

# OpenTheo

## May 10th: Deuteronomy 11 & Luke 6:39—7:10

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A land watered by rain. Testing teachers.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Deuteronomy 11 1. And what He did to you in the wilderness, until you came to this place? 2. And what He did to Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, son of Reuben? 3. How the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households, their tents, and every living thing that followed them, in the midst of all Israel? 4. For your eyes have seen all the great work of the LORD that He did. 5. You shall therefore keep the whole commandment that I command you, and you shall not be ashamed of it. 6. And what He did to you in the wilderness, until you came to this place? 7. And what He did to Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, son of Reuben? 8. How the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households, their tents, and every living thing that followed them, in the midst of all Israel? 9. For your eyes have seen all the great work of the LORD that He did.

10. You shall therefore keep the commandment that I command you today, that you may

be strong, and go in and take possession of the land that you are going over to possess, and that you may live long in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give to them and to their offspring, a land flowing with milk and honey. 11.

For the land that you are entering to take possession of it is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and irrigated it, like a garden of vegetables. 12. But the land that you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the LORD your God cares for.

The eyes of the LORD your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. 13. And if you will indeed obey my commandment that I command you today, to love the LORD your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil.

And He will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you shall eat and be full. Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them. Then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will yield no fruit, and you will perish quickly off the good land that the LORD has given you.

You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give to them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.

For if you will be careful to do all this commandment that I command you to do, loving the LORD your God, walking in all His ways, and holding fast to Him, then the LORD will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than you. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours. Your territory shall be from the wilderness to the Lebanon, and from the river, the river Euphrates, to the western sea.

No one shall be able to stand against you. The LORD your God will lay the fear of you and the dread of you on all the land that you shall tread, as He promised you. See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse.

The blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods

that you have not known. And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim, and the curse on Mount Ebal. Are they not beyond the Jordan, west of the road, toward the going down of the sun, in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, beside the oak of Moreh? For you are to cross over the Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

And when you possess it, and live in it, you shall be careful to do all the statutes and the rules that I am setting before you today. Deuteronomy chapter 11 is the final chapter in the exhortation of Moses. It leads into discussion of the commandments and rules in the chapters that follow.

And a lot of the teaching of this chapter concerns the land that they are about to enter into. They are called to love the LORD, and to keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always. This is how their future well-being as a nation in the land will be secured.

The people Moses is speaking to still remember the events of the plagues in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea. While many of the younger people in the nation will not have experienced the events of the Exodus first-hand, it is a living memory for the people as a whole. And it is in reflecting upon this memory that Israel will be best served in their calling to be faithful to the LORD going forward.

They remember the plagues in Egypt, they remember the crossing of the Red Sea and the judgment upon Pharaoh and his men there. They remember the judgments of the LORD upon the rebels in the wilderness, upon Dathan and Abiram and Korah. They know the power of the LORD's deliverance and judgment, and so they should live accordingly.

Their first-hand experience puts them in the best possible position to understand. Teaching and remembrance are so important for Israel because of the primacy of historical event as testimony to the LORD's character and power. And as they reflect upon these events and keep returning to these events, they will find that they are spurred to trust and to faithfulness.

When the Exodus generation passes, obedience will be much harder because there will not be that immediate sense of this is who the LORD is, this is what he has done. A people will arise who forget the LORD their God. They have not had that first-hand experience.

And so it is imperative that they remember and that they teach their children after them. Among other things that Israel should learn from the lessons of the destruction of the Egyptians at the Red Sea and of the swallowing of Dathan and Abiram in the wilderness is the LORD's power over sea and land, issues that Moses will reflect upon within this chapter. Within this chapter, Moses often returns to the same sort of charge.

Verse 1, You shall therefore love the LORD your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules and his commandments always. Verse 13, And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul. And in verse 22, For if you will be careful to do all this commandment that I command you to do, loving the LORD your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him.

To this point, Moses has spent a lot of time reflecting upon the lessons learned from past disobedience. He's also taught them that they don't enjoy their possession in the land as an entitlement or as a result of their own righteousness. So the question is how are they to live in it? For Moses, the answer to that question is loving obedience.

