

# Deuteronomy 1-3

## AIM

- To understand the challenge to obedience of Israel's time in the wilderness.
- To begin to understand the relationship in Deuteronomy between faith, obedience and the promises of God.

## CONTEXT

- The first five books of the bible form the initial part of the Hebrew canon and are referred to variously as 'the Pentateuch', 'the Torah' or simply as 'the Law' (Luke 24:44). They are foundational in that they recount the historical events upon which all else in the OT depend, in some senses paralleling the place of gospels in the NT.
- The principal theme of the Torah is God's working to fulfil the promise He made to the Patriarchs (Gen 12:2-3, 7, cf Exodus 3:16-17, Deut 34:4), and everything from Gen 12 to Deut 34 needs to be viewed from this perspective. Although the three elements of this promise are prominent at different times - the descendent element in Gen 12-50; the relationship element in Exodus and Leviticus and the land element in Numbers and Deuteronomy - they are really all different aspects of the same promise.
- God had spoken to His people at Horeb. (Mt Sinai is usually referred to in Deuteronomy by its alternative name, Horeb). This event was of enormous importance for Israel, as were the decrees and laws that were declared there (cf Deut 4, 5:1). These 'laws' form one aspect of the relationship element of the Abrahamic promise (see above) and are therefore an important element of 'the Law'. However it is arguable, as we shall see, that the legal codes in Deuteronomy are not its chief concern.

## STRUCTURE

Deuteronomy is principally the record of Moses last words to Israel - 3 sermons addressed to them on the edge of the promised land.

Moses' 1st Address	1:6-4:44
Moses' 2nd Address	4:44-28:68
Moses 3rd Address	29:1-30:20

Within this overall structure there are many detailed parallels with ancient treaties or covenants that regional powers made with their vassal states. One feature of these was a brief historical introduction that recapitulated the circumstances that had brought both parties to that point. After a brief introduction of the book (1:1-6) the rest of ch 1-4 serve as such an introduction.

Introduction	1:1-5
Reminders of Israel's past faithlessness	1:6-2:3
1:6-18	Command to take the land
1:19-46	Israel's refusal to take the land
2:1-3	A generation destroyed
Reminder of God's past faithfulness	2:4-3:11
Preservation and destruction	

## MOSES'S WORD'S

As Deuteronomy opens Moses, who has been at the heart of all the action since Exodus 3, has led Israel for 40 years. For the second time he has brought them to the edge of the promised land (1:1). As they are poised to enter it, and as he is about to die (cf Deut 34) - at this crucial point in their history - he gives them direction and commandment from God as to how they are to live in the land God is giving them (1:1,3, 5).

He begins to expound the law (1:5) by reviewing the time since God told them to leave Horeb and go and take possession of the promised land (1:6-8). A journey that should have taken 11 days (1:2) had taken them 40 years (1:3). Why?

## IDOLATRY & JUDGMENT AT KADESH BARNEA

1:19-46 summarise the events of Nu 13-14. Despite God's promise that He was giving them the land (1:6, 20) and all the evidence they had had since leaving Egypt of His commitment to and ability to fulfil His promises (1:29-31, 33) the Israelites

- were afraid and discouraged (1:21,29)
- doubted His goodness and His commitment to them (1:27).
- trusted in appearances (1:28) rather than in what God had told them (1:32).

Faithlessness and disobedience had brought judgment (1:34, 42). Those who had refused to follow God wholeheartedly were denied entry to the promised land. Only two of that adult generation would finally enter Canaan (1:36-39). Everyone else was condemned to die in the desert (1:40).

## **GOD'S FAITHFULNESS 'IN THE WILDERNESS'**

- Almost 38 years of wandering is summarised in 2:1 (cf 1:3, 2:7, 14). A generation has died in the desert (2:14-15) and the next generation now turn towards the promised land (2:2-3). Just as God had promised (1:35-37), none (save two) of those who had heard his voice at Horeb will enter the land, not even Moses (3:23-36).
- However as God had promised:
  - a new generation has been preserved (2:7)
  - He has blessed them (1:10-11, cf Gen 12:1-3)
  - He has brought them to the edge of the promised land (3:18).
- As Israel approach Canaan, this time from the east, they have to pass through the lands of their 'brothers' (2:4) - the Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites (see below). This area was not part of the promised land and the Israelites were not to fight the inhabitants (2:2-5, 9, 19).

God had previously given lands to Esau and Lot and their descendants (2:5, 9, 19) driving out the original inhabitants in the process (2:21-22 cf 12) and has remained faithful to that commitment

- As Israel approach the land for a second time they are once again faced by impressive opposition . Once again God promises to deliver them into Israel's hands. All they need do is engage them in battle and it will be theirs (2:24, 31; 3:2). This time Israel trust God (2:32, 3:3) and God defeats their enemies (2:32, 36, 3:3). They are completely destroyed (2:33-34, 3:6).

Having destroyed them Moses begins to allocate to the tribes of Israel the land God has given them. The Reubenites, Gadites and half tribe of Manasseh are each allotted a portion but will be unable to enjoy it until they have crossed the Jordan and taken possession of all of the land that God is giving them (3:18-20).

## **MOSES'S REQUEST REFUSED**

Moses has led the people for 40 years. They are on the verge of achieving the goal he has been working for for so long. He can see the land ahead of him. He has seen what God has done in destroying their enemies, is confident that He will keep his promises and long to lead Israel across the Jordan - but it is not to be. He must die outside the land (1:37, 3:23-27, cf 34:1-5).

The events behind this are recorded in Nu 20. God had commanded Moses and Aaron to speak to the rock (Nu 20:8). Moses struck it instead. Like the rest of his generation he had failed to trust God (Nu 20:12). This lack of trust meant that he too would never enter the land. .

