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How Do We Face the Future?

Deuteronomy 1:1-8

Deuteronomy is the right book to help us think about facing the future. Every human being, Christian or not, must think about what the future will be like. It is always unknown, uncertain, and sometimes dangerous. Particularly as believers, how do we face our own future? Such a question every day takes us to the cusp of the unknown.

But there are particular junctures in our life when it comes powerfully before us. How do we decide what kind of job to take, where to go to college, whom we marry, or how many children to have? All of us must face the unknown.

Deuteronomy was delivered by Moses while Israel was facing an unknown future. They had been under his leadership for forty years in the wilderness. By the Lord's work through him, Moses had led them out of slavery in Egypt. Now we find them here on the verge of the River Jordan and God has said, 'You have been here long enough; it is time for you to cross over the river.'

This crossing would be challenging, even to the faith of the strongest person, especially because Moses could not go into the land with them. The Lord would remove the strong, competent leader whom they knew and trusted. However, in the wilderness, for the most part, except on a few occasions (as with the Amalekites), they didn't have to face many enemies.

It will be different for the children of Israel after crossing the Jordan River. They must face 'battle royal' time after time, and they must do so without Moses. There were hostile cities to be conquered, and powerful tribes to be forced out. They already knew enough to realize that their future, in the plan of God, must include warfare, danger, slaughter, and sometimes death.

So how did they face this kind of future? What Moses says in Deuteronomy is a wonderful key to all our futures, and we do well to take it to heart, whether we knowingly face danger or not.

Four Reasons to Study Deuteronomy

BECAUSE 'ALL SCRIPTURE

IS INSPIRED BY GOD'

Any part of the sixty six books of the Bible should be studied, because, 'All Scripture is inspired by God [or God-breathed], and is profitable for reproof, for instruction' (2 Tim. 3:16).

Many ministers worldwide were influenced by the Rev. William Still from Aberdeen Scotland.

He wrote a book for students over sixty years ago entitled The Work of the Pastor. His essential point is that the main work of the pastor is to take his people through different parts of the Bible, by expounding each text. One has to balance different parts of the Old Testament and New Testament, and one must vary in one's preaching Law, Prophets, Wisdom, History, Gospel, Epistle, and the future. He holds that if the preacher does not give his congregation all parts of the whole Bible, they will not grow in Christ-like character in certain areas because each part assists different aspects of the believer's character. The Holy Spirit uses each text to change, strengthen, and transform us. Sitting under the preaching of the whole counsel of God's Word over time, even though we don't feel it ourselves, will cause others to perceive that we've been with the Lord; that we're becoming more like Him. All Scripture accomplishes this goal of transformation of the life because it is directly inspired by God, who uses it to make his people more like his Son. That transforming process includes Deuteronomy, which is reason enough to study it closely.

The Old Testament was Written for Our Learning

Romans 15:4 says that 'whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.' By 'written aforetime', he means the Old Testament, because the New Testament had not yet been fully written.

A. W. Pink once remarked that it is an Old Testament characteristic that it often puts into the concrete many New Testament doctrines. For instance, some of the sharp difficulties that God's saints in the Old Testament era went through, are not fundamentally different from hardships we face. When we see that they got through these trials with God's help, then we cry out: I too can get through it! Studying the Old Testament strengthens us in hope—and who needs anything more than hope?

THROUGH MOSES, GOD ATTACHES SPECIAL BLESSINGS TO THE STUDY AND PRACTICE OF DEUTERONOMY. One finds several promises of blessing for studying and seeking to practice. For instance:

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. (Deut. 28:1–2)

So through Moses God is saying that your life, and the life of a nation, can be different if many in it will hearken to these words.

