

Learn from the Past – Deuteronomy 1:1-4:43; 6:1-7:27; 19:1-13

Introduction

- I became a Christian in 1974 when I was a senior in high school. I read my Bible occasionally and in 1975 I started reading the Bible at least 5 minutes a day. My plan for reading the Bible was haphazard, sometimes I read the New Testament, or used a devotional like the Daily Bread, and even managed to read the Bible through a couple of different times over a period of two years or so. Starting in 1996 I started reading the Bible through from Genesis – Revelation at least once a year. Now I must admit that some books of the Bible were more interesting than others. The whole New Testament was good, Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Proverbs, were always encouraging, BUT Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy were not my favorite books. A few years ago, I read Leviticus through and God opened my eyes to the depth of the book. Then I read Deuteronomy and it wasn't boring or tedious but actually God talking to me through the writer Moses.
- Today we start looking at Deuteronomy and over the next few weeks we will go through the whole book together, our fourth Bible book this year. As with any book of the Bible I want to provide a quick summary and plan of the book.
- Deuteronomy is the final book of what Jewish tradition is called the Torah. Christians often refer to it as the Pentateuch. The name "Deuteronomy" is a transliteration of the Greek name for the book which means "second law". The Jewish name for the book, as with most Jewish names of the Old Testament, is derived from the first words in the book and the Jewish translation is "These are the words" or simply "Word".
- *In Judaism and in early Christianity the Mosaic authorship of the entire Pentateuch was generally held...However, the view that Deuteronomy was substantially Mosaic in origin was, with few exceptions, held by both Jews and Christians until the rise of the modern critical discussion in the late eighteen and early nineteen centuries AD. – J. A. Thompson, Deuteronomy (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries)*
- The book claims to be primarily Moses' words in **Deu. 1:1** *These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness.* There is no reason to doubt the authorship by Moses, except for the account of Moses' death at the end of the book.
- Deuteronomy is dominated by the speeches of Moses: First address is 1:1 – 4:43; second address is 4:44 – 28:68; and the third address is 29:1 – 30:20. The book ends with the last acts of Moses and his death in 31:1 – 34:12. The addresses were presented orally to the children of Israel right before they crossed over into the Promised Land. Moses wrote down these speeches immediately after giving them to his countrymen.
- The question we have to ask ourselves then is why is Deuteronomy important to us today?
- Daniel Block in his commentary on Deuteronomy states, *[CLICK]The theological significance of Deuteronomy can be scarcely overestimated. Inasmuch as this book offers the most systematic presentation of theological truth in the entire Old Testament, we may compare its place to that of Romans in the New Testament.* – **Daniel Block, Deuteronomy (The NIV Application Commentary)**

- This book is mischaracterized to call it the “second law”, for it *presents itself as series of sermons that review events described in the narratives of earlier books and challenges the people to faithful living in the future.* – **Block**
- It would be more appropriate to call it a reflection upon, or exposition of, God’s law and its meaning and application.
- You may ask yourself, “**But isn’t this just the Old Testament law that Christ fulfilled, so why should we read and study it?**” This question *completely missed the point of Deuteronomy, which presents the law as a gift of grace to the redeemed to guide them in the way of righteousness and lead to life.* – **Block**
- Paul tells us in **Rom. 3:20** *because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.* The Law cannot save us and it is only in Christ’s death for our sins that we can be saved.
- The passage before us today has four main points for us to reflect upon and apply to our lives.

