

# Old Testament Survey - Part 23

by Dick Woodward

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of putting God first in our lives, through tithing, stewardship, and living a life of charity and obedience to God's Word.*

**Duration:** 27:29

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 10:12, Deuteronomy 14:23, Deuteronomy 15:11, Deuteronomy 17:18-20, Deuteronomy 18:10-12, Deuteronomy 18:15, Deuteronomy 20:1-4, Deuteronomy 25:5-10, Deuteronomy 30:19

**Topics:** "Obedience To God", "Old Testament"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the Book of Deuteronomy, focusing on Moses' sermons to the people of God before entering Canaan. It emphasizes responding to God's grace with obedience and love, highlighting the unconditional nature of God's love and the need for cleansing and repentance. The sermon explores the importance of faith, stewardship, charity, and obedience to God's Word, including teachings on tithing, capital punishment, and the Messianic prophet. It concludes with a powerful exhortation to choose life by obeying God's commands.

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## Transcript

As we continue our survey now of the Old Testament, we come again for the third time to the Book of Deuteronomy, which we have seen is a book or a collection of great sermons of Moses that Moses preached to the people of God just before they invaded the land of Canaan. After wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, when they finally decided to make the commitment of faith and go across the Jordan and invade the land of Canaan and possess their spiritual possession, Moses, as his swan song, gave them these great sermons that are recorded for us in the Book of Deuteronomy. We're looking at some of these sermons as we survey the book.

This has been our approach to this book. In our last session, we were looking at his great sermon on the grace of God, which is found in the first six verses of Deuteronomy chapter 9. That sermon is followed in chapter 10 by a sermon on our response to the grace of God. This is always an emphasis in the scripture.

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you except to listen carefully to all he says to you and to obey for your own good the commandments I'm giving you today and to love him and to worship him with all your hearts and souls? Earth and highest heaven belong to the Lord your God. And yet he rejoiced in your fathers and loved them so much that he chose you, their children, to be above every other nation as is evident today. Therefore cleanse your sinful hearts and stop your stubbornness.

You see, the emphasis here is how are you going to respond to the grace of God? The grace of God means God loves you and he loves you not because you're good, because you're not good. The love of God is not conditional. It is not based upon performance.

You can say this about the love of God. God loves me anyway. And that's a tremendous comfort.

God loves me anyway. If you really are loving with the love of God, then we ought to be able to say this of your love, that you love people anyway, not because. Your love is not conditional.

It's not based upon their performance. In our home, in our family room, we have a big plaque which says God loves you anyway. It's the first thing my children see when they come in at night, even if they're coming in later than they should.

God loves you anyway. And then as they go up the stairs to the upstairs part of our house, there's another little plaque at the top of the staircase and it says I love you anyway. I want my children to be confronted with those two facts every time they come in, no matter when or how they might come in, no matter what they've been into.

God loves you anyway. I love you anyway. You see, that's what the word grace means.

God's love is not conditional. It's not based upon your performance. The word grace is like a double-edged sword.

It cuts two ways. First of all, it says the love of God for me and his blessing is not based upon a positive performance on my part. Now that's very comforting because, you know, even if you do perform well this week and you feel God's blessing you and loving you because you had a good week, you're always going to be insecure because how do you know you can keep up this performance? I might not perform next week, then he won't love me and he won't bless me, so I'm insecure.

But when you understand this word grace, it means you don't have to worry about it. He's going to love you anyway because of his grace. Now that's half of the message of the word grace.

The other half is this. I do not attain the blessing and love of God because of a positive performance and I cannot lose it on the basis of a negative performance. Now there's much comfort in that.

God doesn't bless me because I'm good and God won't throw me away if I'm bad. God just loves me. Jesus loves me, the children sing, when I'm good, when I do the things I should.

But Jesus loves me when I'm bad, though it makes him very sad, but Jesus loves me. That's the message of the Bible. Now how do you respond to that? Does that motivate you? That ought to motivate you and that ought to motivate me, to cleanse our lives and stop our stubbornness or our sinning.

