

BIBLE BRIEFING

“Memories”

DEUTERONOMY 1 - 3

Introduction

“My memory is nearly gone,” wrote John Newton at age eighty-two, “but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior.”

That’s the purpose Moses had in mind when he delivered the series of sermons we call the Book of Deuteronomy: he wanted the people to remember the things that were really important.

“Remember,” and its counterpart, “lest you forget,” is the theme running through the book:

Deuteronomy 4:9 Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, **lest you forget** the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren,

Deuteronomy 4:23 Take heed to yourselves, **lest you forget** the covenant of the Lord your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the Lord your God has forbidden you.

Deuteronomy 5:15 And **remember** that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Deuteronomy 6:12 *then* beware, **lest you forget** the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

Deuteronomy 8:2 And you shall **remember** that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you *and* test you, to know what *was* in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

Deuteronomy 8:11 “Beware that you **do not forget** the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today,

Deuteronomy 9:7 “**Remember! Do not forget** how you provoked the Lord your

God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord.

Deuteronomy 24:9 **Remember** what the Lord your God did to Miriam on the way when you came out of Egypt!

Deuteronomy 25:17 “**Remember** what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt,

The Hebrew title is, “*The Words*,” taken from the opening phrase of the book, “*These are the words...*” Jewish people have also called it *Misneh Hattorah*, “repetition of the Law.” This is translated into Greek as *To Deuteronomion Touto*, “This Second Law.” It’s not really a second Law; Moses is giving God’s Law a second time, to the new generation. Many of them were not born, or were children, at Mount Sinai when the Law was first given.

Some refer to it as the “Book of Remembrance,” because of the many references to remembering – some of which I cited. The people must remember two things:

1. When they prosper, it is God who has prospered them, and not themselves.
2. When they disobey, God will discipline them, as He disciplined their fathers before them.

Two key verses would be,

Deuteronomy 30:19 I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;

Deuteronomy 30:20 that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He *is* your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”

The generation which had experienced deliverance from Egypt was dead – all except Moses, Caleb and Joshua. Moses was soon to die. A new generation stood on the frontiers of the Promised Land, a new leader stood ready to conquer. New challenges loomed ahead, new dangers, new prospects.

In a series of sermons by their 120 year old leader, Moses sought to prepare the people for their future by reminding them of their past.

If you like outlines, you can identify four 'looks' in the book:

1. A **Backward** Look at the History of Israel in chapters one through three.
2. An **Inward** Look at the Holiness of Israel in chapters four through eleven.
3. A **Forward** Look at the Heritage of Israel in chapters twelve through thirty.
4. And, finally, an **Upward** Look by the Hero of Israel in chapters thirty-one through thirty-four.

Moses' first sermon, the *backward look*, is in the first three chapters. The people of Israel are at Kadesh Barnea in the fortieth year after their deliverance from Egypt, and their leader Moses is about to expound God's Law and prepare the new generation to enter Canaan.

Deuteronomy 1:1 These *are* the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on this side of the Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain opposite Suph, between Paran, Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab.

Deuteronomy 1:2 *It is* eleven days' journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea.

Deuteronomy 1:3 Now it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first *day* of the month, *that* Moses spoke to the children of Israel according to all that the Lord had given him as commandments to them,

Deuteronomy 1:4 after he had killed Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who dwelt at Ashtaroth in Edrei.

Deuteronomy 1:5 On this side of the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses began to explain this law, saying,

After the nation left Egypt, they marched to Mount Sinai, arriving on the fifteenth day of the third month. There the Lord revealed Himself in power and great glory. He delivered the Law to Moses who declared it to the people, and they accepted the terms of the covenant. The Jews left Sinai on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year after the Exodus, which means they were at Sinai not quite a year. While the nation was camped at Sinai, the tabernacle was constructed and the priests and Levites were set apart to serve the Lord.

They were eleven days away from the Promised Land, but they were one year preparing!