## **PROMISES FOR THE FUTURE**

Moses is addressing Israel as they anticipate the fulfilment of God's promises to them. Before reminding them of how God would have them live in the land that he about to give them (ch 5-26) he asks them to remember their past experience and reflect on what it has revealed about themselves and their God. On two occasions Israel have been about to enter the promised land, and God has promised to fight for them. All they had to do was to be obedient and trust Him (1:21, 2:24, 3:2). The first time they had been found wanting (2:26ff). The second time they had trusted God and obeyed (2:32, 3:2). Their nations history revealed some of the consequences of trusting and not trusting God. As God now repeats His promise to them (3:21) one of the questions raised is: 'What is Israel going to do now?'

## **THINKING IT THROUGH ...**

- In 1 Cor 10:1-11 Paul call's upon the Corinthians to similarly upon Israel's' experiences in the wilderness, and understand them as examples and warning for them so they don't set their 'hearts on evil things as they (the Israelites) did' (1 Cor 10:6). They are warned not to presume on the mercy of God irrespective of ongoing commitment too and trust in Him. (See also Heb 3:12-18)
- Although Moses is responsible for his own actions (Nu 20:12) the Israelites share in the responsibility for his exclusion from the Canaan. Their constant unbelief and grumbings that had worn him down (3:26 cf 4:21). (Reflect on a NT articulation of this principle in 1 Cor 5:6-11.)

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# **Deuteronomy 4**

## AIM

- To begin to understand the significance events of Horeb for the people of God.

## CONTEXT

- Deuteronomy ch 4 is the conclusion of the first of Moses's three speeches (cf 1:6-4:40, 5:1-28:68 & 29:1-30:20). Having carried out a brief historical review of their 40 years in the wilderness (1:6-3:29) Moses applies the lessons of those years to a new generation (Ch 4).
- In ch 1-3 Moses has detailed the history of Israel since God had appeared to them at Horeb. They have been reminded of Israel's failure and God's faithfulness. All the adults at Horeb (save Caleb, Joshua and Moses) have died (cf 1:37-40) but the nation has been preserved to stand once more on the edge of the promised land.
- Moses is addressing the next generation most of whom would not have been born when God spoke to them at Horeb, and those that were there would have been children at the time. However he speaks to them as though they had all been there (4:10 etc).
- \* Deuteronomy is a record of Moses' proclamation of all that God had commanded at Horeb concerning Israel (1:6). However before he reminds them in detail how they are to live in the land that God is giving them - the 'decrees and laws' of the covenant (5:1) - he reminds them of the context for those commands: the relationship He has established with them (ch 4).

## WHAT HAPPENED AT HOREB

Israel's time at Horeb is recorded in Ex 19:1 - Nu 10:10 but Ex 19-20 are especially in view in Deut 4. God had rescued Israel from Egypt (4:34) and brought them to Horeb as He had promised (Ex 19:4, cf 3:12), where he had then addressed them (4:10), confirming their relationship by declaring a covenant with them (4:13).

Moses recalls this past encounter with God emphasising:

- That it was a unique event (4:32, cf 4:6-8 ) and central to any understanding of their identity as a people whom God had rescued for Himself (4:32-34). Nothing like it had ever happened before, and no event in the future (save one - cf 2 Cor 3:9ff) would surpass it.
- When God met with His people they didn't see any form of being: they heard a voice (4:10, 12, 15, 33, 36).

## IT'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE FIRST GENERATION.

- God had spoken. They were to listen, trust what He had said and obey. The covenant at Horeb thus laid down the terms of Israel's relationship with God. In so doing a whole range of 'religious' options were excluded (see below).
- Israel's mark as the people of God was to be seen in their response to what He had said (4:1, 5-8, 9, 14 etc). Living in obedience to their God would not only ensure that they continued to experience God's blessing (4:40) but also have an effect on the nations around them, who would not only acknowledge their wisdom (4:6, 8) but also come to understand something of her God (4:7).
- But above all the events at Horeb reveal that God is unique: 'the Lord is God:besides Him there is no other' (4:35, cf 4:33-34). He is the one true God who had acted out of love and faithfulness to His promise to rescue Israel from Egypt and bring her to himself (4:35-38).

## THE NECESSARY RESPONSE.

The only appropriate response to such a God is summarised in 4:39-40a. They must take on board that YHWH (the Lord) is God and respond in obedience. As they enter the land they must keep the laws that he has given them (4:40). In particular they are:

- to remember all that God had said and done (4:10).
- to listen (4:1), hold fast to (4:3), follow (4:2, 5, 13, 14) and observe (4:6) all that God had commanded.
- to be watchful (4:8) and careful not to forget all that had happened (4:9).
- not to add or subtract anything to what had been said (4:2).
- to ensure that each generation teaches their children the content and significance of what God had said to them there. Just in fact as Moses was doing in Deuteronomy to the second generation out of Egypt.
- Above all, they must avoid idolatry (14:15ff)

## THE STUPIDITY OF IDOLATRY

All nations benefit from God's provision (4:19) but Israel are special . Of all the nations

- only they have been chosen by God for himself.
- only they have been rescued from slavery .
- only they have been promised the land of Canaan.
- only they had had God speak to them and establish a covenant relationship with them at Horeb(4:66-38).

When God had appeared at Horeb Israel had heard a voice (4:10, 12, 15, 33, 36). They saw no form of any kind (4:15). Worshipping their God meant responding in obedience to what He had said, to the 'decrees and laws' revealed at Horeb.

Therefore it would be foolish beyond measure to fall into the trap worshipping and serving parts of creation, or of making idols and bowing down to them. They were not to think that by worshipping such things, whether manmade (4:15-18) or not (4:19), that they were worshipping God. To do so would miss the whole point. More than that it would be completely unacceptable and have predictable and dire consequences consequences (4:3-4, cf Nu 25).

