

Deuteronomy (Part 5)

Grace and Faithfulness

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 07-Oct-01; Sermon #FT01-06

One of the major instructions that became very clear from yesterday's messages is that there are consequences produced from the choices that we make. There is no avoiding those consequences, but we must choose! There is no way to avoid having to make choices. The most important choices in life are those involving spiritual, moral, and ethical alternatives. Whether we choose a Chevy or a Ford; or a red, or a blue, or a black article of clothing; or to live here or there, is a very minor consequence to life compared to whether or not we choose to submit to one of God's commands, no matter how "minor" it might appear to us at the time that the choice is made.

The Bible gives the distinct impression that Adam and Eve did not consider their choices in the Garden of Eden to be all that big of a deal. We are not given a complete reference of all of the thoughts that they went through. The Bible speaks very sparingly in most cases. But their choice introduced sin to mankind. They not only paid for it eventually themselves by dying, but they passed sin on to all of mankind. All of their descendants, right on down to this very day, die because of the wages of sin.

There are *protections* to help us guard against the choosing of wrong alternatives. They all arise from *faith*—from believing God, rather than any other person; from believing God, rather than any other influence of any cultural institution, like a government, a political party, business, or a church; from believing God, rather than any possibly very deceptive feelings that may be arising from our body.

God shows this very simply in Genesis 3. He instructed Adam and Eve, and He then permitted Satan an opportunity to influence them. They chose Satan's alternative rather than *believe* what God said, and they sinned. It is that simple. The principle that we are dealing with is that simple! It is not

complicated to figure out at all—where sin comes from. Once we have knowledge of the alternatives, then there is nothing to complicate it except those influences that arise from those areas that I just mentioned.

Two of the protections that we have available to us—because God has called us—are *love for God* and *the fear of God*. Neither of these powerful virtues just suddenly and miraculously appears. As I said yesterday, one does not drift into love and the fear of God must be *learned*. Both involve processes that are involved within the relationship that we have with God, and only because He has called us, thus revealing Himself to us. It is because we have access to Him that we can come to know Him, and our warmest affection and our deepest respect can grow. They are to be reserved for Him. Both of these virtues are powerful motivators, influencing us to submit to Him—to be loyal and faithful to Him (rather than any of the other alternatives that might arise in the experiences of life).

I want to touch once again on that definition there in Proverbs. It is such a simple saying, but it is so powerful in the way it can influence us—once we begin to understand what God is getting at here.

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.

Toward the end of my sermon yesterday, we saw that this is a simple definition of *the fear of God*. It is not a dictionary definition, because if it were it would say that fear is respect, fear is reverence, fear is awe, or admiration, or dread, or terror, or alarm. Rather, God defines the fear of Him by what it produces! The fear of God produces a hatred of evil and pride and arrogance. In one sense, as I said yesterday, it does not matter how intense the respect is—whether it is reverence or terror. What matters is how we react to the influence of evil.

I do not think that Joseph felt all that "great," if I can put it that way, or made such a graceful picture as he was running from Potiphar's wife. But run he did because he *feared* the consequences. And what is so strange is that, even though he fled, he got put in jail. However, as far as God was concerned, that was a better consequence than the alternative, which would have been *death*. Which would you choose? Joseph chose to suffer the wrath of the king, as it

were, and the anger of the woman spurned, rather than to face the death that would surely follow on the heels of what might have been a very pleasurable act at the time.

And so the influence of this woman, which we might imagine to have been quite voluptuous (a sexpot, who really had the 'hots' for him), there was nothing hindering it *except* what was in his heart. That was enough for Joseph. His reaction is left as a witness for all of us, for all eternity.

The hatred of evil, the fear of evil, precedes departure from evil. *Love for God* and *the fear of God* together work to produce submission to God, to produce commandment keeping, to produce loyalty, to stop idolatry dead in its tracks. Both of them arise from faith. Both arise from seeking God and knowing God. And that is why we are here, keeping the Feast of Tabernacles.

Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 4:7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom [and remember where it starts. The kind of wisdom that God wants us to have starts with fearing Him]. And with all your getting [all of your striving], get understanding.

So fear, respect, reverence, dread, or terror is important to the process of growing in the grace and knowledge of God because of what they motivate. If a person fears something, he will either submit to it or he will run from it. In these verses, *the fear of the Lord* means *submission to God*. Submission to God is the beginning of wisdom. Submission to God is the beginning of knowledge. I mean, the knowledge that counts! The wisdom that counts—that counts towards life.

