



Lesson 2: Learn from the Past

Deuteronomy 1-3

Lesson Summary and Objectives

Summary

As God's people prepare to enter the Promised Land, Moses reminds them of the good and bad parts of their past in order to help them live faithfully in the future. God has remained faithful, and while obedience is important and disobedience has consequences, God's grace has always preceded the people's obedience.

Learning Outcomes

- Participants can explain the relationship between love/faitth/obedience.
- 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 evaluate the importance of individual vs. communal responsibility to God.
- Participants can discuss with clarity what it means to be the people of God.

Teaching Outline

Invite

- What is a mistake you made as a kid or teenager that you learned from?
What did you learn?

Inform

After beginning with the *end* (Deut 34) last week, we are now going to the *beginning* of the book. We find Moses and the people of Israel at the end of wandering around in the wilderness. A journey that should have taken them eleven days (Deut 1:2) ended up taking forty years – mainly because of their disobedience and lack of faith.

As the people prepare to enter the new land, Moses pauses to offer some sermons that include instructions on how to live in the new land. But success in the new land can only come after careful reflection on the mistakes of the past. The people must learn from the mistakes of those who came before them.

We are going to read a few excerpts of the first part of the first sermon today.

Read Deuteronomy 1:5-8

- Moses gets up to speak to the people after their forty-year journey that should have taken eleven days (1-3).
- Moses reminds the people of God's command to take the new land that he has given them (6-8).
 - This land was promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as their descendants.
 - None of the people with Moses would have met any of these ancestors, but these names loomed large for God's people.

Read Deuteronomy 1:9-18

- Moses continues telling the story, now noting how God took care of Moses and the people by providing leaders (9-12).
 - The original story here seems to be from Exodus 18.
- These leaders were charged to administer justice and not to show partiality. The people understood the role of these new leaders and agreed with it (13-18).

Read Deuteronomy 1:19-33

- As the people approached the new land, Moses told them to "go up and take possession of it," since "the Lord your God has given you the land" (19-21).
- The people proposed to send out spies to report back on the status of the land, and Moses agreed and sent one from each tribe (22-23).
- The spies brought back a favorable report of the land (24-25).
- However, the people didn't want to go to the land, and they rebelled against God, believing they would be killed in the battle for the new land (26-28).
- Moses tried to reassure the people, reminding them of what God had done before (29-31).
- The people, however, still didn't trust God, even though he had brought them this far (32).

Read Deuteronomy 2:7

- Situated inside a story of wilderness wanderings, there is a verdict about God and his care for his people. God has blessed his people and watched over them. He has been with them the whole time in the wilderness, and they have had all they need (7).

Investigate

- In what ways did God demonstrate faithfulness to Israel, according to the excerpts we just read?
- In what ways did the people demonstrate faithfulness, according to the excerpts we just read?
- In what ways did the people demonstrate faithlessness, according to the excerpts we just read?
- After all God had done to rescue the people from captivity in Egypt, why do you think the people had such trouble trusting God?
- Read the verdict on God in 2:7. What reasons might the Israelites have given for not trusting a God who has been with them so far?

Scan the rest of chapters 2-3. Look for the following three things:

- Ways God demonstrated faithfulness
- Ways the people demonstrated faithfulness
- Ways the people demonstrated faithlessness
 - Do the people seem to get better at obedience as these chapters progress? Why do you think that might be?

Illustrate

- Why are hard times (i.e., times when we feel abandoned by God or unsure of his presence) often so much more vivid in our minds than all the instances of God's faithfulness?
- What else is competing for our attention as we strive to learn from the past?
- What mistakes do God's people (then and now) seem to repeat?
- What past mistakes do God's people now seemed to have learned from?
- What role does obedience play in this discussion?
- Look at Deut 2:7. In what ways is that true for you? In what ways do you have a difficult time believing it?

New Testament Ties

- Read Matt 28:19-20. How does Jesus promise God's faithfulness to his followers?
- Read John 17:11. What does Jesus ask God for, and how does it relate to today's lesson?
- How does Jesus' faithfulness in obedience to God contrast with the Israelites' unfaithfulness?

Inspire

Ideas for closing:

- Read Psalm 136.
- Sing "Great is thy Faithfulness," "Faithful Love," or "The Steadfast Love of the Lord Never Ceases."
- Spend some time as a class thinking of things you've prayed for (as a class) and how God has been faithful.
- Pray that God would give us good memories of our past successes and failures, as well as his steadfast faithfulness, so that we might avoid repeating sins of the past.

For next week, read Deut 4 and 9. Think about the importance of remembering.