We ought to want to please this God who loves us anyway and that should motivate us to cleansing our lives of things that displease him and then of course serving him and expressing our response in gratitude and worship. The Apostle Paul says to us in 2nd Corinthians chapter 6 verse 1, after telling us much about the grace of God and our salvation, he says, I beseech you that you receive not the grace of God in vain. In the commandments Moses told us or God told us through Moses that God is so much a God of purpose and order and design that it is a sin to even speak his name in vain.

Now that isn't referring to profanity primarily, although it covers that. That's referring to the practice of expressing God's name in worship and then not being any different after expressing his name in worship. That's referring to the practice of speaking the name of God in worship and then not being called according to his purposes.

You see, it's a sin to speak the name of God in vain. If it's a sin to even speak his name in vain, then think of what a sin it must be to receive his grace in vain. Just think, God loves you and he puts all this blessing upon you.

He saves you by grace and he blesses you with all spiritual blessings and heavenly places in Christ and you just receive that and as you receive that you receive the charisma, the dunamis is the Greek word, the dynamic to go out and live like a Christian should live and serve like a Christian should serve. You receive all that dynamic in vain. You never do anything with it.

Now that's a sin. So in chapter 10 there's a great exhortation on not receiving the grace of God in vain. Now this is followed by some awesome sermons.

There's an awesome sermon on the subject of apostasy. Apostasy means to stand away from a position that you have taken with God. Let's say you take a position where you say God is first and I want to put him first and serve him.

We all know what it is perhaps to make commitments like this to God. Now having made a commitment, having taken a position, if later on you take a stand away from that position, that's called apostasy. The word apostasy is made up of two words, the word for standing and the word for away from.

To stand away from, that's apostasy. This is a very serious sin because the consequences that follow this are absolutely awesome. We'll see this when we come to the book of Judges, but you really see it all the way through Hebrew history.

Because the consequences of apostasy are potentially so awesome, there's a great sermon, a very severe sermon by Moses about apostasy. He says if your son, if your daughter, if your wife, if your children, if your close relative, if your best friend tries to get you to stand away from God, put that person to death, execute them, have no pity on them. If there's a city that's become apostate, go and raise it to the ground and kill everybody in that city.

That sounds very severe, but later on if you study the results of apostasy, the Babylonian captivity, the Assyrian captivity, you'll see why God through Moses was so severe about this. Don't let apostasy get started among you. That's a very important sermon in Deuteronomy chapter 13.

Now there's another sermon after that in chapter 14, and this sermon is on tithing. The word tithe in Hebrew means tenth. We all know that perhaps, and it teaches that we're supposed to give God one-tenth of everything that we have.

Now when you get into tithing as you find it in the scripture, and this is one of your first places where it's taught, you discover statements like this one, the purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your lives. See, tithing had a purpose. God doesn't need ten percent of our income.

Well then why did he institute this law of the tithe? Because he wanted to teach us something. The first commandment said God first. The great commandment said God first.

The message of the scripture again and again will come down to these two words, God first. Now that's an important thing for us to learn, and God wants us to learn that. How does he teach us to put God first? Well one way is to give us a measure of our commitment.

He knows whether he's first or not in our life, but we don't know, and so he institutes this law. It's not so much that he wants one-tenth of everything, he wants the first-tenth. Notice this, the first-tenth.

When they go into the land of Canaan, the first city they conquer, all the spoils go to God, because that's the first city they conquer. God wants the first thing that you earn. He wants the first-tenth, not just one-tenth.

Now in addition to this, the scripture in the Old Testament will teach that they gave offerings. That was beyond the tithe. The tithe was God's.

If they kept that, they were stealing from God or robbing God. But beyond the tithe, they made offerings, and then they made sacrifices beyond offerings. The definition of a sacrifice is given to us by David.

He says, I will not offer to God as a sacrifice that which cost me nothing. You see, a very wealthy man could give God the first-tenth and he wouldn't even feel it. He could even make offerings and not even feel the loss of them.

But the idea of the sacrifice kind of made us all equal, because how much wealth you have is relative. But for you, a sacrifice has to mean this, it costs you something. And it means the same thing for me.

Now how much do you have to give before it hurts and it really costs you something? Well, if you're very wealthy, you might have to give a whole lot in order to be sacrificing, and we're all commanded to make sacrifices. So in the Old Testament, you have the tithe, you have offerings, and you have sacrifices. In the New Testament, you have a word that even goes further, it's the word stewardship.