The intention of the instruction that is given in Proverbs is that the fear of the Lord is to be *the controlling factor* in wisdom and the use of knowledge. It is cumulative. Again, it is not something that just "boom"—suddenly appears

within a person—any more than knowledge suddenly appears, or wisdom suddenly appears. They are factors, elements, that build as part of a process—as is "the fear of the Lord" as well.

There are a couple of different Hebrew words in Proverbs translated into the one English word *wisdom*. I am only going to deal with two of them. In Proverbs 1:2, the word "wisdom" there means *skill in living*. It means making the right applications. In Proverbs 1:3, it says to "receive the instruction of wisdom." That word means a little bit different. It means *to have good sense*. Or, as we would say today, "common sense." Or maybe it would be better called "uncommon sense." But it means good sense. And so we have then both *skill in living* (or, right application) and *common sense* covered here—of which "the fear of God" is the controlling factor. That is God's intention. Regardless of which is used, the fear of God is essential to us having them and using them.

Let us go back to the book of Deuteronomy, and we will see just a couple of applications.

Deuteronomy 6:1-2 "Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess [Now, why?], that you may fear the LORD your God [Why?], to keep all His statutes. . ."

So God can instruct us and say, "This is what I want you to do;" but if there is no fear of God—if there is no real respect for Him, if we do not admire Him and hold Him in reverence, if there is not maybe a bit of terror or dread mixed within it—we probably will not keep the commandments. That is what that verse is saying.

Deuteronomy 6:2 "That you might fear the LORD your God, to keep [Let me insert this. This is John Ritenbaugh's paraphrase. "In order to keep; for the purpose of keeping . . ."] all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you, and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and [and here is another one] that your days may be prolonged."

Long life comes from the fear of God, because it drives us to act in wisdom. And the consequences, therefore, are very good in terms of physical health and spiritual health. All kinds of benefits lie within allowing the fear of God to be built within us and then to make use of it. These things, then, show us that the fear of God expresses itself—reveals itself—through submission to His way. That is why it is the beginning of wisdom.

Wisdom is the practical application of knowledge and understanding, and it is the fear of doing wrong—of producing evil results, of getting bad consequences, of offending God—that drives us towards submission, to truth, to love, and to loyalty to Him.

Now let us look at the other side of the coin, in Numbers 14. This is the chapter where Israel made, without a doubt, its most significant failure in the forty years. They refused to go into the Land, even though they were standing right on the border of it. This was the first time around—the second year.

Numbers 14:6 But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who spied out the land, tore their clothes.

Boy, they were upset! They were full of passion, zeal. They were jealous for God. There was "heat," passion, there.

Numbers 14:7-9 And they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: "The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.' Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread ["We're going to eat them up!"]; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them."

The word *fear* here is exactly the same word that is used back there in Deuteronomy 6 and many, many other places. Do you see what they did is that they feared the wrong people, the wrong things. So, look at what happened when they feared the wrong party. Or, let me just inject those other

words. They *respected* the wrong party. Or, they were *in awe* of the wrong party. (They were awfully tall.) Or, they were *in terror* of those giants who were within the Land. It caused them to submit to the men who gave the bad report and, ultimately to the Canaanites, by their refusal to go in and take the Land.

The Israelites were driven by terror. They lost their nerve. And thus they moved, so they thought, to preserve their own lives. But they lost them in the wilderness anyway! All they did was to preserve their lives, actually, for just a few days. Then, in their presumption, they said, "Moses, we have sinned. We're going to go forward, and we are going to go into that Land." And they were torn to smithereens by the Canaanites, because God was not with them. Any of those who survived that lost their lives in the wilderness anyway. You see that the example shows very clearly why fear is so important. It is *a powerful motivator*.

In this case, the Israelites moved to preserve their physical lives. That happens to us so often. Maybe our life is not on the line, but embarrassment might be on the line. It might be the fear of being exposed for what we really are that is on the line.

Can we understand that when we are moved by a deep and abiding reverential respect for God—to submit to Him—that we are actually being moved to preserve eternal life? This is one of those times when we need a bit of *vision*. This is a time when we need a bit of *wisdom*. This is a time that we need a bit of *faith* in God's Word. And to *understand* like Joseph did—that he was more willing to bear the consequences of going to jail, embarrassing his sexpot mistress head-of-the-house, have the lord of the house come down on him. He was less afraid of that than he was of *a death* that might come at the hands of God later on.

