

Text: Dt 17-18-20

Today we have our annual Bible Reading sermon. I have Bible reading schedules available for you on the hallway table:

5x5x5: a beginner's level NT in a year schedule

Book at a Time: a whole Bible reading schedule reading through one book at a time.

Discipleship Journal Bible Reading Plan: a whole Bible reading schedule with simultaneous Old and New Testament readings each day

Chronological Bible Reading schedule: our own schedule, in its latest version (new and improved!)

- I can print more if we run out, I have the files on the computer here and can print them right away if you ask. (except chronological)
- In addition, you can find others available on the internet, or some Bible apps will give you their own schedule, or allow you to customize your own

Our message today comes from Deuteronomy 17. Last year I gave a message from Exodus 24, the first mention of reading in the Bible. This is the second mention.

The passage is somewhat well known. It instructs the kings of Israel to have their own copy of "this law" and to read it daily. We'll find out what that means in just a moment.

Read Dt 17.18-20

The passage is at the end of a set of instructions about kings. When Moses gave it, Israel had no king. There would be no king from the time Moses spoke these words until King Saul, a time-lapse of around 400 years.

God wanted Israel's kings to be different than the nation's kings. The kings of Israel ruled as God's representative. They were bound by laws, not their own will. They didn't have absolute power.

And especially, they needed to keep their minds filled with God's words. That's where our instruction today comes in.

Proposition: If God intended OT kings to read the word daily, he surely intends NT king-priests to read the word daily.

I. Spiritual formation of a king of Israel

A. The limits of the king (Dt 17.14-17)

1. God anticipates Israel's desire (14, cf. 1 Sa 8.5)

^{1 Sa 8.5} and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations."

2. Must be the man God chooses (15a)

3. Must be a man of Israel; not a foreigner (15b)

4. Must not multiply horses (16a)

5. Must not return to Egypt (16b)

6. Must not multiply wives (17a)

7. Must not multiply wealth (17b)

Key distinguishing factor: ways the king of Israel was NOT "like all the nations who are around me"

"While permission is given to the chosen people to be like the other nations in this respect, still their king is not to be like other kings."¹

B. The "education" of the king

1. Creating a personal copy of "this law" (18)

a. The word for "write" doesn't necessarily mean he must copy it himself

b. The king's copy of "this law" must be a replica of the copy "in the presence of the Levitical priests"

1) Authenticity

2) Continuity: the same law from generation to generation

Merrill says that the protocol of the ancient Near East required a transfer of documents from one ruler to the next in succession.

¹ Wilhelm Julius Schroeder, "Deuteronomy," in *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, trans. A. Gosman, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), 146.

c. The meaning of “this law”

- 1) Could refer to the very short section beginning in v. 14 through 20 (the law of the king)
- 2) Some think it the whole Torah (minority)
- 3) Most likely “this law” = Deuteronomy

Constable provides these reference to “this law” in Deuteronomy: 1:5; 4:44; 27:3, 8, 26; 29:21, 29; 30:10

“The king’s copy was to be made from the ‘official’ version, that retained by the priests, presumably in or near the ark of the covenant (cf. Deut 31:9, 25–26).

This is most likely the ‘book of the law’ found by Josiah’s priests and scribes in the days of Judah’s reformation (cf. 2 Kgs 22:8–13). By then, however (622 b.c.), the king’s own copy had long since been repressed or destroyed, and the monarchy had functioned without its God-given guidelines.”²

2. Repeated reading of “this law” (19)

a. “It shall be with him”

- 1) Certain items are used daily
- 2) Personal Bible – always know where it is
- 3) Requires some care: protective covers, etc.

b. “he shall read it” ... daily

1) The king’s Bible reading plan

I thought of creating a reading plan that took you through the rest of the Bible but had a daily Deuteronomy reading

- 34 chapters
- Could do bit more than a chapter a day and read it twelve times
- Call it “The King’s Diet”

² Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, v. 4 (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 266.

- 2) In our study of Deuteronomy, we saw some striking passages and many repetitive passages
 - a) What would their effect be if read repeatedly?
 - b) What would their effect be if read throughout life?
 - c) What kind of king would Israel have? (next phrase answers)

c. "that he might learn..."

- 1) To fear the Lord: the beginning of Wisdom
- 2) To keep the law and statutes and do them

The average Israelite would want just such a king – wise, ruling according to God’s mind, knowledgeable of God’s judgements.

“This book was to be the king’s *vade mecum*, his life-long companion and source of wisdom and strength. By reading and learning he would express true reverence for his God.”³

vade mecum = “go with me” — is your Bible your *vade mecum*?

