



**DEUTERONOMY 1 - 4 REHEARSAL OF GOD'S LAWS FOR A NEW GENERATION**

We begin studying the last of the five books of the Pentateuch, also called the books or the law of Moses, because God transmitted most of the content of these sections directly to him.

As we have mentioned before, the first five books of the Bible are actually one book in five volumes--or to be more precise, scrolls of that day. This fifth book consists mainly of the last speeches given by Moses under the inspiration of God during the final month of his life (Deut. 1:3). It was primarily written by Moses (Deut. 31:9, 24-26), with the last chapter recorded by someone else, probably Joshua, relating to Moses' own death.

The Hebrew title for Deuteronomy is *Haddebbharim*, "The words," taken from the opening phrase in 1:1, "These are the words." Yet, as many things about our English Bible, the name "Deuteronomy," taken from the Greek Septuagint version of the Bible, is wrongly named.

Unger's Bible Handbook explains, "The name 'Deuteronomy' ('second law,') the *inexact* rendering in Greek of Deut. 17:18) should be rendered, 'This is the copy [or repetition] of the law.' The book, therefore, *does not* contain a 'second law' distinct from the Sinaitic legislation, but is simply a partial restatement and explanation of previous laws of Israel to the new generation which had grown up in the wilderness."

Regarding the contents of the book, Unger continues, "This is distinctly a book of *obedience*. 'Observe *to do*' was the emphasis of Moses to the people. Everything depended on this—life itself, possession of the Promised Land, victory over foes, prosperity and happiness. Blessing is the reward of obedience; the curse, the result of disobedience. It is also distinctly a book of *remembrance* and *retrospect*. It looks back to redemption out of Egypt and discipline and punishment in the wilderness, beholding both the goodness and severity of God. It is a book of *hope* and *prospect*, looking to the future in Canaan and the prophetic forecast of Israel's future.

Then he adds, "Deuteronomy was our Lord's favorite book, as the book of obedience reflecting His own perfect obedience to the Father. Significantly He quoted from this great book in the repelling the disobedience suggested by the tempter [Satan]."

The book begins with the Israelites in front of the Promised Land, Canaan, and on one side of the Jordan river (1:1).

It tells us it was "eleven days' journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir [in Edom] to Kadesh Barnea [their wilderness headquarters]. What did these eleven days of journey mean?

The *JFB Commentary* explains, "Distances are still computed in the East by the hours or days occupied by the journey. A day's journey on foot is about twenty miles--on camels, at the rate of three miles an hour, thirty miles--and by caravans, about twenty-five miles. But the Israelites, with children and flocks, would move at a slow rate."

Now Moses addresses the new generation of Israelites, and under the inspiration of God, proceeds to repeat to them the law, giving more emphasis on applying it to the new land they would now possess. It is interesting that God's law is not only to be taught, but also *the reasons* for it to be kept. Not only the *what* of the law is given, but also the *why*.

He explains the new governmental system that would be established to serve all: "Choose wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you...So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and knowledgeable men, and made them heads over you, leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, leaders of tens, and officers of your tribes" (1:13-15). This is the system of *delegation* that, in principle, is still applied in many governments, businesses, the military, and the Church, where we have a General Council of elders, a Council of elders, a president, regional pastors, local pastors, elders, and deacons to serve the Church.

Now Moses focuses on the judges: "Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is the Lord's. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it'" (1:15-18).

These are still the guidelines for making a good judgment: (1) Use God's laws of righteousness as the standard (2) Don't discriminate a person being judged by race or nationality (3) Give all of them a fair hearing (4) Don't be intimidated by anyone being judged, either because of fame, fortune, family ties or physical strength or stature. (5) Ask God for guidance and that His will be done (6) Take the most difficult cases to your superior.

Now Moses rehearses why it took 40 years to arrive at the Promised Land. He explains the bad report 10 of the 12 spies gave that led to a rebellion and the desire to go back to Egypt. Moses tried to persuade them not to go back, and encouraged them to go on, reminding them of the powerful God they had that defeated the Egyptians, and was present with them through a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

He uses a beautiful analogy of the way God has taken care of them: "The Lord carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place. Yet, for all that, you did not believe the Lord your God" (1:31). As a result, God did not allow the first generation to enter the land, except for Caleb and Joshua who were faithful (1:36, 38).

