

The Faithlessness of the Fathers and Faithfulness of God

The Beginning of Moses' Final Words

Scripture: Deut 1:1 - 3:29

Sermon Series: *Deuteronomy: The Final Words of Moses*

Topic: Deuteronomy, Moses, Law

Introduction

Today we begin an 11 week overview of the book of Deuteronomy. We will take about 3 chapters each week, which will take us all the way to Palm Sunday.

Why do a sermon series through this book?

1. **To maintain balance between Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT).** Our previous sermon series took us through the Gospel of Matthew in the NT. Thus, it seemed fitting to us in order to maintain a balanced spiritual diet of God's word, that we turn to an OT book.
2. **Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy often.** This book is the third¹ most quoted book by Jesus. He quoted from this book about 15 times. He had the content of this book memorized. Most notable he quoted from it in resisting Satan's temptations.
3. **These are the final words of Moses.** When we approach the end of life, we have a keen sense of focus on what is vitally important and what is not. Moses shares wisdom that is intended to never be forgotten. Generations of believers have benefited from what Moses communicated in this book. Thus, meditating on these words together will be fruitful for us all.



Deuteronomy Details

As we begin, let's cover a few details about Deuteronomy.

¹ Jesus quoted from Psalms about 35 times and from Isaiah about 25 times.

Title

The title of the book is a transliteration of a compound word that derives from two Greek words, *deúteros* (δεύτερος), which means 'second, or 'another,' and the word *nómos* (νόμος) which means, 'law.' Translated literally the title means "second law."² Deuteronomy is a "second law" in the sense that it is a retelling of the law God gave at Mt. Sinai. It is also an "exposition and expansion"³ of that law by Moses as he applied it to every area of Israel's corporate life.

Author

These are the words that Moses spoke (1:1). The question of authorship is addressed both at the beginning and the end of the book. The opening verse states, "*these are the words that Moses spoke,*" and at the end of the book we are told, "*So Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests... and to all the elders of Israel*" (Dt 31:9). Thus, Moses is the primary author of this book.

Joshua may have written the opening verses and the very end of the book since that contains a record of Moses' death and burial, which is unlikely to have been written by Moses. Depending upon when the Exodus is dated, he would have either written this in 1406 or 1220 B.C.⁴

These verses also reveal that Deuteronomy was *first spoken and then written*. Moses *preached* these words first, and then he wrote it down there after. The book is comprised of three speeches, or sermons, of Moses and two poems at the very end of this book. Whereas the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers are primarily marked the LORD God speaking to Israel, this book is primarily Moses speaking to Israel.

Occasion

Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah (1:1). We are given the geographic location of this book. Moses and all of Israel are on the eastern side of the Jordan river "*in the wilderness*" (noted on the map with an **X**). They are not yet in the Promised Land, but are standing at the border of the Promised Land. They are just north of the Dead Sea in the Plains of Moab, as verse 5 says,

"Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses understood to explain this law...
Deuteronomy 1:5 (ESV)



ESV Study Bible

We are also given the timing of this book.

² Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 26.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Matthew H. Patton, *Knowing the Bible: Deuteronomy, A 12-Week Study* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 8.

In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him in commandment to them...
Deuteronomy 1:3 (ESV)

They are in the penultimate month of their fortieth year. If this were on our calendar it would be November the first of the fortieth year of their wandering in the wilderness. Only two more months to go in order to fulfill God's 40 year judgment against the men of Israel.

Why did they wander 40 years in the wilderness? Because of the faithlessness of their fathers. There is one other verse in these opening verses which speaks to the issue of time.

It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea.
Deuteronomy 1:2 (ESV)

Moses is reminding them of the tragic consequences of disbelieving and disobeying the Lord their God.

Let's go back to the Exodus for just a moment.

