

A Book about Jesus

Deuteronomy 1:1-8

I'm doing something this morning that I have only done once in the three years that I have been here preaching God's word to you. I am changing our Sunday morning sermon series, moving from one book of the Bible to another. I preached initially from Peter's epistles, then, almost two years ago, we began the gospel of John. And last week we finished that series.

On occasion, I do preach isolated sermons for more specific reasons, breaking into a long series on a particular book of the Bible, but in general, I have always found it helpful to study whole books in their entirety. I also think it is helpful to have a balanced subject matter, different types of books, different emphases, and different places in the Bible. So I typically alternate between the Old and New Testaments in transitioning from one sermon series to another. And I am certainly doing that this morning.

From the gospel of John to the fifth and final book of Moses, Deuteronomy. It's quite a shift. In time and in focus, in style and in presentation. But, of course, everything in both books is perfectly consistent within the whole counsel of God found in the Bible.

2 Tim. 3:16 "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

Now, I hope the context for the book of Deuteronomy is somewhat familiar to you. At least more than, say, one of the minor prophets. It is the final book of Moses, and those first five books of the Bible are sometimes called the Pentateuch, a word that literally means five books, or five scrolls. That's simple enough. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and

Deuteronomy. Sometimes those five books are called simply "the Law." Or, in Hebrew, the Torah. Sometimes they are identified by their author, as the books of Moses, or the book of the law of Moses. A few examples,

Deut. 31:24 "So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished, 25 that Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying: 26 "Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you."

Or with Jesus' own words,

Mark 12:24 Jesus answered [the Sadducees] and said to them, "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God? 25 For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 26 But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken."

In an abbreviated form, sometimes these five books are just called "Moses." The book is identified by the author. That's still somewhat common today, especially with college textbooks or other assigned curriculum. So when two of Jesus' disciples had the opportunity to speak with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, Jesus identified himself and taught them who he was by saying,

Mark 16:25 "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

That verse is an important introduction to our study of Deuteronomy as well, since I intend to use Moses the same way Jesus used Moses—to expound and proclaim to you “the things concerning Himself.” The things concerning Jesus. And I hope that is obvious to you this morning, and every week that follows. The book of Deuteronomy, which means the second law, is a book about Jesus. The book consists of a series of farewell messages by Israel’s 120-year-old leader, given perhaps a month before he died. It is addressed to the new generation destined to possess the land of promise, those who survived the forty years of wilderness wandering. Moses had received the law from God and delivered it to the people of Israel first at Mt. Sinai, shortly after the Exodus from Egypt. And now, 40 years later, with a whole new generation alive, God gives his law a second time. Deutero means two, or second. And nomos is the Greek word for law. The second law. Deutero-nomos, the second law. Yet again for emphasis, the law of Moses is also a place we go to expound and proclaim Jesus and the gospel. Indeed, to use Paul’s words in Galatians 3, the law is our schoolmaster, or tutor, to bring us to Jesus.

Gal. 3:21 “Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. 22 But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 23 But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”

So let’s jump right in.

v.1

The people of Israel are about to cross the Jordan River into the promised land of Canaan, into the nation that would become the nation of Israel. And they had spent 40 years wandering in the desert wilderness now called the Sinai Peninsula. And remember, God had delivered them out of Egypt, bringing them across the Red Sea on dry land. The armies of the Pharaoh of Egypt were drowned when they tried to follow. That’s all in the book of Exodus. That Exodus was, in fact, an historical demonstration of the redemption that God provides for his people. It is a picture, or a type, of the work of salvation which God provides. A deliverance. A redemption.

The book of Deuteronomy, therefore, is a book about Jesus. God’s work of redemption is about to reach the climactic moment when his people actually, physically enter the promised land. That, of course, takes place in the next book, the book of Joshua.

But for Deuteronomy, the final preparations were being made, namely the final instructions God would give to this group of people whom he has redeemed out of the slavery of Egypt. And they are now ready to enter that land. They are on “this side of the Jordan.” That would be the east side, having travelled out of Egypt and through the desert, according to verse 1. Perhaps even on the banks of the Jordan. They have come from Horeb, according to verse 2, which is another name for Mt. Sinai, where they had received the 10 commandments.

v.2

And look at the last verse of the book of Numbers, for even more clarity about the location,

Num. 36:13 “These are the commandments and the judgments which the Lord commanded the children of Israel by the hand of Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho.”