The fearing of God has to be learned incrementally. It is learned through our experiences with Him, in this relationship that He has called us into. We might even point out that especially the Feast of Tabernacles—and all of the festivals to some degree—play a large part in producing the right kind of fear. That is, if we use the festivals in the right way, and we receive instruction, and have fellowship with Him and with each other. Through the combination of the concentrated experiences of instruction, fellowship,

conversation, meditation, prayer, and service, the right balance of the fear is gradually learned.

The result is two-fold. Put negatively, the effects should be that we learn to hate evil, and pride, and arrogance, and the evil way; and thus we are driven to depart from sin. Put positively, the effects should be that we learn to a greater depth what truth and righteousness are, and this, in turn, produces more good works, skill in living, and good sense.

How is it that we are even in a position to learn to fear God? This is a very important question in regard to this series of sermons, because it opens the way to two more subjects that the book of Deuteronomy addresses. One is addressed indirectly. The other, though, is a major theme directly addressed. Turn back to Deuteronomy 7. This is a paragraph that should be in every converted person's memory banks. I do not mean that you should know it word for word. But you should *know the principle* that is contained within this paragraph. We have touched on it I do not know how many times—either in the "Holiness" series, or the series that we are going through regarding the priesthood and our responsibilities.

Deuteronomy 7:6 "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God. . ."

We are not "holy" to the people out in the world. We are *holy* to God. That is the important part.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8 ". . . the LORD your God has chosen you to be a special people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the lease of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you. . ."

We are going to see more of this as we go along. In one sense, this is *the key* to everything—the key to *faith*, the key to *love*, the key to *the fear of God*, the key to *submission to God*. "Because the Lord *loves you!*"

Deuteronomy 7:8-11 ". . . and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them."

I feel that these verses should be at the very forefront of our understanding of who and what we are and where we are going. It should be at the very foundation of our thankfulness to God. This passage is the basis of a number of very important New Testament doctrines, and the basis of many a context in the New Testament. The subject that is indirectly addressed is grace. Our calling, like Israel's, has no basis in our righteousness or any outstanding quality of our own.

Let us go back to the New Testament, with a section of scripture that we are more familiar with in Romans 9—where Paul covers this subject, as he begins those three wonderful chapters (Romans 9, 10, and 11) on Israel and its place in the scope of God's purpose. But we are only going to be involved in a few verses here in Romans 9.

Romans 9:6 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel, who are of Israel.

Paul is actually beginning to lay the foundation for what he eventually, in the book of Galatians, calls "the Israel of God." There are two Israels. There is *the* physical nation of Israel, with which God made the Old Covenant. There is also the Israel of God. That is the church! Those are the ones that He has made the New Covenant with. So we are dealing with two Israels in the Bible: physical Israel and spiritual Israel. Spiritual Israel is the church. And this is why Paul says, "They are not all Israel which are of Israel." He is already indicating two different Israels.

Romans 9:7 Nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; . . .

Just because a person is physically descended from Abraham does not make them part of the Israel of God.

Romans 9:7 . . . but, "In Isaac shall your seed be called."

Isaac was the "son of promise." We are sons of promise! We are those who are named after Isaac, because we are children of promise. Even though Abraham is our spiritual father, we have descended from Isaac—not Ishmael, or any other of Abraham's children that he had by Keturah. Only those who are descended from Abraham through Isaac are part of those who become "the children of promise."

Romans 9:8 That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

And, eventually, Paul gets around to show that a person can be a Gentile and still be "a child of promise"—all depending upon whether God has called them, converted them, and thus given them His Spirit and they become "children of promise" even though they are not technically Israelitish.

Romans 9:13 As it is written, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

God made a choice! Even as He made a choice between the children of Abraham, choosing Isaac rather than Ishmael, God made a choice between Jacob and Esau. God chose Jacob to be the one through whom the line would come. That was God's choice! Esau had nothing to do with it. Jacob had nothing to do with it. God made the choice while they were still struggling within Rebekah's womb. This is what we are getting to in regard to you as well.