As they devote themselves to the LORD their God and obey God accordingly, they will find that they prosper within the land. Moses stresses that in the land they will have a much more obvious dependence upon the LORD as opposed to the life in Egypt. Egypt depends for its irrigation upon the Nile and a human irrigation system.

The promised land, by contrast, depends upon the rains and it can't be irrigated by the people themselves. Rather, they would have to look to the LORD for his provision of rain. And the LORD must tend to the land and they must depend upon him.

If he does not give the rain, the land will be parched. But if he does give the rain, the land will be fruitful like almost no other. The Feast of Tabernacles is associated with the provision of rain.

Coming before the early rains, Zechariah 14, verses 17-18 describes it in this way. Within the Feast of Booths, among other things, there was a water pouring ceremony, something that's mentioned in the background of John chapter 7. And this would involve pouring water on the altar, the water representing the rain and the altar representing the land of Israel. Rain is a symbol of divine blessing.

The water cycle establishes communion between the heavens and the earth. There was no rain in the original creation when it was first created. It seems to have been irrigated with a mist or a surge, maybe similar to the way that Egypt was irrigated, with a surge of water coming up.

Rain in Israel was more seasonal. It's very important that the rains come at the right times for the agriculture to work. Whereas most temperate countries have rains spread out over a long period of time, for Israel it's far more condensed.

It happens within about a 7 or 8 month period and there are about 40 to 60 days with rain. The first rains would occur in October to November. These would enable farmers to plough and sow as it would soften the soil, which would otherwise be parched and hard.

After this, the rains would increase during December to February, where most of the

rains fell. And then in April and May, just as the grain was reaching its full maturity, you'd have the later rains and it would enable the grain to reach its full height. The dependence upon the Lord for rains coming in their right times and in their proper measures was a very important spur for Israel.

Their dependence upon the rain forced them to look to the Lord, to be dependent upon Him as the giver of rain. In the story of the prophet Elijah, there is a drought declared upon the land, a judgement brought by the Lord upon an unfaithful people. The heavens, from which rain comes, are shut up, a natural symbol of the breaking of communion between God and His people.

As His people have not called to the heavens, the heavens are not open to them, and rain is not given. The description of Egypt as a vegetable garden here is an interesting one. It may make us think of the story of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings chapter 21.

There, King Ahab wants to take Naboth's vineyard and turn it into a vegetable garden. He's taking the symbol of Israel, a vineyard, and turning it into a symbol of Egypt. In verses 18 to 21, Moses returns to instructions from the beginning of his sermon in chapter 6. He's given this charge at the very beginning, but now it's obvious why this is so important, why remembrance is absolutely imperative.

And so he charges them once again to remember in these particular ways, these very physical ways, by binding things onto yourself. And also by constantly teaching your children and those who come after you. Observing the commandment would also lead to them being successful in the conquest and possession of the land.

Everywhere that they set foot would become theirs, as in the case of Abraham in Genesis chapter 13. The Lord would go before them and strike fear into the hearts of all of their enemies. And Moses juxtaposes blessing and curse.

Ultimately, what they have is a choice between life and death. They have a choice between the way of the Lord and the way of their own rebellion. All depends on whether they will love and obey the Lord, or whether they will reject and rebel against him.

When they enter into the land, they will have to perform a ceremony at two mountains facing each other near Shechem. This will be a very powerful and visual representation of the choice that faces them. The choice between life and death.

A choice that we find on many occasions in scripture. This juxtaposition of the way of foolishness and the way of wisdom. The juxtaposition of the way of obedience and the way of disobedience.

And then those things being connected with blessedness and judgement. With beatitudes and woes. This ceremony gets returned to in chapter 27 of this book.

In Joshua chapter 8 verses 30-35 the actual performance of the ceremony is described. A copy of the Law of Moses which he had written. A question to consider.

What are some of the other symbolic associations and connotations that rain has in scripture? Luke chapter 6 verse 39 to chapter 7 verse 10. A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye, when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite! First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like. He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock, and when a flood arose the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them, is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation.

When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great. After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him.

When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue. And Jesus went with them.

