

Route 66

Deuteronomy: Preparing for the Promise

Part 5 – April 26, 2009



In Genesis (3:15) God pledges a Messiah to Adam and Eve, and makes a covenant with Abraham to develop his family into a great nation in the Promised Land of Canaan. In Exodus, 400 years have passed and Israel is enslaved (great in size but not in stature). So, God calls Moses to deliver His people and lead them to Canaan/Israel. In Leviticus, the Lord lays out the sacrifices and the festivals that will simultaneously purify His people, set them apart, *and* foreshadow this promised Messiah. In Numbers, Moses gets them to the Promised Land only to have them refuse to go in - which is followed by 40 years of wandering while the *old* generation dies off. At the end of “Numbers” Moses returns with the *new* generation, but in a moment of impulsive anger he disobeys God and is forbidden from leading them any further.



Deuteronomy takes place in the last month of Moses’ life. And it serves to remind us that although sin can be forgiven: Sin always comes with consequences. This is the view from atop Mount Nebo. We’re told (at the end of Deuteronomy) that this is as close as Moses will get to the Promised Land of Canaan.

Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo ... There the Lord showed him the whole land ... Then the Lord said to him, “This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it.” - *Deuteronomy 34:1-4 NIV*



God said to Moses, “The bad news is you’ll have to live with this regret the *rest* of your life. The good news is that’s only a couple more weeks!” This photo shows where the Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea, where the Israelites were camped (on the *East* of the river), where Jericho sits (across the river in the Promised Land), and where Mount Nebo is (that’s sixteen miles from Jericho).

The book of Deuteronomy is made up of the last words and actions of Moses’ life. He’s got 120 years of life-lessons, revelations, and spiritual insights, and just a few more days to impart them. And so, Deuteronomy begins:

These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the desert east of the Jordan ... -
Deuteronomy 1:1a NIV

Genesis depicts the origin of Israel; *Exodus* her redemption; *Leviticus* her reverence; and *Numbers* her rebellion.

Deuteronomy is all about *preparing*, not only to *receive* God's promises, but to "live in" them and "hold onto" them. There are *conditions* ... and they can be summed up in one word: obedience! The first four books of the Bible are all about *God* choosing Israel. But, in Deuteronomy God is asking Israel to choose *Him!*



Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. - *Deuteronomy 6:4-6 NIV*

Deuteronomy emphasizes a call to total, heartfelt commitment in worship and faithfulness (and is quoted many times in the NT). Remember when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness? Deuteronomy was Jesus' weapon of choice against His adversary!

The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: '**Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.**'" [Deuteronomy 8:3] - *Matthew 4:3-4 NIV*

Then the devil took [Jesus] to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down." ... Jesus answered him, "It is also written: '**Do not put the Lord your God to the test.**'" [Deuteronomy 6:16] - *Matthew 4:5-7 NIV*

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: '**Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.**'" [Deuteronomy 6:13] - *Matthew 4:8-10 NIV*

So, in Moses' final instructions to generation two, the first thing he does is: Moses looks back. He recalls the fearful refusal of generation one to enter and conquer the Promised Land. But Moses reassures generation two that God didn't abandon them.

He has watched over your journey through this vast desert. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything. - *Deuteronomy 2:7b NIV*

And then Moses reels off the *many* incredible battle victories they've experienced since that time, including the defeat of the SIXTY, fortified, high-walled cities of the huge King Og:

His bed was made of iron and was more than thirteen feet long and six feet wide. - *Deuteronomy 3:11a NIV*

They've had such success that the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh have already divided conquered land as an inheritance! However, they'll still help to conquer the Promised Land.

Besides looking back, Moses does something else: Moses looks up. Beginning with the Ten Commandments, Moses reviews the laws that God has given Israel to distinguish them as His chosen people.

The word “Deuteronomy” means “repetition of the law”. And it was named this because the bulk of the book (4:44-26:19) is *just* that, a refresher course on their ceremonial, civil, and social laws.



These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. -
Deuteronomy 6:6-7 NIV

After a 22 chapter review, Moses caps it off with a list of the benefits of obedience and the penalties of disobedience. (27-28). Penalties are meant to redirect us; benefits are meant to reinforce us. In this way, both blessings *and* curses are motivated by God’s love and grace. Both are designed to bring us back into intimacy with Him and alignment with His truth, peace, joy, and life! And then Moses leads this new generation into a renewing of the covenant that their forefathers had made with the Lord. (29:12-13)

So, Moses looks back, Moses looks up, and: Moses looks forward.



In the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them ... as the Lord your God has commanded you. -
Deuteronomy 20:16-17 NIV

What about the Rules of Engagement and the Geneva Convention?! Have you ever wondered why God’s chosen people were commanded to act *so brutally* toward their enemies in the Promised Land? We’re given a pretty good hint back in chapter nine:

It is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations ... - *Deuteronomy 9:4b-5a NIV*

God is choosing to bless the Israelites even *as* He’s choosing to judge the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. These are all descendents of Noah. They have been clearly warned to follow God and are without excuse. The Lord has patiently waited for them, and their time of turning has run out.

Now God is bringing a heavy hand of judgment upon them, just as He did with the flood in Noah’s day, and the fire-and-brimstone destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Abraham’s day. Problem is we don’t know *their* story *or* their interactions with God, because it’s not recorded like Israel’s. But we *do* know that God wouldn’t wait for someone unless He had a good reason.

Why did God keep the Israelites in Egypt for 400 years? So they could grow into a mighty nation ... right? Was that the *only* reason?

Let's go all the way back to the call of Abram/Abraham:

Then the Lord said to [Abram], "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." - *Genesis 15:13-16 NIV*

This passage is incredible for two reasons: First, the amazing, spot-on prophecy regarding Egypt; remember, it was Abraham's grandson Jacob/Israel who first took his family into Egypt because of *his* son Joseph. And second, it explains that the reason for the long delay is because God was willing to wait *centuries* in hopes that the Amorites (and other Canaanite groups) would repent. And now their time has come to be judged, *not* by Israel but by God Himself, and *not* as individuals, but as a nation. Just as a surgeon must sometimes cut into healthy flesh when cutting out a cancer, so God can be faced with the same choice. Moses adds this explanation onto his original order to destroy:

Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God. - *Deuteronomy 20:18 NIV*

Sadly, it turns out this is more *prophecy* than warning. Instead of driving them all out, Israel will make peace treaties with them. And the idolatry will grow and spread like a cancer. And the last thing Moses does: He looks beyond. God called Moses to bring Joshua to the Tabernacle, so that God could commission him to take Moses' place.

The Lord said to Moses: "You are going to rest with your fathers, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them. - *Deuteronomy 31:16 NIV*

And so, as his last act, Moses writes a song proclaiming the faithfulness of God, and offering a warning to His people. And he recites it in the hearing of the whole assembly.

On that same day the Lord told Moses, "Go up ... to Mount Nebo in Moab, across from Jericho, and view Canaan, the land I am giving the Israelites as their own possession. There on the mountain that you have climbed you will die ... - *Deuteronomy 32:48-50 NIV*

And then Moses blesses the tribes and climbs the mountain.

There has never been another prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. - *Deuteronomy 34:10 NLT*