

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## A Disciple's Curriculum

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“...he is to write a copy of this instruction for himself on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. <sup>19</sup> It is to remain with him, and he is to read from it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear Yahweh his God, to observe all the words of this instruction, and to do these statutes.” Deuteronomy 17:18,19

“And they were continually devoting themselves to the doctrine of the apostles, and to the sharing, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.” Acts 2:42

“like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow unto salvation.” 1 Peter 2:2

I have been reading through Deuteronomy, taking note of **Moses' last counsel to the people** he had shepherded for forty years. He knows he is soon to die, and **he does his best to revisit the history of how God had delivered them** from slavery in Egypt, ...**how He made a covenant with them** at Mount Sinai, ...**how He had miraculously provided for them** in the wilderness, ...**and how He had led them to victory and blessing**. He reminded them of how their parents had *rebelled* against God, and *as a result* they did not receive the promises and blessings the Lord had intended for them. **Now, a new generation stands at the threshold of the land of promise, and Moses wants to clearly instruct them, so that they succeed in obtaining the promises of God in their lives.** The same kinds of tests and temptations will try their faith, but if they are careful to reverence God, cling to Him, and follow His instructions, they *can be* victorious.

**God's instructions provided many reminders of how they were His people, and He was their God.** *Their lifestyles*, ...the food they ate, their weekly schedules (Sabbath days, feast days), their high standards of morality and justice, their religious observances and national festivals..., *were centered around devotion to God and His teachings*. If you lived a life that observed God's instructions, you were surrounded with reminders of Him throughout your day, and you set aside time and attention to focus on Him.

**A critical aspect of God's plan to call out a people for Himself was to provide a *written record* of His acts, interactions with people, and His instructions for those who would follow Him.** We see that He told Moses to write down instructions for Joshua, and for the people to follow (Ex. 17:14; 24:4; Deut. 31:9,22). **Most of the first five books of our Bibles are authored by Moses, written for *our* instruction.** By the time Joshua entered the land, **God counselled him, “...be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go.** This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall *meditate* on it day and night, so that you may be careful to *do* according to all that is written in it; for *then* you will make your way prosperous, and *then* you will have success” (Josh. 1:7-8).

**Israel's kings were to write out a copy of this Mosaic law in the presence (and oversight of) of the priests. The king was to keep this hand-written copy with him, and read from it *each day for the rest of his life*.** This was so that he would learn to reverence God and obey Him (Deut. 17:18,19). This was not to be limited to leaders, however. ***The entire nation was to learn God's word!*** The *Shema*, which is the daily confession of faith among the Jewish people, is from Deuteronomy 6:4-9, “Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one! <sup>5</sup> And you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; <sup>7</sup> and you shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. <sup>8</sup> And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. <sup>9</sup> And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” **Clearly, the record of God's acts and teachings was to be learned, memorized, recounted, taught, discussed, meditated on, and followed as essential counsel from Yahweh for His people.** Furthermore, it was not enough to read through them *once*, or even a *few* times. We need to be in them *daily*, because our hearts are *deceitful*, prone to *forget* God and become *distracted* by other things. ***Daily reading and interacting with God's word is a safeguard for us, to keep our hearts and minds oriented correctly.***

**These passages were about only the first five books of our Bibles. We know, however, that God did not stop revealing Himself.** He continued to work through the centuries, and His Holy Spirit inspired other people to record the acts, interactions, further revelations and instructions of God. **There are 34 other books in our English OT, and an additional 27 books in our NT, which have been recognized as inspired writings from God.** There are **historical writings** which tell of Israel's up-and-down journey through the centuries. They departed from following the instructions of God, and they wandered from His ways. As they departed from Him, they lost their

prosperity and blessings, as well. Eventually, they were exiled from the land, taken away by their enemies to distant places. We can learn from *their* mistakes, as well as from the examples of courageous men and women of faith from those times. There are **prophetic books**, records of God's attempts to call His people back, warnings of impending judgment for unfaithfulness, and messages of hope for a future deliverance, and a Messianic King. There are **worship songs and poetry** that give voice to the cries, longings and prayers of the heart. There are also **wisdom writings** dealing with practical matters of living, or dealing with difficult theological/philosophical questions. In the NT, there are **the four gospel records of the ministry of Jesus**, the incarnation of God. ***He is the focal point of biblical testimony.*** The OT writings prepare for and point to His coming (Lk. 24:27,44-49), and **the remainder of the NT was written to explain the significance and outworking of His ministry, His teachings, His death, resurrection, and the sending forth of the Holy Spirit to be a personal "Helper" like Him** (Jn. 14:16-20; Acts 2:30-39).

