



Grace Temple
BAPTIST CHURCH

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A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS AND THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD (1:1–3:29)

The Place of the Passage

The first three chapters of Deuteronomy situate the book within the epic story of the Bible. In the past 40 years, Israel has gone from Mount Sinai (known in Deuteronomy as “Horeb”) up to the plains of Moab, just east of the Promised Land. But in between these two locations were 40 years of wilderness wandering, the result of Israel’s failure to enter the land when they were first offered it at Kadesh-barnea. Now that God is offering Israel a second chance to enter the land, Moses shows what the past teaches them: Israel’s previous refusal to enter the land was a heinous rebellion against God, motivated by fear and unbelief. The new generation will succeed where the previous generation failed only if they trust that God is both (1) still committed to his promise to give Israel the land and (2) able to keep this promise.

The Big Picture

In the face of fears about conquering the Promised Land, Israel must remember God’s constant faithfulness and not repeat their fathers’ sins.

Gospel Glimpses

PAST FAITHFULNESS, PRESENT HOPE. All of our hopes are riding on God’s character, on whether he will be true to himself. As Israel wavers as to whether they will be successful in conquering the Promised Land, Moses directs their eyes to God and his faithfulness, not to Israel and their strength. In 1:30, Moses reminds Israel of how God fought for them in Egypt, which climaxed in the utter destruction of Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea. Moses reminds them of how God then provided for them in the wilderness: God carried them “as a man carries his son” (1:31), and for 40 years they lacked nothing (2:7). And most recently, as they have begun the conquest with the defeat of Kings Sihon and Og, they have seen with their own eyes the power of God to give them complete victory (2:31-3:11). Even when the Israelites themselves underwent judgment, as they did for their 40 years of wandering, they were encouraged by seeing that God keeps his word (2:14). To have hope for their present challenge, they must believe that God will continue to be faithful as he has been in the past. He has never given them a reason to think otherwise. In the same way, Christians derive genuine hope when we recall God’s past faithfulness: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32).

YOUR GOD FIGHTS FOR YOU. God does not promise merely to cooperate with Israel in their battles. He is the divine warrior who fights on Israel's behalf and wins the victory for them (1:30; 3:22; 20:4). When he fights for them, they have absolute certainty of success, and when he does not fight for them, the result is total failure (1:42-45). Thus, when Israel goes into battle, what matters is their trust in and obedience to the Lord, not their military might (20:8; Judges 7:1-8; Psalm 20:7-8). In the same way, Christ comes as a warrior, singlehandedly vanquishing the powers of death and hell in his death and resurrection (Colossians 2:13-15). Our victory over sin comes not from our own fighting prowess but by trusting Christ and entering into his victory by faith (Romans 8:37).

Theological Soundings

REBELLION. Deuteronomy presents a robust and unsentimental view of sin. On the surface, sin presents itself as rebellion, such as Israel's refusal to enter the land when God commanded (1:26) and then their attempt to take the land when God condemned them to wander for 40 years (1:43). But sin is subtler than mere outward refusal to obey. Sin has its roots in unteachability, in a proud insistence that God is not who he says he is (1:27: "Because the Lord hated us he has brought us out of the land of Egypt"), and in an incapacity to listen to correction (1:43). And still deeper, sin springs from unbelief: the unwillingness to trust God's word and to believe that he is capable of giving what he has promised.

SOVEREIGNTY. Although the Lord has a special relationship with Israel, he remains the God of all creation. Even nations who do not worship him receive their respective lands from him (Edom, Moab, Ammon), and they can lose their lands at any time if the Lord wishes (as in the cases of Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan). In contrast to the polytheistic view that the world is controlled by many different spiritual forces that are basically on the same level, Deuteronomy puts forward the Lord as the supreme unrivalled God of all things.

