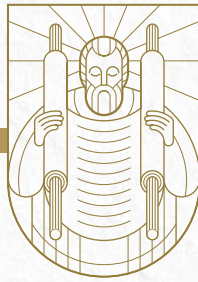


(((PREACHING *the* WORD)))

DEUTERONOMY

LOVING OBEDIENCE
to a LOVING GOD



AJITH FERNANDO

R. Kent Hughes

Series Editor

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Deuteronomy

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Preface:

Why I Am Excited about Deuteronomy

In my thirty plus years of ministry I have worked primarily among first-generation Christians from other faiths both in Youth for Christ and in the church where my wife and I serve. We have faced three huge challenges in this work. The first is that of making contact with these people who have no contact with the church so that they would have an opportunity to hear the gospel. The second is communicating the gospel in such a way that they would not only understand it but also be persuaded to leave their past allegiances to accept the salvation it offers. I have addressed these two challenges in two books, *The Supremacy of Christ*¹ and *Sharing the Truth in Love*.²

The third challenge is nurturing people who have not learned to view life using Biblical categories—that is, those with a worldview that is not Christian—and helping them move into a godly life. This is also becoming an increasingly important challenge in the West where those outside, and sometimes inside, the church have attitudes that are alien to the religion of the Bible. Around twenty years ago, while walking along the beach and praying, I told God that one day I would like to write a comprehensive theology of the Christian life, especially focusing on how to move people on to holiness. I think this book is God’s answer to that prayer.

When my friends found out that I was writing a preaching commentary on Deuteronomy, I usually got one of three responses. Some responded with enthusiasm, pointing out that it is such an important book. I share their enthusiasm. Others pointed to what a tough assignment this would be, and I agree with them too. When I started on this project I had not realized what a large book Deuteronomy is and how much I had to learn about its background in order to do this project justice. The third type of response I received seemed to imply that this is a dry book, with a lot of difficult and irrelevant material, which does not seem to have much to teach us today. I take strong exception to that sentiment!

Deuteronomy is an exciting book that is very relevant today. I first realized this about twenty-five years ago when, early in my ministry, I read the

book for my devotions. I found that there was so much I can learn about the Christian life and ministry that I began to list it all. I ended up with a huge list that has had a huge impact on my ministry. For example, I made a list of 142 incentives to obedience from Deuteronomy. So when I was asked by my friends at Crossway whether I would be interested in writing the Deuteronomy commentary in the series I responded with an enthusiastic yes.

Why am I so excited about Deuteronomy? Primarily because in this book Moses is attempting to do something that is still so important for all Christians. He is close to death, and they are close to entering the promised land without him, the one who led them for forty years. Deuteronomy gives Moses' farewell addresses to them. His aim is to motivate them to go forward and conquer the land and to help them to be faithful to God amidst all the challenges to such faithfulness that they will face. He warns them of challenges, he encourages them to a life of holiness, and he tells them the consequences of living and of failing to live such a life. All the time Moses was aware of the temptation the people would have to compromise their faith by assimilating aspects of Canaanite religion.

Are these not some of our greatest challenges today? How can we remain faithful to God? How can we avoid compromise when the lure of the society around us is so powerful? And how can we help our children and the people we lead to be faithful? Deuteronomy tells us how Moses tackled these challenges. After citing a story that appears in Deuteronomy, Paul writes, "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Therefore I have approached every passage of Deuteronomy as having significance to Christians today. Because all of Deuteronomy is part of God's inspired Word, that affirmation should be accepted without question. But it is often not, for many Christians think that in this era of grace many of the teachings of the Old Testament are not significant for us. Indeed we may not use some of the laws and regulations that are given there because they apply only to the Jewish nation. But the religion of this nation had the same basic ingredients that the Christian religion has today. Their life was to be a response of faith and obedience to the God who had graciously acted to redeem them. So even the laws that are specific to Israel have principles behind them that help us in the life of faith today.

