



Deuteronomy

Life in the Promised Land

Growth Group studies Term 2 2012

Welcome to Deuteronomy!

Need to Know

Here's what you need to know about the story so far before we get started on Deuteronomy.

- **Who Wrote it?** Deuteronomy is the fifth book in the Old Testament, and comes at the end of the section known as 'the Pentateuch,' or 'five books' of Moses. (Clearly, though, Moses didn't write the bits about his own death at the end of Deuteronomy!)
- **Who are these people and why are they here?** In Genesis 12, God promised Abraham that he would make his descendants into a great nation, with their own land. He would be their God, and they would be his people... and he would use them to bring blessing to all the nations. But as his family grew, the following generations found themselves in slavery in Egypt. Under God's hand, Moses led them to freedom, and into the desert, where God gave them his law and declared them to be a nation - Israel.
- **What's just happened?** When they first got to the edge of the promised land, instead of trusting God to give them victory, the Israelites sent spies, who came back with the report that there were giants in the land. Afraid, the people refused to enter the land. As a result, God left them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until the whole generation died out. Now, they're about to try again.
- **What's the title mean?** As Deuteronomy opens, Moses is preparing the Israelites to finally enter the land. It contains a long speech from Moses, in which he explains God's law to Israel a second time. (Deuteronomy means 'second law.' The first time was on Mount Sinai, at the start of their journey to the promised land.)
- **What's in the book?** In his speech, Moses will look back over what went wrong, remind the Israelites of the importance of listening to God, give them detailed laws for living in God's land, and then warn them of the terrible consequences if they disobey. Based on their track record, he will finish the speech without much optimism.
- **Why is it important?** Deuteronomy sets the scene for everything that happens in the rest of the Bible.

Study 1 | Giant Killers

Deuteronomy 1 to 3

Have you ever had the experience of having to go back and do something again to try to get it right? It can be frustrating and time consuming.

Share a few icebreaking failure stories around your group.

Read Deuteronomy 1:1-8

Quick Questions (try to beat 2 minutes for these!)

- a) When they first came to Mount Horeb (otherwise known as Mount Sinai), what did God tell the Israelites to do (v7-8)?

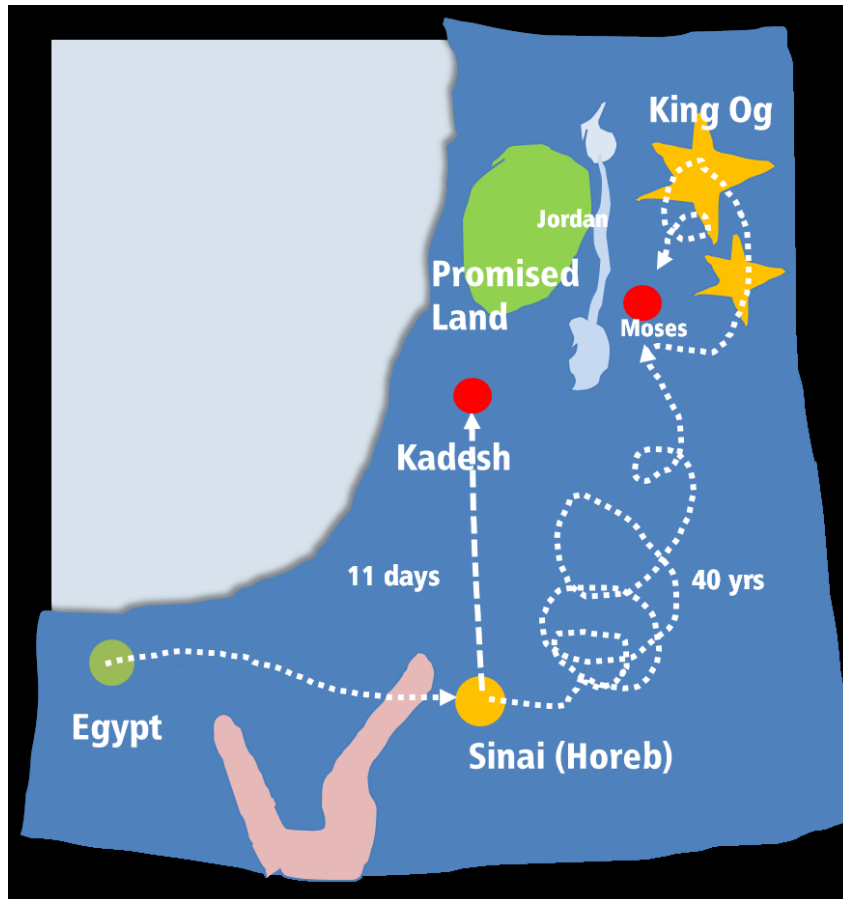
- b) From verse 8, what is special about this land?

