

Tuesday, March 14, 2017 - Day 72 – Deuteronomy 22-24, Psalm 60, Luke 18

By now the novelty of reading the Bible in a year is over. Those who are still reading daily have put in enough time for this spiritual discipline to have it become a healthy habit. For me, the Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy 40 days is where I lost interest and so that is why I want to reflect on Deuteronomy. It would be easy to skim over this portion, recognizing that these laws have very little to do with us in our daily lives. We won't run across escaped slaves, most of us have not worked in a field unless we were paying for some sort of novelty experience, we don't need to worry about temple prostitutes, and quite frankly, we don't even want to think about some of the sexual situations that this section addresses. Couple the section's lack of real connection with a blatant disregard for anything other than a perfect male Israelite, and it's hard to see the sacredness in this portion of the scripture.

But when reading this particular text, it's also important to remember—so that we can frame the scripture in our minds properly—that what we are reading are codes of law written by a religious, albeit patriarchal society. We are reading laws written in light of a common history which has a story of persecution and liberation that the writers want to remember through their code of laws. I suspect, even though our story is somewhat different, that if we were to sit down and read the law books of our own country we would find a similar disconnect.

And yet, through it all, even with its sexism and disconnects, what we can see developing in this scripture is a culture proclaiming its values through its laws. The Ten Commandments, with its four ways of loving and showing devotion to God and its six ways of loving and showing devotion to neighbor, are being expanded and teased out. At the heart of these three chapters of Deuteronomy we can see Israel struggling with what it means to be “a light to enlighten the nations” (Is.49:6). It's a culture whose people want to stress a corporate memory of where they came from, their story of salvation and the implications for their life that this common heritage has. Widows and orphans, societies most vulnerable, are the stated responsibility of this culture. Justice and fairness for all, notwithstanding the culture's blind spot for women's rights, is also an objective of these laws. Social order as seen through a proper relationship with God and neighbor are the focus.

I wonder if we could use this section of Deuteronomy to begin to envision what it would look like for us to take part in being a “light to enlighten the nations”? What would our governing factors be? How would we take care of the “widows and orphans” of our society and what laws would we write down? What ethical laws would we care to write about our business endeavors? What would our moral code be? Would we just say to each his own, because we don't talk about—much less make laws about—what goes on in the bedroom or what happens to our bodies? These questions and many more could be pondered as the people of God try to envision what it means to be that “City on the Hill” (Mt. 5:14).

By The Rev. Joseph Smith