When I studied Deuteronomy this time around with a view to writing this book, I found another feature that makes it extremely helpful. Many consider Moses to be the greatest national leader in history. From what Moses says and does in Deuteronomy we can learn many important lessons on leadership. Perhaps this has been to me the most thrilling aspect of this present study that

I have done of Deuteronomy. This book has also had a chastening influence in my life because often through it the Lord showed me areas where I have been slack in my Christian commitment.

The Biblical writers seem to have considered Deuteronomy to be a very important book; they used it all the time. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart say that “Deuteronomy has perhaps had more influence on the rest of the biblical story (both Old and New Testaments) than any other book of the Bible.” They point out that “Deuteronomy . . . had considerable influence on Israel’s and Judah’s prophets, especially Isaiah and Jeremiah, and through them influenced the major figures of the NT (especially Jesus and Paul).”³ Chris Wright says, “The book of Deuteronomy lies close to the very heartbeat of the Scriptures. It is to the Old Testament something like the book of Romans to the New Testament. It deals with many of the key themes that inform the rest of the Bible.”⁴ It is quoted over eighty times in the New Testament, and references to it occur in all the New Testament books except John, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, and 1 and 2 Peter. Thus it belongs to a small group of four Old Testament books—Genesis, Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Isaiah—to which early Christians made frequent reference.⁵ When Jesus was tempted, he quoted from Deuteronomy in each of his three responses to Satan.

We must never forget that when the New Testament was written, the only Bible that the Christians had was the Old Testament. When they “studied the Word,” they studied the Old Testament. Therefore it was not necessary for some of the things emphasized in the Old Testament to be emphasized again in the New Testament. The New Testament takes it for granted that Christians were very aware of these emphases. Some of these emphases are not very strong in the thinking of Christians today. Therefore it is especially important that we study the Old Testament, because the failure to do that would result in our not being influenced by a key aspect of God’s thinking.

Let me list some of those things that are very important for the Christian life but that the New Testament does not emphasize as much as the Old Testament because they already have a good emphasis there. Each of these is an emphasis found in Deuteronomy also.

- The importance of order and the attention to detail especially in connection with worship.
- The importance of visual and symbolic reminders of Biblical truth, such as festivals.
- The importance of constantly being aware of the holiness of God and how it influences a faithful life. In fact, in the Old Testament the life of faith is often described as walking in the fear of the Lord, an emphasis

that may be much needed today when people tend to be careless about sticking to Christian principles in every sphere of life.

- The need for discipline and disciplining people when serious disobedience occurs.
- The need to have a vital relationship with the Word through memorization, meditation, discussion, and obedience.

Deuteronomy is particularly important because it records a series of sermons given to help people in their day-to-day lives. It begins with the words, “These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel . . .” (1:1). Deuteronomy 1:5 says, “Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to explain this law. . . .” So it is an expository sermon. Paul Barker points out that “apart from chapter 34 there are only five major paragraphs in the book which are not reported speech.”⁶

Because it consists of sermons, Deuteronomy would also give us helpful models for preaching today.

- The sermonic style is found here with its sense of urgency, with frequent pleading and exhorting, and with calls to action.
- The laws are not simply listed, they are preached.
- Deuteronomy is full of imperatives to love, fear, serve, obey, walk after, and hold fast.
- The two main ways Moses tries to motivate the people to faithfulness are reviewing history and retelling the Law. Surely that has something to teach us about good preaching!
- “Almost every time Moses talks about the land, he is seeking to motivate Israel.” Therefore, when he mentions the land he qualifies it with terms like “which the Lord your God gave you,” “the good,” “flowing with milk and honey,” or “which the Lord your God swore (or promised) to give you.”

I must confess that usually I get excited about any book in the Bible I am studying at a given time. The study of all of Scripture is a thrilling exercise. But I needed to give reasons why Deuteronomy is exciting because I have found that many people, assuming that this is a boring book that is difficult to understand, avoid studying it and preaching from it. This is a serious error.