Romans 9:15-16 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on

whomever I will have compassion." So then is it not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

You are sitting here because of God's mercy. You are sitting here because of God's grace! You are sitting here because God exercised His will; and He said, "I want you, and I want you, and I want you." You might have been the most rotten person in your neighborhood; but for whatever reasons, He wanted you! And so He said, "You have I loved. Your next door neighbor have I hated."

Now, we understand that "hate" here is not an emotional quality. It's just showing the distinction between God's choice of you and some other person. So we have nothing—absolutely nothing—to brag of before God. It was simply, purely, absolutely, *His purpose* that made you be sitting here, rather than elsewhere. Our calling—like Israel's—is completely and totally *an act of God's love*, because of His grace.

We will not even turn to I Corinthians 1 (beginning in verse 26), where Paul reminds us of our very humble beginning. Not many high, not many mighty, not many great are chosen. Paul makes our qualities abundantly clear. But I do want to turn I Corinthians 4, because I do want you to see how Paul expresses his recognition of this here:

I Corinthians 4:4-6 [Paul says:] For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. Now all these things, brethren, I have in figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.

Here is a guide for our relationship with each other—including the relationship with the ministry. And that is what Paul is saying here. He is saying, in effect, "I'm no better than you."

I Corinthians 4:7 For who makes you to differ from another? And what have you that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

If I have a gift—if any of these men who have been up here have a gift—it is something that was given to them, so that they could serve the Body. Do you understand that? And you have your gifts—and you are, at God's intention, to serve the Body and glorify Him by using your gifts for the well-being of the Body. One of the major things is simply *overcoming* and *growing*. As we overcome and as we grow, and as the love develops and the fear of God develops, our gifts become honed—and they become more and more useful for the well-being of the Body, and for making the witness, and for being the kind of example that we should be.

You may have gifts of being compassionate, and sensitive, and serving, and caring, and giving, and being hospitable. And your prayers may be the kind that really hit God's ears and make Him respond warmly, as a blessing to His people. Some people's prayers, I am sure, are better than others are. There are others, who are really effective, and they may be somebody who does not look that great on the outside; but, boy, they have persuasion with God. And they are serving the Body—quietly, in secret. Nobody knows what they said, but it is moving God to do things.

So our gift does not have to be something that is publicly displayed. But it is so helpful—to our relationships with each other and with God—when we really recognize, and acknowledge, and understand, and rightly apply this principle that God wrote here through Paul. "What do you have that you have not received?" Every breath of air we receive, because God gives it to us. He could wipe it away in a second if He wanted to, and all life would cease.

Let us go to another place, also in the Corinthians:

II Corinthians 4:5-6 [Paul says:] For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts. . .

It is *because of what God did* that we understand what we do. It is *because of what God did* that we have the opportunity to make use of His Word, because He made it possible for it to penetrate into us so that we could be regenerated.

II Corinthians 4:6-7 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. [Listen to the humility here.] But we have this treasure in earthen vessels [We are so puny. And it was a source of wonderment to him that we are able to understand this.], that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.

Paul certainly shows his appreciation for being put into a position that he in no way deserved. The Bible gives us some insight into what his life was like, and it seems as though he was a very angry, zealous man. In this case, he was angry and zealous about the wrong things. And so he persecuted the church. We know for sure that he had people thrown into prison and persecuted. And he possibly, at the very least, consented to the death of innocent people—Stephen being the prime example. Paul knew that he in no way deserved what he had received, but nonetheless he was going to make the very best possible use of the gifts he had been given.

Martin Luther is credited with saying, in regard to salvation, that all is of grace. He came very close to the truth. But we saw in previous sections of this series that we definitely have a part in what is going on. But what we have *received* has completely turned our perspective on life. While God's grace is overwhelmingly more important than our part, we cannot relegate our part to sheer insignificance by foolishly and carelessly expecting God to save us regardless of what kind of lackadaisical attitude we might have.

I want you to go to the book of Titus and see what it says in regard to what our response ought to be, because of the grace that we have received.

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us [Here is what grace should teach us] that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

So it is very clear that God expects a return on His freely given gifts, and that return results from the completely changed perspective. That is, from one that was virtually driven by *self-centeredness of life* to a *God-centered one* that always has its eye cocked on the Kingdom of God, the return of Jesus Christ, the purifying of our mind and life in anticipation of His return with the promise of our inheritance.

