

Deuteronomy - Intro

The Book of Remembrance - Overview

As we pick up where we left off in our Walk Thru the Word, we see that God chose the perfect place for us to begin anew. In the first four books of the Law, the foundation of God's Story, we've made observations from God's creation of the world (Gen. 1:1--Beginnings) to His unconditional covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) where God promised to make his offspring a great nation, give them a land, and bless the world through them. They had to do nothing for God to fulfill the covenant. God took them into Egypt to protect and preserve them from a great famine and allowed them to become slaves as He multiplied them into a great nation. He showed them that there is no God like He is when He sent plagues on Egypt to release them from slavery (Ex. 1-15—Redemption).

Israel, as a new nation, travelled through the wilderness to the land God promised to Abraham. On Mt. Sinai, God made a new, conditional covenant with them when He gave them the Law. (Ex. 19-24). God told them that if they would be obedient to His commands, He would make them a "peculiar treasure to Me above all peoples...a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6). They would dwell in Canaan, the land He would give them, and He would protect them, *but* they must, in return, keep His laws.

In Leviticus (Holiness), God called His people to holiness because He is holy. He instituted various sacrifices and offerings designed to renew fellowship with Him, but they only offered a temporary solution. These were types, or shadows, of the permanent fulfillment that would be paid in full by the coming of Jesus.

Unfortunately, this first generation of Israelites violated God's laws almost as soon as they received them. The Book of Numbers (Testing) details what should have been an eleven-day journey to the Promised Land. Because of their lack of trust in God's promise, it took forty years instead (one year for each day the spies searched in Canaan). (Numb. 14:33-34). By their disobedience, they forfeited their right to the Promised Land and died, never having reached the Promised Land. Now, a new generation of Israel will move forward with God in Deuteronomy (Instruction).

I. Foundational Information

In Hebrew, "Deuteronomy" means "The Words;" in Greek, it means "second law." The book begins, "These are *the words* which Moses spoke...to declare this Law, saying..." (Dt. 1:1-5). While this is not a new set of rules, it is also more than a simple "copy of the Law" that was given before. Moses restates in detail the original Law, delivered on Mt. Sinai, to remind this new generation of "all Israel" that God's Law is their most treasured possession. It is their responsibility to obey it so they can enter the Promised Land. God takes this time to renew His covenant with His people, to firmly establish the themes and messages of the previous books of the Law, and to lay the foundation for the books of history and prophecy that will follow.

Written in 1406 B.C., Deuteronomy is the fifth and final book of the Law. Like Leviticus, it is filled with many legal details, but the emphasis here is on the common Israelite rather than the priests. Five times, Moses records that he was the one who penned the holy words that God commanded. (Dt. 1:1, 5; 31:9, 22, 24).

This book is filled with transitions. A *new generation* is preparing to take possession of a *new land*. This will be a *new experience* as they move from tents to homes, from being fed with manna from heaven to the milk and honey of Canaan. Even the way God reveals Himself to them will be different. Instead of being the giver of rules and regulations, God reveals a *new revelation* of Himself as a God of love for His people. His love has never before been spoken of, but now He revealed that it was the underlying reason for His covenanting with Israel: “Because He [God] loved thy fathers...” (Dt. 4:37; 7:7-8; 10:15; 23:5).

Deuteronomy is also a foundational book that verifies Israel’s journey, and yet, it is so much more. It is a guidebook for Godly principles that will lead Israel as they enter a new chapter in their lives. Moses’ writings help us understand the Mosaic Law more clearly, show how the Law was to be applied to the Israelites’ lives, God’s expectations of obedience, and the importance of faithfulness to His commandments, all the while foreshadowing the rest of God’s story.

As the most frequently cited book of the Law, quoted over eighty times in the New Testament, Deuteronomy has made a lasting impact on both Jewish and Christian teachings. When tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Jesus quoted passages from it to respond to the temptations. (Mt. 4:1-11). When asked to name the greatest commandment, Jesus quoted, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mk. 12:30; Dt. 6:5), a key verse of the book.