We saw the strong admonitions of God to His people in the OT to learn, meditate on, and implement His word into their lives. It is no different in the NT. **Jesus told people who believed in Him, "*If you continue in (abide in; stay in; live in) My word, then you are truly My disciples (followers), and you will experientially-know the truth, and the truth will set you free*"** (Jn. 8:30-32). He was a teacher, and it is clear that He *expected* those who claimed to be His to immerse themselves in His teachings. **The final charge Jesus gave to His apostles was to "make disciples". Central to that imperative was to "teach them to observe all that I commanded-to-be-done"** (Matt. 28:18-20). Obviously, that entails *learning* all that He taught and expects of us. It also implies, as in the OT, that we need to be *reminding* ourselves of His teachings, much as they did in the OT. **Practices such reading, hearing, studying, discussing, pondering on, and praying over Jesus' teachings were practical efforts toward implementing them. Disciples are active followers who voluntarily employ such practical methods ("disciplines") to grow.**

With this kind of background, we should not be surprised at the emphasis given to teaching and scripture reading in the early church. In the very first church meetings in history, we read that "*they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, the sharing, the breaking of bread and the prayers*" (Acts 2:42). This is what the apostles had the new converts focus on: study, sharing, having-meals-together, and praying-together. **At the head of the list was learning and applying the teachings of the apostles.** Sometimes we get an unrealistic understanding of what these meetings were like. There were 3,000 new converts. **They met daily in the Temple courts to hear the apostles preach, but then they also met in small groups each day to learn more,** ask questions, converse, share with one another over a meal, and to pray for each other. This may sound crazy to us, but in first century Jerusalem, virtually *everyone* went to the Temple, especially for the hour of prayer at 3:00 p.m. The apostolic preaching probably took place right after this event, when people were still in the Temple courts. (A street preacher's *dream* set-up!) Those interested met in the "portico of Solomon", a back porch area of the Temple, out of most people's traffic pattern. After a message, how natural was it to invite people for dinner, especially since many were pilgrims from out of town? There, they met to discuss in more detail the teaching of the day. Thus, **the apostles duplicated the same dynamic they had experienced with Jesus.** He would preach to the crowds, then afterward, when they were alone with Him as a small group, He would answer their questions. **What were the apostles teaching to the new converts? They were passing along Jesus' teachings, and explaining the OT scriptures in light of their fulfillment in Christ.**

**I Peter 2, gives us a glimpse into Peter's ongoing emphasis on learning the scriptures for new converts. Like newborn babes, they are to long for the pure spiritual milk of the word,** so that they might grow up to salvation. Everyone who has had children knows of the eager desperation to feed, when they are hungry. **The apostle Paul, and the writer to the Hebrews, both employ this same word picture** (I Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:11-14). **They exhort believers to move beyond the milk stage to partaking of meat.** [Milk is predigested nutrition, food processed by the mother, and delivered in an easily digestible form for infants. We all expect our children to grow up, eat adult foods, cut their own meat, and even prepare their own meals. This same progression is to happen with our study and digestion of the scriptures. At first, they are too difficult, and we have to rely on others to break them down and explain them to us. **We all are to work at becoming equipped to study the scriptures for ourselves, and be able to spiritually "feed ourselves".** To develop skill and discernment requires repeated reading, study and effort. Paul writes, "Be diligent (work-hard, make-every-effort, be-eager) to show yourself approved to God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15). **The scriptures are not a matter of personal opinion! There is a correct interpretation, ...what coincides with what God meant to communicate!** We must do the work to discover what *He* meant. We need to faithfully understand and communicate *His* thoughts and intentions.]

**Paul tells us that the scriptures are a unique, God-given resource for our growth.** They are profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness, so that the person of God may *be fully equipped* for every good work (II Tim 3:16,17). The early Christians *devoted themselves to* the apostles' doctrine. The verb there means they *continued unremittingly* in it. We must be in the scriptures *daily*, and continue in it *year after year*, using new methods and techniques to *master it and keep it fresh.* **It is the curriculum God gave us to equip us for everything we need to be able to do, and to lead us into our inheritance in Christ** (Acts. 20:32).