- c) On this first attempt, which is described in the book of Numbers, the Israelites travelled from Horeb to Kadesh to launch their campaign. How long does this trip normally take (v2)?

- d) Now, on their second attempt, they are approaching the promised land from the east side of the Jordan river. How long has THIS trip taken (v3)?



These days it's hard to pin down the exact locations that are mentioned, but this rough map might help. In summary, the failure of Israel's first attempt to enter the land God promised them has turned an 11 day job into a 40 year disaster. That's quite a mess-up! So what went wrong? Moses is going to make that very plain...



At That Time...

Read Deuteronomy 1:9-46

Think it Through

- e) So what went wrong for Israel?
- f) Why did Moses tell them not to be afraid of big people (like the Anakites)?
- g) What's at the heart of the problem in verse 32?

h) With Israel's history in mind, what's the significance of being sent back 'towards the Red Sea' (v40)?

i) How did the Israelites make things even worse?

Other Giant Killers

Read Deuteronomy 2:1-23

The geography and tribal names make the chapter seem very complicated. But it's not. It revolves around Israel's contact with some of their neighbours, Esau, Moab and Ammon, who all have some things strikingly in common...

Quick Questions (3 minutes)

How did the Israelites make things even worse?

j) How were the Israelites told to treat these nations and why (v5, v9, v19)?

k) Now remember, the Israelites failed to take their God-given land because they heard that the people there were _____ (1:28)

l) Compare that now with the history of the Esau, Moab and Ammon. What kind of people had been in their lands before them and what had God done for them (v10, v20-22)?

Cracking the Code

Call them whatever you like – Rephaites, Anakites, Emites, Zamzummites. Everyone had a different name for them, but these guys were huge. But they weren't as tough as they looked. As the Lord God prepared and gave places to each of these other tribal nations, the tough looking big guys who had so terrified the Israelites have been sent running. Oddly, it's only God's own special chosen nation, the Israelites, who have failed. And it's because they refused to trust God's promises, and obey his call to action.

Past Victories, Present Confidence

m) **Read quickly through the account of the past victories against King Sihon of Heshbon and King Og of Bashan (2:24-3:11).** What do you notice about Og, and why is it significant?

Verses 12 to 20 in Deuteronomy 3 detail the way Moses has already divided the land East of the Jordan river, where they're now gathered. Two of Israel's tribes, the Reubenites and the Gadites, will settle here... but not until they have crossed the Jordan to help their brother Israelites take their allotments of the promised land.

Moses has given two big reasons why the Israelites can be bold as they take over the promised land. First, the Edomites, the Moabites and the Ammonites had beaten the giants in the area before them... and second, they've already taken down giant King Og, and Sihon as well. They have every reason to be confident... if they just remember one thing...

Remember the Lord!

n) Read the words Moses said to Joshua in 3:21-22. **Why** is there no reason to be frightened?

One of the great tragedies of Israel's journey to the promised land is that Moses, their great leader, won't make the final stage with them. Like the rest of his generation, and because of his own disobedience to God, he'll remain outside the land. However, in 3:27-29, God allows him to see the land from a distance.

Summing Up...

Deuteronomy starts with a reminder of Israel's past failure. An 11 day campaign has taken them 40 years, because they did not trust God to keep his promises. While they were afraid of the 'giants' of surrounding tribes, others like the Moabites fought against them and won. Since then, Israel has had two significant victories outside the land. This speech of Moses is designed to challenge and motivate them for the challenge ahead. Even though they're small, weak and foolish, when God fights for them, they can tackle giants. The only question is, will they trust their God enough to obey him? We'll find out soon enough.

Weakness, Trust and Us

As Christians, maybe we often feel weak and defenceless compared with the world.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

- o) Where is the power of God found (v18)?

- p) What does the world want (v22), and what do we offer?

- q) From verse 27-31 how does God work in our world?

- r) Our society's apathy and opposition towards the gospel can sometimes seem 'giant', just too big for us to even try to overcome. Has that ever made you feel like giving up on talking about Jesus or using your life as a witness to him? How could the lessons from Israel's past and our Christian past help us here?

When we stop hoping in God's weak-looking plans and only see the giants that are against us, we often give up on being obedient. In Israel's case this led to disaster after disaster. How do you expect it will work out for you if you make the same choices?

Study 2 | *Listen, Watch, and Show the World*

Deuteronomy 4

Meet The Unseen God

Israel was very odd. While other nations worshipped idols, that could be seen but were silent, the nation of Israel served an unseen God who spoke to them. This God was a God of WORD... and that meant they needed to listen carefully!

As Moses continues his great speech on the edge of the promised land, he reminds the Israelites of what they have heard from God so far... and what they've seen of the consequences of ignoring him!

To get started... Have you ever have wished you could actually see God? Why or why not?

Read Deuteronomy 4, and note any references to 'hearing God.'

