

Deuteronomy 26 - First Fruits

Part 1

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[00:00:00] Let us turn to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 26. We had a portion of this before us this morning, and so we'll read from the first verse. And it shall be when thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein, that thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth which thou shalt bring of thy land, that the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shall put it in a basket, and shall go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place his name there. And thou shalt go unto the priest that be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the Lord thy God, that I am come unto the country which the Lord [00:01:03] swear unto our fathers to give us. And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the Lord thy God. And thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God, a Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a great, and became there a nation great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians even entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. And when we cried unto the Lord God of our fathers, the Lord heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labor, and our oppression. And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt, with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs and wonders. And he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even the land that [00:02:05] floweth with milk and honey. And now behold I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O Lord, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the Lord thy God, and worship before the Lord thy God. And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you." We've just been singing that this earth is a wilderness, and that heaven is our home. And that of course is very true, because since we've come to know the Lord, we don't find a home.

We don't find a home in this earth in the sense that we had before. Man [00:03:02] without the Lord seeks to settle down on this earth, and just make the earth a comfortable place to live in, leaving God out more or less, and mostly more than less. Although there are many no doubt unsaved who give some recognition to the things of God, but if a person's not saved, he really is not giving God his place. And so the natural tendency of man is to make things down, to make this earth a very nice and comfortable place to live in. We have that, we have a picture of that with Cain. It says he went out from the presence of the Lord, and then he built himself a city, and he named the city after the name of his son. He tried to make this world a comfortable place to live in, away from the presence of God, and that's what's characterized the world ever since. But there is a sense in which while we're still here in this scene, we [00:04:07] enter into the Lord's presence. The children of Israel went through the wilderness, and then they entered into the land. That's one side of the picture as it were. We're going

through the wilderness of this scene, and our home is beyond. But the other side of the picture, as far as the typical teaching is concerned, that we are going through the wilderness as far as our experience is concerned, and we're in the land as far as our position is concerned. Because the land of Canaan represents a certain side of our Christian life. It's what we have in Ephesians really. As they were blessed with every material blessing in the land of Canaan, we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. In that sense, the book of Ephesians in the New [00:05:03] Testament corresponds to the book of Joshua in the Old Testament. And when we go through the book of Deuteronomy, we find very especially instructions given as to what they were to do when they got into the land. The book of Deuteronomy is written by Moses in the wilderness. But time and again throughout Deuteronomy, we find these words like this, when thou comest into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. And I believe that the book of Deuteronomy in that sense sets forth typically for us many of the things that apply to us in the assembly.

We might say that the lessons of the wilderness journey are more applicable to us as individuals in our daily, as we face our daily life in this world, and have to battle as it were against the enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil that are surrounding us. But when we think of the, when we have these [00:06:06] typical things in connection with the land, that is more the corporate side, the side of the assembly side of our life, when we meet together with the people of God, and gather together to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's why this fits in very well with the thought of our gathering together in the assembly. Here they were told that when they got into the land that the Lord their God gave them, there were certain things that they were to do. For instance, when it came to gathering the first fruits, here the Lord had blessed them abundantly in their harvest, and so that they were to take of the first fruits, and they were to take these first fruits in a basket, they were to gather them all in a basket, the first of all the fruits that God had given them, and they were to make a journey, they were to go to the place where the Lord had set [00:07:05] his name. Now the place where the Lord set his name first of all, when they got into the land, was in Shiloh. There in Mount Ephraim was the place Shiloh where the tabernacle was set up. The tabernacle that they had, that God had given them instructions about in the wilderness, and that they had from Mount Sinai right on, and that they had to take all down, and when they moved and then pitch it again, when they camped right through the wilderness, now they pitched it in a permanent place. But the Lord set aside Shiloh. We know what happened in Eli's day, the ark was taken captive, and the Lord because of the wickedness of the priests, and of the people, he refused Shiloh, and he set it aside. And finally the Lord made known that the place where he was going to set his name, and we might say definitely and permanently in Israel, was in [00:08:04] Jerusalem. In fact if we look up the various references, we'll find that the place where the temple was built in Jerusalem, was the very place where Abraham offered up Isaac. The very place where Abraham offered up Isaac, later on it was Ornan's threshing floor. There on the top of a hill, Ornan had leveled off this, or either he'd done it or someone before him, but it was his threshing floor at the time, had leveled off the top of this hill to make a threshing floor, where they drove the animals round, just the same as they still do now in the country places down in Colombia, South America, to thresh out the wheat when they had a harvest. And it was there that the plague was stayed in the days of David. And the Lord made known that that was the place where he was going to set his name. And there was where the temple was built. And so he is [00:09:01] the Israelite, as God has blessed him, he gathers up his basket of first fruits, and he takes that journey up to the place where the Lord has set his name. Thou shalt go, it says, unto the place which the Lord by God shall choose to place his name there. And when Solomon is praying at the dedication of the temple, he especially refers to this, that that's the place where the Lord has set his name. God had a center for his people Israel, and that center was there in Jerusalem.