They are to worship God by responding to His voice in obedience to His words

The character of Israel's relationship with God and the nature of acceptable worship is to be determined by their experience at Horeb when God spoke to them.

## IT'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

It is almost impossible to over estimate the significance of these event. The rest of the OT can only be understood in the light of the covenant at Horeb, and God's self-revelation there provides the necessary background to a proper understanding of the gospel and how He has spoken in Christ.

Moses establishes the relevance of these events for future generations in part by addressing the people now gathered on the borders of Canaan as though they had been present at Horeb (4:10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 36). This second generation to whom Moses will expound the law (5:1ff) need to understand that what was said and what has happened in the past is just as important to them as it was to their parents.

- When God spoke to their parents at Horeb, and He was speaking to them.
  - The God who deals with them in the present is the God who met *with them* at Horeb.
  - And the God who will deal with them tomorrow is the God who dealt *with them* at Horeb.
- The covenant made at Horeb will continue to be at the heart of God's relationship with future generations with whom He was dealing then even though they were yet unborn.

## IT'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR TODAY

- i. The God who addressed succeeding generations through Moses has now spoken through His Son and continues to speak to them through Him (cf Heb 1:1-2, 2:1-3).
- ii. The covenant and the revelation at Horeb was glorious but pale (almost) into insignificance alongside the new covenant and the revelation of God in Christ at Calvary (2 Cor 3:7-11).
- iii. God was dealing with future generations before they were born when he spoke at Horeb. God dealt similarly with his people at Calvary. Although we were not yet born God was dealing with us there (cf Rom 6:8, Gal 2:20, Eph 2:6).
- iv. The character of Israel's experience of God and their relationship with God was shaped by their experience at Horeb, and that experience lay at the heart of their life. Similarly the nature and character of our relationship with God is shaped by God dealing with us at Calvary and demands to be the controlling event in our lives.
- v. 40 years on from the original event God's words at Horeb warned Israel against idolatry and called them to remember his actions, listen to His words, acknowledge His uniqueness, and respond in obedience. Two thousand after Christ first coming God calls His people to respond similarly to what He has said and done through the death and resurrection of Christ (cf Heb 12:25-28).

## THINKING IT THROUGH ...

- Take some time to reflect on the above applications. How do they clarify your understanding of God and what he has done in Christ?
- Why does Moses spend so long reflecting on the events of 40 years ago as Israel are about to enter the promised land?

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# Deuteronomy 5-7

## AIM

- To understand that the controlling ambition of those whom God has chosen for himself must be for a life of wholehearted commitment to Him.
- To understand that such a commitment involves loving, fearing and obeying Him.

## CONTEXT

- The introduction - the 'what, when and where' - to Moses' second speech in Deuteronomy (4:44-49) parallels that of his first (1:1-5). He continues to address the gathered nation on the edge of the promised land, expounding the words that God had said to them as they had stood at Horeb 40 years earlier.
- Acting out of love and faithfulness to the promises he had made to their forefathers (4:37-38) God has brought them to the edge of the promised land. Moses now reminds them how God had said they must behave once in the land. What He said there was not far off and irrelevant for it this must now determine how they are to live (5:3).
- The 'stipulations, decrees and laws' (4:45) are declared to Israel within the framework of the covenant relationship that He had established with them.

## STRUCTURE

Life in the land the land requires obedience:

- to the 'ten commandments' 5:1-33
- to the command to fear and to love 6:1-25
- to the command to destroy 7:1-26

## THE REVELATION OF ..

### ..THE ONE GOD

God made a covenant relationship with Israel at Horeb. As He addressed them directly He revealed Himself to them (5:4, 5:24, 7:24). In ch 5-7 Moses reminds them how YHWH is revealed particularly as the ONE TRUE God (6:4) who is

- terrifying (5:5, 24),
- powerful (5:6; 6:12, 21-23; 7:18-19)  
- and what He has done in the past He can do again)
- great and awesome (7:21, cf 5:5 etc)
- jealous (6:15; 7:15)

### ..WHO SAVES AND DESTROYS

- He out of love for his people and faithfulness to His promises (7:8, 9) to rescue them (5:6; 6:12; 7:8) so they might fear and obey Him (5:29, 6:2-3)
- He destroys those who oppose Him (7:2, 10, 16, 24, . cf 6:15; 7:4)

## THE RESPONSE REQUIRED FROM HIS PEOPLE

### OBEDIENCE NOW POSSIBLE

The laws He had spoken to them at Horeb were to regulate their life in the land (5:32-33, 6:1, 7:20-24). It would have been impossible for them to obey many of them laws whilst slaves in Egypt (cf eg 7:5) but now they can - indeed they must

### OBEDIENCE A PRIVILEGE & AN OBLIGATION

It is not a question of legalism or 'being good' but simply of how people who love God will live.

YHWH is their God (5:6). They are His treasured possession (7:6). He has loved them (7:7). He had rescued them (5:6). He has revealed Himself to them (5:4) and established a relationship with them (5:4) in which they must:

- fear Him (5:23-26, 28-29; 6:13).
- love Him (6:4)
- trust and depend on Him (7:16, 17-18, 21ff)
- serve Him alone (5:7; 6:13, 14; 17:16b, 25-26)

They will be doing this if they remember who He is (6:4) and what He has said and done (6:6-9, 12; 7:18), and respond in obedience (5:29, 33; 6:2, 17, 24).

### **THE BLESSING OF OBEDIENCE**

Obedience will issue in the blessings that He had promised them (5:29, 33; 6:3, 18, 24; 7:12).

