

Deuteronomy 1; 1-18

The book of Deuteronomy is set in the land of Moab, on the border of the Promised Land. It comprises a series of sermons that Moses preached to the people who stood on the brink of this new world.

Its a book about choices.

The words of 30:19 summarise the message.

This day I call the heaven and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curses. Now choose life that you and your children may live.....

According to v2,3 the journey from Horeb (Mt Sinai) to Kadesh Barnea (the border of the Promised Land) should take 11 days but in fact it has taken 40 years. The delay is a consequence of their poor choices. But God has graciously once again opened up to them this invitation to life.

To choose life is to let Gods word disclose our story to us. Moses will remind them of their rebellion but he will do so by first recalling that they are the people God faithfully kept his promises. (v8,10)

They are a people who are to reflect the faithfulness of their God in the way they conduct themselves. Judges are to execute judgment without partiality, dispensing justice to small and great alike, because this is how their God behaves.

Every day is a Moab day when we have to choose. Therefore since the promise of entering his rest still stands let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.

- Every day is a Moab day when we have to choose. *Therefore since the promise of entering his rest still stands let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it..... Today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts (Heb 4:1,7)*
- Lets resolve not to make our choices on the basis of favouritism.

Deuteronomy 1:19-46

Its not difficult to see why Moses preaches this particular sermon. The nation are back at the spot they arrived at 40 years previously. Their leader is adamant that they learn the lessons of history.

The chapter contains two stories.

Israel had a story they told themselves. It was full of self pity and finger pointing. *The Lord hates us so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us in to the hands of the Amorites to destroy us.... Our brothers have made our hearts fear.* (27) The Exodus generation serve as a warning. And even after they recognised their sin it was not possible to recover the situation. (41,42) See Heb 12:16,17

There is another story in this chapter. It belongs to Caleb. (36) See also Numbers 14:1-9. Caleb is described as *'following the Lord wholeheartedly.'* He believes God means to give them the land and although he would spend the next 40 years walking through the desert, living on the manna and confronting enemies he was convinced that God was not a death dealing but a life giving Saviour. He believed that he had good purposes for his little life in this great future he was preparing for the nation. Moses is urging those to whom he speaks to emulate Caleb.

- Are you able to see your life in positive terms even when it maybe going through difficult territory?
- Let Caleb encourage you to follow the Lord wholeheartedly.

Deuteronomy 2: 1-23

Moses recounts the journey and in doing so provides encouragements and warnings for the next stage of the process.

As the nation travels through the region they are expressly forbidden from encroaching on the territory of three nations. The relatives of Esau living in Seir (2-6), Moab (9) and the Ammonites (19) who are descendants of Lot. Despite the fact that these nations are but distant relations of Israel God is honouring the promises he made to their forefathers. They serve as something of a rebuke to the homeless Israel. They have entered into the inheritance assigned to them. Note what it says about the inhabitants of the land removed by the Ammonites: *They were a people tall and numerous and as tall as the Anakites (21)* In 1:28 the presence of Anakites was a factor in Israel's refusal to cross over into the Promised Land.

When it comes to territory and homeland God is the landlord. The phrases 'I will not give you any of their land' (5,9,19) and 'I have given Esau the hill country of Seir as his own' (5) emphasise who is in charge of these matters. *The earth is the Lord's and everything in it*, shapes the outlook of these chapters.

We learn why the journey has lasted as long as it has. Verses 14 & 15 describe the elimination of the Exodus generation. *By then that entire generation of fighting men had perished from the camp, as the Lord had sworn to them. (14)* All Gods promises will be kept

By contrast Moses reminds the nation that stands before him just how able God is to care for his people as they go through times of discipline and difficulty. *These 40 years the Lord your God has been with you and you have not lacked anything. (7)*

- Let Israel's experience encourage your faith.
- If your life is difficult at present reread v7 and appreciate how able God is to make sure you lack nothing

Deuteronomy 2:24 - 37

Although this territory lies east of the Jordan this marks the start of Israel's conquest of the Promised Land. Its this country that God promised to Abraham and his descendants. Its these inhabitants who are given 430 years to reform their ways. Now though time has been called. The conquest of the land serves as a picture of Gods final judgment which will be executed on all who have not accessed his mercy during their time of grace.