1. God is into preparation.
2. But, when He says you are ready – *then you'd better go!*

Deuteronomy 1:6 “The Lord our God spoke to us in Horeb, saying: ‘You have dwelt long enough at this mountain.

“Horeb” is another name for Mount Sinai. They couldn’t stay there. As glorious as the Law and the Tabernacle were, it was all only preparation for the Promised Land. You’ve got to move forward, fight the battles God has ordained for you.

Deuteronomy 1:7 Turn and take your journey, and go to the mountains of the Amorites, to all the neighboring *places* in the plain, in the mountains and in the lowland, in the South and on the seacoast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the River Euphrates.

Deuteronomy 1:8 See, I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to your fathers - to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - to give to them and their descendants after them.’

Philosopher George Santayana wrote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” The first thing Moses did in his farewell discourse was to review Israel’s past and remind the new generation who they were and how they got where they were.

Deuteronomy 1:9 “And I spoke to you at that time, saying: ‘I alone am not able to bear you.

Deuteronomy 1:10 The Lord your God has multiplied you, and here you *are* today, as the stars of heaven in multitude.

Deuteronomy 1:11 May the Lord God of your fathers make you a thousand times more numerous than you are, and bless you as He has promised you!

Deuteronomy 1:12 How can I alone bear your problems and your burdens and your complaints?

Deuteronomy 1:13 Choose wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you.’

Deuteronomy 1:14 And you answered me and said, ‘The thing which you have told *us* to do *is* good.’

Deuteronomy 1:15 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 for your tribes.

Deuteronomy 1:16 “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.

Deuteronomy 1:17 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* God’s. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.’

Deuteronomy 1:18 And I commanded you at that time all the things which you should do.

Accustomed to the comfort of their camp at Sinai, the people resented the hardships of their journey to the Promised Land. They forgot the distress of their years of slavery in Egypt and even wanted to turn around and go back! They got accustomed to the manna that God sent them from heaven each morning and soon took it for granted, and they longed for the savory meat and vegetables they had enjoyed eating in Egypt. No wonder Moses got discouraged and cried out to the Lord! He wanted to quit and he even asked God to take his life!

God’s answer to Moses’ prayer was to give him seventy elders to assist him in managing the affairs of the camp. Moses was a great leader and a spiritual giant, but even he could do only so much. He and the elders organized the nation by thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, with competent leaders in charge of each division. This created a chain of command between Moses and the people so that he didn’t have to get involved in every minor dispute. He could devote himself to talking with the Lord and helping to settle the most important problems in the camp.

Deuteronomy 1:19 “So we departed from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw on the way to the mountains of the Amorites, as the Lord our God had commanded us. Then we came to Kadesh Barnea.

Deuteronomy 1:20 And I said to you, ‘You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the Lord our God is giving us.

Deuteronomy 1:21 Look, the Lord your God has set the land before you; go up *and possess it*, as the Lord God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.’

Deuteronomy 1:22 “And every one of you came near to me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.’

Deuteronomy 1:23 “The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from *each* tribe.

Deuteronomy 1:24 And they departed and went up into the mountains, and came to the Valley of Eshcol, and spied it out.

Deuteronomy 1:25 They also took *some* of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought *it* down to us; and they brought back word to us, saying, ‘*It is* a good land which the Lord our God is giving us.’

The people requested that Moses appoint a committee to search out the land. Israel would then know the state of the land and be better able to prepare their plan of attack. This is the approach any army would use - it’s called “reconnaissance” - *but Israel wasn’t just any army*. They were God’s army and the Lord had already done the reconnaissance for them. From the very beginning, God had told Moses that Canaan was a good land flowing with milk and honey, and He even gave the names of the nations living in the land.

In Numbers 13:2, it might seem that this plan to send spies into Canaan originated with God, not the people. But a careful look shows that Numbers 13:2 deals mainly with the number of spies to send (12) and how they should be chosen (one from each tribe). So, though the plan did not originate with God (is started with the people, and was approved by Moses), the LORD essentially said: “If you are going to send spies, send twelve, and have them represent the whole nation by sending one from each tribe.” God accommodated their weakness; it would turn out badly.

