

Deuteronomy 20 – Conduct of War Study Notes

Introduction

In this detailed section of the law, God prepares the men of Israel for the physical warfare they will face as they cross over into Canaan. He begins by addressing the greatest threat to any army: the problem of fear. While Israel fought physical battles with swords and spears to claim the promised land, we as the Church of Jesus Christ are engaged in a daily spiritual conflict against the kingdom of darkness. This five-day devotional will guide your family through the enduring principles of Deuteronomy 20, equipping you to stand firm in the grace God supplies to those who seek Him.

Day 1: The Reality of the Chariots

Scripture Reading

Deuteronomy 20:1 (NKJV) — "When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

Devotional Teaching

When we read these instructions for ancient Israel, we must first understand their literal, historical meaning, but then we must apply them to the great spiritual battle we face today. The Israelites were facing enemies with swift horses, heavy chariots, and vastly superior numbers. Visualize what is going on. They were a nation of former slaves staring down established military powers. The threat was real, and the danger was physical.

Yet, God commanded them not to be afraid. First of all, looking at the command not to fear, we see that fear is fundamentally a state of mind. When we face the battles of this week—whether it is a temptation we cannot seem to overcome, hostility from a culture that rejects God's law, or trials within our own homes—our minds naturally begin to weaken. We look at the size of the enemy, the strength of their chariots, and our emotions take over. We focus on our lack of resources rather than the abundance of God's power.

We must understand that God does not deny the existence of the chariots. He does not tell Israel that the enemy is small. He tells them that He is greater. When you wake up and feel overwhelmed by the demands of the day, do not let your heart faint. Speak the truth of God's Word to your own soul. The discipline of the mind is the first step in practical obedience when dealing with anxiety or dread.

Family Prayer Prompt

Almighty God, we confess that we often look at the world around us and our own struggles, and we allow fear to weaken our minds. We see the chariots of our enemies and we tremble. Forgive us for trusting in our own strength. Give us eyes to see that You are greater than any obstacle we face today. Amen.

Day 2: The Antidote to Fear

Scripture Reading

Deuteronomy 20:2-4 (NKJV) — "So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; for the LORD your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.'"

Devotional Teaching

The antidote to fear is not finding courage within ourselves. It is not reaching down deep to muster up emotional strength. The antidote to fear is shifting our perspective to the presence and power of God. As Moses reminded the Israelites, the Lord your God is the One who goes with you to fight for you and to save you.

What do we mean by this? Well, men naturally rely on what they can see. If our authority or our security came from man, we would plead with men and rely on human methods. But God placed Himself squarely in the center of Israel's conflict. He reminded them of their deliverance from Egypt. The God who crushed Pharaoh's army was the same God walking with them into Canaan.

Every day, we must make a deliberate choice to govern our minds according to God's promises rather than our immediate circumstances. We do not need to tremble or be terrified, because Christ's comprehensive Lordship covers every area of our lives. When you are on the verge of your own battles today, remember the name of the Lord your God. He goes with you.

Family Prayer Prompt

Lord of hosts, we thank You that You are the One who goes before Your people to fight for them and to save them. When our hearts are tempted to faint, remind us of Your mighty works. Help us to govern our minds according to Your promises and not our immediate circumstances. Amen.

Day 3: The Decisive Battle Won

Scripture Reading

Colossians 2:15 (NKJV) — "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."

Devotional Teaching

Israel in the Old Testament is a type of the church. A type is something that was divinely intended to be a picture of Christ and His redemptive work. The physical battles Israel fought were real, but they also pointed forward to a much greater spiritual conquest.

This is the center of the gospel message: the decisive battle in this war has already been fought and won. Our Lord Jesus Christ secured the ultimate victory on the cross of Calvary. He truly died on the cross, and He truly rose again. The empty tomb is our absolute assurance that the outcome of history is no longer in doubt.

We still must put on our spiritual armor and fight the daily battles of sanctification, but we fight from a position of guaranteed victory. How does understanding that Christ has already won the decisive victory change the way we view our daily struggles with sin? It means we do not fight for victory; we fight from victory. The kingdom of darkness has been disarmed. We can face a culture that rejects God's law with unshakeable confidence, knowing that Christ is King.

Family Prayer Prompt

Father, we praise You for the gospel of Jesus Christ. We thank You for the ultimate victory secured on the cross of Calvary and the empty tomb. Help us to live today in the light of that guaranteed victory, fighting our daily battles of sanctification with complete trust in our Savior and King. Amen.

Day 4: God's Order for the Family

Scripture Reading

Deuteronomy 20:5-7 (NKJV) — "Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying: 'What man is there who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it. Also what man is there who has planted a vineyard and has not eaten of it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man eat of it. And what man is there who has betrothed a wife and has not married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her.'"

Devotional Teaching

As God prepared His people for war, He provided specific exemptions from military service for men who had just built a house, planted a vineyard, or betrothed a wife. We must

recognize what God values in this conflict. In God's order, in God's way, the family unit and family enterprise are the true backbone of a strong nation, not its military might.

God's law protects and encourages the family. Strong families make a strong nation, and strong families make a strong church. The enemy understands this perfectly. He seeks to destroy the family, to redefine marriage, and to distract fathers and mothers from their primary duty.

If we are going to see victory in our spiritual war, we must build strong homes, plant our spiritual vineyards, and raise up the next generation to trust in the living God. Fathers and mothers must dedicate time to building a strong household and training children in the law of God. Defending your family from the spiritual compromises of this culture is one of the most vital acts of warfare you can engage in.

Family Prayer Prompt

Lord, we thank You for Your design for the family. We ask that You would protect our home from the attacks of the enemy. Give fathers and mothers the grace to prioritize the spiritual health of our household above worldly success. Make our home a fortress of truth. Amen.

Day 5: Practical Obedience in the Evil Day

Scripture Reading

Ephesians 6:10-11 (NKJV) — "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

Devotional Teaching

We have looked at the command not to fear, the presence of God, the victory of Christ, and the priority of the family. Now we must bring this down to our daily walk. We must actively prioritize the spiritual health of our home above worldly success or cultural approval.

God designed the family to be the economic and spiritual center of a nation. We must foster a home environment where Christ's Lordship is honored. We must ask ourselves: In what specific ways are we tempted to trust in our own resources, intelligence, or plans rather than remembering the name of the Lord our God?

When we rely on our own strength, we fail. When we trust in His providence, we stand firm. Let us apply these truths to our lives today. Read the Word. Pray together as a family. Submit your anxieties to the Lord. Our ability to stand firm in the evil day comes entirely from the grace He supplies to those who humbly seek Him.

Family Prayer Prompt

Almighty God, give us the courage to do our duty this week. Help us to put on the whole armor of God and to stand against the wiles of the devil. May our family remain faithful to Your covenant in a fallen world. We pray all of this in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and King. Amen.