

"WALK THRU THE BIBLE: DEUTERONOMY."

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

June 16, 2024, 6:00 pm

Text for Sermon: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 10:12-20

Introduction:

As we move through the Bible one book at a time, one tree at a time in this forest of 66 trees, it is good to remind ourselves what we are reading. Scripture is one narrative, inspired by God and told in many parts. Old and New Testaments must, therefore, be studied together.

The Bible is one unified story, one unified revelation with one central message, about what our triune Creator-covenant God planned in eternity, executed in time, to glorify Himself by bringing about the redemption of His people, the judgment of sin, and making all things new in Christ Jesus.

It's good to remind ourselves this is the God-breathed Word of God given to us by God for our eternal benefit. It is all important. It is important to remind ourselves of this because when we get to books like Deuteronomy we are tempted to start to wonder.

Deuteronomy

To many people Deuteronomy is a closed book. It was written by a Jew for the Jews right before they inherited their Promised Land. All of its laws, rules, regulations, instructions are directed at the Jews. It has no relevance to us living under the Gospel. We are so far removed from this book and the world it is written in.

We may not go so far as the Christian heretic Marcion and declare the whole OT should be removed from the canon of Scripture, but we do it in practice when we ignore or neglect to read these books.

Martin Luther said, "There are many who consider Moses and the whole Old Testament of very small value and claim to be content with the gospel. From this opinion the Christian man must be far, far removed."

Deuteronomy means second law, this is a reiteration of the law that was first given to Moses at Mt. Sinai. Evidence of this is seen in the ten commandments repeated in chapter 5. But it is not a new law or a second law, but a repetition of God's law which defines God's covenant relationship with His people.

This is a new generation of Israelites facing a new life in a new land, their new inheritance. This calls for a new commitment to God and a new understanding of what it means to be the people of God. This is the divine will of God for the new generation. This is a renewing of the covenant like we do at the Lord's Table.

The camping trip is over, and they are about to move into houses in a land flowing with milk and honey.

As the fifth and final book of Moses, of the Pentateuch, and as a restipulation of the covenant law of Israel, Deuteronomy is an important bridge or link between patriarchal history of Israel and the exodus, deliverance and wanderings of Israel, and all the historical books that are in front of us concerning the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land.

Moses was 80 when he began leading the people of God. At the end of Numbers/Deuteronomy he is 120.

Deuteronomy opens on the first day of the eleventh month (1:3) of the final year in the wilderness and ends immediately prior to Israel's crossing the Jordan to invade the land of Canaan.

Deuteronomy 1:3 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 2:14-15 The time from our leaving Kadesh-barnea until we crossed the brook Zered was thirty-eight years, until the entire generation, that is, the men of war, had perished from the camp, as the Lord had sworn to them. 15 For indeed the hand of the Lord was against them, to destroy them from the camp, until they had perished.

Deuteronomy is tough sledding for us action/drama oriented Americans as there is no action in this book. All the action happened in the book of Numbers and ended on the plains of Moab east of the Jordan River.

Deuteronomy is three long sermons by a 120 year old man. It only covers about two months, 30 days of which was mourning after the death of Moses.

Don't underestimate its importance. It shares with Genesis, Psalms, and Isaiah the distinction of most frequent citation by New Testament writers. The total references number more than eighty.

It is written in the form of a treaty between a king and his people. It starts with a historical prologue, then the laws that must be obeyed and then ends with what happens if they are kept or broken, blessings or curses.

This is basically the constitution of the nation of Israel. One nation under God.

Deuteronomy divides very easily and naturally into three sermons by Moses right before he dies.

Moses is not going into the land with the people, so these three sermons are his farewell sermons, like a last will and testament, his final admonition delivered on the plains of Moab on the eastern border of Canaan, before he dies and the people cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land.

Has there ever been a man who has addressed a greater audience under a more auspicious and impressive occasion with more important words, and has there ever been a people who had greater reason to give total attention to every word spoken?

A nation on the brink of a great conquest formed and lead by the great God.

I have a book in my library of the 278 World's Greatest Speeches. Tellingly it doesn't include these three.

I. Introduction: Moses Speaks to all Israel (1:1-5)

II. Moses' First Address: Meaning of the Covenant in Israel's History (1:6-4:43)

The Acts of God in Israel's History

A historical look backward

Everything God has done for them, things that prove His love.

Moses recounts their past rebellion lest they forget, and God's recent victories.

III. Moses' Second Address: Demands of the Covenant (4:44-26:19)

The Law of God

Longest sermon on covenant and demand for allegiance.

Ten Commandments, and review of the law.

Idolatry, place of worship, food laws, avoid customs of Canaanites, slaves, feasts

What does God require of you? 10:12-13

IV. Moses' Third Address: Call to Covenant Commitment (27:1-30:20)

The Covenant with God

The Renewal of the Covenant (27:1-30:20)

Recapitulation, warnings, blessings and curses, solemn appeal to chose life.