1. *From Egypt to Mt. Horeb* (i.e. Sinai). After leaving Egypt and crossing the Red Sea, the people of Israel went to Mt. Sinai, where God made his covenant with them and gave them the 10 Commandments. They remained at the mountain for one year. Then God told them to go to the Promised Land.
2. *From Mt. Horeb to Kadesh-Barnea*. Moses reports that it is an 11 day journey from Mt. Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea, which was at the southern border of the Promised Land.



When they arrived at Kadesh-Barnea, the Lord commanded them to go into the land and possess it (Dt 1:19). Moses recounts, in Dt 1:9, that it was at this point that the people then came to him and suggested that they send in spies to explore the land (Dt 1:22). Moses thought it was a good idea and chose one man from each of the 12 tribes.⁵ Those 12 men spent 40 days exploring the land.⁶ After returning to report on the land, 10 of those men did not believe that God was able to give them the land. Their unbelief spread throughout the whole people and so they



⁵ Deuteronomy 1:23.

⁶ Numbers 13:25.

refused to enter the land.⁷ The Lord then pronounced judgment against them that they would wander in the wilderness one year for each day that they had spied out the land (Num 14:33-34). Since they had spent 40 days exploring the land, thus they would spend 40 years wandering.

3. *From Kadesh-Barnea to Plains of Moab.* From Kadesh-Barnea, they backtracked, and went south to the Red Sea, to the western border of Edom, then south around the land of Edom, then north along the eastern boundary of the land of Edom and Moab until they finally reached the northern border of the Promised Land. This journey took 40 years!

What Moses is saying in 1:2 is that, because of the unbelief of their fathers, *a journey that should have taken no more than two weeks, has sadly taken them 40 years!*

The consequences of unbelief are catastrophic.

Audience

To whom was Moses now speaking? He was speaking to the children of those who formerly did not believe in the LORD God. All the “men of war,” upon whom the Lord had pronounced judgment (Dt 2:14-16), had now died and therefore it was time for the next generation of people to enter the Promised Land.

God was gracious⁸ to “*that evil generation*”⁹ by allowing them to live out their lives over the course of 40 years, but they were not allowed to enter the Promised Land until all of those who had seen God’s power at work in Egypt and all that he did along the way (ie. Crossing the Red Sea, destroying the Egyptian army, and all the miracles along the way to Mt. Sinai) had died. It was the children of those who had disbelieved the Lord who now stood before Moses listening to this speech.

Purpose

Why is Moses doing this? What is his purpose in giving these three speeches?

1. *A final call to obedience.* As they stand at the border of the Promised Land, Moses knows the time of his death is approaching. He recalls that God had forbidden him to enter this land. He reminds the people,



⁷ Numbers 13:30 - 14:1-10.

⁸ Numbers 14:20.

⁹ Deuteronomy 1:35.

“Even with me the LORD was angry on your account and said, ‘You shall not go in there.’” Deuteronomy 1:37 (ESV)

Moses was the last living person among all whom God had declared must die before the people could enter into the Promised Land. If the people are to enter the Promised Land, then Moses must die.

These are the final two months (roughly Feb - Mar) of Moses’ life. This book will end with his death. This is Moses’ farewell sermon to the nation. Moses’ own life is a reminder of the consequences of disobedience. Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of his own lack of faith and public disobedience of the Lord by not upholding him as holy in the eyes of the whole congregation (Num 20:8-13). Thus, one last time he calls upon this generation to obey the Lord.

2. ***An explanation of the law.*** We saw this back in 1:5 where we are told, “*Moses undertook to explain this law...*” The word translated as ‘law’ is the Hebrew word *tôrâh* (תּוֹרָה), which means, “direction, instruction; law; rule; teaching.”¹⁰ Moses uses the word 21 times in this book.

Since Moses spoke this law, Deuteronomy has been called “preached law.”¹¹ The word thus refers both to verbal exposition of the law as well as to the written record of it. Moses also refers to God’s law as testimonies, decrees, and statutes. This book is also called “the fifth book of Moses,” and the culmination of the Pentateuch.

