



RIGHTEOUSNESS ON REVIEW

Deuteronomy 16:18–26:19

God's commands are not simply legal requirements; they reveal God's righteous character. So, even laws specifically for Old Testament Israel are of great value to us today. As we study His law, we grow in knowledge and appreciation of God, and our worship of Him is enhanced.

Let me tell you again to fasten your seatbelts as we pick up speed on our Wisdom Journey and move through chapter 16 and all the way through chapter 26 of the book of Deuteronomy. The theme throughout these chapters is the righteousness of God.

What does that mean? Well, God's righteousness is His eternal perfection on display. It means His words and actions are always right. Even when we can't understand it, we can trust the fact that whatever God does and says is always right. We are going to focus on God's righteousness and how it impacts everything in life.

First, I want to point out *the Lord's righteousness and Israel's leaders*. If Israel is going to be a nation that

represents their righteous God, they will need righteous leaders.

Beginning in Deuteronomy 16, Moses mentions the first category of leaders who need to do what's right. God says through Moses:

“You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns . . . they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert justice . . . show partiality [or] accept a bribe . . . Justice, and only justice, you shall follow.” (verses 18-20)



Iron Age gate at Bethsaida

I was invited to deliver a charge to the newly elected chief justice of the supreme court here in my home state. He chose as his theme verse a text regarding Israel's judges being required to render just verdicts and to refuse to be bought with bribes. Frankly, I don't think any nation can pursue righteousness if the judges are corrupt.



A second category of leaders is mentioned here in chapter 17 as Moses peers into the future. He says in verses 14-15:

“When you come to the land that the LORD your God is giving you ... and then say, ‘I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,’ you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose.”

The Lord wants Israel to anticipate and desire a king who will be righteous and stand for justice, one chosen by the Lord.

Now in chapter 18, Moses points to the third category of leaders who need to do what’s right—or righteous. Verse 1 makes special mention of “the Levitical priests [and] all the tribe of Levi.” Verse 5 reminds Israel that the Lord chose these men “to stand and minister in the name of the LORD.”

If anybody needs to do what’s right, it’s the spiritual leaders. That was true then, and it’s certainly true today.

And the Lord reminds Israel here to help these godly leaders by supporting them faithfully with their offerings. In other words, He’s saying, “Take care of them, as they spiritually care for you.”

Before introducing the next category of leaders, Moses delivers a strong warning against the wicked practices of the people living in the land Israel will inherit. Here in chapter 18 these pagan nations are condemned for their occultic practices—contacting the dead, fortune-telling, and worshiping false gods.

Part of God’s solution, we see here in verse 15 and through the rest of chapter 18, is the ministry of true prophets. And a true prophet, verse 18 tells us, speaks the word of God.

And by the way, Moses gives the nation a sure-fire test to discover the false prophet. He says in verse 22

that one who predicts things that do *not* come to pass is not speaking for the Lord; he is a false prophet.

All of this points ahead to a Prophet who will arise in Israel, and He will speak the word of God, for He is the Logos, the Word of God incarnate. Moses himself is prophesying here in chapter 18 of the coming Messiah and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God come down from heaven.

Now in chapter 19, we turn to *the Lord’s righteousness and Israel’s laws*. While Israel’s leaders are to model God’s righteousness in their lives, the Lord also communicates His righteousness through clearly written laws.

In chapters 19 through 25, Moses repeats many of the laws we’ve already seen recorded in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. He repeats the law regarding the cities of refuge in chapter 19; and in chapter 20 he gives instructions to the nation that relate to conquest.

Various laws are laid out in the following chapters governing such things as inheritance rights, sexual boundaries, divorce, ritual purity, and a host of interpersonal relationships. It’s obvious that this new generation of Israelites need to be reacquainted with the law and committed to it if they are to prosper and enjoy peace in the promised land.

All of these laws defined the boundaries of God’s righteousness, much like a fence around your backyard defines where your kids can play. It protects them, shields them, and provides guidance for where they can run and where they can’t. Likewise, the love of God produces the law of God in order to protect and guide His people.

So far, in this rapid review, we have seen the Lord’s righteousness in relation to Israel’s leaders: their judges and priests. We have also noted the Lord’s righteousness in relation to God’s laws for His people. These laws revealed God’s righteous standards—how a person who was righteous, or right with God, was to live.

Now finally, let me show you *the Lord’s righteousness and Israel’s worship*. That’s the subject of chapter 26.



Once again, Moses peers into the future to a point in time when Israel is finally able to harvest a bumper crop there in the promised land. Moses charges them to bring an offering of that bumper crop and present it to the priest and, according to verse 3, say, “I declare . . . that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.”

Each Israelite worshiper is to rehearse the Lord’s faithfulness to the nation and then conclude by saying, “And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me” (verse 10). This offering was nothing less than a declaration of God’s faithfulness. And the one who is faithful to Israel is the same one who is righteous and calls Israel to live righteously—that is, right with God.

Listen beloved, this principle is true to this very day; those who have hearts that are righteous—those who are right with God—are going to love Him and worship Him with joy.

What we see in these chapters is exactly what Moses wanted for Israel back in Deuteronomy chapter 4 and verse 6 when he said:

Those who have hearts that are righteous—those who are right with God—are going to love Him and worship Him with joy.

“Keep [God’s laws] and do them, for that will be your wisdom and

your understanding in the sight of the [nations], who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”

Frankly, every believer wants the same thing for his nation and certainly for his own family and his own personal life.

Can you hear the missionary emphasis in this lifestyle here? The pagan world around you is watching you. And when they see you walking in righteousness with God, they’re going to think to themselves, *That nation, that family, that man or woman or young person—look at them. They belong to a wise God, and they are like Him; they’re living their lives with wisdom and understanding.*

Oh, I hope they say that about you and me today.

What has God provided you with today to test those who claim to speak for the Lord? What does Acts 17:11 teach you about how to test the spiritual claims of others? What key role has God given to Church Elders according to Acts 20:28-31?

Why do we sometimes let the world define how much we can publicly express our love for God? How do the people most often connecting with your life know you are a committed believer? Why does God tie our obedience and the world’s knowledge of Him so tightly together (John 17:23)?

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