

00:00

Introduction

Well, hello and welcome to Ponder. We're having a conversation about the Word of the Lord, as it was preached on Sunday, and as we encounter it in our everyday lives. My name is Jack.

I'm joined today by Ponderers Jono and Ben. How are you guys going?

Good, thanks. Good to be here.

Awesome, awesome. We're reviewing Christ in Deuteronomy, which Ben, you preached a few weeks ago. Could you give us a quick sort of 60 second recap of that sermon?

0:32

Sermon recap

Sure.

Deuteronomy is Moses' famous last words. The people of Israel stand on the cusp of the promised land and Moses effectively says, now choose life. He sets before them the covenant and he invites them to choose life.

And so, in the sermon, we looked at the idea of what a covenant is and then the three sort of aspects of the covenant, as Moses explains it in Deuteronomy, and that is the decision to decide to commit to God, the action, which is the laws and

commands that the covenant involves, and then the outcome, which is blessing or curse. And then sort of the Christ in Deuteronomy twist at the end was that Moses actually finishes Deuteronomy pessimistic that Israel will be able to keep the covenant.

They won't keep it, and so the curses of the covenant fall on Israel. And so, Christ in Deuteronomy is the one who takes the curse on himself in order that we can get the blessing of the covenant.

1:30

What does it mean to "choose life?"

So, I guess, sort of a first question to start us off.

This idea of choosing life, big idea in Deuteronomy and in your sermon. I think for a Christian, I hear like, choose life, and we're choosing eternal life for us. Is that the case in Deuteronomy?

What does Moses mean when he says choose life?

I would say, Moses means choose God, and God equals life, life eternal, we would say. And so, I would not be quick to draw a line between life and eternal life.

Jesus says in John 17, verse 3, Now this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent.

So, Moses is saying, choose to walk in relationship with God, and if you do so, it will be choosing life, because to know God is eternal life.

And so, that's the life that we get to enjoy in our bodies on this earth, and it's also the life that we enjoy forever, to know God, and that is eternal life.

Good stuff.

Yeah, absolutely. Moses really emphasizes the generation he's talking to in terms of you yourselves were there, and you saw this.

2:39

Why does Moses remind Israel of their story?

Why does he go to these great extensors, especially at the beginning of Deuteronomy, rather, to really emphasize, you know, you guys were there, you saw this, you saw this, you know, presumably they already know this.

Yeah, it's interesting because they potentially weren't actually there themselves, because we're talking about the second generation after the Exodus. These are not the ones who saw the ten plagues in Egypt. They're the ones born in the wilderness.

And so, it's interesting that Moses addresses them and says, you yourselves have seen what God has done, when they potentially have actually limited experience seeing what God has done.

Yeah, maybe he's sort of setting up the way things work. Sins passed on and judgment passed on through generations.

Yeah, in a sense, I wonder if there's a sense of also emphasizing to Israel that you agreed to this, right, you saw what I did, you agreed to do this. So fulfill your end of the bargain. I wonder if that's an element too.

3:49

What does covenant mean for in our lives?

I want to talk about this idea of decision, action, outcome, which was sort of your framework.

So in your sermon, you talked about decision, action, outcome as sort of this framework for Deuteronomy as a whole, but then you also sort of talked about it applying to us.

Do you see that playing out as a whole of life thing, like a conversion experience, or does that work in terms of day-to-day decisions of living for God?

Or probably both, but I want to get your thoughts on sort of what that looks like practically in those areas.

Certainly both, I think, that on the broadest level, a person is presented with the invitation to faith in Christ, the decision and the action of trusting in Him, and then the outcome of eternal life and forgiveness.

But what I think is almost more helpful for us to think about is the sense in which it's a daily decision to wake up and to choose again to follow Jesus with intention, rather than this easy thing for us to kind of drift and become backslidden sort

of believers, deciding every day to follow Him and to do the action that that involves, to walk in relationship with Him. And then if we walk in relationship with Him, we know Him better, and to know Him better is eternal life.

So it's both a life long thing and a daily thing at the same time.