Quick Questions (3 minutes)

- a) What is Moses about to teach the Israelites, and what must they do with it (v1-2)?
- b) What will the consequence be if they obey? (v1)
- c) In Numbers 25, the Israelites began to worship the idol Baal at Beth-Peor... which, after God sent a plague on them, was renamed "**Baal**-Peor." What should the Israelites who remain have learned from what they 'saw with their own eyes' (v3-4)?
- d) What are the surrounding nations meant to think when they look at the nation of Israel (v5-8)?
 - i. What are Israel's great privileges?
 - ii. What is their great responsibility? (v9)

The God of Word

- e) What does Moses call the Israelites to remember about their past encounter with God?
- f) What were they meant to do when they **heard God's words**?
- g) Describe their experience in verses 11 to 14.

The ten commandments and other laws that God gave the Israelites were meant to show them how to live life God's way in God's promised land. If they live this way, the nations around them will marvel at their wisdom and the righteousness of their laws... and also at the nearness of their God, who is only a prayer away! They'll cross the Jordan and possess the land with ease (v1,14) and live in it in prosperity... as long as they don't forget the powerful **words of the Lord their God**.

- h) What dangerous temptation do they need to watch out for? (v15-19)
- i) What's the big difference between the Israelites and everyone else? (v20)
- j) What will the consequences be if they or their children or grandchildren start worshipping any kind of idol? (v23-28)

Moses paints a dark picture of a future smashed and scattered Israel – even before they've come into the land. They can't say they haven't been warned! Their future security in the promised land depends on whether they're prepared to **trust the words of the God who has spoken**, and are not tempted to replace him with a 'god they can see' in the form of the kind of idols that all the other nations serve.

But even if (or when) the worst comes to the worst, what reassurance does Moses give in verses 29-31?

- k) Why will God be merciful to these people?
- l) From verses 32-40, list the series of marvellous things God has done.
- m) Why has God redeemed these people from slavery? (There's one key reason!)
- n) What one truth do they need to learn about God (v35, 39)?
- o) God's intention was that hearing his words from heaven would discipline the Israelites. What must they do in response?
- p) What promise is there for their future life in the promised land (v40)? What should they assume will happen if they do the reverse?

Because God is a '**God of Word**', his people are to be 'all ears'! They are to pay attention to his word, be thankful for his covenant promises, and obey his laws and decrees. Most of all, they need to realise that he is the ONLY God. There is no other! Idols made by human hands might be solid and visible – but they didn't bring Israel out of slavery, they didn't speak from the fire, they didn't perform awesome deeds in the wilderness... and they won't keep Israel safe in the promised land! **They need to take notice of God's word!**

God's Word – To Us

Moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament is like going from black and white TV to full HD widescreen 3D! The way God revealed himself back then has been far surpassed – by the coming of Jesus.

- q) Read John 1:1 and 1:18. How can we get to know the unseen God?

- r) What would you say to someone who says that everyone is entitled to make up their own version of 'god'?

- s) Remember, the world was meant to look at the Israelites and marvel at them because of their wise obedience to God. From John 13:34-35, what command are we Christians meant to obey, and what should the result be?

Do you see evidence of Christians putting these words into practice?

How could you be more active in your obedience to Jesus in this area?

Typically, what is the world seeing when it looks at Christians? How can we change this perception?

God is still a God of Word. He doesn't leave his people guessing about himself, his nature, and how he wants his people to live in response. But as we read the upcoming section of laws and statutes that God gave to Israel as they entered the promised land, we need to realise **they will not be God's last word**. Instead, since then he has spoken to the whole world in Jesus Christ, his Son, who has perfectly revealed God's righteous nature. More than that, he has (in the words of Hebrews) become our High Priest and made sacrifice for us, putting us right with God and giving us new hearts that are inclined to be righteous. The Israelites will be given the law, which we'll see they fail to obey. We've been given God's Spirit, which will produce righteousness not from the law, but from the heart. All we need to do is keep our focus set on Jesus – **God's final word** – and keep on living as his people.

Study 3

Ready for **Life in the Land**

Deuteronomy 5-11

Study by Jeremy Wales

The sermon so far:

As Moses addresses Israel on the brink of the promised land, so far he's reminded them of their failure to trust God – they refused to enter the land because they decided the inhabitants were much too big! Now, 40 years later, they're on the verge of the promised land once again. Are they going to take God at his word this time? Moses has pleaded with them to finally *listen* to God (chapter 4)!

Now Moses reminds them how God wants them to live in the promised land. For a start, Moses reminds them again of how they first heard the ten commandments. . .

But before you begin: In the hustle and bustle of everyday life, where does obedience to God generally come in your list of priorities?