## **LOVE & FEAR GOD**

### **An appropriate response (5:1-32)**

When YHWH had revealed Himself to them at Horeb they saw His glory and His majesty (5:24). They heard His voice (5:23-24), and were terrified (5:5, 24-26 cf. EX 19:18-19). Not wanting themselves to speak with God 'face to face' (5:4) they asked Moses to be their mediator (5:5, 27), undertaking to listen to and obey all that he told them (5:27). This response was a right one (5:28).

### **A necessary response (6:1-25)**

Not only was their response a right one, it was a necessary one if they were to experience blessing in the land they were about to enter (5:29-29, 32; 6:3). The God they were dealing with was not any old god - one amongst many - who they could take or leave. He was the LORD - the one and only God who created all things (6:4, 7:9. cf 4:32). The required response to such a God who had dealt with you in that way was wholehearted commitment to Him. He was to be their sole object of affection, allegiance and worship.

Such commitment would be evidenced in unswerving obedience (6:5) to Him alone (6:13-14). This would involve listening to what He has said (6:4 cf 4:19, 10:14), remembering it (6:12, 6:8-9), discussing with and teaching it to your children, and obeying it (6:17).

Doing so will bring blessing (6:1-2, 18, 24) and peace in the land (6:19). Not doing so will result in their experiencing the same fate that befell those who were in the land before them (6:15, cf 7:26). They would be destroyed.

## **DESTROY (7:1-26)**

Some of the 'decrees and laws' that Moses delivered from God to Israel were always to be followed in the land (cf the 'ten commandments' which were written on 2 stone tablets later to be placed in the 'ark of the covenant' that would end up in the temple in Jerusalem - cf 10:1-5).

Some, however, were time limited. Those detailing how they should deal with the other nations (7:1ff) and their gods (7:2, 5, 16, 25) were necessarily time limited as they were to be completely destroyed.

Deuteronomy provides a number of explanations as to why they were to do what to most modern minds (and even many modern Christian minds) consider unacceptable. The reason here is the threat that they pose to Israel as God's people.

If they don't destroy the other nations they will end up intermarrying with them (7:3) and so be drawn after their gods (7:4, 16). Israel's resulting sin - her idolatry and licentiousness - would eventually result in her receiving same punishment that was to befall the other nations: they would be destroyed (7:4, 26).

They must remember that God has loved them and chosen them to be his treasured possession (7:6-7). There is only one God - their God (7:9) - and they are to serve him alone (7:11, 26. cf 6:13).

## **TRUST GOD (7:17-24)**

They were to fear God (6:13) not men (7:17ff) As they faced enemies more numerous and stronger than themselves they were to remember all that their God had done and all that he had promised, and trust Him. Fear of men and failure to trust God had resulted in 40 years wandering in the wilderness (cf 1:27ff). If they love God by serving Him alone they will be blessed (7:9. cf 6:1-3 etc). If they don't He will destroy them (7:10. cf 6:15, 7:26).

## **SO WHAT ... (THINKING IT THROUGH) ...**

- Moses brought God's words to God's people. He challenged them to reflect on all that God has done in bringing them from Egypt

to the promised land and respond in wholehearted commitment to Him.

Now that Christ has come the NT calls us to reflect on the rescue that Christ's death won for us and respond in wholehearted commitment to Him (John 15:9-10, 2 Cor 5:15).

- For Israel such commitment was to be seen on wholehearted obedience to the 'decrees, and laws' that God gave them when they came out of Egypt (5:1), mediated through Moses.

For Christians such commitment is to be seen in wholehearted obedience to Christ and the revelation of God mediated through Him (John 15:9, Mark 8:38), the content of which is distinct from that revealed at Horeb (1 Cor 9:20-21, 1 Pet 9-12ff).

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## Deuteronomy 8-11

### AIM

- To understand how and why God disciplines those He loves, and how they should respond.

### CONTEXT

- Moses continues to address Israel as they are gathered on the edge of the promised land, setting before them the 'stipulations, decrees and laws' that he had declared to them 40 years earlier at Horeb. It is important that they remember it all as they enter the land God is about to give them (6:1-3, 10).
- Before he deals with them in detail (in ch 12 onwards) he first puts them into the broader context of the covenant that God made with them. He has reminded them of how God met with them at Horeb (ch 4) and then moves on to consider their response.

### STRUCTURE

8:1-9:6 God disciplined His people.

9:1-10:11 Because they needed it.

10:12-11:32 For their good.

### GOD DISCIPLINES THOSE HE LOVES (8:1-9:6)

Judging a rebellious generation (1:34-35) was not the only purpose of the 40 years Israel spent in the wilderness. God was also training the next generation in preparation for their entering the land.

This second generation faced two dangers:

- Before entering the land the danger was fear - fear of the inhabitants (9:1-3), and that God wouldn't keep His promises. Such fear had been the downfall of their parents. They mustn't make the same mistake again.
- Once in the land the danger was the very blessing that God had promised. If they are obedient they will be blessed (8:6-9). But such blessing might lead them to forget it's source (8:10-14).

In both cases ignoring God would result in self reliance - pride (8:14, 17) and self-righteousness (9:4) - that would be their downfall.

Therefore God had tested and disciplined them in the wilderness (8:2, 5, 16). (Disciplined here in the sense of 'train' and 'teach' rather than 'punish'). He did this:

- How?  
By causing them to hunger and then providing for their needs (8:3, 15-16).
- Why?
  - i) to humble them (8:2, 3, 16) - for they would learn that everything that was provided for them by God (8:4, 15-18).

ii) teach and discipline them (8:3, 5) - for they would learn that God could hardship and trials that they faced (8:4, 15-18).

indeed be trusted despite the

iii) so that it will go well with them when they enter the land (8:16).