When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you, but say the word, and let my servant be healed. For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me.

And I say to one, Go, and he goes, and to another, Come, and he comes, and to my servant, Do this, and he does it. When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

The end of Luke chapter 6 continues Luke's version of the material that we find in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. There are a number of seemingly disparate sayings on the surface of things, which don't obviously seem to fit with the opening description of a parable, as it isn't what we would usually associate with that term. However, that term

can be used more broadly, and it can include under it proverbial sayings.

Part of our challenge will be to recognise the connection between these statements. In these verses, Jesus seems to be concerned to distinguish between different kinds of people. In verses 39-40, Jesus highlights the importance of discerning the difference between teachers.

In Matthew chapter 15 verse 14, Jesus' saying here about the blind leading the blind, is used in reference to the scribes and the Pharisees, in the context of the controversy concerning ritual handwashing. People who follow blind guides will come to ruin. Also, blindness in this sort of sense is contagious.

If you follow someone who is spiritually blind, that blindness will affect you. We must pay attention to the character of our teachers. Our teachers' characters will tend to be reproduced in us.

You can think about Jesus' teaching about the leaven of the scribes and the Pharisees. The way sourdough works is similar to the way that teaching works. Something of your teachers is placed within you and is a principle of growth and development for you.

And if you are not very careful in the teachers that you listen to, you will take on some very negative characteristics. From this, Jesus moves to the subject of hypocrisy in teaching. Jesus' teaching about teaching, here as elsewhere, is very shrewd.

He recognises the way in which teachers will often use their teaching as a way of getting power for themselves, as a way of actually avoiding addressing their own problems. Indeed, teaching others can be a means of deflecting attention from the issues within ourselves. We must put our own house in order first.

How do you know if someone is a good teacher? You test them by the fruit that they produce. This can be seen in their actions, it can be seen in their more general character, it can be seen in the sort of people that they create around them. If you want to know if the teaching of a church is good, pay attention to the people who have been there for several years.

See what character it has produced in them. In discerning whether someone is going to be a good leader of people, look at their relationships, look at their families, look at the people who have come under the realm of their influence. Are they thriving? Are they growing? Are they people who are maturing into good character? Or are they people who are stagnating, or perhaps growing in forms of wickedness? Are they marked by an unhealthy fear towards that teacher or authority figure? Or are they marked by joy in relationship to them? Are they liberated by that teacher? Or are they held in bondage by that teacher? When you are a student, you are not an expert.

But there are ways, even if you are not an expert, to discern whether someone is a good

teacher. And this is the primary way. Pay attention to their fruit.

What do they produce around them? Do they have a track record of good judgement? Do they have a good reputation with their surrounding society? Are they at peace with people? Or are they constantly causing conflict? Are they producing maturity in the people under their teaching? What about themselves? Are they living righteous lives? Are their families in good order? Do their actions testify to their righteous character? Where these things are lacking, we should be wary. We may not know exactly where they are going wrong, but we have a good indication that somewhere, they are going wrong. Out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks.

If you can discern the fruit of people, you have an indication of their character. And if you have an indication of their character, you have an indication of the source from which their teaching is coming. If that source is a good one, they are people to listen to.

If that source is a bad one, keep your distance. The importance of testing teachers is found throughout Scripture. We can see this in the testing of false prophets in Deuteronomy.

You see false prophets by the failure of their prophecies, or by the fact that they lead people away from God. Deuteronomy chapter 13 describes this in detail. Also chapter 18 verses 21 to 22.

And if you say in your heart, How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken? When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

Test your teachers. Test their teaching. Test their manner of life.

Consider the longer term effects of their teaching in their lives, and in the lives of people around them, in the lives of the people who listen to them. Having discussed the character of teachers, Jesus moves to the character of disciples. There are many who might give lip service to him.

Lord, Lord. Now these are not words that we've really heard to this point in the Gospel. They seemingly express a great recognition of the authority of Christ, and submission to his rule.

But yet, many people who have these words in their tongue do not live according to them. They declare him to be Lord, but they do not live according to his word. What foundation are we building upon? Our lives are like houses, and if we're not careful, we'll build them on something other than solid rock.