Brethren, think about how God's calling of Israel out of Egypt—out of their bondage in Egypt—changed their lives. It was a pretty dramatic change, was it not? They were never the same again! Their lives were completely reoriented. Their thinking and their worldview opened to greatly expanded horizons. Now, make that application to yourself. This is what grace does! This is why it is such a great gift. It completely reorients our view of things, our perspective of life—about the whys of life, and where we are going with life.

Brethren, I know that you know that I can show you that each and every person in the church receives his gifts *personally* and *individually*. And, in addition to His Holy Spirit as a gift, I Corinthians 12 shows that God gives gifts by His Spirit. Ephesians 2 shows that faith is a gift. Romans 6:23 says that eternal life is a gift. And yet there is another very great act of God's grace, and that is the giving of His law.

The world teaches us to hate law. And this world's Christianity amplifies that by telling people that they do not have to keep God's laws—or repeating, almost as a mantra, that one cannot be saved by keeping God's laws. But I want you to notice this, back in Deuteronomy 4. Look at what this verse says:

Deuteronomy 4:1 "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe [Why?], that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you."

"Keep the laws that you may live and go into the Land." This is a recurring theme in this book, and it climaxes in the section that we were in yesterday—in Deuteronomy 30:15-20, where God commands us to *obey His voice* and to *choose life*. This is amplified by Jesus in Matthew 19, when the young man came to Him and said, "What must I do to have life?" Brethren, is there anybody who ever walked on the face of the earth who was better able to answer this?

Where do you think Christ got His answer? He got it right out of Deuteronomy 4:1. "If you will enter into life, keep the commandments." Is Jesus a liar? He is not a liar. But that, in effect, is what the world is saying when they teach that we do not have to keep the commandments of God, or His statutes, or His judgments.

Paul had a different perspective on the law, and so people become confused. He was writing from a different point of view. And his point of view was to point out to people that the keeping of the law does not save us. He wanted to make that abundantly clear, but he nowhere said that we do not have to keep the law. It just does not save us!

Also here in Deuteronomy 4:1, it also goes on to mention God's gift of the Land. The two, brethren, are absolutely essential to one another. The gift of the Land—which is a type of the Kingdom of God—is a constant reminder to us. It serves to alert us of *the precious value* of the peculiar life that we have as a result of His freely-given calling. And, along with it, the fact that only those who keep His laws are going to have the privilege of possessing the Land and living in it.

Now listen carefully to this. There is a subtle lesson that is contained within the organization of the book of Exodus—which, when combined with what I have just said, puts obedience to God's law in its proper position in relation to salvation. I want you to think about the organization of the book of Exodus, and then answer a simple question. The book opens with a brief history of why Israel was in Egypt and how they came to be slaves. Then a large chunk of the book of Exodus describes the destruction of Egypt, and then the leaving of Egypt and the beginning of the wandering in the wilderness.

Here comes your question number 1: In what chapter does God give the Ten Commandments?

Now, here is another question. What is the overall theme of the book of Exodus? Remember the organization—that is, the little bit that I have already given you on the organization of the book of Exodus. There is no consequential mention of and commanding of laws until Exodus 20, and the overall theme of Exodus is the redemption—or, the deliverance—of an enslaved people. There are 19 chapters dealing with the deliverance of the Israelites *before* there is any serious and conclusive mention of law. What does the word *salvation* mean? It means "deliverance." Israel was saved, Israel was delivered, Israel was redeemed from slavery *before* God ever mentioned law!

Let us apply that to ourselves. It shows very clearly that the laws did not save them. God did! He personally did it—through mighty acts of grace on His part, which destroyed both the place of their bondage and their slave masters. And the lesson (when combined with information in Deuteronomy) is that the law does not save men. It is not given to save men. It is not given to redeem men. It is not given to deliver men—because they are already redeemed and free. That is why it is given. Do you understand that? It is given for the purpose of life *after* salvation.

That is so simple. The giving of the law is the consequence of freedom. The giving of the law is the consequence of deliverance. The giving of the law is the consequence of salvation. It is given so that those freed might live in the inheritance. It is given so that they might remain free. It is given so they

might be prepared to live in the inheritance. It is given so that they might be living in exactly the same way as everybody else in the inheritance is going to be living—the way that God lives! The law is given to get us all into harmony, all into agreement, with one another. So that we are all following the same guidelines, because when we come out of the world we are a mess!

