

Bible Passages

- Deut. 26:1-12
- Lev. 25:1-24

Background

After escaping Egypt, the people of God wandered in the desert for forty years, learning the relationship of trusting God through the daily gift of manna.

They were promised that at some point they would enter and receive the gift of land God had promised their forefather Abraham centuries before. With the exception of two families and the Levites, an entire generation died in the wilderness, so that the people entering the land would know for their entire lives the lesson from the manna, and not live in the negative patterns of slavery their parents had grown up with in Egypt.
(See Deut. 8 for more on these ideas).

Definitions

Pentateuch

The first five books of the Bible, in Hebrew it is known as the Torah. In the New Testament this section of Scripture is referred to as the Law of Moses.

Sabbath

Literally it means "stop", and is one of the Ten Commandments given to help the people live rightly.

Teaching Creation

Drawing Lessons From the Pentateuch

Introduction

The first five books of the Bible are known as the Pentateuch. They contain stories and teachings aimed to encourage people to live faithfully according to God's will and purpose. This study will explore some of the Biblical attitudes to land in the Pentateuch in order to discover some wisdom that can be applied to land use today.

Warming Up

We view and use land in many different ways. Discuss why we value the different types of land listed below and what responsibility we feel we have for their care

1. A freehold garden.
2. A rented allotment.
3. A local park.
4. Wilderness land e.g. National Park.
5. A tropical forest.

Exploring the Pentateuch

Passages in the Pentateuch reveal how the crucial issue of land is related to ethics and God. Some of the ideas may be theological ideals, but they represent a significant challenge to God's people – yesterday and today – in their struggles with land issues. Consider the following Biblical perspectives on land.

A) Land as a Divine Gift

Read Deuteronomy 26:1-12. For the People of God, the Promised Land was the fulfilment of the process of salvation that began with the exodus from Egypt. While in the wilderness they were given guidance as to how they should treat the land they had been promised.

For Discussion

- What do you think the people of God gained from their wilderness experience?

- What sort of spiritual impact would the tithe of first fruits have had on the people?

- What was the relationship God wanted the people to have with the land? with God? with others?

B) Resting Land

Read Leviticus 25:1-24. In Genesis 1 we read how God values the Sabbath as a time to rest. In these verses from Leviticus we understand that the land is ordained a time of rest too, a common practice in many traditional societies.

For Discussion

- What are the advantages of allowing land under production to rest?
- In our growth-orientated world, does the concept of 'Sabbath' or having limits on production, have anything to contribute to the way in which we view land today?

C) Whose Land?

Leviticus informs us that land belongs to God, and we, as tenants, may only lease it (v.23).

For Discussion

- If 'the earth belongs to the Lord' what implications are there for our use of land?
- How does this perspective contribute to our understanding of the care and use of the land as discussed in the warming up section above?
- How might we develop relationships that respect land, people and God?

Challenge

Deuteronomy 26:5-10 reads as a creed recited by the people of God in worship.

Write a creed telling the story of a piece of land, or the whole earth, including our responsibility for it.