You know what the word stewardship, which was the favorite word of Jesus, you know what that means? It means it's all God's. When I'm a steward, I'm not cutting God in for ten percent of the action like Jacob did when he first left home and had one of his first conversations with God. When I understand stewardship, it's all God's.

And the issue becomes faithfulness and management. One day I'm going to stand before him and he's going to say it was all mine, what did you do with it? Now give an account of your stewardship. We're all going to hear that soon after we pass into the next dimension.

Now this whole concept of giving in the scripture, you see it in seed form there in Deuteronomy chapter 14, in this sermon on tithing. And remember again, the purpose of tithing is to teach you to always put God first. That was the purpose of tithing.

Tithing was the kindergarten. When you get to the New Testament, it's stewardship. And you really have to learn to put God first in order to even begin to approach the subject or the concept of stewardship.

Now there's also in chapter 15 a great sermon on charity. The Old Testament's very strong on charity. He says that there are several places the tithes should go.

It should go to the Levites, that's where we get the basis for the paid clergy. And it should also go to the foreigner who's in your land, who's hurting. Have you ever thought of bringing a Vietnamese or a Laotian

family to this country, like many Christians did in the last 10 or 12 years? Well, the Old Testament was very strong on that emphasis.

Help that foreigner who's in your country, and he's going through a difficult time of transition. They were supposed to give to the widows and the orphans. And I love the insight of Moses into these Hebrew people.

He never minces words. They are stubborn and a stiff-necked people. And so as he gives them this exhortation about charity, he says, and don't moan about it either.

Don't gripe about it. And he says, there will always be poor people among you, and that is why this commandment is necessary. The poor you have with you always, Jesus said.

But he didn't imply by that that we shouldn't help them just because we always have them. That's a great exhortation on charity. There's a prophecy and a prescription found in a sermon in chapter 17 of Deuteronomy.

Moses was a prophet, and the prophet did two things. He would foretell and he would foretell the Word of God. Sometimes he would foretell or predict.

Most of the time he was not like a spiritual weatherman. He just preached the Word of God. But sometimes he would foretell and then tell forth the Word of God.

Now in chapter 17 he does both. These people don't have a king yet. They're not going to have a king for about 500 years.

But Moses tells them, when you get into that land, one day you're going to decide you want to have a king. I don't believe God is in this. I don't believe God wanted them to have those kings.

But Moses predicts you're going to want a king, and God's going to give you one. Now when this happens, and you have crowned him and he's in office, here is a prescription I want to place upon him. When he has been crowned and sits upon his throne as king, then he must copy these laws from the book kept by the Levite priests.

That copy of the laws shall be his constant companion. He must read it every day of his life so that he will learn to respect the Lord as God by obeying all of God's commands. This regular reading of God's Word will prevent him from feeling that he's better than his fellow citizens.

It will also prevent him from turning away from God's laws in the slightest respect, and will ensure his having a long good reign. Then his sons will follow him upon the throne. One of the great kings of Israel, the first good king of Israel, was David.

David in the Psalms gives us the profile of the blessed man. He says the blessed man, the man who's blessed by God, is not blessed by coincidence or by accident. His blessings are a banquet of consequences.

He's blessed because he's a believing man, and he's blessed because he believes the Word of God. Now he doesn't just believe the Word of God, he loves the Word of God. He delights in the Word of God.

He meditates upon it day and night, and because of this he's like a tree with its roots down into watery soil, and God blesses him. Now where did David get that insight? I believe David was the blessed man himself. I believe he loved the Word of God.

He meditated upon it day and night, and he did this because Moses made it a law that when they had a king, the king should himself with his own hand copy the first five books of the Bible, and then just live with the first five books of the Bible, meditate upon them day and night. Wouldn't that be a wonderful law to have in the United States of America? Whenever the President is inaugurated, the first thing he would do is spend a couple of weeks at Camp David just copying Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy in his own hand, and then wouldn't it be something if we said two hours every morning, Mr. President, the first two hours of the day, you just meditate upon that Word. Just regularly read that Word of God.

Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing to require of a president or of a king or a prime minister? Well, Moses made that a prescription for the king that he knew they were going to have. Now there's a strong sermon in Deuteronomy chapter 18 against the occult. God is not in favor of things like the fortune-teller or the medium.

It says here in this sermon, and all of this is from the Living Bible paraphrase, no Israeli may practice black magic or call upon evil spirits for aid or be a fortune-teller or a serpent charmer, medium or wizard, or call forth the spirits of the dead. Anyone doing these things is an object of horror and disgust to the Lord. It is because the nations do these things that the Lord your God will displace them.

Now the nations you replace do all these things, but the Lord your God will not permit you to do these things. Someone has said there are more things between heaven and earth than men have ever dreamed. Now notice the scripture does not say there's no reality in these things.

It's not poo-pooing these things, it's not saying there's nothing to it, it's all quackery. It says don't you have anything to do with that. I believe the primary reason why God so strongly forbids this is because it all has a source and the source isn't God.

And if the source isn't God then what is that source? A lot of people are so anxious to see charisma or some kind of a spiritual manifestation they think that any psychic phenomena is the Holy Spirit. Anything spiritual is the Holy Spirit. How naive.

The scriptures tell us in so many places try the spirits to see whether they're of God. What is the source of these spirits? The Bible teaches there is a spiritual dimension and it's plus or it's minus. There is a spiritual dimension that's of God, it's sources in God and it's all coming from God.

It's the way God works and expresses himself. That's the Holy Spirit and that's the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, but there are spirits in the spiritual dimension that are not of God. And when you're doing this fortune-telling and this spiritism and when you're a wizard and all these other things you're dealing with the spirits that are not of God.

That's why it is so strongly forbidden for the people of God. Now there's also a great sermon in the book of Deuteronomy and this is in chapter 18 on the Messianic prophet. This was one of the great prophecies of Moses.

He said one day a prophet's going to come into the world. He said when you were at Mount Sinai and God handed the law down, you said to him through me, you said, oh we don't want God to speak with us. We can't stand to hear the voice of God.

It's so awesome. We can't deal directly with God like that. Well he says God heard your prayer.

He heard your petition and so he's going to become a man. He's going to send this special prophet into the world to whom he will speak to you. This is obviously a Messianic prophecy and it was an answer to their prayer request at the bottom of Mount Sinai.

We can't speak directly to God. God gave them a written word but God wanted to communicate with them beyond that written word and in his mercy and love for them he did it through a prophet and that prophet was the Messiah who was prophet, priest, and king. Notice when John the Baptist was examined by the religious leaders they asked him, are you that prophet? And they all knew what that meant.

That prophet Moses was talking about. Who was that? Well that's the Messiah of course. There are some tremendous sermons in chapter 19 on capital punishment.

I don't know how you feel about capital punishment. In the book of Deuteronomy the focus is not upon the criminal and what a pity it is that we would actually put some criminal to death who's killed a half a dozen people. The focus of Deuteronomy, notice, is upon the victims of that criminal.

We have such focus today upon capital punishment. We'll see a television play or a movie dramatizing all the gruesome details of an execution when capital punishment is applied. How terrible that we took the life of this man who may have killed six people.

There's never any focus, we don't see plays that dramatize in great detail the cruel murder of these six people that he killed or you how awful it was that their lives were taken. This criminal has rights, millions of dollars will be spent on his trials and he'll become a world figure practically because his life's going to be taken and there isn't that focus upon what about the victims of this man. I believe in the scripture you will see capital punishment taught and the purpose of capital punishment is that evil might be cleansed from Israel.

Capital punishment is intended to be a deterrent and that's why God, I believe, instituted it. Many people say it's cruel and inhumane but I think the difference between what people are saying today and what the scripture says is that the crime perhaps of the criminal is where the cruelty and the inhumane factor is found. The focus then of course is upon the victim and not upon the criminal.

There's also a great sermon on faith in chapter 20 this is where Moses says now when you get over there and you're going up against armies greater than you remember your only hope is that God is with you so faith is the name of the game when you attack those armies greater than you. Now just to demonstrate the fact that you believe that when you're marching off to battle against an army far superior to yours you should have your priest and your officers get up and say any of you people afraid? Well go home we don't need you. Any of you people just planted a vineyard? Well you might get killed in this battle and someone else will eat the fruit of it.