1

Deuteronomy: Highly Relevant History

DEUTERONOMY 1:1–3, 5



THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY consists primarily of speeches that Moses gave to the Israelites shortly before he handed over the leadership to Joshua. They aim to prepare the people to conquer Canaan and live faithful lives in their new land. The speeches give some strong teaching that would be somewhat unpopular today. Our natural tendency would be to dismiss this teaching as not being relevant to our lives. However, this book claims to contain the very thoughts of God. Deuteronomy 1:3 says, “Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him in commandment to them.” If these are indeed God’s words, we are forced to take them seriously. Therefore, I will give a brief defense of the historical reliability of this book. This study is more technical than the others in this book.

The Name Deuteronomy

The Israelites usually used the first two words in the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy, “*elleh haddebarim*,” meaning “these are the words,” as their title for the book. Sometimes they simply used the shortened form *debarim* (“words”). The name that has become popular in English comes from a translation of Deuteronomy 17:18 in the Septuagint, the most important ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, usually abbreviated as LXX. Here Moses is asked to make “a copy of this law,” and the LXX translated that as “second law” or “repetition of the law.” The Latin Vulgate version of the Bible, which was completed by Jerome in AD 405, titled the book

Deuteronomium meaning “second law.” And that is from where we get our English title.

This strange history of the name should not trouble devout Bible students too much, as the claims we make for the Scriptures are for the text of the Bible, not the titles. Besides, the title is not entirely inappropriate because it is a second version of the one law given at Sinai and originally recorded in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers and because it is structured along the lines of the renewing of the covenant that was originally done at Sinai.

Are These Really the Words of Moses? (1:1)

Deuteronomy begins with the statement, “These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness . . .” (1:1a). In other places too, the book often claims to have a record of the words of Moses (1:5; 31:30). There are references to Moses writing parts of it (31:9, 22, 24). “Other OT books similarly assert Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy (1 Kings 2:3; 8:53; 2 Kings 14:6; 18:6, 12), as do Jesus and others in the NT.”¹ Over the past 200 years or so there has been a strong (but misguided) challenge to the claim that Moses is the main person behind Deuteronomy.

Verse 1 uses the expression “beyond the Jordan” to describe the place from which Moses spoke the words of Deuteronomy. This expression came into use only after the Jordan was crossed, that is, after Moses had died. This points to the hand of an editor in the composition of Deuteronomy. Chapter 34 records the death of Moses, which again is from the hand of someone else. Sometimes there are explanatory notes added to the words of Moses that seem to come from an editor (e.g., 2:10–12, 20–23; 3:11, 13b–14). In this book we will view Deuteronomy as essentially coming from Moses though it contains several editorial touches by others. That is, we believe that Moses really did say what Deuteronomy says he said.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century there was among Biblical scholars a growing acceptance of “higher critical” approaches to the study of Scripture. Along with this came the view that Deuteronomy came from the time of the righteous king Josiah. Some asked whether Deuteronomy was “the book of the Law” that was found around 621 BC during the reign of Josiah, as recorded in 2 Kings 22:8. Some even said that Deuteronomy was a “pious fraud”; that is, that someone had placed the book in the temple so that it would be “found” accidentally. Many said that the writing of Deuteronomy was part of the seventh-century reforms under Josiah.

Josiah clearly seems to have been acting under the influence of the teaching found in Deuteronomy. What is controversial is the claim that

Deuteronomy was written in the time of Josiah. Those who hold this view say that Deuteronomy has a tone like that of the prophets and even opens like the prophetic books that were written during the time of the kings (Isaiah 1:1; Amos 1:1; etc.). In answer we would ask, could not the prophets have been influenced by Deuteronomy rather than vice versa? After all, the influence of Deuteronomy is found in many other sections of the Bible too, including the New Testament. We contend that Josiah and the prophets were influenced by Deuteronomy, which is a much earlier document. After all, the book does claim to contain the words of Moses.

Gordon McConville has given several arguments in support of the view that Deuteronomy came from a time much closer to the time of Moses than claimed by the critics.² “First, Deuteronomy shows no knowledge of the main institutions of Israel’s political and religious life during the period of the kings, namely the kings themselves and the Jerusalem temple.” McConville further points out that Deuteronomy is also unenthusiastic about the idea of a king (17:14–20), merely permitting such a thing, and trying to ensure that the king would not become a tyrant. This law is unlikely to have come from the time of Josiah.