The How and Why of Life in The Land

Read Deuteronomy 5:1-6:3

Quick Questions (less than 5 minutes)

- a) What is Moses trying to persuade Israel to do in this part of his sermon (5:1, 6:3)?
- b) How did God introduce himself when giving the law (5:6)?
- c) Why should they rest on the seventh day (5:15)?
- d) Why should they not worship idols (5:10-11)?
- e) Why should they honour their parents (5:16, see also 6:3)?
- f) What was Israel's initial reaction (5:23-26) and how did God rate it (5:28-29)?

Think it Through

- g) Did Israel have to earn their salvation by keeping the law? Or did God save them before he gave them his law?
- h) What will the consequences be of keeping God's law? What if they don't? (see also the section's conclusion: 11:13-28)

Snares and Pitfalls

Surely it's obvious! Israel has already been saved by God – why wouldn't they want to obey him? They know God will keep blessing them unless they abandon him and his law – why wouldn't they choose life instead of death? God's grace in the past and God's grace in the future – both strong reasons for them to keep God's law.

But Moses needs to warn them of the dangers that lie ahead, and how to handle them. We'll move quickly through each of the potential pitfalls and take time at the end to consider the practical implications...

Pitfall #1: The Prosperity Trap

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-20 and 8:10-20

Quick Questions

- i) What temptation will the Israelites soon face (6:12, 8:11,14)?
- j) What new circumstances will make this such a strong temptation (6:10-11, 8:7-9,12-13)?
- k) What key strategy will help them overcome this temptation (6:4-9,20-25, 8:2,18)?

Pitfall #2: Not clearing out the nations

Read Deuteronomy 7:1-6,17-25

Quick Questions

- l) What's the big danger here (7:4,25-26)?
- m) How could this become a strong temptation (7:3,17)?
- n) What key strategies will help them overcome this temptation (7:2,18-25)?

Pitfall #3: Forgetting about sin

Read Deuteronomy 9:4-6 and 10:12-16

Quick Questions

- o) What's Israel's real problem (9:6, 10:16)?
- p) What does Moses tell them to do about it (10:16)?
- q) What could stop them tackling this problem head on (9:4-5)?

In Deuteronomy 9:7-10:10 Moses re-tells the story of the Golden Calf (first narrated in Exodus 32-34). While Moses was receiving the tablets for the ten commandments from God, (after chapter 5 above) Israel was busy breaking the second commandment already! They made an idol as soon they were told not to!

r) Why do you think Moses is reminding them of this event?

Think it Through

As Gentile Christians, we're not supposed to take on all the laws and regulations that were designed for life in the promised land. But in the new life we are called to live in Christ, you'll remember that in Colossians we were told to "put to death" lust, greed and idolatry which lead to sexual impurity, anger, malice, slander and lies, the things in which we used to live (3:6-9). We need to clear them out to make room for compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and forgiveness like Christ's (3:13-14). So like Israel in Deuteronomy we too are called to live a new life in a new place. So we should take seriously the instructions from Moses on how to do that...

- s) Do you think our prosperity leaves us open to forgetting God?
- t) How could you help yourself to think more often about what God has done for you in Jesus? How often do you read the Bible during a normal week?
- u) How often do you talk about following Jesus with your kids (if you have them)? What about with other people?
- v) How often do you consciously consider your sinful attitudes so you can put them to death?

Pray for each to other to work on these things this week! we have even more reason to live a new life in a new place than Israel did!

Study 4 – Deuteronomy 12 and 13

Worshipping **God's Way**

Study by Phil Campbell

The Story So Far

The Israelites are about to cross the Jordan River and take over the land God has promised their ancestors. Moses has been warning them about the consequences of taking over the land and then ignoring the God who saved them – when they prosper, it will be easy to forget that their success has come from God and not themselves. More than that, there'll be a huge temptation to compromise, and take on the 'worship habits' of the people who live in the land already.

- a) The evil nations Israel is meant to displace worship their false gods under big trees and on high hills. They dance to the goddess Asherah around "Asherah Poles" and make sacrifices on stone altars. What other terrible things do they do, according to Dt 12:30-31?
- b) What are the Israelites meant to do to these 'worship places' when they take the land? (Dt 12:3)
- c) What's the danger if they don't do this? (v4)
- d) What safeguard does God describe in verses 5 and 6?

Looking forward...

As we'll eventually discover, the place God chooses as the one central place to worship him is the city of Jerusalem. But that's not going to be for another few hundred years.

Later on, after Jerusalem's temple has been established, there's a huge split between Judah and the other tribes of Israel, which go off and worship in **Samaria**. Judah alone keeps worshipping God at the true temple in Jerusalem. And just as Moses had warned, the tribes of Israel end up worshipping other gods.

The question of the right place to worship kept being debated for more than a thousand years! Sneak a look at the conversation between Jesus and the **Samaritan woman** (notice the link?) in **John 4:19-24**.

- e) Now that Jesus has come, where (or how) does he say his people will worship?