5:14

How do we live out our decision to follow Jesus?

I think, yeah, absolutely.

I think one of the struggles I'm sure many of us have felt is that we're all on board to make the decision, but then there's sort of a disconnect between getting the decision to the action stage, right?

Like I might wake up in the morning like, yeah, I'm going to be on fire for God. It's all well and good for me to say that in the morning when I'm at my prayer time.

When I'm in the day, when I'm sort of at work and God's not necessarily coming to mind, how do we sort of connect action to decision, if that makes sense?

I think it's the classic vision intention means. That's the one of the answers. So you have a vision for what you want to do.

You have to apply the will. So I've got the intention. And then the means is learned habits that sustain you through the day.

So spiritual disciplines comes in in the means. And I think the question gets back to who gets the good life. Is following Yahweh the good life, the best life?

And that's the philosophical question, isn't it? Who gets the good life? So, that's what Moses is saying.

Choose life, choose the good life, choose the flourishing life. Not necessarily the wealthy life or the healthy life, but the flourishing life that is literally walking with God.

There's that old, those old bracelets, WWJD, What Would Jesus Do? This idea that to follow Jesus is to make it your aim to act the way Jesus would act in any situation. And Jesus didn't spend his life exclusively reading the Bible and praying.

He lived a regular life. He ate and drank and cooked and worked and had fun with his friends and all these things. And so as we do these things, that kind of mindset of how would Jesus do this if Jesus were me?

7:41

Why is the law repeated twice in Leviticus and Deuteronomy?

Coming back to Deuteronomy, the text for a second, someone I talked to pointed out that there's obviously a lot of overlap with Leviticus in terms of the law being repeated.

Why? We've already got a whole book in Leviticus standing it out. Why do we need a whole other book that repeats so much of what's already there?

That's a good question.

One of the interesting things about Deuteronomy is that many scholars have observed it takes this form of three sermons that Moses is delivering these well articulated, well structured speeches and there's three of them.

And so as he stands before the people on the cusp of the Promised Land, Moses' famous last words, he's recapping the entire story, not just the laws, but also the story of what happened in the wilderness.

He's packaging that up in a concise speech to put before the Israelites as a summary of the law. The second thing to say is that there's, there are some unique laws as well that come in Deuteronomy that aren't found in Leviticus.

Third thing to say is that Leviticus and Deuteronomy have different maybe purposes. You preached the sermon on Leviticus and how it's about the holiness of God and the unholiness of Israel.

And so the function of the law in Leviticus is how to clean yourself up in order to be in the presence of a holy God.

The function of the law, as it's explained in Deuteronomy, is more like the terms of the covenants to do life with the covenant-keeping God, which is potentially different framing on the same law, which might be why there's two copies of the same

Hmm, hmm, definitely.

And I think, reflecting on Leviticus, it certainly feels like there's maybe a Venn diagram, because if you look at the ethical law in Leviticus, it talks a lot about the land, right? And don't pollute the land that you're going to enter into.

And so perhaps it makes sense as Israel in Deuteronomy are about to enter the land to restate these things of not this, you know, Leviticus has this big picture view of the tabernacle.

But then for Deuteronomy say, okay, you're going into this land now. Remember to do this, this, this, this, or you're going to, the land will vomit you out as it, as it phrases it. So I wonder if that's probably part of it as well.

It's good.

10:04

The importance of justice in Deuteronomy

Coming out of that, we did a sermon series at Northern Life on the Book of Deuteronomy in July 2022.

And four years ago, I preached one message in that series, and it was a message called Justice, which kind of picked up all the different passages throughout Deuteronomy that refer to the need for Israel to institute justice as their guiding

principle in the land. And I was just so struck by the prevalence of justice in the laws of Deuteronomy. Often we think of the laws as kind of like concerning things that don't concern us anymore. Priestly holiness, what does that mean?

But so much of the Deuteronomic law is care for the orphans, widows, poor and refugees. And making sure that the least and the last and the lost are provided for and cared for.