If they remembered the lessons of the wilderness years they would be blessed. If they forgot them it would prove fatal (8:19-20).

## **FOR YOU ARE STIFF-NECKED! (9:7-29)**

Thus far Moses has recalled the events at Horeb in terms of how God revealed himself to Israel and their initial response (ch 4-5, cf 5:28). However it was not long before they went back on all their good intentions (9:8, 12-13, 16).

They sinned against the LORD their God (9:16), rebelled (24) and made an idol (9:16) having been told not to do so (5:8), the reasons for such a prohibition (4:15-20, cf 6:4) and the consequences of any disobedience (6:14-15).

Their rebellion so soon after God's extraordinary revelation of Himself at Mt. Horeb (4:33) and their rescue from Egypt (4:34) took only a few days (9:11) but it was par for the course (9:7, 22-24). They (and we) may have been surprised at how quickly they had deserted God. It is unlikely that He was. He had doubted that they would be able to all they had committed themselves to (5:29) and was very soon proved right. God was realistic, because He knew they were stiff-necked (9:6, 13).

## **MOSES' INTERCESSION**

God is a jealous God whose anger burns against those who reject Him. Israel knew that (6:15, cf 11:3-7), and so His response should have come as no surprise. By their actions they had destroyed the covenant with God (symbolised in the destruction of the two stone tablets - 9:16-17). He in turn determined to destroy them, and fulfil His promises to Abraham through Moses and his descendants (9:13-14).

Moses's intercession on behalf of the people (9:15-21, 25-29) appeals to God on the basis of His special relationship with Israel, the promises He has made, His rescue of them from Egypt and the harm it will do to His reputation amongst the nations if He were to destroy them in the desert (9:26-29).

The record of these events is briefer here than in Exodus 32-34, but adds to the growing picture in Deuteronomy of Moses as mediator (5:5), teacher (1:3, 5), and ruler and judge (1:9-18). All of which inform what it means when God promises to raise up a prophet like him in the future (18:14-18).

## **GOD'S RESPONSE**

God's response to Moses's prayer is implicit in 10:1-10. The restoration of the covenant between God and Israel is symbolised in the making of the second pair of tablets in 10:1-2ff. Stored in the 'ark of the covenant' they are to be a perpetual reminder of the relationship between them. Aaron does die - but the priesthood continues and God affirms His continuing commitment to give them the land.

## **SO CIRCUMCISE YOUR HEARTS! (10:12-11:33)**

Israel were a stiff-necked people (9:6). If they continued in the same way they would rouse God's anger and end up being destroyed (9:13, 8:19). They must therefore respond to the God who has chosen them (10:14), rescued them (10:21-22), spared them from judgment and established His covenant with them.

He is their God, their praise their LORD. The appropriate response to such a God is to fear Him, walk in His ways, love Him and serve Him wholeheartedly by observing all His commands and decrees (10:12, 20; 11:3). They must circumcise their hearts and not be stiff-necked any more (10:16). If they do that they will be blessed.

Their enemies will be driven out of the land. No one will be able to stand against them and they will inhabit all the land God has promised them, and be richly blessed (11:8-12, 22-25).

However if they continue in the future as they have in the past (9:6), they will not be blessed. Rather they will be cursed (11:16-17, 26-28). The choice, it seems is theirs - as it will for future generations. They must ensure, therefore, that every succeeding generation understands how they must behave to enjoy the promised blessing of God (11:18-21).

## **THINKING IT THROUGH ...**

- The trials Israel faced in the wilderness were God's way of preparing them for the promised land. They engendered an humility before Him, and a trust in Him, that they would need if they were to enter the land and enjoy its blessing. Such training and discipline was a mark of His love for them.

In Heb 12:1-12 the writer is addressing people who, in the face of opposition, were tempted to desert Christ. The writer, as elsewhere in the letter, exhorts them to continue, arguing that such trials were a mark of God's love for them for. As they persevere in faith despite it all He is preparing them for heaven.

Do we really have such a perspective on problems that we face because of our love for Christ? How can we develop such a perspective?

- How does the picture that is emerging of Moses and His role in Deuteronomy inform our understanding of Christ and His work?
- Was the choice that was laid before the Israelites a real choice? What relevance is it for us? (I think Mike You will be addressing this issue, amongst others, on the 14th).

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## ***There was a talk by Michael You on Deuteronomy 12-26.***

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## **Deuteronomy 27-28**

### **AIM**

- To understand the relevance of the blessings and curses of the Mosaic covenant for us today.

### **CONTEXT**

- These two chapters bring Moses' second address to an end (4:44-28:68). In it he has reminded Israel of the extraordinary events at Horeb and their 40 years in the wilderness. Although they had been terrified when God had met them there and committed themselves to serve Him alone (5:27) they had quickly rejected Him (9:7ff). So God had spent 40 years training them so they wouldn't make the same mistake again (8:1ff), teaching them how His word is the most basic thing in life (8:4) and how they must continue to 'fear (Him), walk in all His ways ... love Him ... serve (Him)' with all their 'heart' and 'soul'. They were to do this by responding in obedience (10:13).
- If they did this they would be blessed (11:8-9, 26; cf 5:32-6:3; 7:12-15; 8:1). If they don't they would be cursed, and eventually thrown out of the land (8:19-20, 11:16-17, 28; 12).
- The laws of ch 12-26 have shown them the requirements of obedience. They have dealt variously with the ordering of
  - i. Israel's worship of God in the land - the 'who, when, where and how'
  - ii. family relationships
  - iii. society and the administration of justice.

They have shown Israel how she must behave if she is to experience the promised blessings of the Sinai covenant.

- As He comes to the end of the address he reminds them of how God will bless them in the promised land if they remain committed to Him (26:17-19). He will also warn them of the consequences of disobedience.