In Deuteronomy 29:9, we find a similar kind of promise; 29:14-15 makes rich promises as well, not just to the children of Israel, some 1,400 years before Christ, as they were standing near Jordan, but for their spiritual descendants, such as us: 'Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; But with him that standeth here with us this day before the LORD our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day:' We were born 3,400 years later, and He still covenants with us, if we are in the faith. Similarly, in Deuteronomy 30:9-10, the principle is that your heart is given to God; it is not merely attention to rules (even good ones), but Moses tells us here that we are to live face to face with God. That is the heart of the Covenant that He sets forth (though it is never without powerful rules).

Deuteronomy 32:44–47 promises even more blessings, which believers can take as their own.

Jesus used deuteronomy to overcome the devil

A fourth reason to study Deuteronomy is this: our Lord Jesus Christ, after His baptism and at the beginning of His public ministry, went out into the wilderness to be tempted. While He is there, Satan attacks Him in all his fury, and tempts Him to do wrong. But how did Jesus find strength to overcome the devil? The Lord Jesus Christ in His humanity, made use of three passages from Deuteronomy to deal with the evil one's three temptations. He quotes Deuteronomy 8:3:

And when the tempter came to him, he said, 'If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread'. But he answered and said, 'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God'. (Matt. 4:3–4)

The devil then takes Him up on the wing of the temple (Matt.4:5-7) and essentially says, 'You can show off and make a tremendous media impact if You jump down and show that God can protect you.' Jesus answered him from Deuteronomy 6:16: 'Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah'.

The third temptation is in Matthew 4:8–10 and Christ's response to the devil again is from Deuteronomy (Deut. 6:13). So I believe you will agree that if Jesus felt the need of Deuteronomy to help Him in His hour of trial, surely it can help us in the difficulties of our lives.

AUTHORSHIP OF DEUTERONOMY

The heading of your Bibles calls Deuteronomy 'the fifth book of Moses,' which I believe is correct.

It is believed that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, although he may well have used, particularly in Genesis, sources going as far back as Adam and Noah, although we don't know for certain how he got his sources. But we do know that Moses was inspired to write the first five books, including this fifth book, Deuteronomy. It says in verse 1, 'These be the words which Moses spake.'

In the nineteenth century there was a deeply influential movement of secularization called 'Higher Criticism'. For the most part it began in Germany, and then it spread through Britain to the USA, and to many of the universities, seminaries, and colleges. 'Higher Criticism' was an aspect of 'Modernism', and as such, it sought to undercut traditional authorities, especially the authority of Scripture, with particular disregard for the Old Testament. The 'higher critics' argued that Moses could not have written this book.

In the early phase of the higher critical movement, an argument was made that writing did not exist in the time of Moses—but evidence in no way supports this idea. In fact, we now know from plenty of documentary evidence that writing was thousands of years before Moses, so higher criticism had to drop that one as an argument against Mosaic authorship.

Although this argument fell through, these critics didn't give up. They then took another approach, arguing that Deuteronomy was put together long after the time of Moses from disparate sources and that these sources were cobbled together, producing a book that has no clear structure or focus.

RECENT ARCHEOLOGICAL SUPPORT

However, in the twentieth century, a considerable amount of archeological and documentary scholarship based on research done in the Middle

East between the two world wars has found several treaties from the time of Moses and vindicated the likelihood of the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy. These treaties, dating back to the middle of the second millennium BC, were found on clay tablets and sometimes dried parchments and were written by the ruling powers of the ancient Near East at that time, particularly by a huge, powerful group known as the Hittites. We have a treasure of these Hittite writings that originated at precisely the same time Moses would have lived.

SUZERAINTY TREATIES

Interestingly, these Hittite treaties, known as suzerainty treaties, are structured in much the same way as Deuteronomy. In Hittite culture, a suzerain was a mighty king, and when this mighty king sent in his generals to take over another subject country, he would make a treaty or covenant with them. The ancient Hittite treaties from the time of Moses begin with a preamble, much like Deuteronomy 1:1-8. This preamble serves to identify the high king or suzerain, and then it moves on to a review of the history of the relationship between the Suzerain and the people with whom he was entering into a treaty. Next, the treaty moves to the stipulations or requirements of the covenant, and then the sanctions, that is, blessings for obedience, cursing for disobedience, and then to a statement that this covenant will be displayed publicly. Deuteronomy takes that precise form. So therefore, there is every reason to believe historically, in documentary terms, that Deuteronomy was written by Moses in the same way that treaties were made by the Hittites, by the Assyrians and by others in this time and to accept this historically as authentic; it fits in with the way things were done in Moses' lifetime-that is, the middle of the second millennium before Christ.

