

IN RESPONSE – CHRIST & COVENANT LEADERSHIP

by Dennis Prutow

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Deuteronomy is a book of the covenant. The word comes from Deuteronomy 17:18. Referring to future kings, Moses says, "It shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests." *Copy*, in the Greek Old Testament, Septuagint, is *deuteronomion*, *second law*, *deuteros nomos*, *deutero|nomj*, or *deuteronomy*

Leviticus was for the priests. Deuteronomy, this second recitation of the law, was for the people. As such, Deuteronomy is the book set before the people on the Plains of Moab as the nation prepares to cross the Jordan. "Across the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this law" (Deuteronomy 1:5).

This is the book read to the people in the promised land when the covenant was renewed at Shechem.

Then Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, in Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the sons of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses.... All Israel with their elders and officers and their judges were standing on both sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as the native. Half of them *stood* in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had given command at first to bless the people of Israel. Then afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly... (Joshua 8:30-35, in addition see Deuteronomy 11:29-32 and 27:4-13).

Deuteronomy is also the law discovered in the temple ruins in the time of Josiah. It formed the basis of revival in the nation of Israel under his reign (2 Kings 23:2-3).

The first chapters recall the God of the covenant and His great works of deliver-

ance. In chapter five Moses rehearses the Ten Commandments. These are the stipulations of the covenant, the covenant proper. Moses says of God, "So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, *that is*, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone" (Deuteronomy 4:13, see Exodus 34:28).

Chapter 6 gives us the Great Commandment, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). This is a summary of the Ten Commandments and the theme of Deuteronomy. The book then expounds covenant love for the people of God in chapters 6-26, an extended commentary on the Ten Commandments. Chapters 27 and 28 relate the principal sanctions of the covenant, the blessings and cursings.

The final chapters conclude the life of Moses, Israel's covenant leader. The law was "ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator" (Galatians 3:19). Moses was the God designated covenant mediator and covenant leader.

Part of God's covenant with Israel and with us involves shunning mediums and psychics (Deuteronomy 18:9-14). God forbade His people to seek knowledge about the future, about His plans and purposes, and about life in the world to come from witches, psychics, mediums, or sorcerers. We remember Saul seeking knowledge from the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:7). Today there is an explosion of these phenomena. Many well-meaning people turn away from God and from His Christ and seek knowledge from such sources. They are covenant breakers.

Part of God's covenant with Israel and with us also involves looking to the promised prophet rather than to mediums and wizards. Deuteronomy 18:15 declares, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him." It was always God's purpose to speak to us through a prophet *not* through psychics. Moses says regarding the promised prophet, "This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of

the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.' The LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well'" (Deuteronomy 18:16-17). God approved of the request for a prophet, a covenant leader and God promised the great Covenant Leader.

Jesus Christ is that special prophet and covenant leader like Moses through whom God speaks; we must all take heed to His Word. Note Acts 3:17-22.

And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until *the* period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. Moses said, "THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you."

We do not need mediums and psychics; we need the Lord Jesus Christ and His word; He is *our* prophet, the consummate covenant leader of God's people.

Jesus Christ entered the world as the covenant head of His people. The devil challenged Him three times. Christ met the challenge and passed the test where Adam, and later Israel, failed. Christ met the Devil with Scripture, three texts from the book of the covenant, Deuteronomy. Christ lived out the terms of the covenant as the obedient Son and vicarious substitute for His people. He defeated the devil and earned blessing for His people.

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IN RESPONSE – CHRIST & COVENANT LEADERSHIP, PART TWO

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We now turn to the three texts from Deuteronomy quoted by Christ in His encounter with the devil. We begin with Deuteronomy 8:1-3. On the Plains of Moab, as the people prepare to cross Jordan, Moses explains,

All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore *to give* to your forefathers. You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.

Here is an amazing fact. God led Israel through the wilderness for forty years to take an eleven-day journey. Deuteronomy 1:1-3, “These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness.... It is eleven days’ *journey* from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea. In the fortieth year, on the first *day* of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the children of Israel, according to all that the LORD had commanded him *to give* to them.” Why forty years to go a short distance, a journey of *eleven days*?

We live across the street from a college. We walk on to the campus in minutes. Students take years to get there. They go through years of preparation, training, and testing. God led Israel on a forty-year journey to test His people, to show them their hearts. “God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. He humbled you and let you be hungry” (Deuteronomy 8:2-3). Would Israel love God as directed (Deuteronomy 6:5)?

The people rebelled. “The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled

against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The sons of Israel said to them, ‘Would that we had died by the Lord’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger’” (Exodus 16:2-3).