God saves us because we repent, because we believe—but, brethren, we have a long way to go after that before we are really and truly ready to live in the inheritance. This idea of "deathbed repentance"—I am not going to tell you that it never happens, but it is largely idiotic. It does not make any sense at all when it is fed into the Book and its story.

Let us go back to Titus 2. I want to read verses 11 and 12 to you a second time. Maybe it will have a bit more impact on you as to what Paul said there—as to what *grace* teaches us.

Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present age.

It is the law that shows the saved people—the delivered people, the redeemed people—how God expects that we should live. Until He gets us to that point, we are not living that way. And so, in effect, He says, "Okay, I've saved you. I've delivered you from the grip of Satan. I have taken you from the house of bondage. Now here is what I want you to do in return: Follow these rules."

So do you understand the application to us? Once we come under the blood of Jesus Christ, we are already delivered from death. But our journey—preparing to live in the Kingdom of God—has just begun. We still have the pilgrimage to complete. It is during the pilgrimage that love grows, that the fear of God grows, that responsibility grows, that more gifts are given, that service grows—and on, and on, and on—to prepare us for what we are going to be doing in the Kingdom of God. So that when we finally get there, we are ready! We are ready to take over those jobs that God is preparing us for. And so, during the pilgrimage, we are schooled in the keeping of God's commandments so that we can live.

The law does not save us—God does. But He requires that we keep His commandments for *the development of the relationship* and *the building of character and wisdom*. And all of this helps us to understand why we are in the position to make the choices that God commands. But there is yet another aspect to not only why we are in this position but also why we will be able to complete what God has purposed for us. Again, it appears in Deuteronomy 7. And I can in no way overestimate the importance of this.

Deuteronomy 7:9 "Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God."

You do not very often go to bed at night seriously wondering whether the sun is going to come up the next morning, do you? You probably never give it a thought. I chose that dumb illustration because it is so understandable. The laws of God's physical creation are a constant witness to us of God's *faithfulness*. He never gets tired. He never sleeps. He upholds all things by the word of His power. He is absolutely dependable in the performance of His responsibilities.

This quality is extremely important to us in our pilgrimage. I do not know whether you are aware, but the major Old Testament theme of the Feast of Tabernacles is not the World Tomorrow nor the Millennium. Rather, it is God's faithfulness in providing for His people.

Leviticus 23:39-43 Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast to the LORD for seven days; on the first day shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest. And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. You shall keep it a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths [Why are we dwelling in

booths?], that your generations may know that I made [God purposely did that!] the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."

There are two aspects, as applies to this series; and the one I am not going to spend much time on. So why did Israel dwell in booths? Well, the answer is because God was faithful to His promise to the fathers. The booths were a constant reminder of something. (We are not going to go into that.) But He made the promise to the fathers, then liberated their descendants from Egypt—forcing them from their homes and their normal routines. He set them on their journey toward the Promised Land.

However, He purposely led them away from the direct way there. Their journey took forty years, which was something they probably never counted on. I am sure that you can relate to this too, because you are frequently wondering "How long, O Lord?" But despite the length and the fact that they were not journeying through a verdant area—they were in a wilderness. Do you know what "wilderness" means in the Hebrew? It is just simply means a place where there are no roads. It means a place that is not cultivated. There is nothing there; and it is very likely that, if it were a verdant area, somebody would have been there.

Therefore the implication is that, though it might not have been "desert" like the Sahara Desert, it was still nonetheless an empty place that was generally not suitable for cultivation. In other words, there was not anything growing there that was worth eating. How do you live in a place like that? The caravans are not coming by as soon as you are in need. They had no supermarkets to go to. And so you know what God did—He supplied them with manna, and He brought water out of the rocks.

So the booths, then, symbolized the transient character of life on a pilgrimage. Despite the fact that they could not put roots down permanently and they could not produce crops, He nonetheless provided adequately so that they did not starve or die of thirst—even though the way was far more difficult and longer than they ever dreamed.

Next comes chapter 8. Most of us know what is in Deuteronomy 8; but let us look anyway, and just read it rapidly—because it has to do with God's faithfulness.

Deuteronomy 8:1-4 "Every commandment which I command you this day you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to your fathers. And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, and allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years."

We are beginning here a chapter on God's faithfulness. Despite the circumstances that they were in, *God provided*. We could go all through this, especially verses 11-18. But all of this follows right on the heels of His declaration that He is the faithful God, and this chapter is giving examples to show indeed that He was faithful—despite the fact that they were living in booths, temporary dwelling places. And He charges them, in this chapter, *never to forget* that He provided for them. Day after day, night after night, for forty years He was there.

