



## LESSONS FROM HISTORY

Deuteronomy 1-4

History is a wonderful teacher but one that is often ignored. The book of Deuteronomy begins with a brief and selective review of Israel's history. Israel's history—and our own—should remind us of God's amazing mercy and grace and spur us on to more faithful obedience to Him.

Today in our Wisdom Journey, we arrive at the book of Deuteronomy—the last of the five books written by Moses. *Deuteronomy* means “second law.” And it's true the book repeats much of the law already presented in previous books. But the Hebrew title of this book is “These Are the Words.” That's an interesting title, isn't it? “These are the words.” But should we listen to these words? *Whose words are they?*

Yes, you and I should listen, because God is the one speaking. Now if you think the God of the Old Testament is only about unbending holiness and heart-stopping judgment, you need to know that in Deuteronomy the word *love* is mentioned more than twenty times.

The idea of *rejoicing* because God is *gracious* also occurs several times in this book. So, while Deuteronomy speaks of God's judgment, His motivation is love and His desire is to *bless* His people.

As we begin our journey through this fascinating book, Israel is camped out in the wilderness east of the Jordan River. They have not yet crossed over the Jordan into the promised land.

The purpose of Deuteronomy is clearly stated here in verse 5: “Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab,

Moses undertook to explain this law.” Moses is going to teach God's people about the true and living God who gave this book of the law and how they are to walk with Him.

Down in verse 8, the Lord delivers to Israel their mission:

*“See, I have set the land before you. Go in and take possession of the land that the LORD swore to your fathers . . . and to their offspring after them.”*

This mission has been on God's heart since all the way back in Genesis chapter 12 when He called



Ashtaroth being captured by Tiglath-pileser III



Abraham. Six hundred years later, here is Israel standing on the threshold of that promised land. And God is now urging them to complete the mission.

Beginning here in verse 9, Moses gives Israel three history lessons from the past forty years—three lessons they are going to need to recalibrate their hearts to pursue their mission from God.

The first history lesson is recorded in chapter 1, in verses 9 through 18. Moses reminds Israel that when they were still at Mount Sinai, forty years earlier, he had followed his father-in-law Jethro's advice to choose wise men from among them to act as judges over the people. Moses would handle the more difficult cases. Moses then repeats here in Deuteronomy chapter 1 and verse 14, that the people answered, "The thing that you have spoken is good for us to do."

The second history lesson from Moses, here in verses 19 through 36, is the account of the twelve spies who went in to spy out the promised land. Of course the people of Israel refused to enter the land, and as a result, the Lord caused them to wander in the wilderness for forty years. This history lesson is intended to encourage this new generation of Israelites not to repeat the faithless rebellion of the former generation.

Next, we have the third history lesson—here in verse 37—where Moses talks about his own rebellion in striking the rock, rather than speaking to the rock as God commanded. We read here, "Even with me the LORD was angry . . . and said, 'You also shall not go in there [the promised land].'"

These history lessons point out the obvious fact that even though the judges, and the nation, and even Moses himself fell short of full obedience to God, the grace of God has still brought the nation of Israel to the front porch of the promised land. God always keeps His promises.

In chapters 2 and 3, the history lesson continues as Moses recalls more recent events—their detour around Edom and their victories east of the Jordan. This history lesson is peppered with encouraging words. Note, for example, these words in Deuteronomy 2:

*"These forty years the LORD your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing."* (verse 7)

*"This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you on the peoples . . . who shall . . . tremble and be in anguish because of you."* (verse 25)

Chapter 3 offers more encouragement.

*"Og the king of Bashan came out against us . . . But the LORD said to me, 'Do not fear him, for I have given him and all his people and his land into your hand.'" (verses 1-2)*

*"Your eyes have seen all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings. So will the LORD do to all the kingdoms into which you are crossing. You shall not fear them, for it is the LORD your God who fights for you."* (verses 21-22)

As chapter 3 wraps up, Moses tells the nation his own personal testimony of when he pleaded with the Lord to let him lead the nation into the promised land. The Lord's answer was a clear "no," followed by instructions to begin preparing Joshua to take his place.

I love the fact that Moses is transparent here. He doesn't hide his failure; he doesn't offer excuses; he's not angry with God. Even though he shares with the people the most disappointing moment in his life,



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he highlights the fact that even though he failed the Lord, the Lord did not fail him; in fact, the Lord will not fail to keep His promise to Israel—they will enter the promised land.

Moses highlights that truth throughout chapter 4—that God can be trusted! First, *He can be trusted to be consistent in discipline*. Moses begins in verse 1, calling on the people to obey God: “Listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them.” And in verse 9, he makes the point that God can be trusted to discipline them for disobedience: “Take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen.”

“Watch yourselves very carefully” is the warning of verse 15. “Beware,” he says in verses 16 and 19. Take care, watch, beware—of what? These are all warnings against idolatry and turning their back on God.

You can count on the Lord being consistent in disciplining His children—just as He does with you and me.

Second, *the Lord can be trusted to forgive and show mercy*—your failure, beloved, is never fatal. Repent, and fellowship is restored, just as Moses promised the people here in verse 31: “The LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.”

Let me make one more observation here, and it’s this: *the Lord can be trusted to be motivated by love*. Everything, including His discipline, is motivated by love. It’s who He is. First John 4:8 declares, “God is love.” He is love in essence; and He is love in action. John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Even here as we begin our journey through Deuteronomy, the loving heart of God can be traced all the way to the Savior of the world, who “loved [you] and gave himself for [you]” (Galatians 2:20).

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What is the short and long-term value to you personally of regularly reviewing your own spiritual history with God? How might such a review be helpful as you minister to your yet to be saved family and friends? Who in your life might benefit from your history with God?

Re-read verse 31. Apply its spiritual principle to your worst sin or most difficult struggle, disappointment or loss. How does it feel? What yet to be saved family member or friend might you share your encouragement with?

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