

Adult Teaching Resources

March 10, 2019



Epiphany (January 6-March 3) Not Your Typical Teacher

Luke 9:28-43 – “Climbing Higher”

Lenten Season (March 10-April 14) Deliberate Devotion

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 – “A Joyous Confession”

Genesis 15:1-21 (RCL 1-12, 17-18) – “A Hair-Raising Prediction”

Isaiah 55:1-9 – “A Stunning Invitation”

Joshua 5:1-12 (RCL 9-12) – “A Cutting Reaffirmation”

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A Joyous Confession

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

“Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.”

Deuteronomy 26:11

Today, we begin the season of Lent in the church year. For our studies, we will explore four texts that deal with divine grace and human commitment.

For our lesson today, we remember how God was revealed to God’s people through the story of the Exodus.

Opening

After everyone has arrived and is ready for class to begin, ask each person to find a partner. Ideally, that partner will not be a spouse.

Ask each person to share their family’s faith journey.

Who was involved in forming your family’s faith story?

Where did it take place, or in what places did it happen?

When did it begin?

What were the major factors or situations that contributed to the overall story?

How has their faith story (or lack of a faith story) informed where you are today?

Give each partnership time to share with each other. Then, as time allows and volunteers are willing, open the floor for larger group sharing.

Reading the Bible

What will God's people take in the land they possess and settle? (some of the first fruit of all the fruit of the ground)

What are they to do with it? (put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name)

Where will they go and what will they say? (they will go to the priest, they will say "Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us.")

What will the priest do with the first fruits? (take them from your hand and set it on the altar of the Lord your God)

What story will they recall and repeat? (the Exodus, vv 5-10)

What will happen after the gift has been offered? (together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and your house.)

Making Connections

What is your definition of gratitude? What is your definition of confession? How do both inform your relationship with Christ?

What gift(s) has God given you? What have you done with that/those gift(s)? How does using those gifts enhance your understanding and relationship with Christ?

Our Lesson Writer says, "The tithes and offerings we bring to church are likewise a way of acknowledging that our lives and our ability to earn income are gifts of God. Most of us deal in cash rather than crops, and don't have to wait until harvest season to bring an offering. Still, the ideal is to think of our tithes as being the "first fruits" of our income." Do you think of your tithes as "first fruits?" Why or why not? What do you consider your tithes in relation to this passage?

If you are asked about your religious affiliation or experience, what is your confession?

What highlights of bullet points in your faith story do you commonly recite in your personal faith statement?

Our Lesson Writer asks, "What is at the heart of our confessions? Whether we recite something like the Apostle's Creed or a similar confession of faith, the focus is not on rules for living, but on our belief that God in Christ has intervened to deliver us from bondage to sin, to empower us with the Spirit, and to bring us into the Kingdom of God." What is at the heart of your confessions?

How do you respond to God for all God has done and is doing for you? Is the way you respond enough?

So What?

Ask everyone to find their partners from the beginning of lesson.

Share with everyone the thoughts from our Lessons Writer as we begin the season of Lent, “The beginning of Lent is an ideal time to remember how fortunate we are, to confess our failures as well as our faith in the Lord who has redeemed us – and to remember God’s call to show kindness to all.”

Ask each person to share with their partner their remembrances of good fortune, confessions of failure, and confessions of faith from their faith journey.

Then, ask each person to share with their partner what they desire this Lenten season.

As time allows, open the floor for volunteers to share, focusing on what each person in your group desires for this Lenten season.

As a class, assign accountability partners to help each other achieve what they desire during Lent.

The Challenge

This week, say out loud your confession of faith, either privately or publically. Say it every day so that it becomes familiar and comfortable.

Prayer

Loving God, today with begin Lent. It's not the happiest of times in the church year, but it gives us time to slow down and look within as you continue to mold us and shape us. As we remember the story of the Exodus, remind us of our own faith stories that keep us close to you. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

No creeds?—One of the sharpest criticisms against the fundamentalist turn in the Southern Baptist Convention was that the adoption of the 2001 revision of the “Baptist Faith and Message” statement made it a creedal body. Southern Baptists had no official statement of faith until 1925, when pressure from emerging fundamentalism led to the adoption of a general – but not binding – statement of beliefs. The statement was updated in 1963 after another controversy sparked by strong conservatives who objected to the progressive scholarship being taught in seminaries and published in professors’ books. Still, that statement declared itself to be non-binding, strongly affirming the “priesthood of the believer” and regarding Jesus Christ as “the criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted.”

The 2001 revision included a section calling for wives to be submissive to their husbands, and explicitly stated that women could not serve as senior pastors. More to the point, the new document deleted the statement that Jesus should be the criterion for interpreting scripture. It affirmed “the priesthood of the believer” only in the plural (“priesthood of believers”), denying individual interpretation. Other revisions changed the understanding of church autonomy and soul competency. Finally, the document declared its statements to be “instruments of doctrinal accountability” – which gave it a creedal sense.

God as giver—The Hebrew verb meaning “give” is *natan*. This was commonly used as a name among the Hebrews, including the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 7, 12) and several others in the Hebrew Bible. In the New Testament, Nathanael’s name reflects Hebrew roots, meaning something like “God gives.”

The place the LORD your God will choose – For many years after entering the land, Hebrews worshipped at a number of different sites, some more “legitimate” than others. When the Northern Kingdom split from Judah after Solomon’s death, King Jeroboam established temples at both Bethel and Dan. Shrines are also known from Beersheba, Arad, Lachish, and other sites.