### **STRUCTURE**

27:1-16 Commitment and celebration.  
28:1-14 Consequences of obedience.  
28:15-68 Consequences of disobedience.

### **COMMITMENT & CELEBRATION (27:1-26)**

Once God had brought them into Canaan - as He had promised (26:19) - they would be in a fuller sense than before, God's people (27:9, 28:9-10) : His people in His place living under His rule (26:17) and proclaiming His name to the nations (28:10). Their entry into

the land was therefore to be marked by a celebration (27:7) and a solemn act of national commitment (27:12-26).

### What they must do.

- They must remind themselves of the law that He has given them to live under and the relationship between them that it represents (27: 2-5), and rejoice in it (27: 6-7).
- They must divide into two vast groups many thousand strong and gather at the top of Mt Gerizim and Mt Ebal, two mountains at the heart of the promised land. Six tribes must assemble on one and six on the other and they are to call back and forth across the intervening valley the blessings and curses of the covenant. (27:12-13, cf 11:29, Joshua 8:30-33). Everyone is to shout 'Amen' as they respond in personal commitment.

### Why they must do it.

To impress on all the people the utter seriousness with which the word of God must be taken (27:2ff) if they are to enjoy the blessings of God and avoid the awful consequences of disobedience.

The curses of 27:15-26 are personal - for individual rebellion - rather than national for apostasy (contra 28:15-68). They echo what has been said both in Deuteronomy and elsewhere in the Pentateuch and relate more or less directly to the ten commandments.

v15	Deut 4:15, 35, 6:14
v16	Deut 5:16
v17	Deut 19:14
v18, 21-23	Lev 19:14; 18:9,17,23
v19	Deut 10:18, 14:29
v24	Deut 5:17

## ACTIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

Israel have committed themselves to God and His covenant with them (26:17). If they are **obedient** they will be blessed more than anyone else (28:1-2). The blessings of God will ensure the establishment of a great and prosperous nation under God's rule, safe from her enemies. It will result in the blessing of other nations as they come to fear God (28:10). The Abrahamic promises (12:3) - people, place, blessing - will be seen to have been fulfilled as Eden is 'recaptured'.

But if they are **disobedient** to the terms of the covenant Moses has laid before them the reverse will happen. Rather than experiencing the blessing of God they will experience the curse of God. The list of curses in 28:15-68 are the reverse of the blessings in 28:1-14.

	<b>Blessings</b>	<b>Curses</b>
Israel as 'top dog'.	v1, 13	v31, 32, 43
Everywhere in the land blessed	v3	v16
Abundant crops	v4, 5	v17, 18, 38-41
All their endeavours blessed	v6, 8a	v19, 20, 29b
Healthy in mind and body	(7:15)	v21-22, 27, 28, 24, 35, 59-61,
Abundant water	v12	v23
More money than they need	v12b	v44
Victory over all their enemies	v7	v25, 29b, 36, 49-57, 63b-64,
Benefit from the labours of others	(6:11)	v30, 33
They will be feared	v10	v37

If they are a rebellious people rather than a mighty and prosperous nation safe from her enemies they will become impoverished and eventually be destroyed (28:20, 21, 24, 26, 45, 48, 57, 68). They will be taken into exile. In a 'reversal' of the exodus they would 'return to Egypt'. There they would offer themselves as slaves - but no-one would want them (68, cf 60).

### Why would it all happen?

- i. Because of their failure to obey God and observe the decrees and laws that He had given them (45b).
- ii. Because they had failed to revere Him (58).
- iii. Because they had forsaken Him (20b).
- iv. To be a 'sign and wonder' to future generations (46): a demonstration to them of the consequences of points (i - iii) above, of rejecting God, and of what it means to live under His curse.

## SO WHAT?

- Although future generations did receive some of the blessing of ch 28 - most notably during the reigns of David and Solomon - they were never received in their completeness. Israel eventually suffered the worst of the God's curses, for they 'mocked His messengers, despised His words and scoffed at the prophets' (2 Chronicles 26:15-16). Therefore God's wrath was visited upon them. They were destroyed as a nation and taken into captivity (cf 2 Kings 25, 2 Chronicles 36:15ff).

These events are a sign to future generations of what it means to live under God's curse (28:46; cf Rom 15:4).

- If Israel were to receive the blessings of the Sinai covenant they had to obey God. They failed and were judged. All those today who rely on obedience to receive the blessings of a relationship with God will fail and are similarly doomed to suffer the consequences of living under His curse (Gal 3:10, cf Deut 27:26).

The glorious good news of the gospel is that those with faith in Christ no longer live under the curse of God - for Christ has rescued them by being cursed in their place (Gal 3:13-14). Those with such faith live under the blessing of God and will inherit all that He has promised for His people (Gal 3:14). Indeed it is already theirs (Eph 1:3).

- Israel suffered the wrath of God. The surrounding nations suffered the wrath of God (Deut 9:4-5). The whole of creation continues to live under God's curse and experience in some measure of His wrath (Rom 1:18). When Christ returns those who have faith in him will no longer suffer from this curse (Rev 22:3). However those who reject Him will continue to experience the wrath and curse of God (Rev 21:8).

## THINKING IT THROUGH

'Reading the blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience for Israel, and knowing what happened to her in Canaan should cause us to despair in our own righteousness and drive us to Christ as our saviour'.

- Do you agree?
- How should we read and apply Deuteronomy ch 5-28?

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## Deuteronomy 29-30

### AIM

\* To understand how the Israelites could receive the blessings that God had promised, and the significance of this for our understanding of the gospel.

### CONTEXT

\* As Israel stand poised in the edge of the promised land Moses has reminded them of how God has dealt with them in the past: He has saved them, revealed Himself to them, acted in judgment and exercised mercy in His dealing with them, and disciplined them in the wilderness in preparation for the promised land.

