

## LEADER GUIDE

# DEUTERONOMY

## A CHALLENGE TO A NEW GENERATION

### GOD'S CHARACTER DEMONSTRATED IN RELATIONSHIPS

**BIG IDEA:** We can learn about the character of the Lawgiver as we study the Old Testament laws.

**DATE:** Sunday, July 12, 2026

**SCRIPTURE:** Deuteronomy 22:1-4; 23:21-23; 25:13-16

### OPENING QUESTION

**Write the word RELATIONSHIPS on the board. Ask people to share all the different relationships they have and write them on the board as they do.** (Things like mother, father, sister, brother, husband, wife, son, daughter, boss, employee, co-worker, neighbor, friend, pets, customers, clients, etc.) If nobody says "God" add that to the list.

Have you ever banded together for a cause at work or in your neighborhood? Maybe someone's pet got lost and everyone formed a search party, or a co-worker or neighbor got an illness, and you organized meals or ran a 5K to raise money for cure, etc.? Share about that experience with your group. (Maybe something happened during COVID where you quarantined together?)

Today we are going to look at three laws given by God to the Israelites. We will see how these laws reflect the character of God, especially in our relationships with others.

### SETTING THE STAGE

Deuteronomy 19-26 deals with laws specifically laid out for the Israelites. One of the most challenging parts of studying God's Old Testament Law is knowing how to interpret it as Christians today. Keep in mind the purpose of God's law was to show God's people how they should live as those set apart for Him; it's a call to holiness. Holiness demands separation and distinction in every part of our lives, a principle we can still apply today.

### SCRIPTURE READING

#### **Deuteronomy 22:1-4; 23:21-23; 25:13-16 (CSB)**

22 "If you see your brother Israelite's ox or sheep straying, do not ignore it; make sure you return it to your brother. <sup>2</sup>If your brother does not live near you or you don't know him, you are to bring the animal to your home to remain with you until your brother comes looking for it; then you can return it to him. <sup>3</sup>Do the same for his donkey, his garment, or anything your brother has lost and you have found. You must not ignore it. <sup>4</sup>If you see your brother's donkey or ox fallen down on the road, do not ignore it; help him lift it up.

23 "If you make a vow to the LORD your God, do not be slow to keep it, because he will require it of you, and it will be counted against you as sin. 22 But if you refrain from making a vow, it will not be counted against you as sin. 23 Be careful to do whatever comes from your lips, because you have freely vowed what you promised to the LORD your God.

25 13 "Do not have differing weights in your bag, one heavy and one light. 14 Do not have differing dry measures in your house, a larger and a smaller. 15 You must have a full and honest weight, a full and honest dry measure, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. 16 For everyone who does such things and acts unfairly is detestable to the LORD your God.

## DISCUSSION

### SHARE WITH YOUR GROUP:

In reading through this section of Deuteronomy (chapters 17-26), you will see laws about all sorts of things: marriage, divorce, warfare, wayward sons, just punishments, care for the vulnerable, slandered brides, and even unsolved crimes. They were the first series of laws and practices the nation was to follow as they represented God in their new land. Moses now speaks to very specific aspects of national and social life. It is important to consider three things:

1. What these laws meant for the people of Israel - the historical and biblical context.
2. What these laws tell us about God and His character.
3. How these laws express the Shema – love God and love your neighbor as yourself. (Deut. 6:1-9)

Now we will look at three laws pertaining to our relationships with our neighbors, with God and in our business.

### RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS

READ: Deuteronomy 22:1-4

- While most of us don't own oxen or sheep, how might the principles in this law apply to you today?
- With which of the Ten Commandments is this law associated?

In an agrarian society, oxen were essential. They plowed the fields that produced the crops and yielded food. A sheep was also important, both for food and for clothing from its wool. Losing an ox or a sheep harmed the financial security of the entire household. So, if an Israelite saw his neighbor's oxen or sheep wandering away, this law commanded him to shelter and feed it until its owner came to claim it. The animals and items in this list seem to go in decreasing order of value. First the law lists an ox, then a sheep, followed by a donkey, a garment, and then anything belonging to your neighbor. This is the opposite of the our selfish principle of "finders keepers, losers weepers."

Whatever the scenario – a lost blanket or donkey in a ditch – the principle in this passage concerns how Israel was to function as a large extended family, one that looks out for each other. This law means that the interests of your neighbor are your responsibility. We don't have permission to look the other way because it's inconvenient, or because it may personally cost us

something. This expresses what righteousness means in the context of community. Unlike other ancient Near Eastern cultures, Hebrew laws weren't just concerned with crimes like theft of a neighbor's sheep; Hebrew law commanded the entire community to shoulder responsibility on behalf of others. And, like all of God's laws, this law teaches us what it looks like to love our neighbor as ourselves. We see this principle carried over into the New Testament.

*Read the following verses:*

"Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won't be tempted." (Gal. 6:1)

"Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others." (Phil. 2:4)

**ASK:** How does Deuteronomy 22:1-4 amplify your understanding of these New Testament verses?

- What did these laws mean for the people of Israel?
- What do these laws tell you about God?
- What do these laws tell you about one's neighbor today?

## RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

**READ:** Deuteronomy 23:21-23

- How were the Israelites to regard the promises they made to the Lord?
- With which of the Ten Commandments is this law associated?
- How does honoring our commitments reflect the character of God?