“Secondly,” McConville says, “Deuteronomy knows only a single, united Israel, and shows no acquaintance with the division of the nation into two kingdoms following the reign of Solomon, around 930 BC (1 Kings 12).”

“Thirdly, the book warns again and again about the dangers of Canaanite religion (*e.g.* chs. 7, 13).” While this remained a problem until the time of the exile, it was a seriously urgent problem immediately after setting foot in the promised land. And Deuteronomy claims to contain material that prepares the people for their life after they enter the promised land.

“Fourthly, certain laws make best sense in relation to imminent (or recent) occupation of the land.” According to Leviticus 17, all slaughter of animals was to be sacrificial and carried out in the tent of meeting, which is where the Israelites worshipped and sacrificed until the temple was built. After settling in the land it would have been too difficult for the people to travel to the tent of meeting every time they wanted to consume meat. Therefore, Deuteronomy permits the secular eating of meat also (12:15–25), indicating that it is talking about a new situation to be faced by the people.

“Fifthly, Deuteronomy shares the concerns of the prophets, namely, the need for heartfelt religion, and a love of justice and the rights of the poor (14:28–29). Yet,” says McConville, “it is different from the prophetic books in the sense that it does not address particular occasions and individuals. It has much more the appearance of a programme for the future.” McConville

says that it is likely “that the prophets take their cue from Deuteronomy, as well as from other parts of the Pentateuch.”

McConville’s last point is that “it has been shown that Deuteronomy formally resembles certain political treaties made by Hittite kings with weaker states, as well as certain ancient law-codes, such as that of the famous Babylonian king and lawgiver, Hammurabi.” Of the eighty or ninety documents of law codes that have been found by archaeologists, Deuteronomy resembles the Hittite treaties from 1400 to 1200 BC, which according to more conservative scholars is the time that Moses lived.

Kenneth A. Kitchen, an esteemed expert in ancient Near Eastern studies from the University of Liverpool, has recently written a 662-page book, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, in which he painstakingly presents evidence for the historical reliability of the Old Testament. In his discussion of the Sinai covenant (of which Deuteronomy is a record), he shows how a comparison of the Sinai treaty, as described in the Pentateuch, with ancient Near Eastern treaties gives strong evidence for a dating of the records of the Sinai covenant in the era when Moses is said to have lived. He divides the history of treaties, laws, and covenants into six phases covering 2,000 years. He says, “It is vitally important to understand that the documents of each phase are sharply different in format and full content from those in the phases before and after them. There is no ambiguity.”³

Kitchen’s observations cause him to place Deuteronomy and other records of the Sinai covenant squarely within the fifth phase, which includes the Hittite treaties. This phase covers roughly 1400 to 1200 BC. He shows how there is a “glaring contrast” between the Hittite and Sinai treaties on the one hand and the treaties of phase VI which covers roughly 900 to 650 BC and includes Assyrian treaties.⁴ His conclusion is:

The impartial and very extensive evidence (thirty Hittite inspired documents and versions!) sets this matter beyond any further dispute. It is *not* my creation, it is inherent in the mass of original documents *themselves*, and cannot be gainsaid, if the brute facts are to be respected.⁵

The six arguments given above give us confidence to say that the contents of Deuteronomy can be traced to the time of Moses. This is very important in determining our approach to Deuteronomy. Some scholars think it is not important. Recently there has been a return in Biblical studies to studying Biblical books as a whole in the way they are found in the Bible—that is, in their canonical form—without chopping the books up according to the various sources from which different parts of a book are said to have been derived.

This chopping up was done a lot in the twentieth century in the heyday of what was known as form criticism. The canonical approach (called canon criticism) is being advocated even by those who would not call themselves evangelical Christians. They study a book as a whole to see what it teaches. This has been a welcome trend, and it has produced some outstanding and helpful studies of Biblical texts.