Deuteronomy 1:26 “Nevertheless you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God;

Deuteronomy 1:27 and you complained in your tents, and said, ‘Because the Lord hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.

Deuteronomy 1:28 Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, “The people *are* greater and taller than we; the cities *are* great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.”

Deuteronomy 1:29 “Then I said to you, ‘Do not be terrified, or afraid of them.

Deuteronomy 1:30 The Lord your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes,

Deuteronomy 1:31 and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.’

Deuteronomy 1:32 Yet, for all that, you did not believe the Lord your God,

Deuteronomy 1:33 who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day.

Deuteronomy 1:34 “And the Lord heard the sound of your words, and was angry, and took an oath, saying,

Deuteronomy 1:35 ‘Surely not one of these men of this evil generation shall see that good land of which I swore to give to your fathers,

Deuteronomy 1:36 except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and his children I am giving the land on which he walked, because he wholly followed the Lord.’

Deuteronomy 1:37 The Lord was also angry with me for your sakes, saying, ‘Even you shall not go in there.

Deuteronomy 1:38 Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.

Deuteronomy 1:39 ‘Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.

Deuteronomy 1:40 But *as for* you, turn and take your journey into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea.’

When the Jews heard God’s judgment declared, they tried to undo their sin in their own way, but they only made matters worse.

Deuteronomy 1:41 “Then you answered and said to me, ‘We have sinned against the Lord; we will go up and fight, just as the Lord our God commanded us.’ And when everyone of you had girded on his weapons of war, you were ready to go up into the mountain.

Deuteronomy 1:42 “And the Lord said to me, ‘Tell them, “Do not go up nor fight, for I *am* not among you; lest you be defeated before your enemies.”’

Deuteronomy 1:43 So I spoke to you; yet you would not listen, but rebelled against the command of the Lord, and presumptuously went up into the mountain.

Deuteronomy 1:44 And the Amorites who dwelt in that mountain came out against you and chased you as bees do, and drove you back from Seir to Hormah.

Deuteronomy 1:45 Then you returned and wept before the Lord, but the Lord would not listen to your voice nor give ear to you.

Deuteronomy 1:46 “So you remained in Kadesh many days, according to the days that you spent *there*.

They repented; but God could not renew them to the place they were at prior to their sin. They must now bear the consequences of their sin. They must submit to His discipline.

Their failure at Kadesh-Barnea is one of the most significant events in the Old Testament. It is the background, and key, to understanding some of the most difficult verses in all the Bible – Hebrews Six.

Chapters two and three summarize the prior conflicts and conquests of Israel. The first eight verses of chapter two describe the animosity of the Edomites. The Edomites were descended from Jacob's brother, Esau, and therefore were related to the Jews. Moses at first tried a friendly approach, but the Edomites wouldn't accept their brothers on any terms; so Moses led the people by another route that bypassed them. The Edomites should have shown Israel brotherly love, but instead they preferred to perpetuate the ancient feud between Jacob and Esau.

Family feuds are the worst... And it's no different among Christians in the Church!

Just as the Edomites were not attacked and conquered because they were related to Jacob, so the Moabites and Ammonites were spared because they were the descendants of Lot, the nephew of Abraham. Verses nine through twenty three of chapter two tell that history. Neither the Moabites nor the Ammonites deserved this kindness, but the Lord sometimes blesses people because of their relationship to other people.

Of interest in this section:

Deuteronomy 2:14 And the time we took to come from Kadesh Barnea until we crossed over the Valley of the Zered was thirty-eight years, until all the generation of the men of war was consumed from the midst of the camp, just as the Lord had sworn to them.

Deuteronomy 2:15 For indeed the hand of the Lord was against them, to destroy them from the midst of the camp until they were consumed.

This is a very kind summary. Moses does not dwell upon the massive failure.

Sihon and Og were powerful kings in the region of the Amorites on the east side of the Jordan, and the Lord had determined to destroy them and their people. That history is recounted from verse twenty-four of chapter two all the way to verse eleven of chapter three.