In addition to such excellent archeological evidence, the New Testament quotes portions of Deuteronomy and clearly ascribes them to the hand of Moses. For instance, Luke 20:28 quotes Deuteronomy 25:5 and says 'Moses wrote'. Considering that early Jews and Christians considered these to be the words of Moses, we too should accept the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy.

The Outline of Deuteronomy

Does Deuteronomy have an outline, that is, a structure? At one time in the nineteenth century, critics argued that Deuteronomy did not make sense as one document; it seemed to be thrown together, with no sort of form or structure.

And yet, as we have already seen, it seems to be clear based on Hittite suzerainty treaties, and this helps us to see that this fifth book of Moses follows a very intentional structure. Specifically, much of the book follows the order of the Ten Commandments given in Deuteronomy 5, which parallels the first time they are given in Exodus 20.

In fact, so central to Deuteronomy is this second giving of the Ten Commandments, that the name of the book itself literally means 'second law' (from the Greek *deuteros* meaning 'second' and *nomos* meaning 'law'). Yet why give the Law again, when Exodus 20 has already presented it in a most glorious manner?

What Moses is doing here is explaining the spirit behind the Ten Commandments, and also providing illustrations of how you carry them out in normal, everyday life. We must understand that Deuteronomy is not a new giving of the law, as though it is adding something different. It's the same law as Exodus 20, given on Mt. Sinai, but it's the second reading. In this second reading, Moses gives careful explication of what it means, thereby showing its spiritual depths, and its practical ramifications. This is similar to what Jesus does in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount. He expounds the law by showing the spiritual depth and inner connectedness it requires, and how it goes into the deep places of human life and daily living. It would be safe to say that in some ways, Deuteronomy is similar in spirit to Christ's Sermon on the Mount—though of course it's not exactly the same.

Dr. John Currid brings out this outline of Deuteronomy in his recent commentary.

- 1:1-8 is a preamble (like second millennium B.C. suzerainty treaties)
- 2. 1:9–4:43 is a review of the history of the relationship between Jehovah and Israel from Abraham to the plains of Moab.
- 3. 4:44–26:19 gives the stipulations of the covenant; a reiteration of the Ten Commandments and a practical exposition of what each of them will mean for life in the promised land. This longest section of Deuteronomy follows the order of the Decalogue:
 - a. 4:44–5:33 giving the setting and proclamation of the ten commandments
 - b. 6:1–11:32 constitute a commentary on the first commandments, opening with the Shema (6:4)
 - c. 12:1–31 commentary on the second commandment, calling for eradication of pagan cults
 - d. 12:32–14:21 commentary concerning taking God's name in vain, thus condemning false prophets
 - e. 14:22–16:17 Sabbath law and festal calendar of Israel (based on Sabbath principle)
 - f. 16:18–18:22 the fifth commandment: parental authority and authority of hierarchical structures

- g. 19:1–22:12 the sixth commandment: no killing, warfare and punishment for capital offences
- h. 22:13–23:14 the seventh commandment: no adultery, and laws against other forms of sexual impurity
- i. 23:15–24:7 the eighth commandment: stealing and other property violations
- j. 24:8–16 the ninth commandment: no false witness: pledges and vows made to one's neighbor; keeping one's word
- k. 24:17–26:19 the tenth commandment: do not covet; restriction of violations against rights and privileges of others
- 4. 27:1–29:1 The blessings and curses of the covenant
- 5. 27:1–4 A statement of display (to erect stones and write on them the covenant words)
- 6. 29:2–30:20 An oath of allegiance of the vassal to the covenant
- 7. 31:1–32:47 Three witnesses to the covenant: the law itself, the song of Moses and Joshua, and heaven and earth.