- f) Remember that in the Old Testament, the way Israelites worshipped God was to bring a sacrifice to the tabernacle, or later, the temple. From Romans 12:1, how (and where) does Paul say we should worship now that Jesus has come?

One God Only

Much of this section of Deuteronomy – in fact, much of Deuteronomy – is really about obedience to the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me!” There are all sorts of ways we can be led away from the one true God. Compromising with the ‘worship’ of people around us is one way.

Read Deuteronomy 13 for warnings about some other ways Israel might be led astray.

- g) What’s the situation being described in verses 1 to 3?
- h) What’s the sure sign that there’s something wrong?
- i) What must Israel hold onto instead of the words of ‘dreamers’ (v4)?
- j) The Israelites need to take care! God might be testing their faith. No matter what surprising things happen, they should not be led astray from the truth. Can you think of any situations where this warning might be relevant today?
- k) What happens to the false prophet?
- l) The same applies if your own brother, son, daughter or wife tries to persuade you to worship other gods. If an Israelite town turns aside from serving God, Moses says, destroy it too! Why do you think the punishment is so harsh? (v11)

Paul says something remarkably similar in Galatians 1:6-9. What is his point?

Even if an angel turns up at church with a different message, we must not be impressed or influenced! It’s a good thing to remember whenever someone comes up with an impressive sounding ‘new message from God.’ As Christians, we’re no longer tied to Jerusalem as the place to worship the one true God. But we are tied to Jesus! There’s no other way to be right with God, there’s no other way to come to him, there’s no other thing to do to impress him ... than to accept the sacrifice of Jesus, who has done all the sacrificing for us. And now, no

matter what anyone else says or does, no matter what impressive signs they show or words they say... we simply stay put!

- What tempts you most to 'let go' of Jesus?
- What questions has this study raised for you about 'how we worship'?

Study 5

More Laws for Life in the Land

Deuteronomy 14-26

The central section of Deuteronomy contains a long (and sometimes dry) list of laws for life in the promised land. As we saw last time, when they finally cross the Jordan River and settle in the land God is giving them, there's to be no compromise with the people who lived there before them. It's a fresh start, with a new and distinctive way of living.

NOTE: This is a long section of Deuteronomy and quite a long study. It would be great if you could read through all the chapters at home. IN YOUR GROUPS, feel free to just pick one or two of the CASE STUDY SECTIONS and leave the rest.

Imagine...

If you were starting a new nation, what would be your first three laws? Why?

If you were going to have the death penalty for the most important crimes, what would they be?

Hints and tips for reading the Laws of Israel

As we take a quick guided tour through these densely packed chapters of laws, we're going to look especially at the reasons God gives for keeping them. Sometimes, no reason is given at all, and the Israelites simply needed to obey. But at other times, God is very clear about the motive and logic behind his regulations. As you read, look for these key reasons:

- Because they need to be different to the nations they are driving out
- Because they need to know what 'clean' means
- Because they flow from the ten commandments
- Because they should remember their past redemption

Case Study – Being Different

- a) Read 14:1-2. What point is stated three times?
- b) Without knowing any background of the odd thing they are told NOT TO DO, where do you think they would get the idea of doing it?
- c) In what sense is verse 2 a REASON?

Case Study 2 – Knowing ‘Clean’

- a) There’s a whole list of animals that Israel can and cannot eat, based on a couple of key principles. Scholars have argued that it’s all about hygiene and community health, but the details never quite fit. According to verse 8, 10 and 11, what word is used to describe foods on the ‘banned’ list?

- b) According to verse 19, swarming insects are “unclean TO YOU.” Then in verse 21, certain things that Israel must NOT eat are said to be okay for others. What’s the REASON for this in verse 21?

Why are some things ‘clean’ and other things ‘unclean’? You can look for patterns and reasons all day – but it’s enough for Israel to know that some things are unclean because GOD SAYS SO. It’s a way for Israel to keep in mind that they’re privileged, and different, and holy, and clean, and other people are ... kind of repulsive. Gentiles like us, of course, were part of the ‘yuk’.

In Acts 10:11-16, the Jewish apostle Peter has a radical vision that redefines “clean” and “repulsive.” What does he say, and what does God say?

How does this affect his response to the non-Jewish Cornelius? (And from then on, to people like us?)

How has God made the ‘unclean’ (like us) ... clean?

Case Study 3 – Remember your Redemption in Relationships

- a) From 15:11, what guiding principle is there for the way Israel is to treat their poor.

- b) How should Israelites treat their 'poor brothers' through chapter 15?

- c) What is to happen every seventh year?

- d) What will the temptation be when this year rolls around?

- e) What should motivate the way Israelites treat their slaves? (15:15)

- f) Read 24:17-18. What is the reason for the command?
- g) From 24:19-22, what should motivate the way Israelites provide for those less fortunate? What practical guidelines are they given for this?