And that was where they had to go with their basket of first fruits. What did they have to do when they got there? It says, they have to take this basket to the priest, in verse 4, and the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the Lord thy God. Now this wasn't a sacrifice in the sense of taking an animal. You see, most of the instructions given for the [00:10:03] children of Israel were that they, because they had to approach God, they had to take a sacrifice. And we get all those instructions given in the book of Leviticus, the burnt offering, the meat offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, trespass offering, and then we know also there were certain other types of offerings that they had to offer, or rather these offerings offered in a certain way, the heave and the wave and so on, and the drink offering was something that was poured out before the Lord. We don't have that here. We have a man going up to Jerusalem in the in the consciousness of his acceptance. You see, it's a picture of what we have before God now. We come into the Lord's presence not in order to be received, but because we've been received. When we come together, for instance, as we did this morning, to remember the Lord, what do we [00:11:03] come here for? Do we come here seeking the forgiveness of our sins? You know, that's what some people call worship, sad to say. There are people, honest and earnest souls, that go to places where they say they're going to worship God, and when they get there, they repeat with the words that are written down in the book that they have, God be merciful to us miserable sinners, and they're there professing to worship God, and calling themselves miserable sinners, and calling on God to have mercy on them, and I've no doubt that some of these people are very sincere. They don't know any better. We've got a lot to be thankful for, beloved brethren, that we have had a full gospel preached to us. You know, I know the Pentecostals like to say that they're the only ones that have the full gospel, but the full gospel means the gospel as it's set forth by the Apostle Paul in all its fullness, a full and free salvation. These people who [00:12:04] talk about the full gospel, the majority of them would deny that the believer is eternally secure, so it's not a full gospel that they have, but a full gospel is the gospel that presents to us that Christ died for our sins, and that we have forgiveness of sins, and we have deliverance from the penalty of sins, we have the Lord with us today, and we have eternal life, and we have the Holy Spirit indwelling us, and we have deliverance daily from the power of sin in our lives, and that we're looking for the Lord to come and take us out of the very presence of sin at his coming. That's the full gospel, and we can thank God that that's the gospel that we've heard, and that we believed, and so we have a conscious acceptance, and we're able to come together, as it were, each one of us coming together and bringing our basket full. Now, the basket of firstfruits for [00:13:03] us speaks of the blessings with which the Lord has blessed us since we last came up. You see, the Jew would see the Lord's blessing on him in giving him such an abundant harvest, he would gather up the firstfruits, and he would go up to the place where the Lord had set his name, to place that basket down, put that basket into the hand of the priest, and the priest to place it there before the Lord. Then, next year, he would come up again, and in the meantime, what he would bring up this second time would be the blessings with which the Lord had blessed him since he last came up. Well, now, you know, this is a lovely picture for us. We come up, as it were, on Lord's Day morning, and we come, or we should come, and I trust every one of us is exercised about this, that we come up having gathered up the firstfruits with which the Lord has blessed us since [00:14:04] last time we came up, and we come into the Lord's presence. What are these firstfruits? They are the appreciation that we have learned through the Scriptures of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we come together, and we should have our baskets so full that we've got something, as it were, to pour out before the Lord. And so the Lord receives the worship of his people, because this man that came up, he comes up with the recognition of the blessings of the Lord, and he's able to come and give the Lord worship. And then he would come up again the next time he came up, and in the meantime, he'd receive further blessings of the Lord that he could bring up. And when he came up, he says there in verse 5, thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God, a Syrian ready to perish was my father. This is Jacob. You remember

when Jacob went down to Egypt? [00:15:03] What was Jacob when he went down to Egypt? He was a Syrian ready to perish.

