

BIB103 OT1: Creation and Covenants

Unit 6a Restatement of the Law for a New Generation

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As we look at this session, we're going to take an overview of the Book of Deuteronomy. Now, when you think of Deuteronomy, think of it as a sequel/remake of the rest of the Hebrew Bible up until this point. It's got a similar cast of characters, a similar story, and even some of the same axioms. Moses is back, and once again, we're talking about the history and future of the Israelite people. This whole thing is made up of a bunch of flashbacks and flash forwards with Moses as the narrator. And there's a few interludes even from possibly an outside writer. The book places the Israelites on the verge of entering the Promised Land while Moses stands before them to review all of God's laws. It's basically a pep talk. I think of those when I was back in high school before the big games and you had the coach come in and wanted to make sure that the focus was on the right spot, that you really were ready to win the game, to go up there and do your best and know your parts and know your place. And the Israelite nation needed that. Moses knew that and crafted this in such a way to give them that kind of pep talk.

It's a pep talk that involves a lot of finger pointing, though, and also some reprimanding of the people, which as a former player, that wasn't always the fun part, but still necessary so that the game could be played right, accurately, and again, hopefully for that win. He wants them to have courage as they prepare to fight for the land that they've been promised by God. Now, once upon a time, the parents and grandparents of the Israelites, now seated here on the banks of the Jordan, decided not to fight the inhabitants of the Promised Land. They were afraid of giants who guarded humongous castles in their mind in Israel and refused to go to war. They allowed fear to dictate the decisions in which they make. And again, I find that even as Christians, for us to be aware of this, we get a concept of that when we are very critical of the Israelites and think, "How could you have not claimed the promises of God?" So often, we allow fear to stop us from claiming the promises that God lays out so clearly as he directs in his word for us right here in the modern day world.

So the giants that they were afraid of, the land was so rich, what were they do? When they finally decided to enter the ring of battle, God would not help them. Why? Because of their lack of trust in God and several other minor offenses, God refused to give them, at that time, the Promised Land. Their enemies beat them down. And God made their survivors and their children wander in the wilderness for 40 years. That generation died in the wilderness. Now their children are ready to conquer the land.

Moses sets up this showdown by reminding them of all the times that God has helped them in their journey in 1:6 through 4:40. He reviews a lot of laws with the Israelites and illustrates what we call the doctrine of the two ways. There are only two choices in life: good, which means following God's laws; or

evil, which means not following God's laws. Goodness leads to reward. Evil leads to punishment. It's really that simple. And Moses is here to make sure that the Israelites really get it.

So what we get basically in the Book of Deuteronomy is that explanation of this covenant between the Israelites and God, with all the stories, specific legal doctrines and ideas surrounding it. It's a big mixed up bowl of confusing 'Bibleness.' When I say 'Bibleness,' I mean, it takes many different aspects of Scripture and puts them together as we are exposed to many different characteristics of God: his love and yet his judgment, his care and concern and yet his eye for detail that is necessary that the Israelites get. They saw God in his wholeness, and that's what we find in the Book of Deuteronomy.

Now, one of the main points of Deuteronomy is that once the people enter the Promised Land, they were told not to adopt the customs of the people that they were displacing. In chapters 27 to 30, Moses encourages the people to be loyal to God and to avoid the idols of the Canaanites. "No idols" could almost be the motto of this whole book. Finally, Israel is just across the Jordan River from the Promised Land of Canaan. Moses has led the nation out of Egypt, and on that 40-year journey that we just talked about, through the wilderness, passing, if you can imagine in your mind, the same spot over and over again. And the thing I think that grabs me the most is they were walking not only on that path where they were recognizing places they had set up their camps, but they were walking by the places where they had buried their loved ones. As the years passed, more and more of those that did not accept the promises of God, that believed the 10 spies instead of the two, that ultimately rejected God's promise to them, are mounting up around them as they walk through. What a vivid reminder that must have been to them, as God was getting rid of the generations, that a new generation would have an opportunity to embrace the promises of God.

Along the way, the defeats of enemies, they see God's protection there. And now these 12 tribes are getting ready to settle the land east of the Jordan, and the whole nation is almost ready to enter the land promised to their ancestor Abraham way back in the Book of Genesis. Are you almost ready? The last time Israel was this close to the Promised Land, they doubted God's promise and tried to go back to Egypt because of their unbelief. But God, as we heard, not only banned the generation before them to go into the Promised Land, but we see that all laid out again remember the Book of Numbers. So you see that reflection that Deuteronomy has back to some of the other books in the Pentateuch. Now that the old generation has passed away, the new nation is going to claim the land. But before they do, we hear Moses rally the people to remind them of God's laws and how they needed to, above all else, obey him. Remember the motto? No idols.