Verse 5 in our text also identifies Moab. So there they are, ready for their final instructions.

Notice here the emphasis upon words. And that is my first point.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF WORDS.

The history of all this is important. The geography is important. The time and place. But those details aren't what is most useful for your Christian life and maturity. This is not just a history book, and my goal is not simply for you to remember dates, times and places so you can pass a history exam. But rather to understand what those dates, times and places mean. And what they mean is this, that God is speaking to his people. And that's the importance of words, that they are,

A. Words from God.

Interesting, in Hebrew, the title of this book is not Deuteronomy, or the second law. Rather, it is the Hebrew word translated in verse 1, "the words." So this book is the book of the words, God's words! And immediately you see that important theme that was so obvious in the gospel of John we just studied. You see, God's words would eventually come to us in a person, a man. Do you remember the beginning of John's gospel?

John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it...14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

So Deuteronomy is very similar to the gospel of John, isn't it?

In the gospel, we came face to face with the word who became flesh and dwelt among us. Here in Deuteronomy, we have that same word presented to us. "These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel." That is a theme that runs throughout the book, repeated frequently. These words from God are,

B. Words for God's people.

For example,

Deut. 29:1 "These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb...9 Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do. 10 "All of you stand today before the Lord your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, 11 your little ones and your wives—also the stranger who is in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water— 12 that you may enter into covenant with the Lord your God, and into His oath, which the Lord your God makes with you today, 13 that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and that He may be God to you, just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

The words from God were central to his covenant with his people.

Deut. 4:1 "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you. 2 You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you...5 "Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you

go to possess. 6 Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' 7 "For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? 8 And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? 9 Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, 10 especially concerning the day you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb, when the Lord said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'"

Let me stress the practical nature of all this. These words are for us. They are to define our lives. They are to direct our lives. They tell us what we should believe and how we should live. God's words do all of that. And that is our most basic definition of church membership, isn't it, reflected in that first membership vow we ask all new members. "Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God?"

And those words from God for God's people are put in writing, so we can remember them. For Moses, that meant writing on stone. Thankfully, it's a lot easier for us to write today, and we have the written word of God available to everyone of us. We have the Scriptures, that which is written, the word of God written. And those Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, are all about Jesus.

Listen to what Peter says about the importance of these

words.

1 Peter 1:22 "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, 23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, 24 because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, 25 But the word of the Lord endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you."

And this book of Deuteronomy is the word by which I will preach the gospel to you.

Let's move on, with some explanation of those 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Moses makes much of that experience, writing in,

v.3

The reference to 40 years is significant. And to summarize it, we see,

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF TESTING.

v.3

In order to understand the book of Deuteronomy, you have to understand those,

A. Forty years in the wilderness.

Reference as well in,

v.2

They travelled in the desert. And the whole generation died! Num. 26:64 "But among these there was not a man of those who were numbered by Moses and Aaron the priest when they

numbered the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Sinai. 65 For the Lord had said of them, “They shall surely die in the wilderness.” So there was not left a man of them, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.”

It was a test. An opportunity to demonstrate their love and obedience to God. And God provided for them throughout those 40 years. God was gracious to them, even in their rebellion and unbelief, even as they often failed the test. But the test was to teach them the most important lesson of life, and it remains the most important less of your life today. It is perhaps best expressed in,

Deut. 8:2 “And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. 3 So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. 4 Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. 5 You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you.”

People of God, you must know what God sought to teach his people in their 40 years of wilderness wanderings, “that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.”

That’s what matters in life. That’s what sustains your life. That’s what brings you life. The word of God, every word that proceeds from his mouth. So this 40 years in the wilderness becomes a useful and helpful example for us.

1 Cor. 10:1 “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be

unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. 5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. 6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. 7 And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” 8 Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; 9 nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; 10 nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

Do you see how practical and how applicable this book of Deuteronomy is? For we have here, in Deuteronomy, words from God. And specifically, words of law.