The famine was in the land. Joseph was king over Egypt, although Jacob didn't know it, and God had allowed him to go before them. He'd been sold by his brothers, and God allowed him to go there so that he could tell Pharaoh to save up the corn, to save up the grain during those seven years of plenty. And when the famine came, Jacob and his sons down there in the land of Canaan, or up there in the land of Canaan, they were perishing. They were ready to perish. Jacob says, we've got no food. Go down to Egypt and buy us some more food. And you know the story. I'm not going into it. We all know it, how that they went the first time, and Joseph recognized them, and he took a hostage, and he sent back, and said they had to come back and bring Benjamin with them. And [00:16:01] poor Jacob thought this was the last straw. He'd lost one son, Joseph, and now he was going to lose Benjamin. And he says, all these things are against me. And he didn't realize that all these things were working for his good. You know, we are like that sometimes. God is working, and we think things are against us. Instead of realizing that what God has allowed, it's for us to give, bring us into further blessing. But Jacob comes down to Egypt, a Syrian ready to perish. And he's dependent on the bounty of Egypt to care, to care for him. And Pharaoh tells Joseph, you let your father and your, and your brother settle in the best of the land. And Jacob, Joseph nourished Jacob and his brothers, all through the rest of the years of famine. And so that's what, where Jacob started. So this, this I think is a recognition, that if Jacob and his, his descendants became anything at all in, before God, it was God's sovereignty that made them that. If [00:17:03] it had just been the question of Jacob, Jacob would have died in the land of Canaan, and his sons would have died with him. They'd have starved to death in the land of Canaan. And, but God saw that they were cared for in Egypt. It was God's sovereignty. Isn't that so with us, beloved? It's the sovereignty of God, as we look back, and we say, well now why did the Lord choose me? That was just His sovereign grace that picked me up and saved me. And so as we come into the Lord's presence with our basket of firstfruits, we have to come and say, we have nothing in ourselves to offer. But what we offer to the Lord, we're giving him back what he's given us. That's what David said, of thine own have we given thee. But hasn't, doesn't the Lord give us a great deal in order to give back to him? And this is the spirit in which we should come, recognizing that we have nothing. And were it not for the grace of God, we'd have nothing that we [00:18:03] could bring. And then he recounts there what happened, the Egyptians evil entreated us. Verse 8, the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs and wonders, and have brought us into this place, and have given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey. You see, it's a recognition of what God has done. Everything is what God has done. The Lord cared for our father, Jacob. When he was about to perish. The Lord is the one who cared for us in Egypt. The Lord was the one that brought us out of that terrible bondage that our nation got into in Egypt. The Lord brought us through the wilderness. The Lord brought us into the land. The Lord has given us this good land, and this is the fruit of it. And we're giving back to thee Lord, what thou has given us. Now that is the same spirit in which we, as the Lord's people, are to come before the Lord when [00:19:04] we come to worship him. In the same spirit, the recognition that all that we have is what the Lord has given us. But beloved, are we gathering up what the Lord has given us? Supposing an Israelite, after the Lord had given him all of that, that lovely harvest of his land, he didn't go around and pick any of the firstfruits. And then he comes up to Jerusalem with his basket, but he's got nothing in it, or hardly anything in it. He wouldn't, he'd be ashamed, wouldn't he? Just because he was not paying attention to gathering in the harvest with which the Lord had blessed him. Well we can do that same thing. We can come to the Lord with our basket full. We can come to the Lord with our basket half full. Or we can come to the Lord with our basket almost empty. I wouldn't like to say that any believer, any