To hear Christ's word, and to obey it, is to have an integrity of life that will hold us firm in



times of testing. And it's in the time of testing that the difference between wisdom and folly is revealed. The foolish person is revealed in that moment of testing.

As the storm comes in their life or their world, they collapse. However, the person who has true integrity, the person who hears and obeys, the person who declares Lord, Lord, and submits in their actions, that person will find security and strength. As we see in the wisdom literature, time and crisis tend to be the things that divide between the wise and the foolish, between the righteous and the unrighteous, between those who have integrity of life and those who do not.

In those moments of crisis, or in the longer-term harvest that we reap over time, our character is seen. There are periods in our lives which will be mostly those of sowing. We'll be making decisions that have long-term effects, but we won't be reaping those effects just yet.

There will be other periods in our life that are mostly times of reaping, times when we're experiencing the consequences of decisions that we have made long before. And for many people, these are the times of crisis. Midlife crisis, for instance, comes when people reflect upon their decisions in marriage, their decisions in their friendships, in the vocations that they chose.

They experience all these other things, and they experience the consequences, and there's no easy way out of them. They feel trapped in their folly, and they don't know what to do. And for many people, such times involve falling into new and greater folly.

The wise, however, those who follow Christ's words, will be prepared for such periods of crisis. They will have sown good seed, and they will reap a harvest of righteousness. Chapter 7 begins with a centurion sending messengers to Jesus, asking for the healing of his servant.

It is not unlikely that this centurion would have been the highest-ranking military officer in Jesus' base town of Capernaum. Jesus doesn't actually meet the centurion. Others approach Jesus on the behalf of the centurion, and they approach Jesus on the basis of an honour and patronage culture.

They are beholden to this man. He's a good man. He has given them a great gift.

He's helped to build their synagogue. And so they can speak on his behalf to Jesus, saying, He's a worthy man. He merits your attention.

However, a surprise soon arises. Jesus goes with the original delegation of the Jews that have gone on behalf of the centurion. But, while on the way, a new delegation comes, some of the friends of the centurion, and they directly contradict the earlier delegation.

The earlier delegation said, He is worthy to have you do this for him. But then the second

delegation says, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. The centurion here has an insight into the nature of the kingdom.

The kingdom does not operate like an honour or patronage culture. He cannot have a claim or entitlement to the blessing of Christ. Rather, he must appeal to Christ as one who has no claim.

Behind this story, we can probably hear echoes of the story of 2 Kings 5, the story of Naaman the Syrian. The story of Naaman the Syrian and his healing by Elisha has already been alluded to in Luke chapter 4, where Jesus talks about the healings and the actions of Elijah and Elisha and their relationships to Gentiles. In both cases, we have a Gentile military leader.

We have a servant. Again, it is a story of delegations being sent between parties, and the prophet never actually meets the person who is healed. Recognising these parallels, however, also helps us to recognise the contrast.

For Naaman, the lack of contact with the prophet and the smallness of the action that he is called to perform is a cause for protest. In 2 Kings 5, verses 10-13, an Elisha sent a messenger to him saying, Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean. But Naaman was angry and went away saying, Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.

Are not Habana and Tharpath, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. But his servants came near and said to him, My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you. Will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, Wash and be clean? By contrast with Naaman, the centurion believes in the power of Jesus' bare word from a distance, without any spectacle at all, so much that he is prepared to say, Don't come into my house.

The power of Christ's word and the authority of Christ's word and his power to heal from a distance is also similar to Jesus' second sign in John's Gospel. It also serves as a sign of the future of the kingdom, of the bringing in of Gentiles. This is a Gentile who has faith that puts people in Israel to shame.

Jesus has not encountered such faith among his own people. And the way in which this story plays off the story of Naaman the Syrian and the way it recalls the sermon in Nazareth in chapter 4 helps to alert the hearer or reader of Luke's Gospel that something is afoot, that the kingdom is going to be blessing Gentiles. A question to consider.

The centurion in his second delegation to Jesus discusses the nature of authority, comparing his position as a leader of men with Jesus' own position. What can we learn

about the nature of authority from what the centurion says?