V. Appendix: Farewell and Death of Moses (31:1-34:12)

Transition from Moses and Joshua

Joshua is believed to have written the last eight verses regarding Moses' death.

We are wrong to exercise chronological snobbery and hubris by looking down our noses at ancient peoples.

“This book is a work of extraordinary literary coherence, poetic beauty and political sophistication. This is a remarkably comprehensive attempt to bring reformation and reform to a culture/people” (Duane Christensen, WBC).

Heart of the Book.

Deuteronomy 5:29 Oh that they had such a heart as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever!

In all of this we hear the importance of the covenant, the bond between the Lord and His chosen people. The essence of covenant is a relationship between God and His people.

The most basic operating principle is love. The heart of the book is love, first God's love for His people, He takes the initiative, and then requires a response to love Him.

Don't lose sight of the fact that though the book emphasizes the Law of God the heart of the book is love, God's love for us and our love for God.

Deuteronomy at its most basic level is an exposition or commentary on Deuteronomy 6:5.

Deuteronomy 6:4-6 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. *5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

Here is life's supreme exhortation and goal. What we are created, called, and saved to do. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength. This love must be all in, must be total, with all his being (6:5). God wants our hearts, God is after our hearts. It is a lifestyle.

This basic principle is the foundation of the ten commandments, love God and love your neighbor.

It is love that motivated God to make the covenant in the first place, and it is by love that the people maintain their close covenant relationship with God.

All through Deuteronomy you hear God's love for His people, of the people's love for Him, and of their love for each other including the alien residents. Notice the emphasis on the poor and needy and the call to love them as well.

This is most clearly illustrated by the metaphor of a father's love for his son and a son's love for his father.

God's fatherly love is seen in His compassionate care and provision, and in His firm corrective discipline. To break the covenant was to break love and the relationship.

Jesus

Moses was a forerunner, as was John the Baptist. He prophesied the coming of a greater prophet.

Deuteronomy 18:15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.

Like Moses, Jesus leads us out of spiritual bondage, out of our spiritual wilderness into our spiritual Canaan, and Promised Land.

Some say Deuteronomy was Jesus' favorite book. He quoted it often. Jesus quoted it three times to Satan in His wilderness temptation.

Jesus took the greatest commandment from Deuteronomy.

John 5:45-47 Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

And who did Jesus appear with on the Mount of Transfiguration? Moses and Elijah.

Is there Gospel grace in Deuteronomy? The book is profoundly "gospel-shaped." Again and again we see God's steadfast love and His gracious keeping of His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Even though Israel utterly fails time and again, God's grace triumphs over their sin.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 describes the curse of being hung on a tree for a crime punishable by death. Jesus endured this curse and experienced death as punishment so that we might be redeemed from the curse of the law.

Implications and application.

Drawing from the life of Moses, no one is indispensable, even God's greatest leader died. Are you aware of your finiteness? Are you aware of your quickly approaching death? Do you have any sort of urgency?

Have you thought about what you want to pass on, what is of first importance? Have you written down a last will and testament, not about finances but about faith? What are the blessings you would like to speak over your children and grandchildren? How do you want to admonish them to stay true to God?

Deuteronomy 33 is Moses' blessings of the 12 tribes of Israel. This is Moses' parting blessing on his children, the children he has led for the past 40 years. All three million of them.

Like Leviticus, without Deuteronomy there is much in the Bible we wouldn't understand.

Why does God punish and eventually exile the whole nation of Israel under Babylon and Assyria? Because of the curses announced almost a thousand years before.

Deuteronomy is the mountain at the center of the Old Testament. Everything in the Pentateuch leads up to it, with its climactic renewal of God's covenant relationship with his people. And everything in the rest of the OT flows out from it: the blessings of the land (Joshua–1 Kings), the curses of the covenant (2 Kings–Malachi), and the subsequent need for a savior. And at the top of the mountain is none other than the God of Deuteronomy, Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew H. Patton).

What about for today?

At the climax of Moses' sermon, he says, "So choose life!" (Deut. 30:19) Deuteronomy is still a life-and-death book for Christians, urging us today to choose genuine life: the life saturated in God's word; the life that sin can never give; the abundant life that is found in Jesus Christ alone (Matthew H. Patton).

How do we live in a hostile world and hostile land, with enemies all around us. How do we get victory over enemies greater than ourselves? Were we not also in bondage and have been delivered?

Do we not face the same temptations as the children of God? Do we struggle with pride over our successes, neglect in devotion to God and prayer, temptations to cut corners, impatience with others and holding them to higher standards than ourselves.

In our polytheistic and syncretistic world, Deuteronomy declares in loudest voice, The Lord our God is one. It is a call to how to live a blessed life.

We are God's people, we don't belong to the world.
We follow God's ways, not the world's way.
We believe God's truth not the world's lies.

You are the people of God. Become what you already are. Live according to your chosen election, your chosen adoption.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, 20 loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.