Lesson

- **Point #1:** They were to possess the land
- **Deu. 1:8** *See, I have placed the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to them and their descendants after them.’*
- God had promised the children of Israel a land that they would call their own. It is called the promised land because God had promised it to them and He would bring them to it. God had provided for them over the 40-year journey. He had demonstrated His power over the gods of Egypt for only He is God. He had sent ten plagues against Egypt and this culminated with the death of the first born, even of Pharaoh’s family, and the “expulsion” of the Israelites following the tenth plague. He led them to the Red Sea, guided them through it, and destroyed the army of Egypt. He continued to care for them though they complained about water, food, comfort, the leadership of Moses, and even of God Himself. They were told to possess the land. They had sent twelve spies to scope out the land. Ten of the spies had discouraged the people, two, Joshua and Caleb, told them it was a good land, flowing with “milk and honey”. They rebelled against God and God told them that generation, except for Joshua and Caleb, would die in the wilderness. Moses here is reiterating the call for the children of Israel to enter the land and they were finally ready.
- **Deu. 1:21** *See, the Lord your God has placed the land before you; go up, take possession, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you. Do not fear or be dismayed.’*
- They were about to cross the Jordan river. They could see the land. They were to take possession of it. They were told that (1) God had given them the land. It wasn’t because of what they had done, but what God had told them. Their admonition? (2) They were told to “go up”, literally to climb or ascend into the promised land. The word used for “go up” is used more than a dozen times in the book of Deuteronomy. (3) They were to take possession of the land. This was not optional; it was a command from God Himself. The word for “take possession” means “to inherit, to take it by force.” The word used here for “possess” is used

more than 50 times in Deuteronomy. (4) They were not to be afraid. Why? God was with them...

- **Deu. 1:30** *The Lord your God who goes before you will Himself fight on your behalf, just as He did for you in Egypt before your eyes.*
- The people had been fearful of those who were living in the land. They were strong and the cities were heavily fortified and they were descendants of “Anak”, literally a very tall people, or giants (Num.13:28-29). Why were they not to be fearful? (1) God would go before them. As he had done in the desert. (2) God would fight for them. It wasn’t only based upon their own skills or attributes, but upon God. (3) God had done it before in Egypt. He had done it during the journey. And now He would do it again in the Promised Land before them.
- **Deu. 2:25** *This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you upon the peoples everywhere under the heavens, who, when they hear the report of you, will tremble and be in anguish because of you.’*
- Look at what Moses said here. The people of Israel were told that God had put upon the natives of the land fear of the children of Israel. We will see this fulfilled in the book of Joshua. The natives had heard how God had provided for Israel during the plague, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the defeat of those nations along the way. God had prepared the way. When they heard the report, the Canaanites would tremble and be in anguish for what was coming, for they recognized the power of the true God.
- **Point #2:** They were to obey God and remember what He had done
- **Deu. 4:9** *Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons.*
- The children of Israel were told clearly that (1) They were to take heed, literally “to keep watch”, “preserve”, “to pay attention to”. (2) They were not to forget what God had said. They were to remember what God had done. (3) They were to not to depart from what God had required of them. Over and over again they were told to reflect upon God, what He had done, and to tell it to their children. They were to teach the children, to help them understand who God was, and what was required of them.
- **Deu. 4:13** *So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.*
- God had made a covenant with them, a promise to obey and follow God. He gave them the ten commandments, literally the “Ten Words”. These ten words were placed in the ark of the covenant as a witness to the agreement that they had made God. They carried the words of the covenant with them, wherever they went. They were written on stone, stone that would not decay or fade away.
- **Deu. 4:40** *So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time.”*

- They were to keep his statues, what was “prescribed by God.” They were to keep His commandments, their “obligations before God.” If they were to do this, the future would be bright for them and for their children after them. They would live long in the land.
- *If they will keep alive the memory of Yahweh’s gracious actions, if their theology remains pure, and if their response is right, God’s mission for them will be fulfilled. The land had indeed been promised them as an eternal possession, but enjoyment of the promise is conditional. Each generation must commit itself anew to being the people of God in God’s land for God’s glory. – Block*
- **Deu. 6:3** *O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.*
- They were (1) to listen to God and (2) be careful to follow what God had told them to do. The promise was made that if they did this it would be “well”, literally “be glad, good, pleasing” to them. God would multiply their numbers greatly. Why should they believe this? (3) God had promised them. The land that they were going to go in and possess was a land abundant and rich.
- **Deu. 19:9** *if you carefully observe all this commandment which I command you today, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in His ways always.*
- Not only were they to obey what God had told them to do, but they were also to love Him, honor Him, to be focused upon Him, and to do as He wanted them to do, every day and every moment of their lives.
- **Point #3:** They were to worship God only
- **Deu. 4:19** *And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.*
- The children of Israel were not to worship the world around them and the objects in the sky, as all the nations around them did. They were not to be drawn to them or serve them, for they are just objects that the Creator of the universe had made. The nations around them had perverted who they were supposed to worship, as **Rom. 1:25** tells us *For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever*. What God had created was not to be worshiped but they were there to point them back to God. What God had created was there for their benefit, to help them in the rhythm of life, but these things were not to be worshipped.
- **Deu. 4:30-31** *When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the Lord your God and listen to His voice. For the Lord your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them.*
- Notice what these verses tell the children of Israel: when bad things happen, they are to reverse their course and return to God and listen to what He says. Listen here is literally “to obey”. Over and over again we are told that listening to God is equivalent to obeying Him. They are to repent, to turn to Him again, and do what He says. God is compassionate, He will