II. The Covenant Treaty Format

In many books of the Bible, a specific format is used. When we studied Genesis, we saw divisions marked by *toledoths*, where we read, “Now these are the generations of...” These ten divisions told the story of something or someone that came after, typically listing descendants of a main **character** that became part of God’s Story. The format of Exodus tells the Story of redemption and is defined by specific **events**: the payment for release from Egypt, the changed lives by the giving of the Law, and the people’s response. The phrase, “I AM the LORD” is dominant throughout the book as God shows Himself to Israel.

The book of Leviticus is not divided by characters or by events, but by **subjects**. It can be divided into three parts: priestly service in the form of offerings, the priesthood itself, and cleansing from sin against God. We cannot stand before a holy God in our present sinful state. The concept of God’s identity in Exodus (“I AM the LORD”) changes to His presence with them. Israel approaches Him through sacrifice. It points directly to the coming of Jesus and His fulfillment of the sacrifices.

Numbers’ format is divided in yet another way, by **places**. Five key places are named: Sinai where the people are numbered and the Levites find out their duties; Kadesh-Barnea where Miriam and Aaron complain about Moses; the departure of the spies into Canaan and the people’s refusal to enter; the travel to Moab where the people anger Moses and is kept from enter Canaan after he seals his own fate by striking the rock to bring water instead of speaking to it; and at the plains of Moab across from Jericho where the people are again numbered in preparation to entering Canaan.

Deuteronomy's format and focus are different from the other four books of the Law; it's about a relationship. From the beginning of time, relationships between people and between nations have been bound by **covenants**. Deuteronomy is formatted like one of these covenant treaties. From Adam to Jesus, covenants were established in this format between God and man.

There are two types of covenants, conditional and unconditional. An unconditional covenant required nothing from the people; only God's faithfulness kept and maintained the covenant. Conditional covenants required faithful obedience of the people to receive the blessing and presented curses or judgments for disobedience. When the King and His people swore an oath in this treaty format, it bound each party to the covenant. The Sinai, or Mosaic Covenant, was inscribed on the front and back of the two stone tablets by God. Each time Moses read this treaty to them, the people agreed to obey it. Now, God is renewing this treaty to a new generation of Israel as they prepare to embark on the next phase in their growth as a nation and to take possession of the Promised Land.

God is aware that Israel will eventually want a national king so they can become like the other nations, and He adjusts His relationship with them. Originally, the Mosaic Covenant was framed more like a marriage covenant, but now He defines their relationship more clearly. He is not just a localized king, but the King of Kings of all the nations of the earth. Deuteronomy reflects this eminent authority of God and identifies Israel as the firstborn son among the nations. It will be Israel's duty as God's holy people to witness that God is the one true and only God.

Deuteronomy naturally divides into five sections that correspond to the five standard parts of the ancient Covenant Treaty Format. The body of the treaty consists of three farewell messages by Moses, bookended by a look backward to what God has done and a look forward to where God is leading. It can be divided:

- 1) Preamble, identifying the Lordship of God, stressing His greatness, dominance, and eminence (Dt. 1:1-5)
- 2) Historical Prologue that recounts God's previous relationship to His people, emphasizing the benefits and blessings of that blessing to them (Dt. 1:6-4:43)
- 3) Ethical Stipulations that list the people's obligations to God that allow them to maintain this relationship (Dt. 4:44-26:19)
- 4) Sanctions that list the blessings for obedience and curses that will fall on those who break the covenant (Dt. 27:1-28:68)
- 5) Succession Arrangements and provisions for the covenant relationship to continue for future generations (Dt. 29:1-34:12)

Moses delivers each of his speeches from a different perspective. In the first, he reviews the background of their covenant with God, stressing the gracious acts that God has done on their behalf and calling them to provide a fitting response in the form of loyalty and obedience. Next, Moses reviews God's expectations of Israel as He adapts the terms of the covenant to their new situation upon entering Canaan. He reminds them that they will encounter practices forbidden in the Law when they enter this new land. They must avoid yielding to these practices, or they will be punished for their disobedience. He encourages them to establish a central place of worship.

