

Deuteronomy 1

This book was first titled “Deuteronomy” in the Septuagint translation. The underlying Greek words mean “second law.” God is not giving a new law to the nation of Israel. Rather, the book is a long retrospective by Moses as he restates the original law received at Mount Sinai and recounts the wanderings of the nation through the desert.

What happened in the meantime? The people had rebelled against the Lord. As first told in Numbers 13-14 and again here in verses 19-46, they refused to trust the word of God but went so far as to say He *hated* them. The result? A whole generation was made to wander in the desert for forty years.

Now they are again arrived at the border of the promised land. The Lord will deliver it to them this time. But He wants to reestablish their loyalty to Him and their faith in His word.

We may find a similar situation in the gospels of Matthew and Mark. At Jesus’ baptism, a voice declares, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Many will follow Him for the next three years, excited by His miraculous acts, but do not acclaim Him as Messiah and Son of God. So again the

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voice speaks from the glory at the mount of transfiguration, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; *listen to him.*” Jesus is about to go to the cross, bringing salvation for all who believe. God makes a plea for obedience, not as a condition for that salvation but as a response to it.

So, then, the theme of the book of Deuteronomy is obedience: the backdrop of Israel’s earlier disobedience and the future blessings of obedience once they take the land. They have failed before and will fail again. But as W. Kelly says, “In a state of ruin the one saving principle is obedience.”

Notes:

1:1 The opening scene is in the Arabah, the dry rift valley between the Dead Sea and Red Sea. Israel is encamped on the east side, in Moab (Numbers 22).

1:4 For the defeat of Sihon and Og, see Numbers 21:21-35.

1:6 Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai.

1:9-18 For Moses’ delegation of authority, see Exodus 18 and Numbers 11.

1:19-46 See Numbers 13-14. Note that in Numbers 13 the Lord tells Moses to send the spies into Canaan, but here it is the people’s request. We must assume that the people proposed it and then the Lord told Moses to allow it.

Questions:

1. The words of Moses take up the first 33 chapters of Deuteronomy. Why do you think the Lord gives Moses this lengthy sermon to deliver to the people?
2. Verse 2 says that the current encampment of the Israelites is eleven days journey from Horeb (Sinai). Why is that ironic?

3. Where is Kadesh-Barnea?
4. What principles of justice are laid out in verses 9-18? Do any of them apply to elders in the church?
5. In verse 22, the people of Israel request a reconnaissance of the land of Canaan before they will attack it. What does this say about them?
6. What fundamental precept of faith in God is violated in verse 27?
7. Read verse 41. It appears the children of Israel have repented their earlier refusal and are now ready to invade. Why does the Lord not give them success? Why do our own words of repentance sometimes seem to have little effect?