Which I think is quite a beautiful angle on the law that it's God's heart for the nation of Israel to care for. What one scholar called the quartet of the vulnerable, those four groups that I mentioned before.

Yeah, that's, it's awesome, it's beautiful.

11:14

How much should Christians shape the world?

I wonder, thinking about Deuteronomy as law and it's essentially an enforced way for the community to live, I think it's pertinent to the times in which we live.

How much should Christians seek to be shaping the society they live in, be it through their laws or through cultural influence?

We know that in the US and elsewhere, you know, there's Christian groups that really are important about shaping what they would see as a godly society, and doing that through law and through politics.

And sort of Deuteronomy seems to be sort of a model of a godly society, if you will, or be it at a certain time and place. Does that recommend to us the idea that we should be trying to influence our society?

That's a massive question. You know, you often hear in conversation around these topics, that we should leave religion outside and we just have a rational debate about what is the best way to run our country or this world.

I don't think it's possible to take religion out of the picture fully, because what is religion apart from a set of answers to the fundamental questions of life? Like, what is reality? What are we here for?

Who is a good person? How do we become good? Every person has either explicit or implicit answers to those questions.

And so, when we say that only Christianity explicitly answers those questions, but the secularist doesn't have a religion and they can bring those questions, they can bring their answers to those questions to the table, we end up with a weird

Yeah, I think, yeah, I absolutely think you make a good point there about that you can't really religion at the door, because then you're, I mean, I think from my perspective, you're asking me to leave my definitions of right and wrong at the door.

Yeah.

That's just not that you just want to, you're just wanting to exclude me as a whole then.

I mean, I have no other framework for judging what is a just and unjust society. So certainly to the point where you say that this idea that you need to relieve religion at the door, it has no place in politics, that can't work.

And I don't think it understands how important religion is to us, to we who believe.

At the same time, of course, I think, you know, history is replete with times which religion has been used as a tool in politics and a tool in society to terrible effect.

And, you know, does that necessarily mean we need to implement a Deuteronomistic code into the Australian legal system? I don't necessarily think that's the case.

Yeah, it's complex and obviously the New Testament complexifies things in that Jesus is not operating within a societal, so his teachings are not meant to be implemented on a society level. He makes no implication that that's the case.

14:19

Who gets the good life?

I think it probably comes back to that idea of who gets the good life.

The teachings, the general teachings of God to his people and then the New Testament, is about human flourishing. So, a lot of it can just be applied, I think, about a good society, you know, looking after the poor, the widow, the orphan, the alien.

You know, there has to be a separation of church and state, I think. That's been proven to what you say is true. The New Testament talks about the classic one in Romans 13, about, you know, powers been put there by God.

I think it's important to use the power that you have been given by God and sort of take that passage and think, well, if I get to wield power, I get to wield my influence as a spirit-filled believer with the whole of the Old Testament and the New

Testament to draw from for wisdom. And I should bring that to the table. Not necessarily to quote Scripture as to why, but to bring it as my foundation of wisdom. Which Charlie Kirk, I think, used to do pretty well in his debates.

I didn't follow him that much at all. I just watched it a bit later on. And he would go, no, I'm just not saying this from the Bible.

I'm saying this from wisdom.

We've talked in the past about the 10 Commandments and how if we follow the 10 Commandments perfectly, we'd be 90% cleaned up as a world. Because they're the guidelines of God's wisdom for how human beings live best with each other and with Him.

16:13

Why did Jesus add "mind" to the Shema?

Talked about the Shema, this sort of passage in Deuteronomy that you said is sort of one of the most important.

I think Jesus says this is the most important passage. And it's a slight, you mentioned that there's a slight updating when Jesus talks about it. He adds mind into hearts on mind strength.

Someone asked me, did people recognize that at the time? Is that dodgy behavior from Jesus changing scripture or something like that? I mean, you know, what do we do with that?

Obviously, I don't think it's dodgy behavior, but I'd like an explanation.

Yeah, I would agree. It's not dodgy behavior from Jesus to do what He did to the Shema. I'm sure there's a complex world of scholarly debate around why and how Jesus added mind.

