side so that they do not really have to think about it. Brethren, do not get caught in that! That is, that kind of thinking.

Amos 6:4-6 . . . who lie on beds of ivory [Notice the wealth, the prosperity.], stretch out on your couches [Has there ever been a nation as rich as the United States of America?], eat the lambs from the flock and the calves from the midst of the stall [Nobody has food like we have food—an overwhelming abundance.]; who sing idly to the sound of

stringed instruments [Here comes our music.], and invent to yourselves musical instruments like David [If they would only have his mind, though.]; who drink wine from bowls [A glass of wine is not good enough. You have to have it in bowls—which shows the gluttonous approach to those kinds of thing.], and anoint yourselves with the best ointments [perfumes], but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.

You can see that what Amos describes is people who express their leadership by paying attention to themselves. They are fashionably dressed, but proud—paying great attention to how they look. They dress suggestively. But where is the mention of their spiritual, moral, and ethical leadership in the home? The corruption of an immoral leadership quickly spreads, because there are so few strong moral convictions to set the righteous policies, to deal honestly, and to set the right example for others to mold their conduct to in dealing with each other.

I want you to reflect, again, on Deuteronomy 1 and the first qualification in the list of qualities that God wanted in leadership. He wants *able* men—meaning strong men. And do you know why Israel failed to go into the land and take it whenever they were first poised right on its borders, towards the end of the second year? They lost their nerve, and they feared the people of the land. And in a wholesale manner, they followed the lead of the ten *weak* men! They followed the fearful report, and they rejected the testimony of the two *strong* men. The strong men were overwhelmed. They were smothered by the quantity and the quality of the bad leadership.

But let us just skip by them for a minute. Where was the leadership of the rest of the captains appointed to lead the people? They abandoned God. They abandoned Moses. They abandoned Aaron. They abandoned Caleb. They abandoned Joshua. They abandoned those who were supposed to lead. Where was their strength and their loyalty, both upwards and downwards? The sad thing is that, like Judah in Isaiah's time, those in Moses' time shared the same fatal weakness.

You have been called to be a king and a priest. Both of them are titles of leadership. And the church is, in reality, a giant *leadership training class*. From everything that we are able to see, we are the last group before graduation. Are we going to lose our nerve, even as we stand on the very border of "the Promised Land"—the Kingdom of God?

I thought it interesting in Richard's sermon that he brought out in his message on Tuesday that Israel did not dwell in booths during the Feast of Tabernacles for over 900 years ["Feast of Tabernacles Basics"]. Is that not a simple instruction there in Leviticus 23—that you are to "dwell in booths"? Where was the leadership that could not follow even that simple instruction? That made me wonder how often they obeyed, after Joshua died, the commandment there in Deuteronomy 31—that every 7 years, in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles the book of Deuteronomy was supposed to be gone through. How often did they do that? I think that in all likelihood they did it all the while that Joshua was alive.

That was just my thinking. And then I got to thumbing around in the Bible and I found a scripture that is very interesting. It does not pertain directly to Deuteronomy 31, but turn to Judges 2. This is very interesting.

Judges 2:7 So the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD which He had done for Israel.

Now that is encouraging, because as they were going through the wilderness that generation that Moses was speaking to there in Deuteronomy had had enough experience to know that Moses was telling them the truth. And then God raised up another strong leader right behind him. His name was Joshua. And Joshua surrounded himself also with strong men as well, to be the leaders there. And they obeyed the commands of the Lord all the days of Joshua and over into the days of the elders who were still alive when Joshua died.

Judges 2:8-11 Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died when he was one hundred and ten years old. And they buried him within the border of his inheritance in Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the works which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; . . .

Brethren, where did the breakdown occur? All the way up and down the line, it broke down right in the family.

Judges 2:12 . . . and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and they followed other gods. . .

Now, you cannot tell me that the leadership of Israel commanded them, "You have to follow that god." I do not think so. Israelites do not take orders like that very well. They just did it themselves, and the leaders did too.

Judges 2:12-15 . . . from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtareths. And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for calamity, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed.

Godly leadership had broken down all along the line. Do not let this happen to you! Degeneration has to be resisted in all of us, at all costs. And do not give yourself permission—an "everybody's doing it" approach. That is very easily adopted. We also say things like, "What does it matter? Nobody's watching." It is so easy to go along with the crowd. It does matter—because God is.

And what is encouraging is that somehow, in some way, there is always a remnant. That is another theme that runs through the whole Bible. There is always a remnant that continues to carry on, so that the light of the truth is never quite snuffed out. Let us make it our theme in life that I, as a committee of one, will make sure that I will never allow the light of God's truth to be snuffed out in my life—regardless of what is going on around me, and regardless of the pressures that are being put on by family, and friends, and neighbors, and business associates.

It can happen to any of us, if we let down. And this is where the subject of leadership comes in. It is the responsibility of everybody to *lead yourself*, if nobody else, to do the right thing. There is very much beyond this that shows very clearly more distinctive and specific things that God wants us to follow, and it can be summed up in just a couple of words. We are to love God with all of our heart,

with all of our soul, and with all of our being. And Jesus said, if you will enter into life, keep His commandments. But I want to warn you that it is not just a matter of keeping His commandments as a cold-hearted obligation. We can never forget that God is our Father and He wants us to love Him!

There has to be a favorable emotional quality in the reason why we do the things we do, in exercising our obedience to Him. I will be able to show you more scriptures later on, but that just about sums up the whole thing. It's not just a matter of coldly keeping His commandments. He wants *affection*. Do you not, as a parent, want affection from your children? So, is it weird that God would want affection from us? Of course, He does—because that is the way He loves us. I can show you scriptures that show very clearly that His love toward us is not heartless. It is not just "by the book." His feelings are in it as well.

We will stop there, but I hope this has given you a little bit to think about in regards to the leadership that God wants in every one of us.