



2019 YEAR OF SCRIPTURE
Monthly Devotions
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Deuteronomy 5 - 1 Samuel 17: “God Gave us the Law; Now What Do We Do?”

Moses brought the Ten Commandments down the mountain in the Book of Exodus. Throughout Exodus and Leviticus those ‘commandments’ are fleshed out in more detail, reflecting the complexities of daily life, and the necessity for helping people answer the hard questions about living in close quarters. After wandering in the desert through the book of Numbers, Deuteronomy relates the importance of the covenant with Yahweh, the God of Israel. Again, and again we hear that if Israel follows and observes the laws given by God, the nation will prosper, for *‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me’*. (Deut 5:6)

Read Deut 6:4-9. Keeping the precepts and laws of the Lord was critically important to the Israelites. *Do we as church communities emphasize the life-sustaining laws of God? How might we today frame the laws as ‘gifts’, rather than ‘burdens’? Can you give an example?*

Read Deut 31:1-7 – After leading the people of Israel for so long, Moses is forbidden entry into the Promised Land. Moses anoints Joshua to take the leader role. Moses does not seem angry but accepts God’s role for him. *What leadership qualities do you see in Moses?*

Read Joshua 24:20-28. In the Book of Joshua, the people finally cross into the land God promised to their ancestors. God directs Joshua in battle, in order to establish territories for the twelve tribes. Joshua builds an altar on Mt. Ebal and reads the Book of the Law to all the people to remind them of their covenant with Yahweh. Each tribe receives their land allotment, and it seems that all is set for the nation to flourish in peace. Joshua gathers the people at Shechem and reminds them once more of their promises. *In the reading, do you get a sense that it will be hard for the people to keep the covenant?*

Read Judges 2:16-21. Without Joshua as a single leader, the tribal leaders act as leaders of their own tribes in an effort to keep their lands from losing their lands. Some of the ‘judges’ act justly as rulers, but none are very successful in keeping the people from following neighboring ‘gods’ or the Covenant. The terrible story of the inhospitable Gibeonites (the deadly assault of the concubine and the warfare that follows) illustrates the breakdown of the tribal relations. Toward the end of the book



(18:1, 19:1, 21:25) we hear this sentiment: In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes. *What have the people forgotten?*

Read Ruth 1:15-17. In great contrast to the perverse spirit of the Israelites in Judges, the widow Naomi and her widowed daughter-in-law Ruth show great loyalty and faithfulness to God and each other. In this way, they are examples of Covenant faithfulness, a welcome respite and happy ending from the previous book!

Read 1 Samuel 10:1. Samuel himself grew up in the temple, serving the old priest Eli. After Eli's death, people recognize in Samuel the makings of a great leader. The Ark of the Covenant, stolen by the Philistines, brought them no end of trouble, and they returned it to the house of Israel. Samuel, now a military leader, continues to 'judge' Israel into old age. His sons, however, are not as faithful as their father. So, the elders of Israel beg Samuel to appoint a king over them, rather than one of his sons. After much searching, the young Saul is anointed king. He does not always listen to the LORD, and as we shall see, jealousy fills his reign. As we shall see, the young David will soon take the role of leader and king.

The Covenant and the Law were given as gift. In this brief outline, *what human characteristics make it so difficult for the Israelites (and us!) to keep to the boundaries of the Covenant established by God?*

