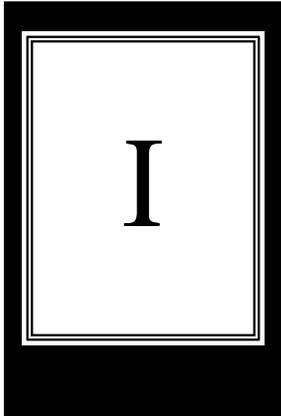


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introductory questions

Deuteronomy

Everyone will answer Questions 1-3 in class.

1. Please give your name, and how you happened to come to this study.
2. Please tell the group about one of your current activities that is characteristic of where you are in life right now.
3. Skim the entire book of Deuteronomy. What piqued your interest? What items are you looking forward to studying more in depth?

Read Deuteronomy 1:1-18.

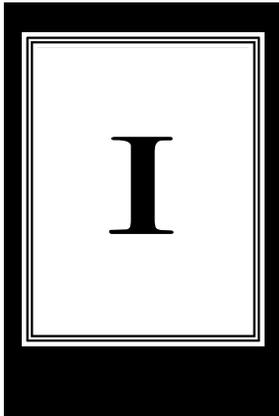
4. **1:1-8.** Skim Numbers 13 and 14. Why had the Israelites spent forty years in the desert?
5. In verse 5, what is the purpose of Moses' words to the people?

6. Read also Genesis 13:14-17; 15:12-16; Exodus 13:11; and Numbers 34:1-2. How was Moses expounding these verses?

7. **1:9-18.** How did God help Moses to care for the people?

8. How does this encourage you?

9. Someone has well said, "Only do what only you can do." What responsibilities should you delegate to others, so that you may better concentrate on what "only you can do"?



promises of god

Deuteronomy 1:1-18

I. Introduction: Why Deuteronomy?

For the last several years, Knoxville pastor John Wood has been leading seminars for pastors in India. He said that it took a while for the pastors to warm up to him. They were suspicious. It was not until he earned their trust that they revealed why. They told him that the whole world looks to the American church with intrigue because of its activity, but no one wants to imitate its version of the Christian life. "We will never have the programs that your church has," said the pastors, "but we are serious about living the Christian life."

Why study Deuteronomy? Because it invades our lives. A careful exposition of this book will leave no stone of motive or activity unturned. It will force us to ask ourselves, "Are we really living a thoroughgoing Christian life out of love for our gracious God?" And a faithful application of this book's teachings will produce a community of people that will draw the admiring attention of a culture that is spinning madly out of control (4:5-8).

A. Timeless.

1. Revelation – 1:1; 34:4. The supreme importance of God's entire Word will be seen in this book. From the very beginning to the very end, it is God's Word to Moses and the people of Israel. In just the first three chapters, the multi-faceted nature of God's Word is demonstrated:

- Practical instruction—1:21
- Sensitive comfort—1:29
- Inspiring promise—1:30
- Timely reminder—1:31
- Necessary rebuke—1:32, 33
- Serious warning—1:34-46
- Merciful reassurance—2:2-3
- Explicit command—2:4-6, 9-13, 16-19
- Sustaining encouragement—2:24-25

God's Word is also to be communicated in varied and imaginative ways:

- To the family— 4:9, 10; 6:6, 7, 20-25; 11:19
- In worship—26:3, 5-10
- By geographical illustration—27:11-13
- Through memorable song—31:19, 21, 22, 30; 32:1-47
- From the pastor to his people—33:1-29

- 2. Grace.** Deuteronomy is the "Galatians" of the Old Testament, clearly outlining salvation by grace alone and endearingly describing the love relationship between God and his people.
- a. Not by works—7:7.** It is clear that salvation is by God's gracious election alone. He reminds the Israelites that he did not choose them because they were more numerous than the other nations. He exhorts them not to take credit for the productivity of their land (8:17). And he warns them not to think that it is by their power that their enemies are routed (9:4).
 - b. But by love—7:7, 9, 12, 13; 5:10; 33:3.** The Lord makes it clear to us in these verses that the only reason anyone is saved is because God chooses to love them.
- 3. Loving response—10:12; 5:10; 6:5; 7:9; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:16, 20.** We will also see in Deuteronomy that the Lord wants our hearts. He does not care for our legalistic or perfunctory service; he wants us to obey and respect him out of loving appreciation for his great redemption of us.
- 4. God—30:11-20.** The history of the Church has been one of vacillating views of God. In the first five centuries, the focus was the Person of Christ and clarifying the doctrine of the Trinity. In the Middle Ages, God the Father and the Son were presented as so awesome that the people felt distant. Therefore the idea of saints and Mary as mediators began to develop. The Reformation refocused attention on Christ as the only mediator. Both the Reformers and the Puritans and Evangelicals revived attention on the work of the Holy Spirit.