And not only that, He promises to continue to provide and further charges them to *keep His* commandments—a little bit later in the chapter—with the remembrance of His providence never being allowed to slip from their minds. (Here comes the lesson for you and me.) He does this because it is an essential part—an essential support—to the faith that we are required to live by.

Let us go to Joshua, and we will look a little bit ahead in the story. This is about the last speech of Joshua, as he is about to die. Here he is giving a little summary of his life, and he says:

Joshua 23:13-15 "Know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you. Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. All are come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed. Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the LORD your God promised you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the LORD your God has given you."

Joshua here is describing the essence of God's faithfulness. It is impossible for God to lie. We are always to remember *God's demonstration of His providence* to the Israelites. And just as surely as He provided for them, He will provide for us. But God is also faithful, Joshua reminds them, to chastise. If He did not chastise, righteousness would have no meaning. He would provide for everybody. So what would be the incentive to do good, to do right, to do well?

We are going to jump to I Samuel 12. David is involved in this, and he says:

I Samuel 12:22 "For the LORD will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you His people."

"It has pleased the Lord to make you His people." That is the really important part of that verse. He chose you because He loved you, and because He did not love somebody else in the same way. And *it pleased Him!*

In II Samuel 7—I think that this was when David was given the promise that his progeny would continue on and eventually be forever. But he says:

II Samuel 7:27-28 "For you, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, have revealed this to Your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house.'

Therefore Your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to You. And now, O Lord GOD, You are that God, and Your words are true, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant."

David knew that God's promise would never be broken, and that David's dynasty would be established forever. That is quite a promise. And so David utters his trust in God's words—that they are faithful.

Now, *faithful* (like most Hebrew words) has a picture in it. It pictures something that can be leaned upon, or built upon—a support or foundation. When that picture is verbalized, it describes something that is trustworthy, solid, observant of obligation and duties, responsible, accountable, dutiful, and dependable. When it is applied to God being faithful, it means that He will take care of what and whom He has made.

Now listen to this, brethren. It means that He cannot begin something without finishing it. I will tell you, that ought to warm the cockles of your heart. He has *started* on our salvation, and He has *started* on our preparation for the Kingdom of God. What He has begun—because He is faithful—*He finishes it!* He does not do something halfway and then grow tired, frustrated, and quit. It means that He is obligated to His Word anytime He gives it or says it. And when He enters into a covenant, He binds Himself to a known line of action—because within the covenant He agrees to do (or, not to do) certain things.

And so the Bible, then, largely consists of illustrations showing God carrying out His obligations—so that we will understand that He keeps His word. *He is faithful!* And He wants this to be an example to us—in order that we being training ourselves, learning, to be the same way. And when we give our word, we carry through.

Now, God is faithful because of His very nature. And it says back in the book of James that within Him there is no variation—no shadow of turning. There will be no change because of unseen circumstances. No failure! His power is never exhausted. And please let me assure you that just because you believe that God exists, that is really not sufficient for saving faith.

Please remember this because here is where faithfulness' importance lies to you and me: It is His faithfulness that is the support—the foundation—of our faith. We could not trust a God who cannot be trusted. But we can have *absolute trust* in Him, because He never breaks His Word. Never, ever—forever and ever! What He starts, He finishes.

Let us go back to Hebrews 11. We are going to look at something in reference to Sarah, who was a woman of faith.

Hebrews 11:11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.

Our God is **the faithful God**. What He says comes to pass. We may not live to see it come to pass—even as these people all died in faith. But they had sufficient faith to know that, even though they were going to die, nonetheless what God had promised to them was going to be done; and in their next conscious thought they were going to see the fulfillment of the very thing that He promised to them.

He is the faithful God, and His faithfulness is what is the ground—the support, the foundation—of *our faith*. We cannot live by faith, at all, unless we believe that we have a God who is absolutely faithful in everything that He says, and that He always carries through. You cannot trust a God in whom there is variableness, who changes circumstances without any good and loving reason, who forgets, who has "Senior moments" (like I do, very frequently).

He is the reason for our salvation. He started it, by giving us grace. He chose to love you—to allow you to come to know Him as the faithful God—in order that you can live by faith, and be prepared for the coming of His Son.