However, some (not all⁶) people advocating this canonical approach would say that it does not matter if the words attributed to Moses were not said by Moses himself. They say that what we need to learn is the teaching of the book without bothering with historical details. I find that approach unsatisfactory. If Deuteronomy contains God's clear teaching to his people, and if it is inspired so as to become a definite infallible source of authority for our belief and practice, shouldn't we expect its basic historical premise—that these are indeed Moses' words—to be true? After all, it claims to contain the speeches that Moses gave to the Israelites and claims that God is the one who is behind those speeches (1:3)! If the claims it makes for itself are inaccurate, I do not think we could come to the book as being a bearer of ultimate and trustworthy teaching that will have an exclusive and authoritative claim on our thinking and behavior.

The Scriptures contain many radical teachings that run contrary to popular thinking, and embracing those teachings is not easy today. In this environment I cannot see how the Bible could become our reliable and ultimate source of authority for faith and practice if we do not accept some of the things it claims for itself. We could drop things that we don't like by claiming that those statements are not historically reliable and that they do not reflect the mind of God. This is what many have done with radical statements of Christ that present him as divine and absolute Lord. These claims go against the pluralist mood of the present day, and they are rejected on the grounds that they come from a period much later than Jesus and therefore should not be attributed to him.⁷ I believe it is not necessary for us to jettison statements in the Bible because of a suspicion that they are not historically accurate. A strong case has been made by several writers in recent years for the historical reliability of both the Old and the New Testaments.⁸

Today people who call themselves Christians are discarding some teachings of the Bible and accepting lifestyles that are contrary to these teachings. For example, homosexual practice, which is explicitly prohibited in Leviticus 18:22; 20:13, is accepted as a legitimate alternate lifestyle by some who call themselves Christians. If we really believed that God gave those commands to Moses, we would be more cautious about discarding them. Deuteronomy clearly teaches that sex belongs within marriage (22:13–29) and that adultery

is prohibited (5:18). But adultery is publicly and shamelessly flouted by famous people and reported in the news media as something quite normal. Sadly, the statistics seem to show that the incidence of extramarital sex is quite high among those who call themselves Christians. If Christians understood that God himself gave those prohibitions to Moses, they would be much more reluctant to violate them. And that is the claim that Deuteronomy makes. Deuteronomy 1:3 says, “Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him in commandment to them.”

Deuteronomy and Hittite Treaties

Moses’ aim in his final speeches is to ensure that the people will remain faithful to God. He reminds them that they are a people under a covenant with God. It probably is not accidental then that the book takes a form somewhat similar to the covenants made by people at that time. We should be cautious about attaching too much significance to the similarities between Deuteronomy and the ancient Hittite treaties that have been discovered. However, the two listings below show the parallels between the parts of a Hittite treaty and the contents of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy, of course, is not a political treaty like the Hittite treaties but a document describing the covenant between God and his people.

Scholars differ about the precise ways in which the parts of a Hittite treaty should be described. We know for sure that the treaties in Moses’ time generally had the six parts (see the column on the left in the chart below). The right column shows Deuteronomy structured according to a pattern that shows remarkable similarities to the Hittite treaties.

Figure 1.1: Hittite Treaties and Deuteronomy

Hittite Treaties	Pattern of Deuteronomy
1. A preamble: announcing the treaty and those who are a party to it	1. Preamble (1:1–5)
2. A historical prologue: remembering the previous relations between the parties	2. Historical prologue (1:6 — 4:49)
3. General stipulations (conditions): setting out the nature of the future relationship between the two parties	3. General stipulations (chs. 5 — 11)
4. Specific stipulations: the detailed requirements applicable to the weaker party	4. Specific stipulations (chs. 12 — 26)
5. Witnesses: gods were called to witness the treaty	5. Witnesses (ch. 32). Calls on heaven and earth to witness the words of Israel
6. Blessings and curses: these are pronounced for loyalty and disloyalty respectively	6. Blessings and curses (chs. 27, 28)

The six features in the pattern of Deuteronomy introduce us to six very important features in a healthy life of faith. We will have occasion to look at them in some detail in the rest of this book.