Lastly, Moses looks forward to what will befall them in the foreseeable future by issuing a series of blessings and curses. He issues a prophecy regarding the dispersion

of Israel among the nations before their eventual return in the distant future. The terms of the soon-to-be-ratified covenant are reviewed. Deuteronomy concludes with Moses' obituary, possibly written by Joshua, his successor.

While reading, it might feel like you are only re-reading the Law. But why would God give us another book when we already have the same thing in Leviticus? We must remember that God is walking us through His Story, and this audience is different than the first generation of Israelites. The first time Moses read God's Law to the people, the Israelites he was speaking to now were only young children; some were not even born yet. The original recipients have all died, except for Joshua and Caleb. Moses wants to give this new group a fresh start. He wants them to know they will be held accountable to the covenant.

And, while this book does list commandments and stresses obedience, its focus is different than the other books of the Law. It is not as much about who God is, nor about works or the motivation for works, but rather, it is about a relationship between God and man. It tells Israel that God set His love on them, not because they were the most wonderful, or most numerous, or even the least of the nations, but because He loved them. (Dt. 7:7, 13; 10:15). Because of His love, He wants a relationship with them.

Deuteronomy, then, is more of a "heart" book, one that stresses a relationship with God. Fifty times, of the 252 in the entire Old Testament, or one of every five times the word "heart" is used, it is found in Deuteronomy. The word "love" is used almost as often. As you read, you will see many times that God is referred to as "your God," "my God," "our God," "LORD, our God," and "LORD, their God." Based on the frequency of these words and phrases that imply relationships, it can be concluded that God wants Israel to develop a heart of love for Him, rather than just going through the motions because it is commanded. (Dt. 6:5; 11:13).

III. Back to the Basics

Throughout the book of Deuteronomy, we will see some basic truths from which all other truths of Scripture hinge. If we remember these truths, it will help us navigate the book more easily:

- The Basic Fact: God is one Lord, and we should love Him with all our heart, soul, and might (Dt. 6:4-5; Mt. 22:35-39). This is the first and greatest commandment on which Israel's relationship with God was built. It is also the one on which Christianity is built.
- The Basic Truth: "God brought us out, to bring us in, just like He said He would." (Dt. 6:23; Rom. 8:1-2; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1:3-4; 2:19; I Thess. 5:23-24). He always keeps His promises. God brought us out of sin to bring us into His family and give us salvation.
- The Basic Requirement: God demands that we "fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD, and His statutes" (Dt. 10:12-13; Jn. 14:21-23).
- The Basic Pledge: "If you shall seek the Lord thy God, you shall find Him, if you seek Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul...He will not forsake thee, nor destroy thee, nor forget His covenant with Abraham" (Dt. 4:27-31; 29:12-13).

Although Israel broke the Mosaic covenant, God kept His covenant with Abraham.

- The Basic Difference: The way of worshipping God differs between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Because Jesus fulfilled the Law by His death and resurrection, all sacrifices ceased. In Deuteronomy 12:10-14, the emphasis is on a special *place* to worship, but now worship is centered on a special *Person* to worship. (Jn. 4:20-26; Acts 8:27-31, 35-37).
- The Basic Blessing: Obedience brings blessing; sin is punished by famine. (Dt. 6:16; 8:3; 10:20; and Mt. 4:4, 7, 10). Jesus quoted Deuteronomy multiple times throughout His ministry. He used its teachings to resist temptation, instruct His followers, engage with religious leaders, and fulfill prophecy.

Conclusion:

Deuteronomy underscores the importance of a relationship with God. If you have never trusted Christ as your Savior, a relationship with Him is impossible. Why not take time to enter into something special with our God? It is an easy thing to do, although not always easy to maintain. When we take Him as our Savior, we are adopted into God's family. He no longer calls us servants, but friends. (Jn. 15:14-15). This kind of relationship is far superior to anything we can find in this world!

Prayer, along with reading and studying His Word, are vital parts of that relationship. Hiding His Word in our heart through memory will keep us close to Him. It provides strength during times of trouble and testing, "that we might not sin against Him" (Ps. 119:11). Jesus showed us this necessity during temptation. (Mt. 4). Although we are no longer under the Old Testament Law, God still wants to have a relationship with us.

