

January 17, 2021

Offering First Fruits

Deuteronomy 26

BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

Jan 10	Genesis 30-31	Jan 14	Genesis 41-42
Jan 11	Genesis 32-34	Jan 15	Genesis 43-45
Jan 12	Genesis 35-37	Jan 16	Genesis 46-47
Jan 13	Genesis 38-40	Jan 17	Genesis 48-50

Lesson Idea: We should give the first of our time, talents, and possessions to the Lord because every good thing we have is because of the love, power and provision of our Lord.

Background: J.G. McConville in the *New Bible Commentary* tells how Deuteronomy 26 serves as the conclusion of the law portion of Deuteronomy which began in chapter 5:

Deut. 26:1-15 Firstfruits and third-year tithe. We have seen that the body of laws which began at ch. 12 has been drawing to a close with the command to remove the memory of Amalek (25:17-19). It is now formally rounded off in this chapter with instructions about two ceremonies. These are hardly new material, but are placed here for a particular reason.

The first ceremony is that of firstfruits, or the offering of the first ripe produce in early summer. This would normally happen at the Feast of Weeks (Lv 23:15, 20; Nu. 28:26). Deuteronomy's law about the Feast of Weeks (16:9-12) did not expressly mention the firstfruits, no doubt because this passage was being deliberately kept for its present place in the book.

The reason for keeping it until now is that the offering of the firstfruits had special significance the first time that it was done in the new land. The present law is thinking primarily of that very first offering of the fruits of harvest which was made by the people which God had taken from slavery, and then from desert wandering, to being a people with a land of its own. While Israel was to bring its firstfruits regularly throughout its history, there is something specially moving about this ceremony (a little like the first American Thanksgiving) as a token of God's keeping of his promises. (*New Bible Commentary*)

Deut. 26:1-15 Offering First Fruits as a Tithe

1 "Then it shall be, when you enter the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you take possession of it and live in it, 2 that you shall take some of

the first of all the produce of the ground which you bring in from your land that the LORD your God gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name. 3 And you shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, 'I declare today to the LORD my God that I have entered the land which the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.' 4 Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it before the altar of the LORD your God. 5 And you shall respond and say before the LORD your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and resided there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty, and populous nation. 6 And the Egyptians treated us badly and oppressed us, and imposed hard labor on us. 7 Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our wretched condition, our trouble, and our oppression; 8 and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, an outstretched arm, and with great terror, and with signs and wonders; 9 and He has brought us to this place, and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 And now behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which You, LORD have given me.' Then you shall set it before the LORD your God, and worship before the LORD your God; 11 and you, the Levite, and the stranger who is among you shall rejoice in all the good which the LORD your God has given you and your household.

12 "When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan, and to the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied. 13 And you shall say before the LORD your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion from my house, and have also given it to the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, in accordance with all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not violated or forgotten any of Your commandments. 14 I have not eaten of it while mourning, nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean, nor offered any of it to the dead. I have listened to the voice of the LORD my God; I have acted in accordance with everything that You have commanded me. 15 Look down from Your holy dwelling place, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel, and the ground which You have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey just as You swore to our fathers.'

NOTES:

As we have seen throughout the book of Deuteronomy, Moses assumes the conquest of the land as if it had already happened. In his mind, God's promise to take them into the land made it factual. The instructions in this book would be fulfilled when God fulfilled His promise of victory.

Verse 2 teaches an important principle about our offerings—God deserves the “**firstfruits**.” He told them to take the first of the crops to the place of worship and offer them there. He calls the place of worship “**the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name**.” In the New Testament, those kinds of designations apply to the places where Christians unite together, because we are called together in the Name of Christ Jesus to give glory to God in all that we say and do (see Colossians 3:17).

Verses 3-10 directed what the person should say when they brought their offering to the priest. They were to recite the history of God’s deliverance of His people out of the slavery of Egypt and into the Promised Land. In doing so, they would give testimony both of the power of God and that the offerings were all due to His provision. Notice how many verbs are associated with the activity of God in their deliverance. The Lord “**heard... and saw... and brought... and has given**.” J.A. Thompson in the *Tyndale Commentary* notes that “the deliverance wrought by Yahweh is often described in the vigorous terms used in this verse, *with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders* [v 8]. The expression *great terror* might be translated ‘*awesome power*’ (4:34; 6:22; 7:8. Cf. Exod. 6:6; 7:3–5, etc.).

When we realize all of the gracious activity of God in our lives, it should not be hard for us to proclaim the same thing they were supposed to say: “*And now behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which You, LORD have given me*” (v 10). As we worship the Lord through song, Scripture, prayer, and testimony, may we always remember that every good thing about our lives has come because of the power and provision of God. As we do, it becomes a time for all of us to **rejoice** together (see v 11). James 1:17-18 reminds us:

17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. 18 In the exercise of His will He gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

This offering of the tithes and firstfruits was also mentioned in Deuteronomy 14:22-29, of which McConville explains:

14:22-29 The tithe. The Israelite tithe was a dedication of the produce of the land. In an agricultural society crops were the immediate token of God’s goodness, and they were thus an inevitable part of worship. It is

not easy to say how much of an Israelite’s wealth the tithe actually amounted to (even though it means lit. ‘a tenth’); it was, moreover, only one among a number of offerings which Israelites were expected to bring. An understanding of it is further complicated by the different laws about it in the Pentateuch. In Nu. 18:21-29 it appears as an offering for the benefit of the Levites (who needed such offerings to live). Here, it is a feast in which the offerers and their households participate, though the Levites are not forgotten (27).