\* In addition he has told them how they must live in the land if they are to benefit from the blessings of the covenant; and warned them of the curses that will come upon them if they neglect to follow it.

\* The opening verse of chapter 29 in the English bible is the last verse of chapter 28 in the Hebrew bible. It is probably best seen as looking back to ch 5-28 where the covenant stipulations are set out. In the renewal of the covenant at Moab Moses has expounded that made at Sinai / Horeb (compare Ex 19-24 with Deut 5-26).

\* His final address (29:2-30:20) is in many ways a recapitulation of all that has gone before in Deuteronomy. However two things are clearer here than previously:

- i. the prediction that all the threatened curses for disobedience will eventually come pass (eg ch 30:1)
- ii. the hope that even then all will not be lost.

## STRUCTURE

29:2-9 Review of God's deliverance

29:10-15 Call to enter into covenant

29:16-29 Warning of curses for covenant breaking

30:1-10 Ultimate Restoration Intended

30:11-20 Call for covenant commitment

### GOD HAS DELIVERED THEM (29:2-8)

Once again Moses addresses the second generation of Israelites as though they were those whom He had rescued them from Egypt (cf Deut 5:4). They had seen how He had

- i. judged the Egyptians as He rescued them from Egypt (2,3).
- ii. led them through the desert (5, 6).
- iii. defeated their enemies (7).
- iv. begun to give them the land (8).

He had revealed Himself to them at Horeb (4:32ff) and shown them all these things (2, 3) so that they might know God (4:35): But they didn't understand.

### PROMISE OF PROSPERITY (29:9-15)

All the people addresses by Moses on the edge of the land - from the greatest to the least (10-11) - are called to commit themselves to the covenant with God. If they are faithful to it they will prosper in all they do (9), and God may fulfil the promises He made to their forefathers (13, cf Ge 12:1-3 etc). But ...

### WARNING OF CURSES (29:16-29)

.. if anyone turns away from God (18) they will bring disaster on themselves. If they presume on the mercies of God irrespective of a continuing commitment to Him there will be no hope. Disaster will come upon them and forgiveness will be impossible (19-21).

... if all the people abandon the covenant all the curses of the covenant will come upon them (26-27). The promised land will be turned into a wasteland (23) and they will be exiled (28) and everyone will know (22) that it has happened because Israel deserted her God (24-28).

### OBEY IT ... YOU CAN DO IT! (CAN'T YOU?)

(30:11-14)

Moses places a choice before Israel.

ù they can choose life - to love the Lord their God, listen to His voice and hold fast to Him - and the Abrahamic and Mosaic blessings will be theirs (30:16, 19-20), or

ù they can choose death by worshipping other gods, and they will be cursed and destroyed (30:17-18).

But how do they choose life? Two broad alternatives have been suggested:

Option 1 : By obeying the law.

ù What is demanded here

i. is not 'legal righteousness' : that required to put them right with God. impossible (Rom 3:20a, Gal 3:11).

Such righteousness is

ii. Rather it is 'ethical righteousness' : that required to walk before God in a sufficiently godly way for the blessings to be received .

sufficiently godly way for

Such obedience must have been possible as they did receive the blessings of the covenant (30:1a, Joshua 23:14-16) . It is a distinction seen elsewhere in the OT (cf Ps 1, 15, 18:20-24 etc where the psalmist can talk about keeping God's law without any suggestion that he is sinless. Israel may not have known everything (29:29) but they knew enough to obey (30:11-14). God had saved them from Egypt and now called them to live godly lives putting their faith in him who is their life (30:19-20).

ù Without such an understanding the whole Mosaic covenant becomes a 'cynical charade', for it would mean that God was simply playing with Israel, setting them up to fail simply for the benefit of future generations (29:45-6).

Option 2 : By realising that 'the Lord is their life' and that their only hope lay in Him.

ù It was obvious - from any sober reflection on the law and Israel's past failures that there wasn't ever any chance of their remaining faithful to the covenant. They may be God's rescued people, and they may have been told how they must live, but they wouldn't be able to obey. They were a stiff-necked people who had found it impossible to change (10:16). They must try, but at the same time acknowledge that obedience required a work of God (30:6).

ù On this understanding the 'not too difficult' and 'not beyond your reach' of 30:11 doesn't mean they could have kept the law sufficiently to enjoy the promised blessings but rather that what the covenant required had been made clear to them. It was neither difficult to understand - 'up in heaven' (12) - nor was it hidden - 'not beyond your reach' (11) - because Moses had just proclaimed it to them (14). However, knowledge of what is required wouldn't guarantee obedience. Only God could make that happen (30:6). Their only hope rested with Him : 'Now choose life ... the Lord is your life (30:19-20).

THEY DIDN'T ... BUT HOPE REMAINED (30:1-10)

The fact that Israel failed to keep the covenant and experienced its curses and were eventually expelled from the promised land came as no surprise to God (30:1, cf 31:16). Nevertheless there was still to be hope, for if they returned to Him (30:2, 4) they would be blessed (30:3, 5). Their enemies will be destroyed (30:8) and they will be established in a land of blessing. The promises of the Abrahamic covenant and the blessings of the Mosaic covenant would come to pass (29:12-13).

They would still need to obey His commands (30:2, 8, 10) to receive this blessing. This had proved impossible in the past as they were 'stiff-necked' (10:16). But what they had been unable to do (10:17) God would do for them so that they could now love Him with all their heart and soul, and live (30:6).