The present era of the Church is a confusing one. The aberration seems to be a matter of balance. Some think God to be legalistic and impossible to please, while others see him as being only gracious and never displeased. Deuteronomy will help us develop a balanced doctrine of God as loving and gracious while also holy and just.

Aberrant views of God produce aberrant views of ourselves. If we believe God to be an ogre, we will never recognize ourselves as forgiven. And if we believe God to be a senile grandfather, we will never recognize ourselves as desperate sinners. We need the balance found in a Puritan's prayer:

I cannot pray, but I sin. I cannot hear or preach a sermon, but I sin. I cannot give alms or receive a sacrament, but I sin. I cannot but confess my sins, but my confessions are still aggravations of them. My repentance needs to be repented of, my tears want washing and the very washing of my tears needs to be washed over again with the blood of my Redeemer.²

B. Contemporary.

But like all of Scripture, Deuteronomy is applicable for today. If we study faithfully, we will be able to mine truths that we can apply to our daily lives. But application will be the difficult and sometimes controversial part of our study. There is a broad spectrum of approaches to Deuteronomy. There are those on the one hand who say that nothing is applicable for today. And there are those on the other hand who say that every detail is applicable for today. Our approach will be to take every section individually and try to discern which parts are exactly applicable and which are only applicable in terms of the principle presented.

There are three broad categories of practical application that we will notice. If we are faithful to apply the instruction found within them, then the world will see that the Lord owns our lives. Here are a few snapshots:

- 1. Family—4:9, 10; 6:7.** God is very concerned that we pass the faith on to our children. He intends to preserve a witness to himself through the offspring of believers. Therefore, he carefully instructs us to think about everything that we do as an opportunity to point our children to the Lord.

2. Society—22:1-3, 8. We will also see that God demands that we not be individualistic but recognize that we have a responsibility for those around us as fellow image-bearers of God. If we see someone's property in jeopardy, we are responsible for it if we can do something about it. We will also learn from such instructions the nature of biblical knowledge—we are responsible for what we know.

The instruction for the building of a parapet around the roof of a house is an illustration of God's concern for human well-being. We are responsible for others' safety because God loves life. Such concern is a part of our history. It was John Calvin who ramrodded legislation in Geneva to require banister rails on every staircase because so many children were dying from falling.

3. Business—24:14, 15; 25:13-16. We will also discern basic principles for fairness in business. For instance, in this first reference we see that the Christian businessman must be more concerned for the person he employs than the bottom line of his accounting. The second reference reveals a God who "detests" dishonesty in the marketplace. There must be no double standards and no rubber rules in regard to treating people honestly.

So what is God saying to us in giving these principles that cover every area of life? He is telling us that he owns all of life and demands loving allegiance from us in every area of our lives. As Abraham Kuyper put it in his address at the founding of the Free University of Amsterdam, "Not the breadth of a thumb exists in all our life but Christ proclaims, 'It is mine.'"

Once I heard R. C. Sproul describe the response of a new Christian to the biblical teaching he was receiving in Dr. Sproul's Bible class. With tears in his eyes, the man said, "R.C., these ideas that God loved me, Christ died for me, and the Holy Spirit lives in me are overwhelming . . . Thank you." And with that, the man hugged him and kissed him on the face! Then he said, "And you know what I am reading now? It's thrilling! Romans 8 and 9. It's about God choosing me to be his before time began. I know that is the only way I got in!"

Most people respond to passages about God's sovereignty with indignation. The notion that God must give you salvation, not to mention that he owns all of your life, can be one that is hard to stomach for a proud sinner. But this man's is the proper response . . . and it is the response of Deuteronomy. "The Lord is your life . . . love him" (30:20, 16). So now let us begin our journey through Deuteronomy.

II. The Promises of God and Keeping Birds in the Air—1:1-18.

Have you ever heard the story of the man that was seen driving a pickup truck with a bunch of birds in the back? Every time he would stop he would leap out and beat the sides of the truck. Someone finally asked him what he was doing. He said, "Well, I've got a two ton truck and four tons of birds. If they all sit down at once it will break down my truck. So I keep at least two tons up in the air with this stick."

Do you feel like that? That you have to keep the birds of your responsibilities up in the air because if they sit they will break down the truck of your life? Perhaps the problem is that you are trying to take God's place. You think that it is entirely your responsibility to perform your responsibilities in the Kingdom of God.