Whole Bible Connections

THE PROMISES TO THE FATHERS. God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob loom large in Deuteronomy. These promises motivated God to initiate his saving work in the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 2:24), and he has already shown himself faithful to some of what he promised. Now his unfulfilled promises explain the great next steps he commands Israel to take. As we examine God's word to Abraham in Genesis 15:1-21, two major purposes must be accomplished: (1) Israel's possession of the land, and (2) the judgment of the Amorites for their iniquity (Genesis 15:16). These two purposes will be accomplished simultaneously: by removing the Amorites, Israel will be able to possess the land. And yet, the timing is the Lord's: Israel can enter into blessing only when they are moving toward what God has promised and only when God determines that the time is right. For Israel in Deuteronomy, the time of fulfillment is now at hand.

THE CHURCH POISED TO ENTER A NEW LAND. In the New Testament, the author of Hebrews identifies the church as being in a place very similar to Israel when they stood outside the land in Deuteronomy. Like Israel, we look to enter the rest that God promises to us, only this time the rest is even better than the Promised Land: we seek a heavenly country (Hebrews 4:9; 9:24). Like Israel, our ability to enter the land depends not on ourselves but on faith in God's provision (Hebrews 4:2). But unlike Israel's situation, our mediator is not forbidden from entering (Deuteronomy 3:26-27). Where Moses fell short, Christ succeeds. He is our forerunner and has already entered into our heavenly rest ahead of us, now beckoning us to follow in his footsteps (Hebrews 4:14; 6:19-20).

Theological Soundings

PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS. After Jesus completed the final sacrifice, the rituals of Israel's priesthood were to come to an end. This was not because the privileges of priestly worship ended. Rather, in the new covenant all of God's people are a "holy priesthood" (I Peter 2:5). The Nazirite vows anticipated this "priesthood of all believers" by providing a way for lay Israelites to undertake a priestly level of ritual purity for a time.

MEDIATION. The priests and Levites encamped between the tabernacle and the other tribes (3:5-10), but they were not there as an obstacle between the people and God. The priests and Levites served as mediators³ to bring the people acceptably into God's presence (3:8). It is an awesome matter for the holy God to dwell with sinful people. The offices of the priests and Levites represented the need for mediation, fulfilled perfectly in the person and work of the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:18-29).

Please answer the following questions:

Chapter 1

1. Who wrote the book of Deuteronomy? (1)
2. Moses spoke to the people when? (3)
3. What is stressed by Moses to these people? (5-8)
4. Who had they defeated to get this far? (4)
5. To what extent had the Lord increased the number of the Israelites? (10)
6. Who were made heads over the people? (15)
7. How were they to judge? (16-17)
8. To whom does judgment belong? (17)
9. Why did he not inherit land? (29-36)
10. Why did the Israelites not enter the promised land after sending out the spies? (32)

11. Why was Moses not allowed to enter the Promised Land? (37)

12. Who would lead them into the Promised Land? (38)

13. Who would inherit the Promised Land? (39)

14. When they realized they had sinned against God, what did they do? (41)

15. Would God be with them in this battle of their own making? (42)

Chapter 2

1. The “for a long time” refers to how much time? (1)

2. Where do the children of Esau live? (4)

3. Why will God not give them Esau’s descendants’ land? (5-6)

4. What had the Israelites lacked for in their wilderness wanderings? (7)

5. Who are the children of Esau called? (8)

6. Describe the Emites. (10-12)
7. What was the purpose of the 38 year wanderings? (14-15)
8. Who were the Ammonites descendants of? (19)
9. What did the Ammonites call the giants? (20-21)
10. What happened to all of Sihon's people? (26-35)

Chapter 3

1. How were the cities fortified? (5)
2. Who was the last of the giants? How big was his bed? (9)
3. To whom was given the kingdom of Og? (12-13)
4. Who was Jair a descendent of? (14)
5. Who was Gilead given to? (15)

6. The Dead Sea is called what? (17)

7. What does Moses ask God for? (23)

8. Does God grant his prayer request? (26)

9. From where was Moses able to see the land beyond Jordan? (27)

10. Who will go in Moses' place? (28)