## THE NT PERSPECTIVE

Paul uses this passage from Deuteronomy (Rom 10:5-10) to argue that Jewish rejection of the gospel is due to a wilful misunderstanding of the OT and not to any shortcomings in God's message. The law pointed to the need for God to provide the righteousness that it alone could not bring (Deut 30:6). Israel's failure was that they sought to save themselves and refused to submit to being saved by God (9:30-10:4).

Paul reminds the Romans that while Moses himself argued that inheriting God's promise depended on obedience, he also insisted that this was available through the acceptance of a readily available 'proclaimed word' (Rom 10:8-10. cf. Deut 30:14): and that 'all who call on Him will be saved' (Deut 30:19b-20, Rom 10:11-13).

ù In Moses' day salvation for individual Israelites was also available through faith as they repented of their rejection of God, and acknowledged and trusted that 'the Lord is (their) life' (Deut 30:20).

ù Now Christ has come this word is the message the gospel (10:8b-10) and salvation is through faith as people repent of their rejection of God and trust that He is their life (Rom 10:5-9).

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# Deuteronomy 31-34

## AIM

To reflect on the message of Deuteronomy and its significance for us today as we seek to love and serve Christ.

## CONTEXT

In all of his addresses in Deuteronomy Moses has sought to prepare the Israelites for their future. He has reminded them of God's dealings with them in the past and told how they must respond to Him in the future if they are to enjoy the blessings He has promised. They have been given a clear choice (30:15-20) and their future in Canaan will depend on the choice they make. All the indications to date is that things will not go well (eg cf 29:19-28).

## STRUCTURE

31:1-15 Succession secured

31:16-32:47 Moses's writings and song as witnesses to Israel.

33:48-33:29 Moses's final words of blessing

34:1-12 Looking to the future

## **SUCCESSION REQUIRED**

(31:1-2)

Moses has been the dominant human figure in the Pentateuch. He has led them for 40 years to the borders of the Canaan for the second time. He has mediated God's word to Israel (Ex 19:19, Deut 5:5). He has been their judge (1:9-18). He has interceded for them (9:25-29). He has taught and explained God's word to them (1:5). Despite all this, he is destined only ever to see it from a distance ( cf 32:48-52, 34:1-5) - will never enter the land (31:1-2, cf 1:37, 3:21-29).

Israel are about to lose the man who has led them for more than a generation. What are they to do? How will they survive without him?

## **PROVISION FOR THE FUTURE**

In these closing chapters God makes a number of provisions for the future:

### **MOSES'S SUCCESSOR.**

Moses time has come to an end but Israel is not left without anyone to lead them. Joshua is the appointed successor . He is commissioned and filled with the spirit of wisdom (31:14, 23; 34:9) and must be both strong and courageous to fulfil his task of leading the Israelites to possess the promised land (31:7).

However in all this they must realise that future success is not dependent on Joshua (31:3) any more than past victories were on Moses (31:4). God would go ahead of them and fight for them (31:3, 6).

### **THE WRITTEN LAW AS A WITNESS AGAINST THEM.**

Moses has not only expounded the law for the present generation but has written it down for future generations (31:9, 25). It is to be placed beside the ark of the covenant to remain at the heart of national life. It was to become a witness against them (31:26).

The 'law' he is not just the 'dos and don'ts' of the covenant, or even a transcript of Moses speeches in Deuteronomy. Rather it is the whole Pentateuch - the first five books of the bible. As such it will be a constant reminder not only of how they should behave but of their God: all that He had done and how they were to respond in love and obedience. It will also remind them of the warnings and promises that they have been given and the consequences of their actions. It therefore provides a permanent frame of reference by which to interpret their future experiences in the promised land.

### **THE READ LAW AS A WITNESS AGAINST THEM**

Provision is also made for the law to be regularly read publicly (31:10-13) so that everyone can learn to fear and obey God (31:12, cf 6:1, 10:12ff). They will remember all that God had done to deliver them and the nature of the covenant they had pledged themselves to obey. When disaster comes - as seems certain (31:15-18, 27-29) - they will understand why.

### **MOSES' SONG AS WITNESS AGAINST THEM**

Moses composes a song that everyone is to learn and sing (31:19, 22, 30). When God blesses them and they prosper in the land and they turn away from God and disaster comes (31:20-21, 32:15-18 cf 6:10-12) it too will be a witness against them (31:19).

## **MOSES' SONG**

(32:1-44)

The song:

- i. Reminds Israel about her God and how he has acted to save and bless His people (32:1-14).
- ii. Predicts the rejection of God by Israel (32:15-18).
- iii. Predicts the rejection of Israel by God (32:19-38).
- iv. Proclaims God's vengeance on His enemies and blessing of his people (32:39-43)

Throughout God is revealed as Creator of all (32:6, 8, 13, 39) and Father of His people (32:6, 10, 18, 19-20). He rules over nations and sends calamities and blessings as He sees fit. He brings both life and death (32:39). He is in complete control of all that He has made. He will destroy His enemies and make atonement for His people (32:43). These words are not idle words for Israel - but her life (32:47).

## **MOSES' BLESSINGS**

**(33:1-29)**

Part prediction, part prayer these final words of Moses to Israel before his death repeat many of the themes of the song, but the emphasis here is on how God will bless His people.

How, in view of all that has happened in the past and all that will happen in the future (32:15-38) can Moses be so confident that Israel will be blessed?

His confidence rests in God alone (33:26-29). What God has promised He will bring to completion. Exile may be inevitable (31:16-18) but restoration is assured for God will act once more (30:6, cf Ez 36:24-27) - as Moses himself had foreseen (John 1:45, cf Deut 18:15-19) - to change His people, and bring them to Himself.

## **THINKING IT THROUGH**

- What have you gained this term by studying Deuteronomy?  
Has anything surprised you about what it says about God and His purposes?
- \* How has it developed your understanding of the gospel, and what it means to love and serve Christ?