Now, there is a themed verse in Deuteronomy that we see in 30:19-20. “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, the blessings and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and by holding fast to him, for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.” A powerful section of Scripture. And if you think about what we just talked about, it ties in so beautifully with the whole theme: no idols. Focus on God. Obey God. Do what God tells you. That was a doctrine of two ways. Will I do good and obey God? Will I do evil and follow my own path in life?

Now, Deuteronomy, as we kind of touched on, is reviewing the Pentateuch and it foreshadows the rest of the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy, Moses finds the people of God’s actions in the past. They see his promises to Abraham in Genesis; his faithfulness in rescuing Israel, which is referenced in Exodus; his holiness, which we talk about in Leviticus; his punishment to the disobedient, which we see in the Book of Numbers. Moses also gives directions, blessings, and warnings for the children of Israel, looking forward into the future in this book. We see the appointment of Joshua as the new leader; God’s expectations of kings, which take effect when Saul becomes king in 1 Samuel; the prosperity that they would have for obeying God, which happens during David and Solomon’s reigns. And that’s in 1 Kings 8:56 through 10:14-29. We also see exile for disobedience, which happens when the tribes are conquered by Assyrian Babylon in 2 Kings 17:6-23 and 25:1-26. And finally, another future event that would take place that we hear sat on in the Book of Deuteronomy is God’s promises to restore Israel, which happens when Cyrus allows the Jews once again to return from Babylon in the Book of Ezra.

Deuteronomy is primarily the retelling of the Mosaic Law, but the text is still important today. When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus cites Deuteronomy 6:5. “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.” (Mark 12:30) Jesus quotes Deuteronomy three times when the devil tempts him in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). And Deuteronomy focuses on loving God and keeping his commandments (Deuteronomy 11:1), which is exactly what Christ expects of us, as stated in John 14:15. Wow. There’s so much richness here. There’s so much reminders and there’s so much looking ahead and even seeing that Jesus values the importance of Deuteronomy by quoting it, as you’ve heard on several different occasions in the New Testament in Jesus’ earthly journey with us.

Now, the genre of the Book of Deuteronomy is much more different than that of Exodus. It’s a narrative history and also talking about the law. Now, although there’s a song in here for Moses just after he

commissions Joshua, the song describes the history that the Israelites had already experienced. And you'll see that a couple of times in the Old Testament when songs are specifically written as remembrances of what had taken place and to keep that as a visual every time the song is sung of what again God had done, either as warnings or as remembering of God's blessings in their life.

Deuteronomy was written right around 1406 BC, at the end of those 40 years of wandering that were endured by the nation of Israel. At this time, the people were camped on the east of the Jordan River, on the plains of Moab across from the city of Jericho. We see that in Deuteronomy 1:1 and 29:1. They were on the verge of entering the land that had been promised centuries earlier to their forefathers. Again, we see that where? Genesis 1:2, 12:1 and verses 6-9. The children who had left Egypt were now adults ready to conquer and settle in the Promised Land. But before this can happen, the Lord reiterated through Moses his covenant with them.

Now, Deuteronomy means second law, a term mistakenly derived from the Hebrew word Mishna in Deuteronomy 17:18. In that context, Moses simply commands the king to make a copy of the law. But Deuteronomy does something more than give a simple copy of the law. The book offers a restatement of the law for a new generation rather than just a mere copy of what had gone on before. Deuteronomy records this second law, namely Moses' series of sermons in which he restates God's commands originally given to the Israelites some 40 years earlier in Exodus and in Leviticus. Now, there are two words which Moses spoke to all Israel and it says them in Deuteronomy 1:1. Mosaic authorship of the book finds that this usual support from Jewish tradition is found throughout the entire Pentateuch but also from within the Bible text itself. Several times, Deuteronomy asserts Moses as the author, in 1:1, in 4:44, and in 29:1.

Now, speaking to Joshua, Moses' successor, the Lord referred to the book of the law as that which Moses commanded in Joshua 1:8. And when future Old Testament and New Testament writers quoted from Deuteronomy, they often referred to it as originating with Moses. We find that in 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; Ezra 3:2; Nehemiah 1:7; Malachi 4:4, and lastly, in the New Testament, in Matthew 19:7. So there were some obvious editorial changes that were made to the text sometime after Moses recorded the bulk of it. For instance, he could not have written the final chapter which dealt with his death. However, these and other small changes don't affect the generally accepted authorship of Moses.