As you can see, it is clear from our knowledge of the structure of Hittite treaties, that we must reject the idea that Deuteronomy has no structure as the critics once thought. Rather, we now know that it is written with an identifiable and intentional structure

The preamble to deuteronomy 1:1-8

Now that we have uncovered the background and context of the book, let us consider Deuteronomy 1:1–8. Just as in ancient Hittite suzerainty treaties, this covenant document starts off with a preamble, somewhat like the Constitution of the United States of America begins with a preamble.

Moses starts off in verse 1 by identifying himself as the spokesman of the Lord. Next, in

verses 3 and 6–8, he makes clear that it is God Almighty, the great king and covenant Lord, who is speaking through His servant Moses. In doing so, Moses specifies the precise time of the second reading of the law and the place where it was done. These verses give us precise details as to the immediate history when it was written.

First, the time was at the end of the forty years of wandering, just before the people of Israel would cross over Jordan into the Promised Land. Verse 3 says it was the fortieth year, the eleventh month, the first day of the month. That's being very precise; clearly this was not a mythological dream, but a precise, historical, datable matter.

Second, the place of the second reading of the law is, according to verse 5, what we call today Transjordan, east of the Jordan River in the ancient territory of Moab. Thus, the people of God were on the verge of the greatest movement they have made since they came out of slavery in Egypt and crossed over the Red Sea some forty years before. And while they were still God's people, most of that generation which left Egypt had died out, and the group Moses is leading here is a new generation, with a few exceptions. Hence, they are preparing to cross into the Promised Land that God would give them!

However, to gain it, they would face a tremendous amount of fighting and risk their lives on the high places of the field. Naturally, any normal human, even those with faith, facing those kinds of battles would become quite sober, and probably have a bad feeling in the pit of their stomach. And so Moses is writing this book to encourage them, as Paul says, 'that you might have hope through the Scriptures' (Rom. 15:4). They need encouragement as they face an unknown, and warlike future. To do so, he gives them this encouragement by turning their hearts and minds to who God is, and to what His covenant promises are like for His people.

As he does so, he reminds them they are in the line of the patriarchs whom God chose and blesses: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As they went through their difficulties, they found that God is still just as big as He was in the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and indeed, as He was when they came through the Red Sea. Moses is saving afresh, if you will look to Him, it will give you all the encouragement you need to face severe testing and physical battles, and that you will be fighting for your lives and your children. Only faith in this God of the covenant will get you through. They will not have Moses with them after this; God will take him home, and bury him, so they go forward without the comfort of this tremendous leader and shepherd.

Sometime back, we attended the wedding of a young man, who within days was to be sent to Iraq as an army officer. I decided that I would write a letter and hand it to him. In that letter, I wrote out by hand Psalm 121, and asked him to memorize it before he goes to Iraq.

> I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

I could think of nothing better that I could do for a young man, just married, who would soon endure such trials, than give him Psalm 121. His greatest hope is to lift up his eyes to the LORD who made heaven and earth as he faces every battle and some of the severe challenges of life. Notice two points in 1:1-8 First, Moses tells them to look by faith at who God is. And secondly, he tells them to look at the land that God has promised to give them. These two points are a summary way of saying, your future can be a very good one, if only you will keep your hand in My hand.

Looking by faith at who God is, is the big picture. In Deuteronomy 1:6, Moses calls Him, Jehovah our God. We don't know exactly how the word translated Jehovah or Jah-veh [or Yahweh] was pronounced, but it was given to Moses in Exodus 3:14 at the burning bush. In this account, the Lord has just told Moses to go into Egypt and tell Pharaoh to 'let My people go.' In response, Moses tells God that it will be a very hard thing, and for help in doing so, he asks God, 'What's your name?' God responds, 'I am that I am', which basically means, 'I depend on nothing; I am always existent; everything else depends on me. Pharaoh depends on me. The Red Sea depends on me. You go down there and tell him I am that I am has sent you, and says, let the slaves go free.' The word given to Moses at the burning bush encouraged him to do the impossible.

