

Deuteronomy 26:1–11

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Moses commands the Israelites to set aside the firstfruits of their harvest for the Suzerain (Ruler) God once they were settled in the Promised Land. This offering was an acknowledgement of God's gifts of redemption, covenant, and land.

The exposition of the Ten Commandments and its underlying principles now completed, Moses then moved on to what needed to be done when Israel entered *the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance* (v. 1). The LORD promised to give that land to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 15:18), and the Israelites were the ones who would *possess it and live in it* (Deuteronomy 1:8, 21).

An Israelite was required to *take some of the first of all the produce of the ground* (v. 2). Firstfruits were emphasized because they were considered the best yield of the harvest. Offering the best of the produce would demonstrate the worshiper's gratitude to and dependence upon the LORD (Suzerain God). He was to *bring in from his land that the Lord his God was giving him, and he would put it in a basket*. This would guarantee His blessing and that the land would continue to be productive. This grateful act of the worshiper was to be brought *to the place where the Lord his God chose to establish His name*. This refers to the central sanctuary, which was a place God had stated He would establish once they entered the land (Deuteronomy 12:5). At this point the people are listening to instructions from Moses prior to entering the land (Deuteronomy 1:1-5).

At the sanctuary, the worshiper was to *go to the priest who was in office at that time* (v. 3). This was the officiating *priest* that was tasked with receiving these offerings. The worshiper/offerer was to *say to him, I declare this day to the Lord my God that I have entered the land which the Lord swore to our fathers to give us*. This declaration, made before the *priest* as the LORD's representative, was a thankful acknowledgement that their inheritance of the Promised Land was a gift from their gracious Suzerain LORD.

Also, the possession of Canaan was an irrevocable promise God made to Abraham, making the people of Israel His people and giving them title to the land (Genesis 13:15; Romans 11:29). That promise would be fulfilled once the worshiper entered the land and lived in it. This included bringing the firstfruits, the choicest portion, of his harvest to the central sanctuary as a way of giving thanks to God for His gifts.

After hearing the worshiper's declaration, the *priest* was to *take the basket from the worshiper's hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord* (v. 4), meaning the LORD's presence. Placing the basket before the altar indicated that the LORD had accepted the worshiper's offering.

Following this, the worshiper would *answer and say before the LORD his God* (v. 5) a confession containing an account of how the LORD had acted faithfully on behalf of Israel throughout history. The worshiper was to begin the confession by saying that *My father was a wandering Aramean*. This statement likely alluded to Jacob, whose mother Rebekah was Aramean (Genesis 24:10; 25:20, 26). In fact, Jacob himself lived twenty years with his mother's brother, Laban, in Aram (Genesis 31:41 – 42). Jacob was a *wandering Aramean* because he moved from place to place, first from Aram to Canaan (Genesis 31). Then Jacob and his family *went down to Egypt and sojourned there* (Genesis 42:1; 43:1–2; 47:4–7). Jacob went to Egypt *few in number* (70 according to Genesis 46:27), but while there *he became a great, mighty and populous nation*. This is similar to what is stated in Exodus 1:7. Obviously, God had a plan for his life.

In the next part of the confession, the worshiper declared that *the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us* (v. 6) This began when *a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph* (Exodus 1:8), and the numerical growth motivated the Egyptians to afflict the sons of Israel. During that time, the Israelites knew nothing but hard labor and oppression.

Israel's mistreatment by the Egyptians was part of God's plan for His people, as He clearly said to Abram/Abraham (Genesis 15:13). God had also told Abram/Abraham that He would judge Egypt and would allow His people to go out from there (Genesis 15:14).

Next, the worshiper was to recall that *we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our*

oppression (v. 7). This part of the confession recognizes that the LORD responded (*heard...and saw*) to the desperate situation of His people. The same God who made lasting promises to Israel's ancestors was the one who heard the cry of the children of Israel and delivered them from bondage in Egypt. The truth of God's redemption was to be made explicit by the worshiper when he brought his offering to God.