Case Study 4 – Remember your Redemption in Festivals

- a) Why celebrate the passover? (16:3)
- b) What is the purpose of the feast of weeks? (16:11)
- c) What should they remember? (16:12)
- d) What measure is used for how much is given? (16:17)

Case Study 5 – Flowing from The Commandments

- a) Why is justice so foundational? (16:20)
- b) Why are bribes so dangerous? Which of the ten commandments is connected to this?
- c) What's the warning in 16:22? Which of the ten commandments do the punishments of 17:2f relate to?
- d) Read 19:16-21. Which commandment do these regulations apply to?
- e) Read the harsh sounding penalty of 21:19. Which command does this apply to?

Assuming that capital punishment is reserved for the most significant offenses, why do you think this one is so important in the life of Israel?

Moses gives laws for cities of refuge in the case of accidental homicide, rules for setting property boundaries, penalties for malicious witnesses and disobedient children, reassurance for battle, rules for sanitation and 'keeping clean', lost property, divorce... hundreds of ways the redeemed Israelites are to live as God's clean people in the land he is giving them.

- f) Ultimately, (from Dt 26:18-19) what will these laws show?

The Days Ahead...

Scattered among the rules and laws that God is giving Israel, there are a number of hints about the good times, and the bad times, that lie ahead.

- a) One day Israel will have Kings. What will the King need to do and why? (17:19-20)
- b) What do you observe when you read about King Solomon in 1 Kings 10:26-29?

Jesus says he comes as King of Israel. How does he contrast with Solomon?

Does he match up with the requirements of Deuteronomy 17?

- c) What does Moses promise in 18:15-18?

According to John 1:17, who fulfills this?

According to Hebrews 3:3-5, what's the difference between Jesus and Moses?

- d) According to Titus 3, the coming of Jesus (the promised King and Prophet) has saved us from our past slavery to our passions and pleasures. (Read Titus 3:3-7) How does Paul say WE are to now live, and why? (v8)
- e) Can you think of practical examples of how we can better 'reflect our redemption' in the way we treat one another, those in our church family who are less well off, those in our community?

Study 6

Twin Peaks

Deuteronomy 27-28



On the verge of the promised land, the people of Israel are faced with a huge choice — and huge consequences. To help them understand and remember it, God organizes an equally huge ‘visual aid.’ Two mountains lie before them, and they’ll each represent a completely different version of the future. (Picture: Mt Gerizim (left) and Mount Ebal)

Turning Points

Can you think of any ‘turning point’ moments in your life where you had to make significant life choices?

Can you think of any turning point moments where you made significant decisions about God?

Investigate...

Read Deuteronomy 26:1-13. When they cross the Jordan river to take over the promised land, the people are to split in two groups, one on Mount Ebal, and one on Mount Gerizim. First, they are to set up stones on Mount Ebal, and write on them. What are they to write? (v3)

- a. According to verse 9, what has the crowd of Israelites now become, and what must they now do?
- b. What will the group on Mount Gerazim do after they cross the Jordan? (v12)
- c. What will the group on Mount Ebal do after they cross the Jordan? (v13)
- d. What two options are put before the Israelites as they enter the land between these two mountains?
- e. There are a number of specific reasons a person will be cursed... but the reasons are all summarized in verse 26. What will bring God's curse on them?

Blessings... and more curses

The blessings God promises for Israel in their new land are spelled out in Deuteronomy 28. Again, there's one condition.

Read Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

- a. List some of the blessings in verses 3 to 8.
- b. What will Israel need to do to be blessed? (See v 9, 13-14)

The list of curses begins in verse 16. There's a huge list of bad things that will happen if Israel turns away from God. Take a sample from...

verse 22

verse 25

verse 28

verse 29

It's interesting that the description of the possible future curses in Deuteronomy 28 seems to go on much longer than the description of the promised blessings. Worst of them all is the possibility mentioned in verse 36. What is it?

It's mentioned again in verse 37, 41, and 48. Then it's spelt out in detail in verses 49-57. Enemies from a faraway nation will besiege Israel, starve them, then drag the survivors into exile. It's not a pretty picture. All this... if they don't carefully follow all the words of God's law (58).

By verse 64 it's almost sounding definite – 'then the Lord WILL scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other.' The great 'gathering' that God has done to bring them to the land will be undone. Can you see the 'reversal' in verse 68?

Time Machine...

Remember, the threat of these curses comes right at the start of Israel's history as a nation. They're presented with a dramatic choice, and their whole future in the land hinges on how they respond to God's word.



If you're wondering how things will turn out for them, let's step forward hundreds of years, and come for a quick tour of the land of Israel in the time of Jesus. The fact is, they've already been smashed and scattered. Now they're back in the land, but all is not well!

What do you notice in ...

Mark 1:29-33?

Mark 8:22?

Mark 15:33?