Practices varied widely at these sanctuaries, however. Many incorporated polytheistic elements related to the worship of Baal and Asherah. One of the primary purposes of this and many similar passages in Deuteronomy was to insist that the temple in Jerusalem was the only legitimate place of worship. Even there, activities and furnishings relative to the worship of other gods occasionally intruded (see 2 Kings 23), but once cleansed, it was easier to enforce cultic uniformity at a single site.

Why, then, does the text not mention Jerusalem? Although written or edited by someone who believed Jerusalem was the only proper place to worship, the text purports to have been spoken by Moses, who would not have known where the cultic center would be.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Thus, the writer has Moses refer to “the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name” as a euphemism for Jerusalem, where the Ark of the Covenant came to rest in an elaborate temple thought of as the home of Yahweh’s earthly presence (see also Deut. 12:5-7; 14:23-24; 16:2, 6, 11, and others).

Wandering?—The word typically translated as “wandering,” *’avar*, does not normally have that meaning. Its primary meaning is to perish, to die, to be destroyed, or in some cases, to be lost. A straightforward translation would be “a perishing Aramean was my ancestor,” but that would make little sense in the context. Since the passage appears to contrast the settled life of Israel in the land with the nomadic lives of the ancestors, translators take a cue from the possible meaning “to be lost,” with the extended meaning “to stray,” which leads to “wandering” as the perceived best sense of the text.

Aramean?—Both Jacob and his grandfather Abraham had spent considerable time in the city of Haran. Haran was originally considered part of northwestern Mesopotamia, but later became part of Syria, known in the Bible as Aram. Jacob was born in or around Hebron, in southern Judah, but after fleecing his brother Esau of his birthright and blessing, he was forced to flee. Following his parental instructions, Jacob traveled to the region that was called “Paddan-aram” in Gen. 28:5-6, seeking both sanctuary from Esau’s wrath and a wife from within the extended family.

Having spent most of his adult life there, Jacob could have been considered an “Aramean” when he returned.

Corporate identity—As we study the Israelites’ ancient credo, notice that each worshiper would speak as a member of the corporate community, past and present, as if he or she had been there in Egypt, rather than just remembering the ancestors.

What? No law?—Commentators often note that the confession of Deut. 26:5-9 makes no mention of the covenant established between God and Israel at Sinai/Horeb, or of the giving of the law. Despite the narrator’s deep interest in the “statutes, commands, and ordinances” found in the law, it is unlikely that he composed the credo, which is focused clearly on promise and fulfillment.

The confession, probably handed down through the ages and reflected in other texts that joyfully recall God’s mighty works and delivering power, joyfully remembers how Israel had been oppressed, but God heard their cry, liberated them through displays of great power, and brought them to a promised home.

That God would have certain expectations of Israel is a given: inserting a clause about receiving the law would have made the confession more cumbersome and drawn attention from the central themes of promise and fulfillment.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Milk and honey—As nice as “milk and honey” sounds, people don’t generally live on those products. In the text, they serve as symbols of the suitability of the land as a future home. Milk could not be abundant unless the land contained sufficient grasslands as pasture for cattle, especially goats, who provided most of the milk used during that time. Such land could also be suitable for growing grain crops such as barley and wheat.

Similarly, an abundance of honey would require the presence of bees, which implies a land filled with fruit trees, grape vines, and other flowering plants. Honey was a sign of fertility as well as sweetness.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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Who wrote Deuteronomy, and why does it matter?

Our text is found in the book of Deuteronomy, which was probably written in two stages. Although the book consists mainly of speeches attributed to Moses and an old tradition held that Moses was the author, critical scholars believe it was actually written much later. Hebrew was still a developing language in the time attributed to Moses, and the proto-Canaanite alphabet first used for writing Hebrew had not yet been invented. The book reflects a time when the people had left their nomadic ways behind, settled in the land, and taken up a lifestyle of various agrarian pursuits.

Some scholars believe an early version of the book may have been written by priests living in the Northern Kingdom, Israel, and brought south to Judah during the seventh century BCE, probably after Israel had fallen to the Assyrians.

It is likely that this early version of Deuteronomy was the “book of the law” said to have been discovered by the high priest Hilkiah during temple renovations under King Josiah. A reading of the book inspired Josiah to have its message validated by consulting the prophetess Huldah, who affirmed that Judah was in danger of destruction due to its history of worshiping other Gods. Josiah thus began a campaign of religious reform in Judah, destroying both pagan and Yahwistic worship sites, cleansing the Jerusalem temple of elements representing Baal and Asherah, disestablishing the work of Yahwistic priests outside of Jerusalem, and reestablishing the Passover (2 Kings 22-23).

The prophet Jeremiah was active at this same time. Themes and language found in the book of Jeremiah are so similar to Deuteronomy that at least one scholar, Richard Elliott Friedman, has speculated that Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch could be responsible for writing at least parts of the book, which appears to have been expanded during the early years of the exile, when the core of the book became foundational for an examination of Israel’s past relationship with God (*Who Wrote the Bible?* [Harper Collins, 1997]).

Exilic theologians – perhaps inspired by Jeremiah and other prophets – concluded that the people’s failure to keep the covenant outlined in Deuteronomy had prompted God to discipline them by allowing the Babylonians to conquer Judah and carry its leading citizens into exile.

This understanding allowed them to insist that Israel’s god Yahweh had not been defeated by the Babylonians’ leading god, Marduk, since Yahweh had voluntarily sent them into exile. The message from the past also offered hope for the present and future: the same covenant theology promised that if the people proved faithful, God would bless them. Thus, the expanded version of Deuteronomy laid out specific actions to be taken as a means of explaining where the Hebrews had gone wrong and how they should behave if they were to become more obedient and regain God’s favor.