The LORD's response to the prayers of His people was that He *brought us out of Egypt* (v. 8). He delivered them *with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm*, both pictures of His sovereign power (Exodus 32:11; Deuteronomy 5:15, 11:2; 1 Kings 8:42; Ezekiel 20:33; 1 Peter 5:14). His power was experienced when He delivered them *with great terror and with signs and wonders*. These are references to the plagues (Exodus 7–12), the pillar of fire (Exodus 13:21f), and the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14). Both the Israelites and the Egyptians needed to learn that the LORD (Yahweh) was their sovereign God.

The confession went on to state that, not only were the Israelites delivered from slavery in Egypt, they were also delivered *to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey* (v. 9). The phrase *milk and honey* describes how the land of Canaan was productive and fertile. God had delivered them to such a place, just as He had promised to their ancestors.

It was from the perspective of the LORD's deliverance from Egypt and His provision of the land of Canaan that the worshiper declared, *Now behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which You, O Lord have given me* (v. 10). This confession acknowledged that the Suzerain (Ruler) God deserved the best of the harvest. In Israel's case, the Suzerain was the LORD (Yahweh), who owned everything and was the Creator of everything.

The verbal confession now complete, the worshiper was then to set the offering *down before the Lord God, and worship before the Lord*. The word *worship* (Heb. "shāḥā") means literally "to bow down," a gesture that recognizes that the LORD was one's Suzerain and the worshiper was His vassal. This worship was also an expression of thanks to the Suzerain for His gracious and bountiful provisions. Israel was chosen by God as His people, because of His love (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). Nothing would change that. This worship was to maintain fellowship with God, and walk in His ways. Walking in God's ways are greatly to our benefit (Deuteronomy 6:24; 10:13).

The New Testament also encourages believers to apply verbal confession as a part of their ongoing worship and fellowship with God. God's acceptance of those who believe on Jesus is unconditional and complete, all sins having been nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14; John 3:14-15). However, maintaining fellowship requires ongoing obedience. 1 John 1:9 tells believers to confess sins in order to be restored to fellowship (which makes our joy complete).

Romans 10:8-10 encourages confession as a means of focusing our hearts to walk in the ways of God. In that passage the apostle Paul explains Deuteronomy 30:11-14, where Moses will make the point to the people that these laws are not complex, they are simple. The key is to believe they are for our best, then choose to do them. A part of making that choice is to confess the belief that God's ways are in our best interest, and therefore something we should follow.

As a part of one's worship, Moses told them that *You and the Levite and the alien who is among you shall rejoice in all the good which the Lord your God has given you and your household.* (v. 11) The enjoyment of God's gracious provisions were to be shared with the *Levite* and the *alien*.

The *Levite*, of the priestly tribe of Levi, was set aside to the work of the sanctuary and the priests (Numbers 3). Thus, the Levites had no way of supporting themselves. The *Levite* was to depend upon the offerings and dues of the other tribes. Therefore the gift of the firstfruits of the harvest to God was enjoyed by the Levites as a share of the harvest for their work on behalf of the people.

The *alien* was anyone who was not an Israelite but lived in the Promised Land. The *alien* could not own land as could the Israelites. But the Suzerain God asked His people to allow the *alien* to enjoy the festival of the firstfruits with them. In other respects the alien was to be treated the same as the Israelites, particularly in the administration of justice in the land (Deuteronomy 10:16-18).

In Deuteronomy, Moses reminded the Israelites of their responsibilities to provide for the *Levite* and the *alien* because neither one was allowed to own land, and thus both were economically inferior to the rest of the people (Deuteronomy 1:16; 12:18; 14:29). Thus, caring for them would ensure that

they, too, participated in the blessings of God, the one who gave the land and its produce to His people.

This section teaches that all of God's covenant people should acknowledge the LORD as the Giver of all good things and to give back to Him the best of what we have. We should also care for those who minister to us (Galatians 6:6-7).

Biblical Text:

¹Then it shall be, when you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and live in it, ²that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground which you bring in from your land that the Lord your God gives you, and you shall put *it* in a basket and go to the place where the Lord your God chooses to establish His name. ³You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, 'I declare this day to the Lord my God that I have entered the land which the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.' ⁴Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God. ⁵You shall answer and say before the Lord your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation. ⁶And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us. ⁷Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression; ⁸and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders; ⁹and He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰Now behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which You, O Lord have given me.' And you shall set it down before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God; ¹¹and you and the Levite and the alien who is among you shall rejoice in all the good which the Lord your God has given you and your household.