Clearly, by the time Jesus arrives, the promised land has fallen under God's curse. In fact, the land has been under God's curse for hundreds of years, because Israel did exactly what God warned them not to do! But as Jesus travels the land, he progressively turns things around and brings blessing again. **He is the one** who can undo God's curse... which is one of the key ideas in the gospel accounts. Jesus brings Israel the offer of healing, and restoration, and God's blessing again. And ultimately, he does it by taking the full force of God's curse on himself!

Revise Deuteronomy 21:23. What will mark out a person under God's curse?

Read Galatians 3:13-14, which quotes this verse from Deuteronomy. What did Christ do for Israelites ('us' in Paul's sentence) and also for Gentiles (like us!)?

In real, everyday terms, what will this blessing be like? (The verse may help, but try to translate it to your own experience.)

Study 7

How Long in the Land?

Deuteronomy 29-30

The Problem with People

- a. What do you think is the biggest problem with people?

- b. Having followed the story of Israel for a while now, what do you think is the biggest problem with the Israelites?

A Final Pep-Talk

In Deuteronomy 29, Moses calls Israel together for one last pep-talk. He reminds them (v2-8) of all the great things they've seen God do for them as he brought them out of slavery in Egypt.

- c. What, from the very beginning to that day, had been the problem with Israel? (v4)

First, the bad news...

Deuteronomy 29:22 through to 30:10 has both bad news and good news for Israel. It's also one of the most useful bits of the Bible. In much the same way as God's promises in Genesis 12 shaped the rest of the story that followed, this short section is almost like the table of contents for the rest of the Bible. It's hugely helpful to understand it, and then as you read the rest of the bible, looking for the things that are mentioned to happen – right through to the time of Jesus!

Continuing the theme of God's blessings and curses, in verse 22, Moses pictures a scene in the distant future. He imagines the promised land lying in ruins. People will come from far away and look at the burning wastes of sulphur, and they'll say "why did this happen?"

- d. What will the answer be? (v 25-28)

- e. In this imaginary picture, where have the people of Israel ended up? (v28)

Just as Moses has said in chapter 28, Israel's future in the promised land depends on their faithfulness! It sounds hopeless. But God's plans go further than Israel's failure!

Now for the Good news...

- f. The good news for Israel comes in Deuteronomy 30. If things are going to be fixed, what will they have to do first? (v1)

- g. What will they have to do second? (v2)

- h. What will God do for them when they take to heart their exile from the promised land and repent with all their heart and soul? (See verse 3, verse 4 and verse 5!)

- i. The problem with Israel is that they have never really *wanted* to serve God. What will be different when God restores them from their exile? (v6)

You've probably noticed the word 'exile' by now. As you might have guessed, as the story of the Old Testament unfolds, the Israelites are unfaithful to God in every way you could imagine. The promised land is smashed, just as Moses warned them. They are taken captive by the Assyrians and the Babylonians... and things are a mess. It's the great 'exile' of Israel. But because of these words of Moses, prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel still see a rosy future.

Read Jeremiah 31:33. What does Jeremiah foresee?

Read Ezekiel 36:24-28. What does Ezekiel foresee?

Can you see the promise? When they repent, God's going to bring them home and change their hearts. He's going to give them His Spirit! But the story takes a long time to unfold – and it's not until Jesus comes that we finally see the promise fulfilled. And the surprising news is, God's Spirit is poured out on anyone who repents and follows Jesus... even 'gentiles' like us.

The Life and Death Decision

Moses is bringing his final speech to an end. Israel has before them a life and death decision – and Moses makes it plain to them. **Read Deuteronomy 30 verse 15.**

- j. What will bring life (verse 16)?
- k. What will bring death (verse 17)?

Moses is confident that none of this is too hard for Israel. Look back to what he said in verses 11 to 14.

- l. What does he want them to choose? (verse 19-20)

Sadly, it seems, it WAS too hard for Israel to keep God's law. Israel chose death. But one day, an Israelite will come who WILL choose life in every way... and WILL obey God with all his heart and all his soul. The benefits of that will flow to all humanity!

In Romans 10, Paul looks back on the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 30:15,, and makes a significant change to what Moses original words. Read Romans 10:8-9. What WORD is it that can save us?

Paul is saying that while the Law WAS too hard for Israel to keep, trusting in Jesus WILL save Israel – and us! That's the good news that he's preaching!

Study 8

A Painful Goodbye

Deuteronomy 31

Saying goodbye is often painful. In this case even more so, as Moses appoints his successor to lead Israel into the promised land...

Read Deuteronomy 31:1-8, and feel the sadness as Moses hands over the leadership of Israel to Joshua. He says the same thing to the Israelites as he does to Joshua (v6 and v 7-9) – “Be strong and courageous; the Lord your God goes with you, he will never leave you or forsake you.”

- a) Why can Moses be sure of this? (v7)
- b) Moses writes down the law, and commands the priests to read it to the people every seventh year. What do their children need to learn (v13)?