3. ***A renewal of the covenant.*** Since this generation before whom Moses was speaking is the children of the generation of those who were at Mt. Sinai when the covenant was first made, now Moses recounts to them all of God’s law in a way that is a kind of reaffirming of God’s covenant with his people. Moses will call them to love the Lord their God with all of their hearts. Steve will lead us through this point in three weeks.
4. ***A final blessing.*** Moses will conclude his third speech with a listing of all the blessings that will come to the people if they will obey the Lord. Great blessings and joyful abundance is held out to Israel if they worship and serve the LORD God alone.
5. ***A warning against disobedience.*** There are also curses that will accompany disobedience. Moses very clearly reminds this generation that if they turn away from the LORD and worship idol and other false gods, then the curses of God will fall upon

¹⁰ Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

¹¹ Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 31.

them, just as his curses had fallen on Egypt. Moses lists the curses one by one in chapter 28. Moses aims to strike the fear of God in them so that they would not fall under these curses. But he knows them and their hardness of heart and stubbornness. He warns them of their own future failure and the national exile that will result, but even in warning them, he reminds them of God's great faithfulness. He tells them that in the future when they turn away to worship idols that God will drive them out of the Promised Land for a season, but then he says this,

²⁹ But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. ³⁰ When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. ³¹ For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.
Deuteronomy 4:29-31 (ESV)

Even when you are in a place of exile because of disobedience, even then you can return wholeheartedly return to the Lord and He will be merciful and allow the exile to find the LORD.

Chiastic Structure

There is chiasmic¹² structure to Moses' explanation of this law.

- A. First speech - Looking back (1:1 - 4:43)
 - B. Second speech - General expectations of law (4:44 - 11)
 - C. Second speech - Specific expectations of law (12 - 26)
 - B. Third speech - Blessings and curses of law (27 - 30)
- A. Third speech - Looking forward (final exhortation & succession, 31 - 34)

Faithless Fathers and a Faithful God

The central aim of Deuteronomy is to motivate loving obedience to a faithful God who is worthy of all of our devotion, adoration, and affection. Ultimately this book is "*about what God does for Israel, not what Israel does for God.*"¹³ If this generation can keep in mind the breathtaking faithfulness of God, then perhaps they will not repeat the sinful faithlessness of their parents.

The Faithlessness of the Fathers

In these first three chapters, Moses lists two examples of the faithlessness of their fathers.

¹² Chi, in the Greek alphabet is the letter that looks like our X.

¹³ Matthew H. Patton, *Knowing the Bible: Deuteronomy, A 12-Week Study* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), Apple Books, chapter 1.

1. ***The unbelief that keep them from the Promised Land*** (Dt 1:26ff). We've already discussed this first point, but further contemplation may be helpful. It is heartbreakingly sad to consider all that Israel had seen and yet they still did not believe in God's power. This reveals how hard and sinfully stubborn the human heart is.

Consider the power of God demonstrated in his deliverance from Egypt; the ten plagues in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the pillar of fire standing as their rear guard to keep the army of Pharaoh pinned down while they walked across the ocean bed on dry ground, the collapsing of the ocean in upon the Egyptian army and their entire destruction, the miraculous provision of water and food sustaining more than a million people, the pillar of fire present among them at night and the cloud that overshadowed them every day to keep them from being cooked in the desert sun, and yet only one year later when they arrived at Kadesh-barnea the faithlessness of 10 men prevented them from believing that God could deliver them into the land that he had promised Abraham that he would give them. Moses tried at that moment to prevent them from making a catastrophic mistake saying.

²⁹ Then I said to you, 'Do not be in dread or afraid of them. ³⁰ The LORD your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, ³¹ and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place.' ³² Yet in spite of this word you did not believe the LORD your God, ³³ who went before you in the way to seek you out a place to pitch your tents, in fire by night and in the cloud by day, to show you by what way you should go.
Deuteronomy 1:29-33 (ESV)

Even with these sweet words, they remained in their unbelief.

2. ***The self-reliance that got some of them killed*** (1:1). This second example of faithlessness came after God then pronounced judgment upon their unbelief and told them that not a single one of them would therefore enter into the promised land.

