

# THE WORD OF GOD

## FOR THE

# PEOPLE OF GOD

THE SERMONS IN DEUTERONOMY



## Lesson 1: Those Who Went Before Us

Deuteronomy 34

### Lesson Summary and Objectives

#### Summary

A new generation is taking the reins, so they need new leaders and new instructions about how to move forward while honoring their past.

#### Learning Outcomes

- Participants can describe the proper role of the past in determining our choices for the future.
- Participants can identify with the ancient Israelites and the issues they faced.
- Participants can discuss with clarity what it means to be the people of God.

### Teaching Outline

#### Invite

- Tell the class about someone in your past who still influences you. Talk about the attributes of that person that made him/her influential.

Deuteronomy contains accounts of three different sermons that Moses, the leader of God's people at this time, preached to them. They have just finished wandering around in the wilderness for forty years, and they are preparing to enter the land that God promised them long ago. Because they are at a hinge-point between two eras, Moses believes it is important to remind them of their *past* and instruct them on how to live going *forward*. Thus, the book is an exploration of how God's people are to live as a community.

Today's lesson takes us to the *end* of Deuteronomy, where we get a glimpse of the situation in which Israel finds itself. The current leader, Moses, will *not* be joining them in the new land. A new leader, Joshua, is emerging. The people must appreciate the past and look to the future.

#### Inform

We pick up at the end of Moses' life. We will discover later on what has led to this point, but we are *beginning* our lesson series with the *end* of the story.

#### Read Deuteronomy 34:1-12

- Moses climbs up Mount Nebo and looks across to Jericho and all the land the people of Israel will soon occupy (1-3).
- God tells Moses that he (God) is keeping his promise to give the Israelites the land (4a).

- He made the promise to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3, 15:18).
- He made the promise to Abraham's son Isaac (Gen 26:3).
- He made the promise to Isaac's son Jacob (Gen 28:10-15).
- Moses himself will not cross over into the land (Deut 4b).
- With verse 5, we come to a (somewhat distant) retrospective on Moses' death. Moses dies and is buried in Moab (5-6a).
- "To this day" no one knows where his grave is (6b).
  - This suggests, by the way, that this part was written *long* after Moses' death.
  - "To this day" is not a statement one would make just a few months after the event.
- The text notes that although Moses was old (120 years), "his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone" (7).
- The Israelites grieved for their leader for the customary thirty days (8).
- Now we transition to Joshua, who was "filled with the spirit of wisdom" after Moses commissioned him and laid his hands on him (9a).
- Because of that endorsement, the Israelites listened to Joshua (9b).
- The text tells us, immediately after introducing Joshua, that no one like Moses has risen since, because Moses knew the Lord face to face (10) and because he did "signs and wonders" by the power of God in Egypt (11).
- In summary, no one has shown the power Moses did (12).

## Investigate

- Why did God allow Moses to *see* the land if he was not going to be allowed to actually *go* there? Is God just "rubbing it in," or is there a nobler motive?
- Why introduce Joshua (9) and then immediately say that Moses has had no equal (10-12)? Doesn't this seem to undercut Joshua?
- Imagine you are Joshua. As a new leader, how can you navigate the balance between being your own person and leader and honoring Moses?
- What does Joshua need to learn from Moses?
- How might Joshua's future give hope to Moses?
- Many generations after the promises were originally given, what struggles might Joshua face to believe God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? How could Joshua strengthen his belief?

## Illustrate

- What are some images we use to reflect handing over leadership?  
 A few examples: passing the baton, passing the torch  
 Optional: view this video detailing the journey of the 2014 Olympic torch:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jamkdVGTbE>
- Why do we pick those images? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- What concerns did Moses probably have as he handed over the reins to Joshua?
- What general concerns does *anyone* have when handing over the reins to someone else?
- Why do younger generations sometimes disregard who and what came before?

- Why do older generations sometimes cling too heavily to who and what came before?
- Put yourselves in the shoes of another generation. What concerns about God's people today do you think they have? Which of these makes sense to you, and which do you have more difficulty understanding?
- How does the well-known quote "Those who fail to learn history are doomed to repeat it" apply to the context of the people of Deuteronomy? To us in the church?
- How can we honor those who have kept the faith in the past? How do we keep their memory alive so we can be inspired?

## **Inspire**

Ideas for closing:

- Read Psalm 145, noting especially v. 4 ("one generation commends your works to another").
- Have someone lead the song "Faithful Love."
- Ask class members to send a note to someone they know in another generation.
  - If your class is primarily young adults, have them send a note to an older Christian thanking him/her for her example and faithfulness.
  - If your class is primarily middle-aged or older, have them send a note to a young Christian to encourage him/her in her faith.

For next week, read Deut 1-3, thinking more about how we learn from the past.