

March 7

## Deuteronomy 26-30

Hello, I'm Jack Arant, the Director of International Student Ministries. I have been a part of this church for about 30 years, and I've been on staff for 4 years.

Today we are looking at our reading from Deuteronomy chapters 26 through 30.

This passage gives instructions for God's people to observe as they settle into the promise land to insure God's blessing, and some stern warnings of the awful curses that will come upon those who reject the Lord's commands.

Chapter 26 begins with a reminder that the good things we have acquired are all from God. They were to put some of their first crops, or the first fruits, into a basket and present it to the Lord as a tangible expression of a grateful heart. They were to remember that he is the giver of all we have. This kind of expression brings rejoicing. There's something about the physical expression of an offering that connects us in worship and praise. Notice this; they are to present the basket and bow down. Sometimes if I feel disconnected with the Lord the best thing I can do is to connect my body to worship in a physical expression- like bowing, kneeling, lifting my hands, laying face down, or even crying aloud to the Lord. Our action helps our minds to focus and our hearts to open.

The rest of Chapter 26 deals with the tithe. The idea of setting aside a portion of what God has given us is an important act of worship that demonstrates our real desire for God and his kingdom. The old cliché – "put your money where your mouth is" nails it pretty well! You can tell a person's real priorities by looking at their checkbook.

It's good to set aside a portion for the Lord. You will notice they were instructed not to touch the portion that belonged to God! They were to take it out of their income before anything else. There's a great application here for us. When we determine to give, set it aside. Put it in an envelope, or deposit it in a separate account used only for giving. We've got to be intentional! After all, we are promised a blessing if we tithe.

Malachi 3:10 says: *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. "Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.*

I know it's true! God's blessings still rain down on those who put Him first. Your money shows where your heart is. In our day, just as then, our money is a life test of who is first, God, or myself.

Keeping God first, walking in his ways, brings blessing. What about rejecting his commands and turning away from him? Chapters 28 and 29 show the graphic consequences! What makes the blessings so good is that the curses are so bad.

The nightmare of curses listed in these chapters include: disease, drought, defeat, destruction, mental torment, failure, loss, family ruin, pain, suffering, alienation, starvation leading even to cannibalism, terror, dread, despair and slavery. A dark picture of what turning away from God does to mankind.

In Israel's case, as with us, it all starts with the worship of other gods.

I use to think that idolatry was a problem in ancient times for Israel, but not so much for our day. Then one day I heard this quote from John Calvin : "Our hearts are idol-making factories".

We are designed for worship! It will be God or something else. When it is God, the all wise King of love and goodness is in charge. Turning to other gods opens the lid to the garbage can of curses. That's why I must continually remember my covenant with God. Communion is the reminder of the New Covenant Christ made when he took our curse. Jesus said "...this cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 1 Cor 11:25-26

The final passage for today is about restoration and hope. Returning to the Lord, heart and soul restores his blessing once again.

Two options - Life and prosperity or Death and destruction.

Life - love the Lord, walk in his ways

Death- turn from God, worship other things

Moses God's spokesman says"

<sup>19</sup> This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live <sup>20</sup> and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Paul the apostle says: <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Col 3: 2-4

Christ is your life! Choose him. Love Him! This is Jack Arant reminding you to let the word of Christ dwell in you richly!