Disobedience Slows Us Down (1:1–3)

The first three verses of Deuteronomy give some introductory historical and geographical notes. Verse 1 says that the words of this book were spoken by Moses “beyond the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph. . . .” The Arabah was a rift valley running from the Sea of Galilee in the north all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba, which is some distance south of the Dead Sea. Verse 5 also gives the historical context: “Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to explain this law. . . .” God’s people are in the northern part of the Arabah. The promised lands east of the River Jordan have been conquered. Now it is time to go into the main portion of the promised land west of the Jordan.

Verse 2 makes a strange observation: “It is eleven days’ journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea.” Horeb is another name for Sinai and is the preferred name in Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy uses the word Sinai only once [33:2]). Kadesh-barnea is where they camped after leaving Horeb. This is at the border of the promised land, and it is from here that they sent the twelve spies to check out the land (Numbers 13; Deuteronomy 1:19–25). They had left Horeb a long time ago. Verse 3 even gives the time that these events took place: “In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month . . .” This is the only time specification in the whole book. And “fortieth year” refers to the time calculated from when they left Egypt.

There seems to be a reason for mentioning the eleven-day journey just before mentioning the fortieth year. It takes eleven days to travel from Horeb to the border of Canaan. But it took forty years for the whole journey from Egypt to Canaan. They traveled for about two years before coming to Kadesh. This means it took about thirty-eight years to go from the border of Canaan to Canaan itself and only eleven days to go from Horeb to the border. That is the price of disobedience! The thirty-eight-year wilderness wandering was a punishment for the stubborn disobedience of the people. Deuteronomy will refer to this many times. Disobedience never pays. God will forgive us when we repent, but the consequences of sin make it sheer folly to disobey. Disobedience slows down our progress!

Verse 3 says that “Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him in commandment to them.” The book consists of God’s words given in a specific historical setting. Here it differs in style from

the Qur'an, which contains absolute statements that claim to be directly given by God. In the Bible the style of the writers and the contents of their writings differ according to their personalities, experiences, and the specific cultural situations in which they lived. If we are to fully understand the meaning of a text we must work hard to understand the context from which it arose. This makes for an exciting lifelong pilgrimage of discovery as we seek to understand the Bible.

The fact that Deuteronomy was written to a specific context adds a freshness and relevance to it. The places, people, and experiences mentioned in Deuteronomy are real. This is why the Bible is so relevant to everyday life. I will never forget a conversation I had one day with a colleague working in our drug rehab ministry while we were traveling to our rehab center. We were talking about the things of the Lord, and suddenly my colleague said, "When I read Paul's epistles, I feel that Paul himself may have been a drug addict at some time." He told me that the struggle with sin that Paul records in Romans 7 is very similar to the experience of drug dependents. Our study of Deuteronomy will show how relevant it is to our lives today.

Moses Gives the People God's Word (1:3b, 5, 6)

A Practically Relevant Word from God (1:3b, 5)

Moses is an aged leader who has led his people from slavery to the brink of possessing a land that will be permanently theirs. He knows he is soon going to die. Now he speaks for the last time to these people whom he has led for forty years. He is considered by many to be the greatest national leader in history. You can imagine the eager anticipation of the audience. These messages will need to be motivational in tone because the people have a river to cross and a few battles to win before they take possession of the land. They will also need to be exhortational, because the people will face many temptations to disobedience, and remaining faithful to God is going to be a big challenge.

What approach would Moses take? Would he dazzle the people with creativity and brilliance that would elicit praise from them for his eloquence? That is what many consider to be a great speech today. Moses' intention is not to leave an impression of his brilliance. He has a far more important task before him. He has to give people the word of God that will mediate to the people the health and stability they need in order to face their challenges successfully.

Verse 3b says, "Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him in commandment to them." Verse 5 explains this further: "Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to

explain this law.” What the people needed most was not eloquence or attractive speeches. They needed a word from God.