Another interesting thing to note is the differences between the quotation of the Shema, even between the Gospels that record the Shema. So, in Mark 12 and other places, Jesus is asked the question, what's the greatest command?

And He says, love the Lord your God. In Mark, Jesus says, heart, soul, mind, strength. In Matthew, Jesus says, heart, soul, mind, and misses strength.

In the Gospel of Luke, it's not Jesus saying the Shema, but it's Luke puts the words of the Shema on the lips of the teacher of the law who answers the question, and he answers it differently again.

So, you have three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, all three of which are giving different, technically different quotations of the same text.

But all, I think, coming back to the same idea that you love God with everything that you have, heart, soul, mind and strength. We could keep on adding words to what it means to be a human and love God with everything.

17:55

What has struck you about the Torah as a whole?

So, this was obviously our last sermon in the Torah, as we've looked.

And I guess I wanted to get your guys' reflections on this sort of epic story that begins in Genesis and ends in Deuteronomy. As you've been preaching through it, what struck you about the story as a whole?

Or Christ's relation to this big story as a whole? Sort of zooming out a little bit.

The first thing I'm struck by is how dark it is. It's a story with a lot of chapters that are just awful and gruesome and evil. And yet, this is Scripture.

This is part of the story that Jesus says points to Him. And that sense in which Scripture points us to the person of Jesus and the emphasis on story, I think, is a really, really helpful thing to take from our series.

That as dark as the Torah gets, it's a story that does find its culmination in Jesus. And we're recording this a couple of days after Easter. The crux of the entire Bible is an incredibly dark moment.

A man tortured and humiliated and crucified on a cross, executed by the powers, by the Romans and the Jews. It's a very dark moment, and yet in the midst of that darkest moment of history, God is doing the most profound work of transformation.

And so, this emphasis on story and the dark parts of the story that still lead us to Christ has been helpful for me.

Yeah, I mean, just to me, it's the big parts of the story that we know, I think, good, calamity, and then covenant and rescue and faithfulness.

It's the outworking of that big story through people who are undeserving of God's love and grace and then this sort of relentless commitment of God to rescue Exodus 19, 4-6. The whole earth is mine, you will be mine for mere people.

Kingdom of priests are holy nation. That's probably it to me, the Exodus 19 quote.

What about you, Jack?

Oh, for me, I think whenever I read Torah, I'm struck by its scale.

I think it's a story that crosses, within itself it crosses thousands of years and traces these huge nation, world-defining events, you know, pharaohs and plagues and family lineages that go back for thousands of years.

And it's an epic story in scale. And there's sort of nothing quite like it in literature. And I think as huge as it is, it also ends inconclusively and pessimistically in Deuteronomy.

Yeah, Moses is like, well, you're going to fail. And that's confirmed by the rest of the Old Testament. And so as huge as it is, you end it and you're like, oh, this is only one part of an even bigger story.

That was something that really struck me.

21:15

Torah as the origin story of the whole Bible

Yeah, interesting.

It's the sense in which the Book of Genesis is the origins of the universe, not necessarily directly speaking to the material origins of the universe and the way that the world was created.

But all of the big themes that are developed throughout the course of the rest of the Bible find their origin in Genesis. The goodness of God, the goodness of creation, the problem of sin, humanity's deepest problem, God's heart to bless all nations.

The serpent crusher, the son of man lifted up. All of these themes that are developed throughout the rest of the Bible find their origins in the Torah.

And so, I've loved our five weeks studying the origin story of the universe and how we can read the rest of the Bible and trace its threads back to these books.

And the way that the story ultimately is fulfilled and culminated, like the other end of all the threads is Christ on the cross, where the threads come from the Torah and they end with Christ on the cross, and then push through Christ into the

new creation. new creation.

22:16

Can we read ourselves into the story of the Bible?

When we come to reading Torah, and this is definitely for both of you, I'm reading Exodus, I'm reading Deuteronomy, I'm picturing things in my mind.

How do I fit into this story? We've talked about Jesus, but should I be sort of thinking like, oh, I'm kind of like Israel and these are my wilderness? And we talked a little bit about wilderness in the numbers section.