Chapters two and three consist of reminding them of their most recent victories against the Ammonites and Moabites, and how they have been protected to this day.

He then explains why he can't enter the Promised Land. "The Lord was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me. So the Lord said to me, 'Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter. Go up to the top of Pisgah, and lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east: behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan. But command Joshua, and encourage him and strengthen him, for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you will see' (3:26-28).

Moses is now ready to rehearse the law of God one final time to the new generation, with an emphasis on inhabiting Canaan, so a number of new civil laws are added by God.

This shows an important spiritual principle: God reveals His laws according to the needs of the people. Certainly conditions are different for them than they would be later for the Church—the spiritual principles do not change, but the laws are

given according to their circumstances. This helps us understand what God expects of us today, in contrast with He expected of the Israelites. In the World Tomorrow, God's laws again will be adapted to those circumstances, although the spiritual principles stay the same.

Notice what Moses says to them: "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. 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 eyes have seen what the Lord did at Baal Peor; for the Lord your God has destroyed from among you all the men who followed Baal Peor. But you who held fast to the Lord your God are alive today, every one of you" (4:1-4).

These instructions, in principle, still apply to us today. We are to keep God's commandments, and not add or remove anything from them. We are not to worship God according to the world's way, but be faithful to what God has instructed—faithfully keeping the commandments as they were given—taking into account how the New Testament adapted them to the Church through God's inspiration.

We are spiritually alive because we chose not to follow those who went the way of the counterfeit Christianity, with its mixture of pagan and Christian beliefs and a general abhorrence to God's laws.

Moses then warns them: "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.' 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. And what great nation has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?...And teach them to your children and your grandchildren" (4:6-9).

This is so true. How many people remember the laws of the Babylonians or Egyptians of that day and patterned their modern societies on them? None. But how many modern societies have patterned their laws on these laws? Almost all the successful societies of today have as their basis the

Judeo-Christian principles we are reading about here in Deuteronomy.

As George Washington once said, “It is impossible to govern the world without God and the Bible.” Calvin Coolidge, the 30<sup>th</sup> U.S. president added, “The foundations of our society and our government rest so much on the teachings of the Bible that it would be difficult to support them if faith in these teachings would cease to be practically universal in our country.” Queen Victoria of Great Britain said, “That Book accounts for the supremacy of England.”

This is why it is so important to read this part of the Bible—it still has so much relevance to all of us. It’s principles are timeless.

Moses now explains the first commandment, and how they are to worship God “in spirit and truth” and not make any idols of Him or to Him!

He says, “Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air...And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the Lord your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage. But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people, an inheritance” (4:15-20).

Here the clear prohibition is given that we are not to make any physical likeness of God, and this would include pictures of God and Jesus. We are not to bow down to images of them either. This is why we do not have images of God or Jesus in our worship service, nor use crosses as religious images. God said not to use any physical thing to represent Him. Neither should we worship the starry sky, which is called astrology, or use horoscopes, where the position of the stars at our birth supposedly influence us. This is all idolatry and nonsense. We should only worship God and Jesus in spirit and truth, (John 4:14) as the invisible God (1 Timothy 1:17).

Moses then warns them again not to make any images of God or they will eventually be expelled from the land. “And the Lord will scatter you

among the peoples, and you will be left with few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. And there you will serve gods, the work of men’s hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul...when you turn to the Lord your God and obey His voice (for the Lord your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers” (4:27-31).

He reminds them of the wonders God has done before them for forty years, and that no other time in history has God intervened in this way. He then concludes, “Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the Lord Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is none other. You shall therefore keep His statutes, and His commandments which I command you today; that it may be well with you and your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time” (4:39-40).

With that, Moses is ready to repeat the 10 commandments, but with certain additions to why the fourth commandment is kept. This, we will cover in the next study.