But Moses reminded the people, God “fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know” (Deuteronomy 8:3). God miraculously provided bread for His people they nor their fathers had ever seen nor known, bread from heaven. Yet in their hunger and greed, the people persisted in disobedience. They did not trust God and His word. They hoarded the manna. They failed to learn the lesson God had for them, “that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

God reminds us we are no better. But we proudly declare that if *we* were in the circumstance of Israel, *we* would have properly followed the Lord. Is this the case? Would we not also have our hearts of discontent, grumbling, and rebellion revealed to us? “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

The circumstances of the Savior in the wilderness with the devil were similar to those of Israel. Matthew 4:1-3,

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

As God led Israel into the wilderness, so the Spirit led Christ into the desert. As God took Israel on a forty-year trek, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness for forty days. The number forty in both cases is not inconsequential. As the children of Israel became hungry in the wilderness, so our Lord Jesus, after fasting forty days and night was also hungry. As God led Israel into the time of testing, so also the Spirit led Jesus into the wil-

derness for the express purpose of being tested by the devil. The challenge set before Christ was simple. You say you are God’s Son. Adam made the same claim. Prove it. Turn these sand worn stones that look like loaves of bread into actual loaves.

Jesus answered with a quote from Deuteronomy 8:3, “It is written, “MAN SHALL NOT LIVE BY DREAD ALONE, BUT BY EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD”” (Matthew 4:4). Our Lord undoubtedly remembered Adam’s failure. He also remembered Israel’s failure. Adam failed to keep the Covenant of Works. Israel failed to walk in the Covenant of Grace. Where Israel failed the test, Christ sustains His time of testing on behalf of His people.

Christ not only quoted Scripture to rebuff the devil, He spoke from the book of the covenant given to the people. He set forth a very specific stipulation of the covenant. We are not to work solely for physical bread to sustain us in this life. We must find life in God Himself. “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me” (John 4:34). Our lives must be to do the will of God, to be covenant keepers.

Christ not only rebuffed the devil with Scripture, He lived out the Scriptures before God. He refused to compromise the covenant as Israel had done when similarly tested in the wilderness. Christ also lived out the Scriptures *as the Son of God*. He lived out the Scriptures for and in the place of His people. Where they failed, He kept covenant with the Father. He lived the theme of Deuteronomy, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart” (Deuteronomy 6:5).

We need similar covenant leadership. Obviously, such leadership cannot emulate the vicarious aspects of Christ’s work. However, it can and must, by the grace of God, model the life of the Savior in covenant keeping. It must not only quote Scripture to combat the devil; it must live the mandates of Scripture with love for the Father. In so doing, it must also become a model for the covenant blessings promised in Scripture.

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The next text quoted by Christ in answer to the devil is Deuteronomy 6:16. “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested *Him* at Massah.” To show their love for God, Moses tells Israel to trust the LORD and not put Him to the test. In other words, we must not grumble and challenge the LORD; we must trust Him and positively prove His faithfulness by doing His Word.

The negative standard is the conduct of Israel at Massah and Meribah. Exodus 17:1-7 gives us the record.

Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water that we may drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, “Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, “What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me.” Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us, or not?”

The people grumbled. They were testy. They were testy toward God. Such testiness was testing to God. It is improper and sinful.

On the other hand, testing the LORD by trusting His word and by doing His word is perfectly acceptable. Malachi 3:10 reminds us, “Bring the whole tithe into

the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.” Follow the word of God and freely give your tithe. Do not hold back. Test the faithfulness of the promise of God. “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom” (Luke 6:38). Positive testing through obedience is permissible, in fact required. Negative testing through grumbling and disobedience is not. Israel engaged in the latter.

Satan challenged Jesus’ faithfulness in His offices as Messiah and Savior. He freely quotes Scripture out of context (Matthew 4:5-6).

Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU’; and ON *their* HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.’” Psalm 91:11-12 speaks of the security believers find in the Lord. The angels are “all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). They are sent out by God to help keep us from stumbling. This is blessing.

The texts elicited by the devil do not call us to tempt God by jumping off a cliff or leaping in front of a train. God will not send His angels to sweep us out of danger or catch us before we are crushed on the rocks. This is negative sinful testing stemming from a testy attitude.

Jesus Christ answers the devil with a second quote from Scripture, Deuteronomy 6:16. “Jesus said to him, ‘On the other hand, it is written, “YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR God TO THE TEST.”’” (Matthew 4:7). The answer of Jesus Christ was simple, “No, devil. I will not put My Father to the test in the way you suggest. The Bible says tests of the sort you propose are evil.”

Quoting Scripture is one thing. Christ went further. Although Christ did not mention Massah, He knew the exact text of Deuteronomy. Christ remembered Massah. He was unwilling to go the way of ancient Israel. Christ quoted the precept of Scripture *and* lived it out in the face of the devil and before God.

Further, Christ again quotes from Deuteronomy, the book of the covenant written for the people. The theme of the book, the core of the covenant, is Deuteronomy 6:5, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” The posture of Christ is one of exemplary love for the Father. Deuteronomy 6:16 is a first precept of the covenant. Christ kept the covenant. He loved the Father. Christ kept the covenant and loved the Father where Israel failed.

