

Bible Tuesday for Lent 1, 2019

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, ² you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³ You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "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." ⁴ When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, ⁵ you shall make this response before the Lord your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶ When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, ⁷ we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸ The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹ and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰ So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me." You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. ¹¹ 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.

This law is given in Deuteronomy 14 and 16. In this passage, however, theological and liturgical instruction is given alongside the First Fruits law. This law describes the Festival of Weeks, aka Pentecost, where first fruits tithe is gathered from the fields and brought to the Tent of Meeting (and later, the Temple) where it is offered to God in thanks for farmland, seed, soil and weather conditions which have brought about the harvest.

Note that in bring the offering, each tither was to briefly state the history of the Jewish people and why they should be grateful to God. This history which begins, "A wandering Arameans was my ancestor..." is believed by some Jewish scholars to be an early Jewish Creed which made its way into this text.

Finally, after the gift is offered and the creed is recited, all of the tithers and their families, the Levites and their families, as well as non-Jews living with the Jews, shall take these tithes and make them into a festival meal which they all share.

Psalm 91:1-2, 9:16

You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, ^[a]

² will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."

³ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;

⁴ he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,

⁶ or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

⁷ A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

⁸ You will only look with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.

⁹ Because you have made the Lord your refuge, ^[b]
the Most High your dwelling place,

¹⁰ no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.

¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.

¹² On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

¹³ You will tread on the lion and the adder,
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

¹⁴ Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.

¹⁵ When they call to me, I will answer them;

I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.
¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy them,
and show them my salvation.

This is the psalm on which the favorite hymn, “On Eagles’ Wings” aka “You who dwell in the Shelter of the Lord” is based. The psalm proclaims that God will protect from all harm those who trust in Him. The downside of this proclamation is the belief that the happy and successful are blessed by God, that the source of their wealthy and satiation is God. Conversely, the poor, the ill, and suffering are believed to deserve their lot because they are being cursed or punished by God.

“Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” the disciples ask Jesus in John 9:1-12. This question very directly reflects this theology. Jesus’s terse, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the words of God might be displayed in him.” And then Jesus heals the man.

This conflict of believing in God and trusting that God has a never loosening grip on us, and knowing that we all suffering and we all die is one of the theodicy questions that all Christians face.

Romans 10:8-13

“The word is near you,
on your lips and in your heart”
(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because ^[a] if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹ The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³ For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

In the verses preceding this passage, Paul discusses the difference between adherence to the Law of Moses as practiced by Jews, and faith in Jesus Christ who fulfilled the Law. In the above passage, Paul describes faith as speaking and trusting in Jesus, inward and outward activities.

“Saved” – the word here translated as “saved” is the Greek “sozo”, Sozo means “to be restored”, restored to one’s proper place. In a honor/shame society, any false honor or shame can elevate or knock one down from one’s proper place. False honor: credit for something you did not do. Real shame: anything that you genuinely did or that happened to you that would knock you down from your proper place in society, such as marital infidelity, leprosy, being fired from your job, failing in school, etc. False shame: rumors and false witness that are believed and inspire folks to discredit or disbelieve you. In Paul’s quoted verse, Paul writes that all who turn to God for help (through faith) will be restored to their proper place. Not necessarily good reputation or physical health, but restoration to their proper place in the Kingdom of God..

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³ The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” ⁴ Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” ⁵ Then the devil^[a] led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And the devil^[b] said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸ Jesus answered him, “It is written,
‘Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’”
⁹ Then the devil^[c] took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written,
‘He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you,’
¹¹ and
‘On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”
¹² Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

“If you are the son of God” – Satan, the accuser in the heavenly court, challenges Jesus’ title. He does so with a very human problem, since Jesus has been fasting for days, he must be ravenously hungry to the point of malnourishment. Jesus refutes this challenge to his godhood and his humanity by quoting scripture that brings the focus off of Jesus and onto God.

“To you I will give” – Jesus is the son of God, and all the glory of God is his as described in the gospel of John. But while alive on earth, Jesus is a very hard working human with an inhuman job to do, sacrifice himself for the sins of all humanity. Jesus already has all ultimate authority over creation, but Satan has temporary authority over the governments of the earth. Jesus refuses to trade his kingdom which is not of this world for Satan’s which is.

“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down...” – Why the pinnacle of the Temple? Certainly, it was the highest point in Jerusalem. But also, it contains the footstool of God. Satan is suggesting a circus trick for Jesus, a free fall to certain death suddenly interrupted by surprise heroes. Either Satan is aware of Jesus’ impending public crucifixion and is belittling it, or Satan has no idea that Jesus will allow himself to be publicly executed and surmises God will save Jesus no matter what. Both ways, Satan has missed the entire point of Jesus’ purpose on earth