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Your word!"*

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Deuteronomy 1:1–5

The preamble

(*The Lutheran Study Bible*, page 277)

Look

- Verse 1 *“These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah.”* The Israelites were at a crossroad in their history. They were camped in the desert on the east side of the Jordan River, where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea. After 40 years of wandering, they were about to cross over the Jordan and take possession of the land God had promised to Abraham. God spoke to them once more through Moses, giving them final instructions before they entered the land.
- Verse 3 *“In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him in commandment to them.”* Solomon began building the temple in the fourth year of his reign, 480 years after the exodus (1 Kings 6:1). Since Solomon reigned from 970–930 BC, the fourth year of his reign was 966 BC, 480 years earlier would put the date of the exodus at 1446 BC. The 40th year after the exodus, the time when Moses spoke to all of Israel, was 1406 BC.
- Verse 5 *“Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to explain this law.”* Moses did not give the Israelites a new law but began to expound a law that was already in existence, the law God had given them on Mount Sinai.

Discuss

1. Why was a further expounding and a revision of the law needed at this time?
2. What lesson for the younger generation is contained in verse 2?

Apply

3. Agree or disagree. The fact that God restated the law for a new generation of Israelites facing new circumstances shows that God’s laws do not always apply in the same way to every generation.

The preamble gives the historical setting for Deuteronomy.

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Discuss

1. Why was a further expounding and a revision of the law needed at this time?

During the 40 years of wandering, the older generation had died off. The younger generation needed to be instructed in the law given to their fathers. In addition, the younger generation faced new circumstances as permanent residents in Canaan. Also, they needed to realize that a new leader (Joshua) did not mean a new law.

2. What lesson for the younger generation is contained in verse 2?

The journey from Mount Sinai to Kadesh Barnea ordinarily took less than two weeks. But Israel's rebellion (Numbers 13, 14) stretched the journey to 40 years. Moses was encouraging the younger generation not to make the same mistake.

Apply

3. Agree or disagree. The fact that God restated the law for a new generation of Israelites facing new circumstances shows that God's laws do not always apply in the same way to every generation.

Although new circumstances dictated new applications, God did not change his laws. The same is true today. God's basic will outlined in the Ten Commandments remains constant. However, new applications may arise in different times and cultures.

The preamble gives the historical setting for Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 1:6–36

God's faithfulness versus Israel's rebellion

(*The Lutheran Study Bible*, pages 277–278)

Look

Verse 6 *“The LORD our God said”*—The name LORD comes from a Hebrew verb that means “to be.” It emphasizes God’s absolute independence and faithfulness. The name God comes from a Hebrew word meaning “the exalted one.” It emphasizes God’s great majesty.

Verse 7 *“In the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negeb and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates”*—God listed the various regions of Palestine that made up Israel’s inheritance. Notice how the Lord reminded Israel of his promise to Abraham and said that now he would fulfill that promise.

Discuss

1. Who benefited when assistants were appointed for Moses to administer the affairs of Israel? Why do you think God reminded the Israelites of this event from their history?
2. Compare verse 13 with Exodus 18:21. What were the qualifications of the men chosen to assist Moses? How important were spiritual qualifications?
3. Moses told the Israelites they would not have to take the land through military force, because God had *given* them the land. How does the sending of spies reveal that the Israelites’ faith was weak? What other evidence of weak faith do you find in this story?

Apply

4. Some may say: “It’s not good to bring up people’s sins and mistakes from the past. It’s best to forget about them.” When is looking at the past counterproductive? When is it helpful?

Moses exposed the Israelite’s unfaithfulness to God in spite of God’s faithfulness to them.

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Discuss

1. Who benefited when assistants were appointed for Moses to administer the affairs of Israel? Why do you think God reminded the Israelites of this event from their history?

Moses benefited since he was relieved of the burden of being sole judge and administrator of all Israel. The people also benefited because gifted men were enlisted to serve and lead them. Their judicial matters were handled more quickly and efficiently. This is a reminder of how God cared for them.

2. Compare verse 13 with Exodus 18:21. What were the qualifications of the men chosen to assist Moses? How important were spiritual qualifications?

The leaders were to be “wise, understanding, and experienced men” (verse 13) and “men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe” (Exodus 18:21). Spiritual qualifications were important to ensure that there be no partiality or taking of bribes and that justice be rendered. You might ask, “Which is more important in the church today: capable men or godly men?”

3. Moses told the Israelites they would not have to take the land through military force, because God had *given* them the land. How does the sending of spies reveal that the Israelites’ faith was weak? What other evidence of weak faith do you find in this story?

Israel depended on their knowledge of the land, the route they decided to take, and so forth. They feared the giants who lived in the land and the strength of the fortified cities. How quickly they forgot how God had rescued them from Egypt, carrying them as a father carries his son (verse 31), showing them places to camp and routes to take (verse 33)!

Apply

4. Some may say: “It’s not good to bring up people’s sins and mistakes from the past. It’s best to forget about them.” When is looking at the past counterproductive? When is it helpful?