Obedience, by submitting to His will, is also a part of that relationship. It brings blessings, while sin brings consequences. None of us is "above the law." Even Moses, the leader and prophet chosen by God, was required to obey. When he didn't, God punished him by keeping him from entering the Promised Land. (Num. 20:13).

As Moses encouraged Israel to remember God's faithfulness, so should we. The crossing of the Red Sea, the holy presence at Sinai, and the blessing of manna in the desert should be an encouragement to us as well. A great way to keep going forward with our eyes fixed on God is to take time to look back and see what He has already done for us. As we begin this final book of the Law, let us build on our relationship with God.

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:17-19).

Remember When . . . (Deuteronomy Part 1)

- 1)** Read Deuteronomy 1-4. As you read this week, and throughout the entire book, choose a color to highlight the word “heart,” “love,” and phrases that show a personal relationship with God, such as “our God,” “your God,” “my God,” etc. Highlight in a different color than you highlighted, “And the Lord said unto Moses,” or your key verses in previous books.

- 2)** When was Deuteronomy written according to this passage? Describe what has happened previously to this writing. Where are they located at this time? Specifically, who is Moses speaking to? How much time should it have taken them to arrive here? (Dt. 1:1-5)

- 3)** What is the purpose of Moses’ message in this passage?

- 4)** Throughout Deuteronomy, the Israelites are commanded to remember four things: God’s faithfulness, God’s holiness, God’s blessings, and God’s warnings. On the Chart, “What the Lord our God has Done,” list the things that Moses calls to their remembrance in this section. (Hint: Many times, the thing Moses wanted them to remember follows “The Lord our God” or some such phrase). Fill in the reference in the first column, what God wants them to remember about Him in the second, and something you should remember God for in the last column.

- 5)** What truth can we establish about God, knowing that Israel rebelled and yet, forty years later, they were about to enter the land He had promised them?

- 6)** Certain lands were not to be given to Israel. What were they, and why wouldn’t these become theirs? (Dt. 2)

7) Highlight Deuteronomy 4:6-7 and 9 as key verses in the same color as the rest of the Law.

8) What was the reason God chose Israel according to this passage?

Conclusion:

Have you ever felt like you were stuck in a rut? The more you stayed in the rut, the deeper it became as the rain and frustrations poured down. It may have seemed that the rut kept washing out, and you became mired even deeper than you were before. This, of course, can lead to depression, frustration, anxiety, and discontent. At the end of the book of Numbers, the Israelites had come to another crossroads in their lives. They had a choice to make, even now when they were across the Jordan River, ready to enter Canaan and take possession. They had the choice to trust God and believe that He would fight for them so they could settle in Canaan, or they could turn and go back to Egypt.

As Moses begins to address the people in the last month of his life, he issues to the people the words of God, “Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount: Turn you and take your journey.” (Dt. 1:6-7; 1:40; 2:3, 13). (You might want to highlight these verses too, so you remind yourself that God doesn’t want you to stay in one place. He wants you to grow in Him, to move forward with the Lord, and stretch for new heights of achievement.)

Digging out of a rut can take some work on our part. It requires finding a shovel, maybe getting a plank to help you get on solid ground, or maybe getting some bags of dry sand to fill the rut in. It would be even better if we could find someone to help us by driving our vehicle (or letting us drive the vehicle) while the person filled in the rut and pushed.

God told Israel, “You have dwelt here long enough.” It’s time to get moving instead of just sitting where you are in the rut, doing nothing for God. Being unproductive in His command to go and tell others. Sliding backward away from Him and getting mired deeper into the world. “You’ve dwelt here long enough!!!” God says, “Get moving!” Come back to Him for help pushing you out, filling in the hole that is trapping you, keeping you away from Him and the things of Him.

What is God telling you to leave today? Are you willing to move forward for Him? Grab onto His hand and let Him lead you. Begin your “Walk Through the Word” if you haven’t started yet. Maybe you’ve put your Bible study on the back burner because you had “more important” things to do with your time. Time spent with God is *never* the lesser thing of importance.

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus tells us, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you.” Putting God first is ALWAYS the best option!