Moses offers Sihon peace terms. (27 - 29). This is in contrast to the instruction of (24) *engage him in battle*. Perhaps even Moses was reluctant to obey and fight.

Again we are not left in any doubt who controls these events. *The Lord your God has made his spirit stubborn and his heart obstinate (30) See I have begun to deliver Sihon and his country over to you (31) The Lord our God gave us all of them (36)*

- The Christian life is a call to arms. Fight the good fight of faith. Is there anything about our lives that would qualify as being involved in this conflict?
- It is clear that God is the one who takes action. See how Paul urges us simply to stand firm and to have on the gospel armour.
- There are strict rules of engagement. How clear are we about the way God would have us engage in this battle?

Deuteronomy 3:1-20

Hebrews describes the conquest of the Promised Land (of which this is the prelude) as an act of faith. The crucial issues are not the size of the army or their military strategy but their readiness to believe and act on God's word. (2) This remains the crucial issue for God's people in any age.

The chapter is a record of progress. The opposition is formidable. Og the king is described as a Rephaite. They are described in 2:21 as strong and numerous and tall. The size of the King's bed confirms this fact (11). But nothing can hinder God from keeping his covenant promise to his people. The book of Acts in a similar way charts the progress of the church from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth. That remains the mandate. The issue centres on our faith to act in the light of these promises.

In the first part of the Bible geography matters. Israel is to become a nation with a land of their own. God is locating this tiny nation in a place of strategic importance where nations will pass through and observe their way of life. Jesus announces to a Samaritan woman that geography is less significant. "Woman" Jesus replied, "believe me a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem..... the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-23) It remains true though that God intends the lives of his people to be visible and attractive to those who look on.

The second half of the section describes the experience of the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh. They are attracted to settle east of the Jordan. But far from looking out for themselves they commit to enable their brothers to obtain their inheritance before returning to this land they now occupy. OT Israel has things to say to the individualism that shapes many of our lives.

- Moses faith arose from having a big view of God and his faithfulness. Do we need to encourage our faith by considering God's greatness and his promise keeping record?
- Could our worship of God fill our lives more comprehensively?
- Who are you serving in order that they will succeed?

Deuteronomy 3:21 - 29

The encounter between Moses and the Lord is disturbing. Moses the man of prayer has his request refused. He is not to be allowed to lead Israel into the Promised Land. His behaviour at Meribah disqualifies him from this honour.

Deuteronomy is a collection of lessons Moses seeks to impress on the people as they gather on the border of Canaan. The lessons are not confined to the nations failures they also include the failure of Moses. Sin is serious and although forgiven it can leave tragic consequences in its wake.

The incident is described in Numbers 20:1-13. This is the second time drought leads to the peoples anger being directed at Moses. God instructs him to speak to the rock and it will pour out water. Instead Moses stood in front of the rock and said: 'Listen you rebels, must we bring water out of this rock' He then struck the rock twice. Both in the first incident and in the NT commentary on the incident (1 Cor 10:3,4) the rock is closely identified with God. It poses the question: was Moses venting his frustration on God? The reaction of the Lord to this behaviour serves to emphasise that great privilege brings great responsibility.

The section is bookended with reference to Joshua. The project is not about individual success. None of us, not even one so great as Moses are indispensable. Our concern ought to be with continuity and making sure others are able to enter into all that God has for them. *But commission Joshua and encourage and strengthen him, for he will lead this people across... (28)*

The OT should have the words of 1 Cor 10:11 written over it. *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warning for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.*

- Can we take a warning? Are we learning to deal with our anger?
- Are there people we are seeking to invest in so that they can succeed?

