

Deuteronomy: An Introduction

In the first book of the Bible, we're introduced to how God created the world and all that's in it. God says the world is good, yet when sin enters the world it fractures the beautiful relationship God has with mankind. As the population of humanity grows, so does the evil in the world. God is so saddened by what He sees He decides to start over; He floods the world and all that's in it, but rescues one family who still worships God. After several more generations, sin is still fracturing the relationship between God and people. Instead of flooding the earth again, God reveals His plan to make the world right again known to a man named Abram, later renamed Abraham. God tells Abraham that He's going to give Abraham and his wife, Sarai (later renamed Sarah), a baby through Sarah, a barren woman well into her nineties. God then tells Abraham that He will send a Savior to rescue the world from evil, and that Savior will come from Abraham's lineage. This is a promise, or covenant, that God makes with Abraham, and we're about to see just how seriously God takes His promises.

Imagine your family has lived somewhere for 400 years - 20 generations. Your parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and even great-great-grandparents have taught you how to travel the land, the language, the customs, and the religion. Then you're forced to leave without much warning. Can you imagine how distraught you'd feel? And to go into a new country and not know anything? How would you buy groceries? Find a job? Get around town?

That's kind of what's happened to the Israelites at the beginning of the book of Deuteronomy. They've lived through the Exodus, where God rescued them from 400 years of slavery in Egypt. Now God has said He's going to take them to a land He promised to Abraham all the way back in Genesis. But there's people there...strong people who worship all different gods than the ones they've known. Are they ready to leave 400 years of learned behavior and beliefs to trust this new God, one who claims to be the only God, and to only worship one when they're used to worshipping a lot?

As you read the story of the Israelites after the Exodus, you can see that they were not. God was revealing some basic guidelines about how they should behave now that they're free and they've promised to be His people, but after just a few days they go back to their old habits of making and worshipping idols. It's understandable. They've likely never had a God who keeps His promises before, because who they worshiped were fake and fickle gods. They didn't know how seriously God was about His covenant, or promise, with them. But because they broke the promise they made with God, they're forced to detox in the desert for forty years.

Though some of them will die in the desert, all is not lost. What we find in Deuteronomy is the story of God revealing Himself to His people. Have you ever considered how kind it is that God reveals His character and nature, and His expectations, to His people? Have you ever worked for a bad boss, one who didn't clearly communicate expectations, but punished those who didn't follow the unclear ones? That's not who we see God to be in Deuteronomy. Dr. Svigel, a professor at DTS, says it this way, "The

stipulations of the covenant God had made with Israel at Mount Sinai were straightforward. If they'd love Him and obey His commands, He'd bless them with security, hope, and prosperity in the Promised Land. Yet if they rejected and disobeyed God, He would send judgments in the form of warfare, sickness, and calamities (Deut. 30:15-20). God didn't leave His people with a fuzzy picture of general possibilities, but a full catalog of benefits they'd experience if they lived in heartfelt devotion and obedience to Him (28:1-14).

God also didn't leave the Israelites with a vague warning of abstract judgment for unfaithfulness to the covenant. Rather, He spelled out curses that would come as a price for disobedience (28:15-68)."

God told His people exactly what to do, how to do it, and sometimes even why things needed to be done that way; after all, as the designer of everything, He knows how things work best! Overall, though, God wanted other nations to understand that He alone was God, and for the way the Israelites lived (which was radically different than other nations at the time) to reflect their trust and love in the one true God. The one who made Himself known to them, and still makes His way known today.

As you're reading through the book of Deuteronomy, we'd ask you to think through four questions:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage reveal about God?
3. What does this passage reveal about man(kind)?
4. What does God want you to do or change? What is one thing you can pass on to someone else?

Also, remember, as God gives the Israelites guidelines for how He wants them to live, He never does so without a rationale or a reason. If you get to a part that's confusing, ask yourself what it is that He might be responding to. (If you've ever parented a toddler, remember all the rules you had to make that you never thought you'd need to.)

Lastly, remember that God doesn't have to reveal Himself to His people, then or now. The fact that He does shows us how much He loves us, wants the very best for us, and just how very gracious He is. Whether God's communicating a promise to us or an expectation for us, it's all grace.