Can we identify with people in the story? Can we identify with Israel and say, oh, we're kind of like them? Or is it too different?

Or is it more complicated?

I think you can. I mean, the safe theological answer is don't do that, just look for God. So that's one way.

You just don't worry about putting yourself in the picture. Just look for what the story is telling you about God, because it's about Him. So that's the first way, just see God.

But I think it makes more sense that the story is recorded and told. Why would the Shema talk so much about, tell this to your children, to tell it to the next generations?

Because what it's trying to say is, the blessings and curses that humans can experience were explained to you a long time ago. Hundreds of years ago, you've got to look to apply it, in general, like who is God? What is He like?

What has He asked His people to do? And what are some of the pitfalls that you can see in the human response? And things like, what does power do to you?

I think that that's sort of all over the place. What does boredom do to you? Where does whinging take you?

There are sort of some big pictures like Sunday School felt boards of truth.

Something helpful that I heard once is that the Bible is not written to you, but it's written for you. And so, that's a helpful way of reminding yourself that there is an original audience. There's a context that's important.

But the Bible was written for us. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3, 16, all scripture is God-breathed, God-spirited, and is useful.

He says useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

I think that's a helpful paradigm for coming to the entire Bible, is thinking, this is written for me.

God has preserved this by His Spirit for me, not for me individually, for the community of faith, that we may be formed, that we may be corrected, rebuked, challenged, and trained in righteousness.

And that's kind of quite a personal thing, that it's not only pointing us to the character of God, the unchanging nature of the God that we walk with, but it's also challenging us and forming us and asking hard questions of us, which I think is where

we come into the picture. As we read the Bible, the Bible does something to us.

Yeah, absolutely. I love that idea of the text sort of forming us as we read it.

25:36

What is your favourite story in the whole Torah?

We'll kind of finish on, I guess, a bit of a fun question. In all the Torah, what's your favorite story or little episode that you just like, I love coming back to that. I love imagining that in my mind.

For me, it's Genesis 1 and 2.

And specifically thinking about what life was like for the first humans before the fall. God's made them in the image of God, male and female, commissioned them to rule and reign, to fill the earth and subdue it.

And of course, very quickly, the story goes off the rails in Genesis 3. But I love just spending some time in Genesis 1 and 2 and imagining that, because that's the future that we're destined for. That Christ is restoring the image of God in us.

And that one day we will rule and reign with Christ in a new creation. And so, looking back at the start of the story is the same thing as looking forward to the end of the story. That's my favourite story to dwell on.

What's yours?

Me?

It's got to be the Exodus story and the plagues and Pharaoh. I mean, I may be being influenced by the Prince of Egypt movie, which is an awesome portrayal, but the story of that is just so cool.

The full power of God on display against, and the characters, like Pharaoh is such a great antagonist, and Moses and Aaron, and it's great, it's an awesome story, I think, just from a purely story perspective.

Yeah, it would be, my first thought was the moment of getting rescued and then going to the edge of the Red Sea. I think that moment of, in Psalm 77, saying, your path led us through the sea in a path that no one knew was there.

And just the fact of the 11th hour God, it's just so God's way. It's like, keep trusting me. Whoa, what's going on?

Like, they're coming down. This is ridiculous. This sort of sense of waste, which is so intrinsically woven into the gospel.

The woman who pours out the perfume, the perception of waste, but it's like, no, no, I'm coming through. And the Joseph story. I would just pick the two of those, I think.

Yeah, because Joseph is proud at the start, but he's really about as good a human as you find in the, in certainly in the Torah. A really super powerful Christ figure, I think.

And the Joseph story is so, oh, I'll try not to go down in an hour, but it's so emotional.

Like the scenes where he's like, he meets his brother and then he has to go into the other room and start, you know, breaking down in tears because like, he's such a, yeah, he's such a human character. It's awesome.

Yeah.

All right. Well, I think that will finish up for this week. Thank you all for listening.

I hope you have a really blessed week and we will see you next time.