There are some firsts that I think are significant in Deuteronomy that I want to touch on. The significant firsts are about five or six in nature that are kind of interesting. We see, first of all, that there's a word

called the Shema in 6:4-5, which we'll talk about a little bit later. We see this is the first mention of the great tribulation in 4:29-31. There's the promise of the coming prophet in 18:15-19. That great prophet being Jesus Christ. We also see a Palestinian covenant that's made here in 29:1-30 [sic Deuteronomy 29:1-29], and then also we see it in chapter 10. And then there's the prophetic song of Moses which we referred to in chapter 32. All these were firsts. They had not been mentioned earlier in any of the Pentateuch, but they're worth making a note of.

There's also some new things in Deuteronomy. We talked about how we looked ahead into the future of what was going to take place. But remember, we're not talking to that old generation. We see one of the firsts is that new generation, because of their wilderness experience, they hadn't battled like the old generation has. They hadn't seen the hand of God the way the older generation has. They weren't now remembering and living in some of those plagues like the old generation have when Egypt was plagued and they were freed from bondage there. It's a new country, a new possession, and a new life. There were houses now that they were going to live in instead of tents. They were going to become farmers now instead of nomads. They were going to be planting roots in cities and in towns, which before they had just been traveling, never spending more than a few nights or possibly a few weeks in any set location. As a result of that, there may have new duties within those cities. They were going to have jobs and there was going to have to be possibly governmental changes that took place as different people oversaw the different towns and cities. And the Levitical priests as well as the temple priests would be there to be keeping an eye on things in a different way than what they experienced in the past.

And then there was the new revelation of God as well, and that was the revelation of his love. From Genesis to Numbers, there was no reference to the love of God for his people. Now, in Deuteronomy, the word love occurs 22 times. Now, consider that. "Because he loved your fathers, therefore he chooses their seed." (4:37) "The Lord did not send his love upon you nor choose you because you are more in number than any other people, for you are the fewest of all people, but because the Lord loved you." (7:7-8) "The Lord had delight in your fathers to love them." (10:15) "The Lord thy God turned a curse into a blessing under thee because the Lord thy God loved thee." (23:5) Now, we know God loved them even though he didn't say it, much like the Book of Esther has God all in it, although his name is not mentioned. We see specifically now in Deuteronomy brought up not just God focusing on them but reminding them of his love for them. And that's something we should never forget in a world that we easily lean towards hate, easily feel like God doesn't love us because we're not worthy, to remember

that God's love is not based on my circumstances, my reactions, purely on the fact that he created me, he sent his son to redeem me, and he loves me deeply always, on my best day and on my worst day.

There's a few characteristics in the book too I wanted to point on before we continue on. This book is a book of instruction and it also demands obedience. I think sometimes we have a tendency to look at some of these passages as suggestions that were made to the Israelites because we view oftentimes the Bible in our modern day era, unfortunately, as suggestions rather than commands. "Love your enemy." "Boy, I don't know that I can do that." Well, if God states it, there's an expectation not only that we can do it, but we can do it through his power. So he told them. There was a demanding of obedience that took place here. A book that's often used in the New Testament, again, is Deuteronomy. The book that Jesus used, as we talked about in his temptation, a book that directly quoted or alluded to over 80 times in the New Testament. A record that's only exceeded by Genesis, Psalms, and Isaiah. The book is actually a series of four sermons based upon Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, applying these materials to this new situation that they were now facing.

Now, there's a big picture that we want to look at in Deuteronomy, but then there's also a breakdown of understanding what the different chapters of Deuteronomy really encapsulate. In chapters 1 through 4, Moses reviews some of the details of the history of Israel, such as the exodus and the wandering in the wilderness. He then urges them to obey the laws of God. Then in chapters 5 all the way through chapter 28, Moses restates the Ten Commandments to the Israelites. He explains the principles and instructions that were necessary for living a godly life as God's chosen nation. These include how to love the Lord, the laws of the worship, the laws regarding relationships, like divorce, for instance, and the consequences and penalties if the laws are broken. We see chapters 27 and 28 specifically talking about the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience. Now, as we're taking a bigger view of the Book of Deuteronomy, there is a significant anchor passage that really is a powerful part of the Pentateuch itself, and that's Deuteronomy 6. So before we go further into the overview of the chapter sections, I'd like to take a brief break here and specifically talk about the first half of Deuteronomy 6 as it relates to the roles of parents and God's expectation that can be easily applied to our modern day world, even as it was stated for the children of Israel at that time.