Much later, as a million of the children of Israel were standing on the banks of the Jordan River, he gives them the same name that God gave to him. What a wonderful encouragement to the people as they literally stand on the edge of some extremely difficult, onerous days! He reminds them that it is the Lord God, *Jehovah*, or *Jah-veh* who told them to go and, and that God Himself will go ahead of them.

God has several names in the Bible. The one for the Creator of the whole world is usually *Elohim*. It speaks of God's mighty, creative force. But the one He specially reserves for His people, both to the Jews in the Old Testament and Christians in the New Testament, is usually *Jehovah*, and it's a covenant name, a name of grace. When God gives you that name, it says you are included in the grace that I have shown to the unworthy; I have called you to be Mine, and I am dealing with you graciously in a special way, in a salvational way, so the name Jehovah is a name reserved to His covenant people. That's how Moses names Him again, as they are standing on the banks of the river, needing Him so much, since they will not have Moses with them as their leader anymore. They are going to have to face hostile Amorites, Canaanites (Deut. 1:7), but Moses wants them to know that the Almighty Creator is more than sufficient because whatever enemy you must face, it is less than God. They were called on to remember that.

Earlier I mentioned Psalm 121, verse 1, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth'. Another wonderful psalm, Psalm 141:7-8, contemplates a terrible situation. One thinks of the various terrorist attacks on innocent people in different countries, where bodies are blown apart by bombs, or crowds run into by cars or trucks: 'Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth'. And now verse 8, (and this is what is happening in Deuteronomy): 'But my eyes are unto Thee, O God the LORD. In Thee is my trust. Leave not my soul destitute'. I don't believe any minister, priest, or whoever, is called upon to explain why God lets some of these terrible things happen, because we really don't know. But we are called on to remember the suffering, and to remind ourselves to turn to God (Ps. 141:8). Moses says that turning to God will keep you from being totally devastated by awful things.

Or think of Ezekiel 37:1-3 where the Lord leads the prophet Ezekiel down to this valley

of bleached bones. What Ezekiel saw there was like a huge army that had been destroyed ages before, where the bones are bleached and sticking up in the shining, sparkling desert sands. God asks Ezekiel, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' It's impossible. But not if God is there. And Ezekiel gives a very brilliant answer. Oh, that you and I could give such an answer when we face challenges we don't know how we're going to get through! Ezekiel says, 'O Lord, Thou knowest'. He does not give an answer from the realm of his human common sense. He knows that dead bones that are disassembled don't live. But then he remembers that God is in it, the Maker of heaven and earth, Jehovah, is in it. And the bones come together and are clothed with flesh, and then God breathed into them the breath of life. That is the value of looking to God!

In the New Testament, we see a similar movement. You may be facing difficulty, an unknown future, where everything seems to have gone wrong, but call to mind what happened in Mark 9:20–24. They brought to Jesus a desperately ill child. Immediately when Jesus saw him, the evil spirit caused the boy to have fits: 'And he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth'. This was apparently something like epilepsy, in addition to being deaf and dumb. Jesus asked His father, how long is it since this came to him? and he answered, 'Of a child. Oft times it would cast him into the fire and into the waters to destroy him, but if Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth'. Notice the honesty of this father in his concern for his very handicapped child: 'And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief'. I'm not where I ought to be;

yet I'm looking with faith, and I do believe, as far as I can. Help me anyway. And God did.

Never contemplate your future without thinking of how powerful and gracious God is. That's what you've got to do every day, particularly before certain turning points in your life: think about how great, how mighty, how good, how gracious, how condescending, how loving, your God is, who is in absolute control of all things you have to face. Some of these things make you afraid, but God is bigger than they. Think of Him. Think of how faithful He is to fulfill every promise He makes to His people. He has never failed yet; He's never lied one time. I consider the key here to be Romans 8:32, 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?'