B. Ten commandments.

And those commandments themselves are often called the ten words. And those 40 years in the wilderness are an appropriate symbol and type of the whole of our lives as well. In the biggest possible picture, we are living today as the Israelites were living then. We are living in the wilderness. And for us, the promised land is heaven. So we, too, are being tested. We are given

opportunity to learn, opportunity to show forth our love for God, opportunity to grow and mature in our faith. Or as Paul puts it, to be trained in righteousness. That's what the word of God still does for us. As I quoted earlier,

2 Tim. 3:16 "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Now, my third point. And this point is so important I could wish that I have opportunity every week we study Deuteronomy to repeat this point. It's that crucial. It is a point I will mention regularly, and one that you simply must keep in your mind at all times. And that is,

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF GRACE.

Some people think that there is an inherent contradiction between the law and the gospel. And so when we come to study giving of the second law, we are somehow leaving behind the gospel of grace. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Grace is everywhere here in Deuteronomy. It's everywhere in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

Grace is a gift. It's something you receive that you have not earned, that you do not deserve. And surely, as the Bible is so clear,

Eph. 2:8 "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast."

So where is that grace in Deuteronomy? Look at,
v.4

You can go back to Numbers 21 to read all about that. The

main idea is that God was providing for his people. Specifically, land. And safety to live in the land. God caused Israel to be completely and entirely victorious over those two kings, Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan. God enabled his people to safely pass through those cities. God restored peace and tranquility to his people the complete conquest of Sihon and Og. That's grace! We will study that in more detail in Deuteronomy 2 and 3.

But there is more evidence of God's grace. Even greater evidence I would say.

v.5-6

Remember what God spoke at Horeb? Or Mt. Sinai. He spoke the law, the ten commandments. But here's the point. Here is the emphasis upon grace. And here is the awareness that you must always preserve as you study Deuteronomy. Here is the one point I want you to remember from this sermon, even if you don't remember anything else.

A. God has provided redemption for his people.

That's it. That's the point. God has provided redemption for his people. That's what this story is all about. Just think about it. The exodus. God delivered his people out of Egypt, out of slavery. The wilderness. God delivered his people not only from their enemies but from the natural deprivation of the desert itself. He provided manna. Their clothes didn't wear out. He defeated those kings. I could go on, but the point is that when God gave the law, he gave it to his people. God gave the law to a people whom he had already redeemed! He gave the law to a people whom he had already saved, by grace.

The law was never the means by which that salvation would be accomplished.

So go back with me briefly to Horeb, to Sinai. What did God say before he gave the ten words of the law? What is the preface to the Ten Commandments?

Ex. 20:1 “And God spoke all these words, saying: 2 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

That’s grace! God has redeemed his people. Now, as a people saved by grace, by the gift of God, the law gives them instructions on how to live. Most especially, how to love God, in response to his grace.

That’s the starting point for the book of Deuteronomy. God has provided redemption for his people. But Deuteronomy also allows us to see the promise of God with respect to the future. And the people of Israel surely understood that promise.

v.7-8

Ultimately, that’s the promise of the gospel. That’s the promise of salvation.

B. God has promised salvation to his people.

And the tangible expression of that salvation was the land, the land of promise. And that covenant promise God made to Abraham is understood and explained in the New Testament to be nothing other than the very promise of the gospel.

It was the promise of an inheritance, an inheritance of land. And the law never cancelled that promise at all.

Gal. 3:16 “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ. 17 And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it

should make the promise of no effect. 18 For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.”

God promised his people land. And he promised that all the nations would be blessed in that promise to Abraham. And that promise is now for us.

Gal. 3:6 “...just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” 7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.”

So I am preaching the gospel to you this morning from the book of Deuteronomy. The gospel of grace. God promises his people land, he sets that land before them. And the promise of that land, for us, is the promise of our eternal inheritance, a promise of heaven just as sure and certain for believers today as the promise of the land of Canaan was for the believers to whom Moses spoke the words of Deuteronomy.

With that promise made clear and certain, let us study together this great book of Deuteronomy over the coming months. With the people of God on the plains of Moab, let us learn how to be trained in righteousness by the words of God given to us in this book about Jesus.