brother or sister, would come to the Lord with the basket [00:20:02] completely empty. But I'm sure, beloved, that perhaps not often. Haven't we realized it, that often the basket is not as full as it should be, just because we haven't been filling up the basket through the week. We've not been occupied with the Lord's things as we should have been. And how many things the enemy would bring in to hinder us from being occupied with the things of the Lord. Maybe even things right in themselves. Things that we have to attend to. And yet we can allow them to become a hindrance. Or other things that perhaps, that we ourselves are just careless to allow these things to occupy us, instead of the Lord occupying us. And our basket isn't full. You know, I like to link the thought of the basket being full up with what we have in the 23rd Psalm, when the psalmist says, my cup runneth over. And if a cup's full, and you try and pour something else into it, it runs over. And someone has said that worship is really overflow. It's what we have flowing over to the Lord. We've got to give the Lord something. What's in there has to come out. And if every one of us comes along with our baskets full, then the Lord will receive his portion. [00:21:17] All the sisters say, well after all, we only take part in the singing and we don't say anything. Well, if you've got your basket full, the Lord will appreciate what you have brought. And he will use the brothers to express it too. And it's all expressed. Everything, I believe, that everything that is brought to the Lord when we come together, finds expression. Either in the hymns that we sing, or in the praise that is given through whoever the brother is who is the mouthpiece of the assembly. Because in the breaking of bread, when we give thanks to the Lord, the one that does that isn't just expressing his own thoughts. He's the mouthpiece of the assembly. He's expressing the praises of the gathered saints that are going up to the Lord.

[00:22:14] The basket, as it were, is being emptied out in the Lord's presence. How important then that we bring the basket full. The Lord has brought us into the land of milk and honey. And he says in verse 10, And now behold, I brought the firstfruits of the land which thou, O Lord, hast given me, and thou shalt set it before the Lord thy God, and worship before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you. It's a lovely picture. He is the Israelite coming up to worship before the Lord. Because he's conscious of all that the Lord has done for him. And aren't we conscious of all that the Lord has done for us? And something more, because as we come together, we have the emblems that remind us of the Lord's death. [00:23:19] And it's through that death that everything has been procured for us, were it not for that. And I believe that's what leads our hearts out in worship. We come together to remember him, but that's what leads us out. You can't remember the Lord without your heart going out for him in worship. So here we have a picture, we might say, in the Israelite going to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the place where the Lord has set his name. And so each one of us, we should come up with our baskets full, so that collectively our baskets are poured out in the Lord's presence, and we worship. Worship in the Old Testament conveyed the thought of bowing down. And even in the New Testament the thought is that, but in the New Testament there's a further thought, it's really prostrating yourself before a superior. And that's why the word worship only applies to the Godhead. It only applies to divine persons. We don't find worship in the New Testament ever given to a mere creature. [00:24:21] It's only the Lord, he's the object of the worship of his people. Now we have something more. In the twelfth verse it says, And when thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase, the third year, which is the year of tithing, and thou hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates and be filled, then thou shalt say before the Lord thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of... out of mine house, and also have given them unto the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all thy commandments which thou hast commanded me, I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them. [00:25:08] So here we have something further. And this no doubt is connected with the other because it

follows on naturally. It's a different picture we might say. It's what's to be done every third year. Every third year they have to pay the tithe of the third year.

And the tithe of the third year was a special tithe that was given for the, as it says here, for the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and the stranger that was within the gates. Yes? This was something special. You know, sometimes people say, well, the Israelite had to give one-tenth. Sometimes the Israelite had to give three-tenths. If we study the question of the tithe very carefully, we find that every third year they had to give three. They had to actually give three-tenths of the product of the land with which God had blessed them. [00:26:10] And this was the special tithe of the third year that went to the Levite, and the stranger, and the widow. But what is the lesson in this for us? If the coming up with the basket of first fruits represents what we are to give the Lord, this represents what we are to give out to others.

You see, the Lord must come first. We can't really give to others if we're not giving to the Lord. And it's when the Lord has his portion that others will get their portion. So this naturally follows. As much as to say, well now, the Lord's received his portion from his people. Ah, but are there no others that are going to get anything? Yes. Here we have the Levite. The Levites were those who helped the priests. And they were to be supported by the freewill offerings of God's people. [00:27:12] They were the strangers, the fatherless, the widow. These had to be cared for. These are the needy souls. And I believe we can apply this to meeting the needs of souls, whether they be the Lord's people, or even whether it be that we go out to those who are unsaved and seek to bring the gospel to them. It's a picture of the blessings that flow over to the Lord also flow out to others. In the fourth chapter of John, we have the woman at the well. And we have there the Lord says that those that come to him, that they would have in them a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

[00:28:05] And in that chapter, of course, we have mentioned worship, where the Lord says God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. So it seems that there we have the thought of this well of water springing up in worship to God. But when you come over to the seventh chapter of John's gospel, the Lord says, he that believeth on me, as the scripture has said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. And there it's more the thought of the blessings flowing out to others. And that's what is needed too. We're in the midst of a needy world. All around us there are souls that are in need. And we should be exercised that the Lord would use us just to meet these souls in their need. It's true we live in difficult days.