If God gave you Jesus, that took care of your biggest need! Sins to be cleansed, hell to be conquered, gates of heaven to be opened, everything you need to be a transformed person, in renewed image of God, like Christ. God gave you these stupendous gifts on the cross; God gave you all this when He gave you Jesus! That's the big gift; if He gave you the big thing, He will also give you lesser things. For instance, if somebody asks his father, 'Could you lend me \$1,000?' and the father agrees. Then at some later time the son or daughter wouldn't mind asking, 'Could I have \$5?' Of course, He would give it! If God gave you the big one, His Son, surely He is going to take care of your future next week. Why not? Hereby Paul, in Romans 8:32, points us in the same direction that Moses was pointing in Deuteronomy.

Then briefly, the second point of this preamble is, look by faith at what God has promised to give His people. Look by faith; exercise faith in what God said He would do. That helps it to become real. Now with the Old Testament people of Israel, at this stage of their history, it was particularly the Promised Land, a specific territory. Even though it was a particular piece of real estate, Abraham, and others, knew that that land represented a better country on the other side, to which they were eventually going.

To us Christian believers today, you could say that the Promised Land represents the rest of our remaining years on earth, however many they be, which by grace are to be characterized by a spiritual union with Christ—we are one with Christ; He is in us and we are in Him, by the invisible bonds of the Holy Spirit. That's all we need. That is our place of security and rest. We are one with Christ in a real sense, and beyond that, and as part of that, glory and eternal life follow.

How different we all are, alike in many ways, but we have very different backgrounds and challenges in our lives, and so the rest of the time that we live on this earth will be different for each one of us. But, what will be the same, what really matters for all of us who have faith, is that Psalm 23 will always be true of us; the Psalm of the Shepherd, 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want', I shall not lack, for the presence of the Good Shepherd with all of His graces will meet me in my time of need tomorrow, and on every tomorrow. And it's interesting to note that in the Hebrew text, Psalm 23:1, says, 'Jehovah is my Shepherd—'I am that I am' is my Shepherd'. David says that the same one that Moses met at the burning bush, and of whom Moses reminds the people, 'this is your God, the I am that I am, the all-sufficient, gracious Jehovah, that's who your shepherd is' is precisely the one of whom David is singing in Psalm 23:1. Then, during His Incarnation, Jesus shows us how He is the fullness of the Good Shepherd, as in John 10.

In sum, what Moses says to the wilderness Israelites in verse 8, can in a real sense be said of all who are God's people: 'Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess it'. The literal translation of 'behold', and some of you have a more modern English version, is simply the Hebrew word 'see', I have set the land before you. This verb, the imperative 'see', is important because in the ancient Near East, the legal transaction conveying a piece of property from one person to another, was concluded by taking the person who had bought the property or inherited it, and making him look at it, and literally walk on it. Once they had looked at it, then they had the legal authority in the presence of the elders of the community, to go in and possess the land. To 'see', concluded a real estate transaction. So God is saying, 'look,' 'see' the things that I have promised you through Christ, through My grace. Then by faith go in and occupy, take possession of it. That is our future. Take possession of what God has promised. See it, and by faith occupy it in union with Him.

In closing, I remember reading the history of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. Just before the outbreak of World War II (in 1939), they were having a meeting, I believe in London, of university students from various countries. The students from Germany were meeting for the last time they were able to travel to the British Isles. War was imminent; Hitler was believed to be preparing to invade Poland, and it was known that communications would soon be cut off. Christian students from Germany were in London, but also Scottish, English, Welsh and Irish students were there. As they were leaving, they hugged one another, knowing that terrible things were going to happen, and they wouldn't see each other for a long time as Christians, maybe never, or maybe even meet on the battlefields of northern Europe. And so before they left they stood and sang this wonderful hymn to the tune of Be Still My Soul:

We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender! We go not forth alone against the foe; Strong in Thy strength, safe in Thy keeping tender, We rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go.