A short while later, when commissioning Moses’ successor Joshua, God told Joshua, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8). The path of prosperity and success for Joshua was the path of obedience to the Word of God. It would be so for Joshua’s people too. So when Moses addresses them, just before Joshua is appointed, he expounds God’s Word to them.

When will we learn that our great responsibility as leaders is to get our people into the Word? That is what will help them successfully tackle the challenges they face. I think one reason for the woeful statistics, showing that Christians are not behaving very differently from non-Christians today, is that the church has focused much on keeping the people entertained and much less on making them strong through the Word. In this marketing-oriented era we have concentrated on providing people a program they will like and have neglected our responsibility to give them “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Jesus asked God to “sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). People who are not properly fed the Word will not be sanctified.

I am amazed at how many Christian leaders today think that it is not appropriate to expound the Scriptures in their regular preaching to their people. A prominent evangelical leader once told me that he exegetes society more than exegeting the Scriptures so that he can give a relevant message to the people. But wouldn’t the message of the Creator to his creation be most relevant to people? Indeed, because the Bible is a message for all time we will need to work hard at applying its eternal message to a particular context. Yes, we must exegete society, but it is even more important to exegete Scripture because that is where the power to change lives lies.

The challenge to exegete both Scripture and society and then integrate the results into an attractive and powerful message calls for hard work. But our desire to faithfully fulfill our call would make us take on this tough challenge. I believe a primary reason for the scarcity of relevant expository preaching in the church today is that preachers are not willing to devote the time needed to do that well.

Another reason is that we live in a postmodern society where the value of objective truth has been greatly diminished. This affects us because objective truth is basic to Christianity, and it is given to us in the Bible. Therefore, today we need evangelists for objective truth. Earlier we had the challenge of con-

vincing people that the gospel is the truth. Now we have the more basic challenge of convincing people that truth is valuable, necessary, and appealing.

Some people say that Biblical preaching does not attract people anymore. The answer to that is not to stop doing Biblical preaching. It is to do it in a way that is attractive. We may use creative means of communication and the new methods that are currently popular in society. We can use things like story, drama, film, PowerPoint, dialogue, and discussion. But the driving force should be the Scriptures. That should never be dethroned by the methods we are using. All the methods are servants of the truth of the Word that needs to be communicated.

A Year of Equipping the People (1:6)

The major job of equipping the people with God's Word took place at Horeb (Sinai) when God gave Moses the Law and Moses explained it to the people. In Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people of the things they were taught at Horeb. Moses' first speech begins with God telling the people that they had stayed long enough at Horeb and that now it was time for them to move on (1:6). They had to spend approximately a year (see Exodus 19:1; Numbers 10:11) at Mount Horeb⁹ learning from God before they went any farther. After that year God says, "You have stayed long enough at this mountain" (1:6) and commands them to proceed with the journey. This long stay follows the pattern of God giving people an extended period of preparation before they launch out into difficult projects.

Moses started his leadership of the Israelites at the ripe old age of eighty years. It would look like a waste of time for him to be hidden for so long while there was the urgent need of delivering his suffering people. Need or no need, we must let people be spiritually prepared for the challenges they face before giving them the huge responsibility of leadership. So Jesus started his public ministry only when he was "about 30 years of age" (Luke 3:23). Paul became an evangelist immediately after his conversion, but several years elapsed before he joined Barnabas to begin what would become his life's work.

Paul asks Timothy not to appoint recent converts to leadership in the church, because they could get conceited and become prey to Satan's devices (1 Timothy 3:6). Some new believers seem eminently qualified for leadership, because they have the personality and gifts that go into making a good leader. Others have so much enthusiasm for the work that, given the shortage of leaders, we see them as the answer to our need for people to carry out our programs. But until the Word has taken solid root in their lives they are too immature to handle the challenges of Christian leadership. They will be

forced to become something they are not. They begin to live beyond their resources and are vulnerable to Satan's tricks. One of the most important ingredients of nurturing leaders is feeding them with the Word and developing them into people of the Book. By that we mean that they should know the Word (2 Timothy 3:14–17), know how to handle the Word (2 Timothy 2:15), and depend on the Word for guidance (Psalm 109:105).

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