Not only so, Jesus Christ kept the covenant as the Son of God. Adam was the son of God (Luke 3:38). Adam failed the test presented by God. As God’s son, Israel also failed in its period of testing in the wilderness. “Thus says the LORD, ‘Israel is My son, My firstborn’” (Exodus 4:22). The devil came to Jesus and said, “If you are the Son of God...” (Matthew 4:3). Above all, the devil wanted to undermine the position and authority of Christ as Messiah and Son. But Jesus Christ fulfilled the covenant. Acting for His people, Jesus Christ fulfilled the covenant by loving His Father and living out its stipulations. He thus procured blessing for all His people. Jesus Christ is therefore the preeminent covenant leader.

We need such covenant leadership. This leadership will be skilled in the use of Scripture. It will also live out the precepts of Scripture. It will not tempt God in negative sinful ways contradicting the love defined in 1 John 5:3 and described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. It will stand against the wiles of the devil by living out the precepts of the covenant. It will positively test, prove, and bear witness to the reality of the covenant blessings promised by God to those who walk faithfully in covenant with Him.

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The third text quoted by Jesus in His encounter with the devil comes from Deuteronomy 6:13, “You shall fear *only* the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name.” We look briefly at the context of this verse and how Jesus uses it.

God issued a warning to Israel.

Then it shall come about when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied, then watch yourself, that you do not forget the LORD who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (Deuteronomy 6:10-12).

When God gives us much, we readily forget His grace; we easily forget. Israel is the example. She was given much. God gave her houses, vineyards, water supplies, etc., etc. She failed to give thanks to God and turned from the Lord.

We are no different. God has given us much. So much has been given to me. I think of the food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and many other good things my parents gave me as I was growing up. I think of the education I received at the Military Academy at West Point. It was given to me. The better part of my Seminary training was given to me through veteran’s benefits. I thank God for these blessings and gifts. I have a wonderful family and adequate finances. These are all common and tangible benefits of this life. When we have these *things* in abundance it is easy to forget God, His grace, His benefits, His love and care.

When much is given to us, we may also readily forget God’s grace in delivering us from slavery to sin. God delivered Israel from Egypt and from slavery. God has also delivered those who trust in Christ from bondage to sin and to Satan. The deliverance is profound and pervasive. “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ

Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death (Romans 8:1-2). As God frequently exhorted Israel to recall her salvation, we too must not forget the work of God in Christ on our behalf.

The lure of the world is great.

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever (1 John 2:15-17).

The lust of the flesh, gratifying the desires of the flesh, may involve the desire for bread. The pride of life may cause us to place ourselves before the word of God and wrongly think we can immediately press God into service when we dare Him and test Him.

We forget basic thankfulness, proper worship, appropriate reverence, and dependent awe before God. We take the work of Christ for granted. Moses reminds us as well as ancient Israel, “You shall fear *only* the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name” (Deuteronomy 6:13). We must live God centered and Christ centered lives. We must display our dependence upon God in regular prayer and worship. We must take the Name of the Lord upon our lips, not to denigrate Him, but to swear allegiance to Him. Deuteronomy 6:5 once again comes to the fore, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

Note the third temptation of the devil and the response of Jesus. First, the temptation: “Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me’” (Matthew 4:8-9).

We do not know the geographic location. It may have actually been a prominent spiritual location. We see this in the visions of Revelation. John is located where he is able to view the expanse of

heaven. The devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. The devil is a liar. He cannot deliver the nations to Christ. He wants to dispossess Christ. He therefore wants the allegiance of Christ.

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go, Satan! For it is written, “YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY”’” (Matthew 4:10). Jesus Christ again quotes from Deuteronomy. He quotes the book of the covenant written for the people. Christ knows the covenant obligations. But it is not just Scripture that waylays the devil. It is obedience to Scripture. It is covenantal obedience lived before God in the face of the devil that defeats the enemy of our souls.

It is not simply the rebuke, “Go, Satan!” that sends the devil back to his haunts. It is not merely the quotations of a few words as if these words were a special magic formula designed to exorcise the evil one. It is the active obedience of the Savior in loving God by really following the stipulations of the covenant. Where both Adam and Israel failed, Jesus Christ, the covenant leader, kept covenant with the Father, as the Son of God, Savior, and Messiah, and purchased blessing for His people.

Covenant leadership cannot mimic this substitutionary work of Christ. But covenant leadership follows Christ’s example. James 4:7 exhorts, “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” Submitting to God by knowing His word and by speaking His word is only a beginning. Obedience is also required. But danger lurks close at hand, obedience for the sake of obedience. We do not resist the devil with mere incantations. Remember the sons of Sceva (Acts 19:13-16). Nor do we resist the devil with knowledge of Scripture. The devil knows the Bible better than we do. We must know God’s word and live God’s word with hearts full of love for God. Covenant leadership guides us in such a life before God. Covenant leadership emulates Christ and resists the devil living out the covenant of grace with profound love for God.

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