be there when they return to Him. Here the passage tells us that (1) God will not fail Israel, (2) God will not destroy Israel, and (3) God will not forget the covenant with Israel. God is faithful and a fulfiller of the promises He makes. Israel's future is secure. We have seen the partial fulfillment of this in our day, when in 1948 Israel was reestablished as a nation, after almost 1900 years of not being a nation.

- **Point #4:** They were to know God
- **Deu. 4:24** *For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.*
- There are a number of verses in the passage today that tell us about God's nature. This verse tells us God is a jealous God. But what is God jealous of? He is jealous that His people were not worshiping Him, obeying Him, and being faithful to Him. The word here for "jealous" is only used of God not of man. J. I. Packer says in Knowing God, *The worship of idols, and all compromising relations with non-Israelite idolators, constituted disobedience and unfaithfulness, which God saw as spiritual adultery, provoking him to jealousy and vengeance. All the Mosaic references to God's jealousy have to do with idol worship in one form or another; they all hark back to the sanction of the second commandment.* - **Packer**
- **Deu. 4:35-36** *To you it was shown that you might know that the Lord, He is God; there is no other besides Him. Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire.*
- These verses are very powerful in our understanding of God. (1) God can be known. They can understand who God is and know Him. He is not some kind of god way up there that doesn't know about them or care about them. He wants a relationship with them. (2) There is only one God. There are no others. No matter what other religions try to tell them, they are false, for there is only one true God. Period. God is in a class by Himself. (3) God communicated to them. That is one of the most amazing things that we can contemplate on. God, the infinite creator of the universe, the sustainer of the universe, who is holy and just, communicates to us. (4) God disciplined them. God cares enough about them to help them grow and mature and overcome their failures. Just as parents discipline their children because they love them, God disciplines His children because He loves them. (5) God manifested Himself to them. The children of Israel heard the voice of God. They saw His great fire. They witnessed His power. They witnessed His love by providing for them.
- **Deu. 7:9-10** *Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face.*
- What else do we learn about God in these verses? (1) God is faithful. He can be relied upon. He keeps His promises and we can trust Him to do what He has promised. (2) God is love. Not only does God have a loving nature, but He shows His love to His people forever. (3) God is holy and just. Sin and rebellion must be dealt with for sin is abhorrent to God. Those who sin against God and do not accept the payment of sin by the Lord Jesus Christ, will pay the penalty for their own sins. There are not many ways to God, for it is only through the death of Jesus on the cross paying the penalty for our sins that we can be saved and be with God forever.

- **Application**
- When we look at God's Word, we need to understand what it **says**, we need to know what is **means**, and we need to **apply** it to our lives. We should never go away from reading a Bible passage without applying it to our lives. As I have reflected upon the passage this week, a few significant applications stand out to me:
- (1) We are called to obey God – We have the choice in our lives to do whatever we want to, but there are consequences to all of our decisions. God has made us for a reason and that is to obey Him and do what He says.
- (2) We need to remember what God has done – What God has done in the Old Testament is not just some story told years ago. It shows us who God is, what He has done, who we are, and what we are supposed to do and not do. God has left us His word so that we can learn and grow.
- (3) We must strive to know God more. God can be known. Can we understand everything about God? No. God can be known, but we are finite and He is infinite. **Rom. 11:33** *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!*
- (4) We must worship God alone. Our focus in life must be upon Him. No matter what happens in our lives or in society God is in control. He alone is all powerful. He alone is all knowing. He alone deserves our worship. **Psa. 95:6** *Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.*