It's almost time for Moses to die - God tells him so in Deuteronomy 31:14. Then he gives him a glimpse of what lies ahead for Israel. It's bad news!

- c) What are they going to do? (v16)
- d) What will happen to Israel then? (v17)
- e) God gives Moses a song to teach the Israelites. We'll see the lyrics in chapter 32. What's the purpose of the song, according to verses 19 and 20?
- f) Moses writes down all the words of the law, from beginning to end, in a book, which he gives to the Levites. What will the Law be, according to verse 26?

Interesting – right from the beginning, the Law is a ‘witness *against* Israel.’ Right from the beginning, it’s the book of what should have been and what could have been... but right from the beginning God knows they’ll choose death and destruction rather than life! Life for Israel is never going to come from the law... it will have to come some other way!

Sing along with God

God has told Moses to write down the words of his song – and they’re the words you’ll see in Deuteronomy chapter 32.

g) Read verses 3 to 6. How would you summarise what the song is saying?

The song goes on to talk about the way God chose Israel, and shielded and guarded ‘him’ through the desert wilderness. (The Old Testament often speaks of the nation of Israel as God’s precious ‘son’.)

In verse 21, God says Israel made him ‘jealous’ by gods that are not really gods. So he’s going to make them envious by a people that’s not really a people!

h) The Apostle Paul quotes these words in Romans 10:19 and 11:11, 13-14. Non-Jews everywhere are putting their trust in Jesus. What does Paul hope this will do for the Jews?

Because of their unfaithfulness in the land, God is going to bring all kinds of calamities on Israel, including famines and pests and plagues – but verses 26 and 27 of Deuteronomy 32 bring a change of direction. He would scatter them and blot out their memory for ever... except for one thing.

i) What is it?

j) Much later, when all this has happened, the prophet Ezekiel picks up the same idea. **Read Ezekiel 36:19-27**. What is God concerned for?

God is concerned that other nations will think they are stronger than he is! He’s concerned for his own Holy reputation. So ultimately, God is going to do all the work! He’s going to bring them back from the nations, he’s going to wash them clean from their sins, and he’s going to give them his Spirit. The way he’s going to do it is by

sending his son, Jesus... and it's all for the sake of his Holy reputation! (That's actually what Jesus was praying when he said "Hallowed be your name"!)

The end of the Song

The song God gave to Moses in Deuteronomy 32 is a long and painful one. Israel is a nation without sense (v28) – they should have known better. God will justly judge them, and challenge their idols to help them. But the song ends on a note of hope for Israel.

- k. What's the glimmer of good news in verse 39?
- l. How will God 'bring to life' and 'heal' his people according to verse 43?
- m. How (and when) do you think this 'atonement' happens?
- n. Moses finishes reciting his song of warning to all of Israel. How are Israel to treat these words? (v47)

God tells Moses to climb Mount Nebo, where he will glimpse the promised land from a distance. Then he'll die. It's tough. But God told him this would happen, because of the way Moses dishonoured him back in the desert of Zin!

A Final Blessing from Moses

Moses blesses the Israelites, tribe by tribe in Deuteronomy 33, much as Jacob blessed his sons back in Genesis 49. His final words are very positive – **read them in verse 29.**

What incredible privileges do the Israelites have?

In **Deuteronomy 34**, God takes Moses to the top of Mount Nebo, where you can look right down a valley at the rolling hills of the promised land. Author Morgan Spurlock visited Mount Nebo recently, and describes the view like this:

"Moses ... certainly had a breathtaking view. We stood facing west, looking out across the valley, rumpled and brown. To the north, our right it was cut by the glinting ribbon of the Jordan River, the border of modern Jordan and Israel. Straight ahead, the northern tip of the Dead Sea glistened. Bethlehem and Hebron were over on the left somewhere, just beyond the haze that rose from the hills on the Dead Sea's western shore... Jerusalem was on the horizon just about due west of us, Jericho stood at the northern tip of the Dead Sea a little to our right

and further in that direction lay the troubled West Bank. (Where in the World is Osama Bin Laden, p 114,) In short, it's a place where you can take in the whole sweep of the promised land. Sadly, that view is all Moses is going to get.

Sadly, Moses dies there in Moab, outside the promised land, just as God had said he would. It's the end of the story of Moses... and the beginning of the story of Joshua, his successor. But nobody could ever really fill the shoes of Moses. **Read verses 10 to 12.**

- o. It was true. Nobody else ever had the mighty power Moses had – or performed such awesome deeds – until Jesus came. **Read John 1:17.** The law Moses brought was good – but what is far better?

Looking back

That brings us to the end of our quick look at Deuteronomy. What have you learned along the way?

People might say a book like Deuteronomy has nothing to teach Christians today. How would you respond?

Your Feedback...

Please send your comments and feedback on these studies to phil@mpc.org.au.