"Then you answered me, 'We have sinned against the LORD. We ourselves will go up and fight, just as the LORD our God commanded us.' And every one of you fastened on his weapons of war and thought it easy to go up into the hill country."
Deuteronomy 1:41 (ESV)

Moses warned them not to do this because God was not with them, but they went ahead and went anyway, in their own strength, and the Amorites came out against them and "*chased them like bees do and beat them down*" (Dt 1:44).

The Faithfulness of God

There are three ways we see the faithfulness of God in these first three chapters.

1. ***Providing Moses assistance in leadership*** (Dt 1:9-18). God gave Moses help in leading the people when he was felling the weight of doing it alone.

"At that time I said to you, 'I am not able to bear you by myself. How can I bear by myself the weight and burden of you and your strife?

Deuteronomy 1:9, 12 (ESV)

¹³ Choose for your tribes wise, understanding, and experienced men, and I will appoint them as your heads.' ¹⁴ And you answered me, 'The thing that you have spoken is good for us to do.'

Deuteronomy 1:13-14 (ESV)

Moses cried out to the Lord for help, and the Lord faithfully provided the help he needed.

2. ***Providing Israel entrance into the Promised Land***. God kept his promise to give them the land in spite of their lack of faith. One generation did not believe in God, and he could have destroyed them all, but he did not. Instead, he was patient and allowed another generation to grow up who did believe that he could give them the land. No human unbelief is able to prevent God from keeping his promises. May we be a generation who trusts Him and believes that He can keep his word.
3. ***Providing daily necessities for 40 years*** (Dt 2:7-8). Even while living in the consequences of their unbelief and rebellion, God still provided for the daily needs of the people.

"For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He knows your going through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing."

Deuteronomy 2:7 (ESV)

The Lord daily sustained them even while under his discipline. His kindness toward them was daily evident even while they had to endure his discipline. God miraculously provided daily bread for them while they waited until they could enter into the Promised Land.

Conclusion

May we listen to these final words of Moses.

1. ***God's past faithfulness should give us present hope***. Just as God was faithful in the past to deliver Israel into the land he promised, so today we can have sure and certain hope that he will be faithful to keep all his promises.
2. ***Moses recounts for Israel all that God did for them, not what they did for God***. Thus, we are reminded that God saves us, we do not save ourselves. "Salvation belongs to the

Lord.”¹⁴ The Lord saves all who hope, trust, and believe in him. Accomplishing salvation is why Jesus came and so all who go to God through Him will be accepted by God.

3. *Even though there are real consequences of sin, but also is there the reality of God's sustaining grace.* Even when Israel struggled under the 40 years of wilderness wandering, yet God was daily with them. Learn from Israel's mistakes. Even when God may be disciplining his children, he never abandons them. Hear Moses' words, "You will seek the Lord and find him when you seek him with all your heart and soul" (Dt 4:29).

The faithlessness of the past does not necessarily dictate faithlessness in the present. The failures of the past does not nullify God's grace in the future. God is a faithful God. Trust in Him. Worship Him. Seek Him with all your heart and soul. Love Him with your whole being. Draw near to Him and He will draw near to you.

Discussion Questions

1. What reasons were offered for doing a sermon series overview of Deuteronomy?
2. What is Deuteronomy primarily about? What is the purpose(s) of this book?
3. What does the name 'Deuteronomy' mean?
4. When was the content of this book delivered? How was it delivered? To whom was it delivered?
5. How old was Moses when he spoke these words? In what time period was these sermons delivered?
6. What happened at Kadesh-Barnea?
7. Did you learn anything from these first three chapters? If so, what?
8. What do these chapters teach us about God?
9. What do they teach us about mankind?
10. Why do think Jesus quoted more from Deuteronomy than another other OT book? What does this reveal about Jesus opinion of this book?

¹⁴ Psalm 3:8; Jonah 2:9; Revelation 7:10.