

Deuteronomy 6:20-25

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Moses encourages the Israelites to study their redemptive testimony well in order to share it with boldness with their descendants in the future.

As part of their responsibilities, the Israelites were to teach their children in the ways of the LORD (Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:7). One of the lessons the children needed to learn was Israel's redemptive story, that is, how the Suzerain (Ruler) God rescued them from Egypt, from the hand of Pharaoh. Moses anticipates that the children will ask questions: "When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the LORD our God commanded you?'" When the children ask questions, God wants the parents to give a compelling answer. An answer that teaches the children their history, and transmits the values inherent in the obligations of the covenant between God and Israel.

Here again, Moses used three different terms (*testimonies*, *statutes*, and *judgments*) to describe the whole decree of God. The term used for testimonies (‘ēdôt) denotes covenant stipulations upon which the contracting parties agree. The term "statutes" ("ḥuqqîm" in Hebrew) refers to something prescribed by an authority. As such, it could be translated as "prescriptions," or "decrees." The term translated as "judgments" ("mišpāṭîm" in Hebrew) refers to legal procedures, or commands issued by a judge. The use of these three terms together highlights the significance of the whole decree of God for Israel as a covenant partner.

Now, when the children raised the question concerning the meaning of these *testimonies*, *statutes*, and *judgments*, the answer would be given in the form of a story which spells out Israel's deliverance from Egypt, God's triumph over Pharaoh, and His promise to grant Israel title to the land of Canaan.

Thus, Moses commanded the individual Israelite to say to his son: "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand." The Israelites were slaves under Pharaoh for about 400 years, but the LORD rescued them with great power. So, it was important for them to recount this story to their children. Stories are the most effective way to convey principles. The Bible itself is largely conveyed as a story of the human race, its fall and redemption. An application of this principle is that it is vital for

parents to teach history to their children that is true, and that orients them toward God.

Moreover, they are told to tell their children that *the LORD showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household*. The LORD did all those *great and distressing signs and wonders* to show His power and might, and His favor upon Israel ([Exodus 19, 20](#)). As Moses succinctly put it, “*He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers.*” God used His mighty power to redeem Israel out of Egypt, showing His loving care and benevolent intent. But He didn’t bring them out of Egypt with no where to go. He *brought them out from there in order to bring them in* to the Promised Land.

God kept His word because He is always a faithful God ([Deuteronomy 32:4](#)). He had promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants ([Genesis 12, 15](#)). So He redeemed the Israelites from the hand of Pharaoh and all the Egyptians in order that His promise might be fulfilled.

Now that they are entering the land, God wanted His covenant people to be loyal to Him., . As Moses noted, *the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God*. God’s reason for His commands was *for their good always*. The benefits of self-governance, which would lead to vibrant and mutually beneficial communities would provide much *good*. *Always*. Following God’s commands would also benefit them in their *survival, as it is today*.

To *observe* God’s statutes is to *fear* Him and vice versa. Simply stated, observing God’s commandments is the means by which Israel could display the fear of the LORD, which guaranteed Israel’s prosperity living in and possessing the land. Such a life of submission to God would confirm Israel’s faithful devotion to God, which Moses summarized as follows: “*It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us.*”

The word *righteousness* occurs throughout the Bible. Gaining righteousness in the sight of God is only possible by God’s granting of His grace, through faith ([Genesis 15:6](#); [Romans 4:3-5](#)). However, living in obedience to God’s commands causes righteousness to be experienced through our lives and in our communities. Living in obedience to God’s commands would *be righteousness* for them.

The theme verse of the New Testament book of Romans ([Romans 1:16-17](#)) makes a similar point to a group of believers whose “faith was spoken of throughout the world” ([Romans 1:8](#)). This verse makes it clear the believers in Rome receiving this letter were already declared righteous in the sight of God. Paul exhorts them further that living in a righteous manner requires walking by faith. [Romans 1:16-17](#) quotes the Old Testament verse of [Habakkuk 2:4](#) “But the righteous man shall live by faith.” This shows that this principle that ‘righteousness is experienced through obedience’ runs throughout the scriptures.

In Greek translations of the Old Testament, the Greek word *dikaiosune* is used to translate the Hebrew word “righteousness” in [Genesis 15:6](#). *Dikaiosune* is also the primary word translated into English as righteousness in the New Testament. It can also be translated as “justice.” Both terms convey the idea of lining up with a standard. Like a left justified text lines up perfectly with the left margin. In this case Moses is making a practical statement. If Israel obeys God’s commands then they will be living according to His standard for a just society. A society in which each person loves others as themselves. Where each person freely chooses to benefit others just as they wish to be benefitted.

In [Romans 12:3-21](#) and [1 Corinthians 12:12-20](#) the Apostle Paul illustrates righteousness by describing a well-functioning body, where all the parts are working together toward the same end. If Israel keeps the law by honoring one another’s possessions, acting out of love rather than envy, and dealing in honesty, the community will function in a mutually beneficial manner. It will *be righteousness* for them. Much of the reward for practicing righteousness comes from enjoying the resulting harmonious and beneficial community that stems from this kind of loving behavior.

Biblical Text

²⁰ When your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What *do* the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments *mean* which the Lord our God commanded you?’ ²¹ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand. ²² Moreover, the Lord showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household; ²³ He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers.’ ²⁴ So the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God for our good always and for our survival, as *it*

is today. ²⁵ **It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the Lord our God, just as He commanded us.**