Anybody just gotten engaged? Well if you got killed in this battle somebody else would marry your fiancée. And if you build a home and you haven't lived in it yet for any of these reasons go home we don't need you. Remember Gideon implemented that when he was going up against the Midianites.

He had 32,000 people going up against hundreds of thousands and God reminded him of this prophecy and preachment of Moses and he said Gideon get up and tell these people any of you people afraid go home and so Gideon did and 22,000 went home. He only had 10 left and God said goodness Gideon you've got too many people. You got 10,000 people why if you win this war you'll think it's because you had 10,000 people.

You've got to sift them. So take them down here to the water and I'll show you how to sift them. He says those that go through the water lapping as they go tell them to stand on the far side and those that lie down to drink tell them to stay here you don't need them 9,700 laid down to drink.

God said send them home all you need is 300 that's less than 1% of what he started out with. Now the thinking there was this it wasn't how many soldiers they had it wasn't their skill or their talent as warriors it was the fact that God was with them and God could be with 300 just as well as he could be with 32,000 just to make sure they believed that that their only hope was the fact that God was with them. God instituted through Moses this tremendous challenge.

David believed this all these men of God believe this David said the battle is the Lord's. I wonder what we really mean when we put on our coins and currency in God we trust. One day some ministers were having lunch on a big military base where they had the biggest and best jet planes and they showed us what these planes would do and something of their fire power and an old Presbyterian minister nudged me while we were looking at one of these superpower plants and he said in God we trust.

Is that really what we mean? Do we really trust in God? What do we trust in our missiles in our firepower? That's the issue in that great sermon in chapter 20. There are exhortations on the wars of extermination we'll say more about those when we come to Joshua. They're a theological problem to many people but really if you're going to have a war at all it seems to me the only kind of war that is right is a war of extermination.

General MacArthur said the carnage and suffering of war is so terrible the only way you can justify war is to bring it to a swift and victorious decisive conclusion. I think the agony of our Korean War and our struggle in Indochina was the fact that these were awful wars and there was all the carnage and hell of war but we never even intended to win. This is what is disillusioned so many of the Vietnam veterans that are walking around today.

It was a war we never intended to win. That's the worst kind of war. So as you look at these wars ordered by God think about this.

If God ordered a war would he order a war of extermination? He obviously does in Deuteronomy. It's because they don't obey God in the book of Joshua and exterminate all those people that they are themselves conquered by those people seven times in the next book in the Bible which is the book of Judges. So this is a factor a big sermon here on the wars of extermination.

There is a sermon on the kinsman redeemer. We have met the word grace in the book of Deuteronomy. We also meet this beautiful word in Deuteronomy, redemption.

This law of the kinsman redeemer in Deuteronomy 25 is a beautiful picture of our Savior Jesus Christ. Remember we said the Bible is all about Jesus Christ. The Bible is not a textbook on science or a history of civilization.

It's a history of redemption and the Redeemer for whom that redemption came. Now what is redemption and what was this Redeemer when he came? Well the first time you run into the concept of Redeemer or redemption it's a domestic law. It's perhaps a business law in Leviticus and a domestic law in Deuteronomy.

But if you understand these legal terms that are called redemption then you can understand the spiritual or theological concept of redemption when you come to that. This little passage in chapter 25 is a tremendous backdrop for the book of Ruth and the whole concept of redemption in the Bible. You'll also find at the end of the book of Deuteronomy, just as at the end of Leviticus and at the end of Joshua, a tremendous exhortation on obedience to the Word of God.

This perhaps again is the definitive emphasis of Deuteronomy. And this is the way the book concludes. This is Moses at his best.

I believe this is some of the greatest preaching the world has ever heard in these last chapters of Deuteronomy where Moses promises the blessing of God upon them if they obey the Word of God and the curses of God upon them if they do not obey the Word of God. He says, I have set before you a choice, life or death. Oh that you would choose life, he says.

And that's a wonderful way I think for us to end our survey of the book of Deuteronomy.

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