3. Purpose of education in “this law” (20)

a. Humility vis a vis his countrymen

- 1) Some ancient kings proclaimed themselves as “gods” – certainly as a “better sort of man”
- 2) Israel’s king was a chosen man among men
 - a) A *primus inter pares* – first among equals
 - b) A man under the law like other men
 - c) The Bible has no concept of “the divine right of kings” (King James notwithstanding)

³ Peter C. Craigie, ed., *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 257.

b. Obedience to God's commandments

- 1) God's law is the king's law
- 2) No deviation

c. Endurance of his dynasty

- 1) This is more a result than a purpose
- 2) It is a reward for faithfulness
- 3) Only David of all Israel's kings fulfilled this law to any great extent

II. Spiritual mind of David

"David's integrity is perhaps best summarized in the song recorded at the end of his life."⁴ (2 Sam 22.2=51, cf. Ps 18 — virtually identical)

A. Quick summary of the Psalm

1. The Lord is my rock on whom I call (2-7a)
2. The Lord delivered me with his great power (7b-20)
3. The Lord rewarded my faithfulness (21-25)
4. The Lord evaluates men (26-30)
5. The Lord is a man's pure rock (31-33)
6. The Lord strengthens a man's hand (34-46)
7. The Lord: Blessed be the Lord (47-51)

We will concentrate on what David says about his own faithfulness (21-25)

⁴ David M. Cook, "The King's Fear of the Lord as a Theme in the Books of Samuel," ed. Brian Tabb, *Themelios* 45, no. 3 (2020): 521.

B. David feared the Lord (2 Sam 22.21-25)

- ²¹ “The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me.
²² “For I have kept the ways of the Lord,
And have not acted wickedly against my God.
²³ “For all His ordinances were before me,
And as for His statutes, I did not depart from them.
²⁴ “I was also blameless toward Him,
And I kept myself from my iniquity.
²⁵ “Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my
righteousness,
According to my cleanness before His eyes.

1. Notice the inclusio in this section: “according to my righteousness ... according to my cleanness” (21, 25)
2. Notice the parallel testimonies of David’s deeds
 - a. I kept the ways of the Lord (22)
 - b. I was also blameless toward Him (24)
3. Notice the central key: “For all His ordinances were before me” (23)
 - a. We have no record of David and Deuteronomy as such
 - b. Yet when we read David’s psalms, we find a man deeply acquainted with “this law”
 - c. When we observe David’s life, we find a man highly obedient to “this law” (even when he fails)
 - 1) When David fails, he is open to rebuke (Saul is hardened against rebuke)
 - 2) When David is rebuked, he confesses (Saul excuses)
 - d. Other prophets mark David as the standard for later kings
 - 1) Evaluation of Abijam

^{1 Ki 15.3} He walked in all the sins of his father which he had committed before him; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, like the heart of his father David.

2) Compare Jehu and the standard of Jeroboam

2 Ki 10.29 However, *as for* the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin, from these Jehu did not depart, *even* the golden calves that *were* at Bethel and that *were* at Dan.

III. Our spiritual minds

A. The need for spiritual minds

1. We are not kings
2. We are Christians (priest-kings)
 - a. We have responsibilities in our homes
 - b. We have responsibilities in our church
 - c. We have responsibilities as citizens: city, province, nation

B. We have no other source of wisdom

1. The world can provide no wisdom but its own cunning
 - a. The world knows how to “go along to get along”
 - b. The world knows how to manipulate and get what it wants
 - c. The world knows how to “crowd source” ideas:
 - 1) “Everyone is doing it”
 - 2) “We’re on the right side of history”
 - 3) “go along with the crowd”

I did a search on this phrase and found two articles from Psychology Today: “Five ways to fit in with just about any crowd” and “Six ways to stand out from the crowd”

2. The word of God is the wisdom of God
 - a. We go back to this well day by day
 - b. We drink deep, we think much

c. We conform our minds to His mind and His will

Rm 12.1-2 ¶ Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship.* ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- 1) The renewed mind is the goal of spiritual life
- 2) The renewed mind proves (or demonstrates) the will of God

Conclusion:

Proposition: If God intended OT kings to read the word daily, he surely intends NT king-priests to read the word daily.

“The role of the *book* in the life of the king is of importance for understanding the full dimensions of Israel’s faith. In the early part of Moses’ address, he recalled for his audience the events of past history; on the basis of the experience of God in history (one form of revelation), the Israelites drew strength for the future. But the revelation of the word of God, written down for successive generations, was also a source of strength. Both the acts of God and the words of God were recorded; but while the former gave evidence of the living reality of their God, it was the latter that provided in detail the guidance and wisdom for daily living, in the first place for the king.”⁵

We are of the generations that must read *about* the Red Sea; God doesn’t give us the Red Sea experience. Instead, God gives us the Red Sea word (and many other words) to learn and grow by.

⁵ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 257.