The whole process of the Israelites' leaving Egypt and entering the Promised Land is intended as a visible representation of salvation. In other words, when we read about the process of entering the Promised Land, we must understand that it was a real-life allegory intended to assure us that God will just as faithfully bring us into his Kingdom. That means that he will complete his will in us. More simply, it means that you are not bearing all of your responsibilities (at least the ones God has given you) all by yourself.

This passage shows us, through Moses, God's care and provision for us.

A. Like Christ: Care reveals the characteristics of the Redeemer. Next to David, Moses is the clearest representation of Christ in the Old Testament. In fact, Moses is such a clear picture of Christ that one's regard for him can indicate one's regard for Christ.³ Whenever we read an Old Testament narrative, especially one related to Moses, we must ask ourselves, "How did this prepare the Old Testament people for the work that Christ would come to accomplish?" Our next question must be, "How does this incident shed light on my understanding of Christ's work?" Or you might ask the question this way—"What does this show me about God's redemption or about my need for redemption?"

Wherever we see the work of redemption in the Old Testament, we see the work of the second Person of the Godhead. So, it is not anachronistic to speak of "Christ" in the Old Testament. This first point demonstrates the Redeemer. The next will reveal our need for a Redeemer.

1. Preacher—1:1, 3, 5-8, 18. Moses reminds us of Christ in that he proclaims to the people the will of God for their salvation. Look particularly at verse 5. Moses "expounds" (Hebrew: *be'er*) the law, that is, he made it "absolutely clear." It is the same word used in 27:8 in the command to write the law legibly so that it could be clearly read.

Deuteronomy is not simply a restatement of the laws found in Exodus and Numbers, but an *exposition* of the law. The Israelites were preparing to enter the Promised Land; therefore, the law had to be made clear and specifically applied to the lives of the people. "Success in possessing the Promised Land lay not in military prowess and strength but in an unbroken covenant relationship with the Lord, who alone could bring further victories like those over Sihon and Og."⁴

The Lord does the same for us. He provides us preachers and teachers who expound the Word, making it clear so that we can understand its meaning and then apply it to every area of our lives. You are, therefore, not left alone in your responsibilities. God gives you direction for how you are to face them when they are overwhelming. He gives it through his Word and the faithful exposition of it by those called by God to be preachers and teachers.

2. Organizer—1:13-15. Moses also shows us God's care for order. But you will notice that it is not order for order's sake. God directs Moses to break the people down into groups with respective leaders because he cares for Moses and he cares for the people. Notice that God is concerned even for the "tens" of the people.

Christ is concerned not just for his people en masse but for them as individuals. Just think of how he has organized his Church around the world. Of the one billion Christians worldwide, they are organized into thousands of denominations, millions of congregations, under hundreds of millions of pastors and elders. Beyond that, churches are often organized into folds, small groups, or cell groups. What is that but a reflection of Christ's care for his people?

Perhaps you are overwhelmed by your responsibilities because you are not taking advantage of the means of grace of Christian fellowship within smaller communities. You may need to come in closer into a prayer group, or the choir, or a small group, or even Sunday evening worship where your brothers and sisters can help you bear your burdens in a more intimate way.

3. Just—1:16-17b. Finally, notice that Moses charges the leaders under him to be just in their adjudication. They are not to show favoritism. Regardless of the matter— domestic (between Israelites), ethnic (with foreigners or aliens), or social (small or great)—they must reflect God's justice and care.

Notice that God is concerned that everyone receive justice—even those outside the Israelite camp. It demonstrates his love for all people, his image bearers. Notice, too, his concern for small matters. The judges must not say, "Only bring us important matters." No matter is "big" to God; yet his love and

power are so vast that no matter is too "small" for him to be concerned about it. Then notice that he wants nothing to be handled inadequately. Matters too difficult for the judges are not to be fumbled, but brought to Moses.

No matter your background, race, or problem, you have recourse to God. Do not go on bearing life by yourself because you think that you are not good enough to come to God. Look at his just and merciful care described in this passage.

B. But not Christ: Provision demonstrates the need for the Redeemer. Although Moses was like Christ, he was not Christ. He needed a Redeemer, too. Not only does Moses anticipate Christ by his similarities, he also anticipates him by his differences. Look at all the things Moses needed himself or the things he could not provide for the people. They point us to the Redeemer.

1. Carried—1:9-12. As capable as Moses was, these people were too heavy for him to carry alone. Moses was a weak human being. Although brilliant, strong, and wise, God had given a burden too great for him to bear himself. Although God wanted to prepare his people for the Messiah through Moses, he also wanted Moses and all of the people to know that Moses was not the Messiah.