We find that the emissaries of Satan are around on every hand, seeking to sow falsehood. The enemy has always sowed the tares among the wheat, as we find in the parables there in the 13th of Matthew of the kingdom. And that's what he's still doing, maybe with greater intensity than ever.

[00:29:25] But there are souls, unsaved souls who need Christ. And there are Christians who need spiritual help. And so may the Lord enable us to be able to give them of our tithes as it were. That is, what we give to the Lord, we give it that his word might go out to be a blessing to others.

That's the thought of others receiving blessings. The Lord getting his portion, and then others getting their portion. Then thirdly, we have another thought. In the 14th verse we find the same one saying, in verse 14, [00:30:25] Of course here the Israelite is praying a prayer that is not fully in keeping with this dispensation. He's asking the Lord to bless him because of what he's done.

But rather our thought is that the Lord blesses us not because of what we've done, but because of

what he's done. But the lesson I wanted to point out in this is that we do have in this a lesson for us. [00:31:08] And that is, he says, I've not eaten thereof in my morning, neither have I taken away thereof for any unclean use. That is, the Israelite here is speaking of himself as a person who is separate from that which is dishonoring the Lord. He's not used these things, he's not eaten in his morning. That is, to eat a thing in your morning there, it would be defiled. Because the person would have to have a contact with a dead body. And that would be a defiling thing. And that would give us the thought of allowing ourselves to be defiled by the contact with the things of this scene that would be a hindrance to us in our service for the Lord. Or, as it says there, nor taken away what thereof for any unclean use, nor given what thereof for the dead.

[00:32:07] That is, he was using it, that is, he was keeping himself and he was keeping what the things that the Lord had blessed him with for the Lord, so that the Lord's blessing could be on it. You know, sometimes we've noticed in the Lord's work that some of the Lord's money seems to get wasted. And I got an exercise about that many years ago as to why it is that sometimes that the Lord seems to allow some of his money to be wasted, what seems to be wasted.

And I think sometimes that it's because he allows that to be done to use up some that shouldn't have been given. Now, you know, what we give to the Lord, we should give it of a free will, whether it's money, whether it's our time, our service, or whatever we're doing.

[00:33:11] That's the thought here. We're giving something to the Lord. But if we're giving it in the wrong spirit, supposing there's a Christian that's earned some money, that he's got some money dishonestly, he's been dishonest in his business, and he's made quite a bit of profit, and he thinks, well, now I'm going to give some of this to the Lord. Is the Lord's blessing on that? Perhaps that's the reason why sometimes the Lord allows his money to be wasted. Someone has given it in the wrong spirit. He's not given that. He's given something, as it says here, that's been defiled. This man says, I have not eaten thereof in my morning, neither have I taken away aught thereof for any unclean use, nor given aught thereof for the dead. But I have hearkened to the voice of the Lord my God, and have done according to all that Thou hast commanded me. [00:34:07] That is, he was seeking to keep himself in a spiritual condition so that the Lord could bless what he was doing for him. So you see, this brings it home to ourselves. We have the part that the Lord gets in worship. We have the part that the Levite and the stranger and the widow gets in that which goes out to them. But then we also need to watch ourselves and to keep ourselves so that the enemy is not coming in with us and allow something in our own lives that would be a hindrance. So here we have the three things we might say that the Lord would have his people occupied with. The Lord comes first, though. The Lord gets his portion first. And may the Lord enable us to do that. And I believe if we're giving the Lord his portion, beloved, these other things will naturally fall into their right place because we'll have the Lord before us. [00:35:07] If the Lord has his portion, the Levite, the widow, and the stranger will get their portion. And we ourselves will be exercised to not allow things in our lives that would be a dishonor to the Lord and that would be a hindrance to us in our testimony for him. So may the Lord enable each one of us to be more occupied with these precious things and to gather up through the week, each one of us, that basket of firstfruits so that when we come together we'll have the place before the Lord and be able to give him the praise and the worship that is his due.