Focusing exclusively on one’s own weaknesses and failures can be debilitating. Harping on someone else’s mistakes can backfire by breeding resentment. Yet focusing on the past can also emphasize the importance of daily repentance and the need for God’s forgiveness. This is what Moses was doing here.

Moses exposed the Israelite’s unfaithfulness to God in spite of God’s faithfulness to them.

Deuteronomy 1:37–2:23

Desert wanderings

(*The Lutheran Study Bible*, pages 278–280)

Look

1:37 “*Even with me the LORD was angry on your account.*” After 38 years of desert wandering and still another rebellion by the people, Moses, for a few brief moments, lost faith that God could ever keep his promise to bring such a rebellious people into Canaan. Review the events at Meribah recorded in Numbers 20:1–13. God wanted Moses to speak in a kindly way to the new generation—to speak gospel and not law. Moses’ lack of trust and his disobedience were just as bad as that of the previous generation. Therefore Moses would share their fate, dying outside the Promised Land.

Discuss

1. Was Moses denying his own guilt when he said that God was angry with him *because of the people*? Do you sense resentment festering in Moses’ heart against the people?
2. God was angry when the Israelites refused to enter the Promised Land and receive it as his gift. Why was he still angry when they changed their minds and attempted to march in?
3. What does Israel’s attempt to claim the Promised Land tell us about sinful human nature?
4. Why was the Lord’s statement that *he* had given the hill country of Seir to Esau and Ar to the descendents of Lot an amazing claim to make in the ancient world?

Apply

5. In 2:15 we are told, “the hand of the LORD was against them, to destroy them from the camp, until they had perished.” Is it correct to say that God *allows* suffering, or is it more correct to say that God *causes* suffering? (See also Job 1:1–2:10.)

The disobedience of the Israelites led God to sentence them to 40 years of wandering in the desert.

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Discuss

1. Was Moses denying his own guilt when he said that God was angry with him *because of the people*? Do you sense resentment festering in Moses’ heart against the people?

Moses was not denying his own guilt in this matter, but he was not overlooking the rebellion of the people that provided the occasion for his sin. He did not resent his people but reminded them of their sin lest they repeat it.

2. God was angry when the Israelites refused to enter the Promised Land and receive it as his gift. Why was he still angry when they changed their minds and attempted to march in?

The time for entry into the land had passed. Their change of mind was but a new form of disobedience (verse 43).

3. What does Israel’s attempt to claim the Promised Land tell us about sinful human nature?

Sinful human nature ignores God’s will, preferring to make its own rules and decisions. It finds forbidden things particularly inviting. Now that God had forbidden Israel to claim their inheritance, the inheritance suddenly looked inviting. So it is with us. What is forbidden is sweet.

4. Why was the Lord’s statement that *he* had given the hill country of Seir to Esau and Ar to the descendents of Lot an amazing claim to make in the ancient world?

People in the ancient world believed in territorial gods, each having his own sphere of influence. For Israel’s God to claim power over all nations and territories was contrary to common belief.

Apply

5. In 2:15 we are told, “the hand of the LORD was against them, to destroy them from the camp, until they had perished.” Is it correct to say that God *allows* suffering, or is it more correct to say that God *causes* suffering? (See also Job 1:1–2:10.)

Both are correct. But since no suffering enters our lives contrary to God’s will, it is more correct to say that God causes suffering. We must be careful to distinguish suffering from evil. God uses suffering not only to punish evildoers but also for the benefit of believers. Suffering works to strengthen faith. It gives believers an opportunity to glorify God with courage and patience. It may also serve to help bring people back to God if they have drifted away.

The disobedience of the Israelites led God to sentence them to 40 years of wandering in the desert.

Deuteronomy 2:24–3:20

The conquest of the Transjordan

(*The Lutheran Study Bible*, pages 280–282)

Look

This section tells how God began to fight for Israel. Moses reminded the Israelites of how the Lord helped them in their battles against Sihon, king of Heshbon, and Og, king of Bashan. In each case God delivered the Israelite's enemies into their hands.

Make sure you have in your mind the lay of the land. Four nations are mentioned in this section: Edom; Moab; the territory of Sihon, king of Heshbon; and the territory of Og, king of Bashan. Locate these places on the map. Note which lands the Lord gave to Israel and which he did not. Also note that God did not give the land of the Ammonites to Israel.

2:34 “[We] devoted to destruction every city, men, women, and children.” The Hebrew word translated “devoted” refers to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the Lord, usually by totally destroying them (Joshua 6:17). The word carries a spiritual meaning.

Discuss

1. Why did God command Israel to completely destroy all the people east of the Jordan? (See Deuteronomy 2:25; Exodus 15:14–16; Joshua 2:8–13.)
2. Why did the Lord spare Edom, Moab, and Ammon?
3. Scan Numbers chapter 32. What additional information does Numbers give us about the division of the Transjordan? Why was Moses concerned, even angry, when the tribes of Reuben and Gad wanted to receive land east of the Jordan as their allotment?

Apply

4. Humanly speaking, the people of Israel had no chance of defeating the residents of the Transjordan, not to mention those who lived in Canaan proper. What lesson did the Lord teach Israel? How does this lesson apply to us today?