God wanted everyone to know that he alone is strong enough to bear up his people. Notice how beautifully he puts it in the following verses: "as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place" (1:31); "like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions" (32:11); and "Let the beloved of the Lord rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long, and the one the Lord loves rests between his shoulders" (33:12).

You are not carrying your responsibilities alone—God is carrying you. Your burdens are too heavy for a reason: God wants you and those about you to know that he is your God.

This was my great comfort in accepting the call to the church where I now serve. I stayed up late one night wrestling with God. I wanted to be an assistant pastor in a nice quiet corner of the Kingdom. "How can I possibly be the pastor of these people at Covenant Church, all by myself?" I asked the Lord. Then something came ringing in my ears that a wise pastor had told me earlier, "Pray to the Lord like Moses, 'I will not go farther unless you go with me.'" I knew the answer. I was not going to be the pastor and carry the people all by myself—God was going to be our pastor.

2. Increased—1:10, 11. In fact, this whole crisis was caused by God. The reason the people became too heavy for Moses is that God fulfilled his promise to Abraham to make his descendants as numerous as the "stars in the sky."

See how the titles of God change throughout this passage. Earlier in verse 6, Moses referred to God as "the Lord our God," emphasizing their covenantal relationship. In these verses, Moses calls him "the Lord your God . . . the God of your fathers." With the recalling of the promise to Abraham and this different address, Moses is emphasizing the continuity of the covenant. God is fulfilling his promise to make a people for himself and Moses prays that God would continue through their sons' sons.

And God is as much your God as he was Abraham's, Isaac's, Jacob's, and Moses'. It is he who will fulfill his promise to complete the work he began in you (Philippians 1:6), to fulfill his will through your vocation, and rear your family for his name's sake.

3. Made confident—1:17. Finally, when Moses tells the judges not to be afraid, he does not say, "If anybody gives you a rough time, come to me and I will straighten them out!" He says instead, "Do not be afraid of any man, for judgment belongs to God."

Moses was capable of fear too; only the Lord is a sure refuge. One preacher made this application:

In God's work in the modern world, fear is probably a greater danger than favouritism. A man or woman in any position of leadership might be afraid of acting in a particular way because of what others might think, say, or do. The "fear of man" is a cruel and crippling enemy and the Bible frequently warns its readers against it. Believers who honour God have no need to fear anybody else.⁵

The whole book of Deuteronomy—the whole of the Bible for that matter—and the whole of our lives with Christ can be distilled into this one thought in verse 11: "May the Lord, the God of your fathers . . . bless you as he has promised."

Donald Grey Barnhouse tells a story about a little girl that he led to Christ while he was a student in France. She would often come to his family's house, and there she observed them pulling promises from their "promise box" for family devotions. The promise box had some 200 passages written on little scrolls of paper. Whenever anyone in the family was feeling discouraged, he or she would pull out one of the promises. The little French girl was so impressed that she made her own promise box and used it through the years with her own children. She told Dr. Barnhouse about how the Lord used that box during World War II. Her family had no food except potato peelings from a restaurant. Her emaciated children were begging her for something to eat. Their clothes were rags and their shoes were worn through. In desperation, she took out her promise box and prayed, "Lord, O Lord, I have such great need. Is there a promise here that is really for me? Show me, O Lord, what promise I can have in this time of famine, nakedness, peril, and the sword." She was so blinded by her tears that when she reached for the box, she knocked it over and all the promises cascaded around her. In a moment, she knew that the Lord had answered her prayer, saying, "All my promises are for you in your hour of greatest need."⁶

What you need to know in the midst of overwhelming responsibilities and circumstances is not just a promise, but that all of God's promises are yours.

Footnotes

¹ Raymond Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 22.

² Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), 76.

³ Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 190.

⁴ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 92.

⁵ Raymond Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 36.

⁶ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Let Me Illustrate* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1967), 253, 54.

Read the lesson notes with Deuteronomy 1:1-18.

1. What did you find encouraging or interesting in the notes?

2. How did you see God's care for you in Deuteronomy 1:1-18?

Read Deuteronomy 1:19-46.

3. **1:19-25.** How did the people respond to Moses' charge not to be afraid?

4. Why is it difficult to trust God for the future, even in the face of promises such as Jeremiah 29:11?

5. How do we ask God for "spies" into our future when he commands us to trust him in a difficult circumstance?

6. **1:26-40.** To reassure them, of what instances of God's past faithfulness did Moses remind them?