The Lord considers our words serious. Jesus said we will be judged for every careless word we speak. This law admonished Israelites not to make vows carelessly or disingenuously. Whatever a person vowed, the Lord would hold him accountable to fulfill. "When a man made a vow to God of his own free will, it would be pleasing to God, but only insofar as the spoken word found fulfillment in the [accompanying] act." This is reflected in Matthew 5:37, "But let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no'."

The nature of this law conveys the nature of the covenant itself. The Lord spoke His vows to His people, and He would be faithful to fulfill them. As the people who reflected the character of God, Israelites were to be faithful to the words they spoke as promises to the Lord.

## RELATIONSHIPS IN BUSINESS

**READ:** Deuteronomy 25: 13-16

**Briefly summarize this law.**

With which of the Ten Commandments is this law associated?

This law reinforces that belonging to Yahweh changes every area of life, including business. If a merchant wanted to obtain more of a product than he paid for, he would use a larger weight. But when he sold to a customer, he would use a lighter weight, leading the customer to believe he was purchasing more for his money than he really was. This passage stipulated that the Israelites had to use the same set of weights for buying and selling. Commercial dishonesty was an act of injustice and was "detestable" to the Lord. It violated the eighth commandment, "Do not steal" (Deut. 5:19).

The Lord judged dishonesty in business with severity. Later in Israel's history, the Lord rhetorically asked whether He should ignore the accumulated profits of the wicked, or the man with the wicked scales and deceitful weights (Mic. 6:10-11). To use dishonest weights was to commit fraud and exploit one's neighbor for financial gain.

- What did these laws mean for the people of Israel? Treating other people right in business would act as a stabilizing force in society and enable Israel to live long in the land that the Lord was giving them (25:15).
- What do these laws tell you about God?
- What do these laws tell you about loving God and/or loving one's neighbor today?
- In what ways do business owners cheat customers? If what ways as a customer do people cheat businesses?

## RESPONSE

Remember the law reflects the Lawgiver. In keeping the spirit of these laws, we reflect the Lawgiver as well. Think through all your relationships. Ask God to examine your heart to see if you are treating people in all areas of your life justly. What about your relationship with God? Are you keeping your word and obeying His word? Are you set apart?

## COMMENTARY

One of the most challenging parts of studying God's Old Testament Law is knowing how to interpret it as Christians today. It can be confusing to know what to do with what we read.

Here are some helpful guardrails to keep in mind as you study:

1. **BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT:** How does this law fit into the developing big-picture story of the entire Bible? We call this the history of redemption which is the theme of the whole Bible.
2. **COVENANT IMPLICATIONS:** How does this law relate to God's covenant?
3. **NEW TESTAMENT PRESENCE:** Is this a command that is reiterated in the New Testament? Has the New Testament demonstrated that this law is no longer applicable, or does New Testament teaching amplify this command its application for the Christian? (see Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.)
4. **PERSONAL APPLICATION:** You can read the law as God's *Word* for you, even though most of the specific laws are no longer *laws* for you. Ask yourself, what does this law tell me about God, about living for God, and about loving others?

Above all, keep in mind that the purpose of God's law was to show God's people how they should live as those set apart for Him: it's a call to holiness. Holiness demands separation and distinction in every part of our lives, a principle we can still apply today.

## Deuteronomy 22:1-4

Righteousness Demonstrated in Respect for Neighbors and Care for Domestic Animals

All Israelites were to love their neighbors as themselves (Lev. 19:18). A good opportunity to express that love arose when someone found another Israelite's ox or sheep that was straying from its owner (22:1). Though these animals would have been considered valuable—especially an ox, which in the ancient world was the rough equivalent of a modern tractor or truck—the finder must not keep it or butcher it. Instead, he must care for it until the owner comes looking for it (22:2). Similarly, if another person's donkey or ox stumbled or fell down on the road, nearby Israelites were to help the owner lift it up and get it back on its feet (22:4).

Farm animals were the most valuable property that most Israelites could have lost. But the command to return a neighbor's lost possessions extended to other items as well, including a garment, or anything else a brother had lost (22:3). Every Israelite was to be his brother's guardian (see Gen. 4:9); each person was to help maintain the wholeness and well-being of their community.

## **Deuteronomy 23:21-23**

### **Safeguarding Promises**

The frequency of references to vows outside the Pentateuch reflects the significance of vows in the ancient world. This statement highlights three fundamental principles underlying vows:

1. Vows are entirely optional. This is explicitly stated in verse 22 and reinforced in verse 23 with the word "freely."
2. Once vows are made, they must be kept. Verse 21 warns those who make vows not to delay in making good on the vow, while verse 23 speaks of keeping one's word and acting according to what one has vowed to Yahweh.
3. Yahweh holds persons accountable for the vows they make. The Hebrew expression means "to require of, to hold done accountable for" – in this case, to punish for what is considered a crime. The emphatic construction, "the LORD your God will certainly demand it of you," reinforces this point. Like failing to keep an oath, failing to fulfill a vow is sin and renders one guilty of theft, technically what has been vowed belongs to another person. It is eminently better not to vow at all than to vow and not keep one's promise.

## **Deuteronomy 25:13-16**

### **Safeguarding Righteousness in Business Transactions**

Moses concludes his instructions on righteous living by considering an aspect of life that may be most vulnerable to compromise: everyday economic transactions. Honesty and integrity were to be hallmarks of Israelite society, and nowhere could those virtues be showcased better than in the marketplace. Accordingly, Israel's merchants were not to use two different sets of weights or measures (25:13-14). Instead, they must use only a full and honest weight and a full and honest dry measure (25:15). Treating other people right in business would act as a stabilizing force in society and enable Israel to live long in the land that the Lord was giving them (25:15).