With God's help and guidance, the Israelites enjoyed their first successes on the battlefield.

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Discuss

1. Why did God command Israel to completely destroy all the people east of the Jordan? (See Deuteronomy 2:25; Exodus 15:14–16; Joshua 2:8–13.)

God wanted to strike fear into the hearts of Israel's enemies. That would make taking the land easier.

2. Why did the Lord spare Edom, Moab, and Ammon?

These three nations were descended from close relatives of Abraham, to whom God had given promises. The Edomites were descendants of Esau. Moab and Ammon were descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew.

3. Scan Numbers chapter 32. What additional information does Numbers give us about the division of the Transjordan? Why was Moses concerned, even angry, when the tribes of Reuben and Gad wanted to receive land east of the Jordan as their allotment?

The Numbers account is much more detailed. Moses' anger is much more apparent. Moses was concerned, because it seemed that this was the beginning of another act of rebellion, similar to how the older generation had refused 40 years earlier and brought God's punishment on Israel. All the tribes were needed to capture the land. If two tribes dropped out, the others would become discouraged.

Apply

4. Humanly speaking, the people of Israel had no chance of defeating the residents of the Transjordan, not to mention those who lived in Canaan proper. What lesson did the Lord teach Israel? How does this lesson apply to us today?

Israel learned that with God, nothing is impossible. In recounting the story of the defeat of the two Transjordan kings, Moses was encouraging Israel to move forward and take the land. These lessons teach us to move forward and use the gospel to extend God's kingdom today.

With God's help and guidance, the Israelites enjoyed their first successes on the battlefield.

Deuteronomy 3:21–29

God denied Moses' request to enter the land

(*The Lutheran Study Bible*, page 282)

Look

Verse 27 *“Go up to the top of Pisgah.”* Pisgah was either a high plateau or a mountain on the east side of the Dead Sea from which Moses could view the land that God had promised Israel.

Discuss

1. Abraham lived in Palestine many years, but the only bit of land he owned there was a burial plot for his wife, Sarah, near Mamre. Moses never even set foot in Palestine. Yet both Abraham and Moses inherited the land as God had promised. Explain.
2. How would viewing the land and commissioning Joshua comfort Moses?

Apply

3. God forgave Moses for striking the rock at Meribah (Numbers 20). Yet God's judgment that Moses could not enter the land was not lifted even after repeated requests. In similar fashion, God forgave David's sins of adultery and murder but still decreed a number of serious consequences (2 Samuel 12:11–14). How can the consequences of sin actually be beneficial to a believer?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–10. God does not always answer our prayers as we would like. Paul asked three times that God would remove a thorn in his flesh. God refused, but gave Paul something better. What better thing did God give him? When Moses asked to enter the land, God refused. What better thing did Moses receive?
5. The sin of Moses that angered God happened very late in his life, when he was a mature leader and believer. What lessons can veteran church leaders and mature believers learn from this?

God refused to let Moses enter the land but comforted him with a renewed promise that the Promised Land would soon belong to Israel.

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Discuss

1. Abraham lived in Palestine many years, but the only bit of land he owned there was a burial plot for his wife, Sarah, near Mamre. Moses never even set foot in Palestine. Yet both Abraham and Moses inherited the land as God had promised. Explain.

Both inherited the land through their descendants. In Genesis 15:13–21 God revealed to Abraham the 400 years of slavery and the subsequent possession of the land by his descendants. Moses too would have to be content knowing his people would enter the land.

2. How would viewing the land and commissioning Joshua comfort Moses?

God's invitation to view the land was a renewal of his promise that the Israelites would indeed possess the land. The command to commission Joshua assured Moses that Joshua would take over where Moses had left off and be “the head of this people, and he shall put them in possession of the land” (verse 28).

Apply

3. God forgave Moses for striking the rock at Meribah (Numbers 20). Yet God's judgment that Moses could not enter the land was not lifted even after repeated requests. In similar fashion, God forgave David's sins of adultery and murder but still decreed a number of serious consequences (2 Samuel 12:11–14). How can the consequences of sin actually be beneficial to a believer?

The consequences of sin are a powerful reminder of the seriousness of sin. They serve to correct the believer, lead him to ask for God's forgiveness, and serve as a deterrent for the old man. You might ask the members of the class to share examples of when something similar happened to them.

4. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–10. God does not always answer our prayers as we would like. Paul asked three times that God would remove a thorn in his flesh. God refused, but gave Paul something better. What better thing did God give him? When Moses asked to enter the land, God refused. What better thing did Moses receive?

Paul received a stronger faith, an ability to cope with his thorn in the flesh. Moses soon entered a better land in heaven.

5. The sin of Moses that angered God happened very late in his life, when he was a mature leader and believer. What lessons can veteran church leaders and mature believers learn from this?

Even the most respected and experienced church leaders can fall. If Moses, David, and Peter could fall into sin, then no one is exempt. God forgave these people through the sufferings and death of Jesus and restored them to their former place as his children.

God refused to let Moses enter the land but comforted him with a renewed promise that the Promised Land would soon belong to Israel.