

The Compass

Week 14

OT Readings – Deuteronomy 21:1-32:52

NT Readings – Luke 9:51-12:59

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- 12:1-26:19 is “the heart of the book of Deuteronomy.” The adaptation and application of the law is made to the new situation of Canaan with laws governing worship, leadership and community life. 27:1-30:20 is a covenant ceremony detailing the “blessing and cursing” that follow obedience and disobedience. 31:1-34:12 is a look forward - last counsel of Moses (including a song), commissioning of Joshua and death of Moses.¹
- Pay attention to the *intent* of the various laws. Much of this section is about community relationships. Ask, “How would these laws have been an expression of the command to ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’” While much seems strange to us, it would have made total sense to them.² How might these apply to us?

New Testament

- The focus of this week’s readings is Jesus’ instruction to His disciples. These readings are “dense,” filled with practical teaching which we can apply immediately. Take your time; ask the Holy Spirit what He would want to say and meditate there awhile.
- 9:51 marks the beginning of a new section for Luke, “Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

12:1-34. Of all Jesus’ words, few are more startling *and* assuring than 12:6-7. The minutest details of *my* life are His concern, “Really, God? The hairs of my head?” His concern and care extend to our basic needs, food and clothing, (12:22-29) but far more. There is a lavishness and extravagance in God’s attitude and actions toward us; even as far as giving to us the blessings and benefits of His kingly rule. (12:32) God is not distant from us, lounging on His throne or sitting in a windowless office filling out administrative paperwork fulfilling His responsibilities for the universe. Paul in his “Mar’s Hill” sermon (Acts 17:22-27) speaks to those who worshipped many gods, but knew not the true One. The true God, says Paul, “is not far from each one of us...” If they would but “feel their way toward Him, they would find Him.” He is closer than our next breath. Close enough to count the hairs on *your* head.

Application: “What about me? How does this apply?”

Interwoven with this Godly care and concern is the foolishness of seeking life and fulfillment anywhere else but in God and His kingdom. For those who choose to control our own lives, be their own gods, materialism and stuff is what matters but they are *poor toward God*. (12:21) There is a kingdom to seek (12:31) and it rightfully demands all. (12:8-9)

Here is the reality check: you can know your heart by what you actually treasure. What are you seeking? What matters to you? What consumes your time, money and energy? The parable of the rich man (12:16-21) is the story of 21st Century Americans, including many in the church. We have trusted in our stuff and built lives resting on the false security of incomes, 401k’s and continued national prosperity. It could all come crashing down and be gone in an instant or we could be gone in an instant. (12:20) The time to learn to trust Him is now, not in moments of crisis, we will not be in “condition”³ to do so. The time to bring our lives under His Kingly rule, to give His kingdom and its values our full attention is *now*. Where are you?

Difficult Question of the Week

Deut. 28. Q. “If God desires to bless His people, why does He spend so much time talking about cursing them?”

Deut. 28 contains “covenant sanctions,” “blessings and curses,” and is similar in form to other ANE treaties.⁴ God is using a familiar form to make an important point: responsiveness to God brings life; rejection of God brings death. In a sense, this is simply an elaboration of the truth given to Adam and Eve in the garden. If you choose to push the Source of life out of your life it will bring about dreadful consequences. Written into the fabric of the universe is an inescapable fact – there is only One Source of life and if we reject Him, we are on our own, struggling against the very design of the universe. This always has negative consequences. In Deut. 28, God uses the strongest language to get their attention, “This is serious, please pay attention!”

Does God punish or judge, “curse,” for disobedience? If you live against the design of things you will suffer the bad effects.⁵ God hardly ever *actively* punishes or judges and when He must it is a last resort and distasteful to Him.⁶ It takes the form of parental discipline – always with the hope of repentance, change and reformation. Jeremiah illustrates how this worked with Israel,

“O Jacob My servant, do not fear,’ declares the LORD, ‘For I am with you. For I will make a full end of all the nations where I have driven you, yet I will not make a full end of you; but I will correct you properly and by no means leave you unpunished.” (Jer. 46:28)⁷

Lofthouse captures it, “Kind and compassionate in all His ways, the God of Israel chooses to bind His people in covenant, in a reciprocal relation with Himself...He will if their deeds disturb the covenant, plead with them and go to all lengths to restore them to their loyalty. He will never rest until the defaulter is brought, not to punishment, but to a re-entrance into the old personal relations.”⁸

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¹ Above follows layout of Fee and Stuart, *How To Read the Bible Book by Book*, 60-61.

² The laws are an expression of the two great commandments, “Love God with all your heart...” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matt. 22:40) God’s intent in giving *these specific laws* was shaped by the need for His people *to not do* the things of the people of Canaan and *to do* the things that reflect His heart and character. (Duet. 4:5-9) Therefore, some of the seemingly weird commandments (“Do not boil a kid in the mother’s milk”) are refutations of the practices of the idolatrous peoples of Canaan.

³ Like athletes who train for the big day of the race or event, we are to be those who “condition” our lives, discipline ourselves in the exercise of faith. We truly do perform for our own “Audience of One,” day in and day out and the “muscles of faith” we have bulked up and toned are to be trained for the day of difficulty and crisis so we can run the race to finish line. (1 Cor. 9:24-27. Heb. 12:1-3.)

⁴ Here is another example of God using what is available and adapting it to teach Truth. The ANE treaty model would have been familiar to Israel; God uses the form of it to teach about the consequences of faithfulness and unfaithfulness. (ANE is “Ancient Near East” and was the present day region surrounding Israel.)

⁵ A good example is choosing to drive your car on the RR tracks. You can probably do it (with some difficulty) but it is unwise and has bad consequences. ☹ Your car was not designed to bump along on the RR ties and the drive will eventually ruin your car, it will “curse” your car. On the other hand, if you care for your car and use it according to the Owner’s manual, it will be a “blessing” to you.

⁶ God’s anger is not an essential aspect of His life and character and only comes about in response to our rebellion and sin. Lam. 3:31-33. Ezek. 18:30-32. Further, God’s anger is not like ours. He experiences no road rage (never out of control) and His anger is best likened to a parent’s anger with their wayward child, frustration and grief with the child’s behavior with a longing for positive change.

⁷ The context is the looming exile of God’s people to Babylon. Their sin is grave; so committed to their sinful practices they are committing worse evil than the nations that God drove out of Canaan. For example, they are burning their children alive, sacrificing them to Moloch to insure “prosperity.” (Sound at all familiar, America? What about abortion?) Their hardness of heart leaves God little choice – He must bring discipline in hopes of a new start in the future.

⁸ Quoted in Heschel, *The Prophets*, 288.