A full picture may be obtained by taking the different laws together. The family feast at the place of worship would have left large amounts over for the Levites’ dues. The tithe of the third year, however (28-29), seems to have been put to special use, being collected in the towns rather than taken to the place of worship, and used for the disadvantaged (as well as the Levites, who lived in all parts of the land; Nu. 35:1-8).

The tithe as presented here is typical of Deuteronomy, however. It is celebrated by all Israel at the central place of worship. It is marked by joy in worship of the one God, and symbolizes the oneness of the people by stressing the fact that all share in it. And it shows a people that were at the same time obedient (in bringing its tithes) and blessed with abundance of the land (in the feast which the offering itself affords them). (*New Bible Commentary*)

Deuteronomy 14 and 26:12-15 also show us an interesting practice that God prescribed. Every third year, the tithes were not taken to the place of worship. Instead, the tithes would be gathered locally to be distributed to the Levites, strangers, orphans, and widows. God designed a way to provide for those without incomes or who had undergone great loss. They would do so collectively by each landowner providing a tenth of what God had blessed him with to care for the poor and needy. Of course, there were other offerings that were given throughout the year according to the Law; but this tithe would be dedicated for special benevolent purposes.

Thompson notes concerning verse 13:

13. Since the distribution was not made before Yahweh, i.e. as a rite performed at the central sanctuary (cf. 12:7, 12, 18; 14:23, 26; 15:20; 16:11, 16), the man of Israel was required to go to the central sanctuary to declare that he had fulfilled all the requirements of the law. The time at which this was done is not given here or anywhere else in the Old Testament, although it may have been at the feast of booths. The man declared that he had removed the *sacred portion* (*qōdeš*, ‘*holy thing*’)

from his house. The verb *remove* (*bi-ēr*) is used elsewhere for the total removal of something evil from Israel (13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 24:7, etc.). The connotation in the present context would seem to be that the man confessed that he had utterly and completely removed the tithe from his house and given it to Yahweh for the relief of the needy. The confession goes on, *I have not transgressed any of thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them.* (Tyndale)

God cares for the weak and struggling; and He calls for His people to have the same type of compassion. Have you thought about how you can help in God's benevolent work? Are there hurting people around you that you can minister to? Can you volunteer to help in our food pantry or produce distributions? Can you be a listening ear to one of our widows? Can you volunteer time to a homeless ministry like Our Calling? Have you given to our Lottie Moon Christmas Offering to help support our missionaries who minister in Jesus' name all over the world? What can you give to help care for the less fortunate today?

Deut. 26:16-19 Offering Faithfulness and a Testimony

16 *"This day the LORD your God commands you to perform these statutes and ordinances. Therefore you shall be careful to perform them with all your heart and with all your soul.*
17 *Today you have declared the LORD to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His ordinances, and listen to His voice.*
18 *And the LORD has today declared you to be His people, His personal possession, just as He promised you, and that you are to keep all His commandments;*
19 *and that He will put you high above all the nations which He has made, for glory, fame, and honor; and that you shall be a consecrated people to the LORD your God, just as He has spoken."*

NOTES:

Thompson explains that the form of verses 16-19...
 ...looks like a contract in which the two parties bind themselves by means of a solemn declaration. Moses acts as a covenant mediator between Israel, who declares that she will be Yahweh's people, and Yahweh, who declares that he will be Israel's God (cf. Exod. 6:7; Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:28). In fact the wording of the pericope makes it clear that both declarations refer to the obligations which must be fulfilled by Israel alone. Yahweh has no obligations to keep, but in grace he has blessings to bestow. (Tyndale)

More than anything, this has been the constant demand of Deuteronomy: *"be careful to perform all the*

statutes and ordinances of the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul." If your testimony is that the Lord is your God, then *"walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His ordinances, and listen to His voice."* Even the New Testament emphasizes that the outward sign of our love for the Lord is obedience. In John 14:5, Jesus says: *"If you love Me, keep My commands."*

The beautiful promise of this passage, though, is found in verses 18-19. God promises to claim His people as *"His personal possession."* That means He will cherish them and protect them and even honor them. Verse 19 says that He placed His people *"above all the nations He has made, for glory, fame, and honor."* When He exalted them, it was for the purpose that they would *"be a consecrated people to the LORD your God."*

God never blesses us just for our sake. His blessings always come with a responsibility to be a "consecrated" person unto Him. Being consecrated means being "set apart" for His use and His ownership. That is the root meaning of holiness. One could say that we are only "holy" when we are "wholly" dedicated to Him. Thompson helps to explain the term:

The term *holy* (*qādōš*), often applied to Israel in the Old Testament (7:6; 14:2, 21; 28:9; Exod. 19:5, 6, etc.), denotes something that is set apart completely for the sole use and enjoyment of its possessor. This character was conferred by Yahweh on Israel and was not something that Israel could achieve herself. In practice the adjective has the double connotation of something set apart by God and something which Israel could become by separating herself from all evil. (Tyndale)

Several times in both the Old and New Testaments we are called to *be holy because our God is holy* (Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:8; 1 Peter 1:15-16). In fact, Deuteronomy 23:14 instructed them to keep their camps clean of filth: *"Since the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to defeat your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy; and He must not see anything indecent among you or He will turn away from you."*

How consecrated is your life? Do you keep "your camp" (the places where you dwell) holy? Is there anything indecent in your life that you need to confess to the Lord and repent of today? How actively do you seek to know the Lord's commands from the Word of God and carefully *"perform them with all your heart and with all your soul"* (v 16)? Does your testimony declare the greatness of the God who rescued you?

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