

# THE READING OF THE LAW

Jon Macon

In Deuteronomy 4:9-14, the Lord gave a warning to His people Israel: *“Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons; specially the day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb, when the Lord said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children. And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness. And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone. And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it.”* Deuteronomy 8:11 similar says, *“Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day.”* To help ensure that Israel would not forget His commandments, God commanded them to read the law before all the people.

## **The reading of the blessings and cursings**

In Deuteronomy 11:26-30, Moses told the Israelites: *“Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day: and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known. And it shall come to pass, when the Lord thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerizim, and the curse upon mount Ebal. Are they not on the other side Jordan, by the way where the sun goeth down, in the land of the Canaanites, which dwell in the champaign over against Gilgal, beside the plains of Moreh?”* Later, even more detailed instructions were given to the children of Israel concerning the reading of the blessings and curses upon those two mountains. Moses said, *“These shall stand upon mount Gerizim to bless the people, when ye are come over Jordan; Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin: and these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse; Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali”* (Deut 27:11-13). When Israel conquered Canaan, Joshua obeyed this commandment, and the blessings were read from mount Gerizim, the curses from mount Ebal (Josh 8:30-34). And Joshua 8:35 adds, *“There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them.”* Joshua did his part in reading God’s word to the people of Israel so

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(continued)

they would remember His commandments and keep them.

## **Every seven years**

The reading of God's law was not meant to be a one-time occurrence. In Deuteronomy 31:10-13, "Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, when all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose, *thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: and that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.*" Sadly, Israel became slack and did not read God's law like they were told to. Under the judges and the kings, they went through many cycles of forsaking the Lord and suffering punishment until they repented. However, they eventually reached a point where they literally *lost* the word of God, and nobody had any idea what it said anymore. Under King Josiah, the law was rediscovered, and it was read to the king (2 Kgs 22:8-13). In response, Josiah read all the law in the ears of "all the people, great and small" and made them swear to keep all of God's commandments (2 Chr 34:29-33).

Unfortunately, Josiah's sincerity in this was not found in his subjects. In Jeremiah 3:10, the Lord said that "Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly." As a result, the Lord testified, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge," and, "seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (Hos 4:6). Later, the remnant of the people who were in captivity in Babylon repented and God returned them to the land of Israel. Ezra the priest was given the job to teach the people to follow the word of God (Ezra 7:10,25). In keeping with this, in Nehemiah chapter 8, Ezra got everyone to follow the commandments in Deuteronomy 31:10-13 as he read all of God's law to all the people. Like Joshua, Josiah and Ezra did their parts to cause Israel to know and keep God's commandments. But what about us under the New Testament? Hebrews 2:1-4 says, "*Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.* For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" And 1 Timothy 4:13 says, "*Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.*" We all need to follow the examples of Moses, Joshua, Josiah, and Ezra so none of us ever neglect our great salvation!