Deuteronomy 4: 1-24

Israel are about to cross the Jordan and engage in warfare. We are though not left in any doubt about the key to progress and success. This will not be down to military strategy or strength of numbers. Obedience is central to success. (1)

This obedience is to Gods word. V9-14 describe the events at Horeb or Sinai where Israel met with God. Moses speaks to the people 'as though they were present' when in fact those who stood at the foot of the mountain are now dead. His point is God was speaking to the present generation. There is further emphasis on the sufficiency of this word (don't add to it 2) and of its on going relevance (pass it on to the next generation 9,10)

The section emphasises Gods invisibility. They are not to make an image. (15,16) But God will be revealed to the nations through the obedience of their corporate life. (5-8)

Moses own experience of being barred from entering the land emphasises the folly of taking liberties with such a God (21) *For the Lord our God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. (24)*

- Israel were to be careful to retain the word of God (9) Is that a priority for us?
- It is to be intentionally passed onto our children and lived out before the world. Which of these responsibilities need re-emphasising?
- Do I have ways of excusing myself from the clear commands of the Bible?

Deuteronomy 4:25-49

The word not image (25-31)

The repeated warning against idolatry runs through these chapters. Long time or short Israel is to appreciate their security in the land is related to the purity of their worship of God. ... *if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol.... The Lord will scatter you among peoples* (25,27) It becomes clear as Moses goes on that this is 'when' not 'if'. *When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you..(30)* But as if to emphasise the value of the word Moses adds a promise: *if from there you seek the Lord you will find him*. He reminds us just how committed to his word God is: *he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath. (31)*

One not many (32-40)

Following on from Moses emphasis forbidding idolatry is the section that highlights the Lords unique place. *Acknowledge and take this to heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other. (39)* That may seem unexceptional to us but in the context of Moses day when all the surrounding nations had their gods it was a very big claim to make. He though is not content to simply state it. He draws attention to Gods unique activity in making this nation his people. (32-34)

Reality not fantasy (41-43)

Canaan is not paradise. This will be an environment where accidents happen and provision will need to be made for their consequences.

- By the time you get to the NT fashioning visible idols is a thing of the past. The concern is not with statues in our homes but sinful desires in our hearts. *As obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. (1 Peter 1:14)*
- God calls on us not to forget the unique way he has intervened in our lives. (Eph 2:1-10)
- Do we have realistic expectations of the Christian life?

Deuteronomy 5:1-21

It would be easy to imagine the commandments belonged to the past. God spoke them 40 years previously to the ancestors of these people. Did they belong to the days of desert wandering or to a particular time and place. As they stand on the border of the Promised Land Moses impresses upon these people, many of whom were not born at Horeb or were simply young children, *"The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb.*

The motive for keeping the commandments is grace. They are prefaced with the words, *"I am the Lord your God who brought you out of slavery"*

The first 5 commandments inform us how we can love God. The God who liberates us calls for first place in our lives. ... *no other gods before me*

We are to beware of rival attraction. Like a wise and good marriage partner he is jealous over his partners affections

Beware how you speak of the Lord

Notice the change in motive around the 4th commandment. In Exodus 20 we are urged to observe the rest of the 7th day because it is Gods pattern. In Deuteronomy 5 the motive is the Lords rescue.

Families are important and order and respect matter.

The second five reveal how to love our neighbour.

We are to respect his life, his marriage and his property.

Words matter. We are not to deal in deceit.

Thoughts matter. The ten commandments address what is going on in our minds. Our culture encourages us to want what others have got. Only the gospel can deliver contentment.

- Do we hear these words spoken to us and do we hear them as the word of the God who has rescued us?
- Which side of the law do we need to invest in; Love for God or love for our neighbours.
- Pick one of the commandments and memorise it.

Deuteronomy 5:22-33

As Moses preaches to the people there in Moab he sets before them what will be necessary *'so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess. (33)* This holds good whether its the 10th century BC or 2017.

There needs to be a sure word from God. The people had that through the events at Horeb and though the intercession of Moses. Although we may like the idea of God speaking directly to us the experience of these people would warn us against it. *This great fire will consume us and we will die if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer. (25)* Be glad for the intercession of the Bible writers and value what they give to us.

There needs to an internal concern to relate to God appropriately. *Oh that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always (29)*. The Bible emphasises the importance of that aspect of our lives. *Above all else guard your heart because everything else you do flows from it. (Prov 4:23)*

Take care to do what God has said. *So be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you (32)* This is the route to blessing - those who pursue it will prosper.

- Which one of these 3 areas do you need to work on?
- Are you convinced this really is a route to solid, substantial blessing?