As he did with the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites, Moses first made Sihon an offer of goodwill, promising to pass through the land peacefully and pay for whatever food and water the people consumed. However, the Lord wanted Israel to defeat Sihon and seize all his land, so he hardened the king's heart as He had hardened the heart of Pharaoh in Egypt. When Sihon led his army out to attack Israel, God gave Moses a great victory and all the people of the land were slaughtered.

The victory over Sihon gave the Israelites encouragement to confront Og, and they won that battle as well and took over all the land. Look at verse eleven of chapter three:

Deuteronomy 3:11 "For only Og king of Bashan remained of the remnant of the giants. Indeed his bedstead was an iron bedstead. (Is it not in Rabbah of the people of Ammon?) Nine cubits is its length and four cubits its width, according to the standard cubit.

The fact that Og was a giant didn't seem to create any of the problems that the older generation had feared.

The victories over Sihon and Og, the two mighty kings of the lands east of the Jordan, were themselves preparation for the battles Israel would fight when they arrived in Canaan. The new generation was getting its first real taste of warfare and was quickly discovering that Jehovah could be trusted to overcome every enemy. All that the army had to do was obey God's orders, trust His promises, and courageously confront the enemy.

A second step of preparation for conquest was the settling of the two-and-a-half tribes in the territory that had been captured on the east side of the Jordan. This land was given to the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh. They especially wanted this land because they were herdsmen and the territory was suitable for their livestock. The two-and-a-half tribes were allowed to fortify the cities for their families to live in and also to build pens for their flocks and herds. But it was understood that the men of war in the tribes would cross the Jordan with the other tribes and help their brothers conquer the land. Once that was done and all the tribes had been assigned to their inheritance, the men of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh could

return home to their families. The record of this is in verses twelve through twenty of chapter three.

Deuteronomy 3:21 “And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying, ‘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 through which you pass.

Deuteronomy 3:22 You must not fear them, for the Lord your God Himself fights for you.’

Joshua would lead once Moses was gone. At the command of the Lord, Moses publicly laid hands on Joshua and with the help of Eleazar the high priest consecrated him to his new office. Moses also began to hand over some of his authority to Joshua so that by the time Moses left the scene, Joshua was ready to take charge. Joshua was a man of great faith and experience and was fully qualified to lead God’s people. He had served as Moses’ servant and as leader of the army, and he had been on Sinai with Moses. At Kadesh Barnea he proved his faith and obedience by standing with Moses and Caleb against the ten spies and the whole unbelieving nation.

Still, Moses had this charge for him. He, too, must “remember” what he had seen and experienced. “Fear” lurks around every corner, seeking to quench faith.

Moses was not shy about recounting his own failure, for which he would not be allowed to set foot in the land:

Deuteronomy 3:23 “Then I pleaded with the Lord at that time, saying:

Deuteronomy 3:24 ‘O Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what god *is there* in heaven or on earth who can do *anything* like Your works and Your mighty *deeds*?

Deuteronomy 3:25 I pray, let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon.’

Deuteronomy 3:26 “But 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.

Deuteronomy 3:27 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.

Deuteronomy 3:28 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.’

Deuteronomy 3:29 “So we stayed in the valley opposite Beth Peor.

Again I would say that some things, though repented of, **cannot ever be renewed**. Still, Moses was about to enter eternity; and he would later stand in the Promised Land, on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus. And he is probably one of the Two Witnesses in the Book of the Revelation who return to the Promised Land during the Tribulation to challenge the anti-Christ.

Moses’ death is not recorded until chapter 34, so that the whole book of Deuteronomy is framed between the announcement of Moses’ impending death and the announcement of his actual death. The book is thus, in a sense, the spiritual testament of Moses, Israel’s great Lawgiver.

Conclusion

Moses was the great law-giver, and represented relationship with God through the Law. This could give a person a “wilderness” kind of relationship with God, but could never bring them into the Promised Land kind of relationship with God. Only Joshua could do that - and the Hebrew name Joshua exactly corresponds to the name Jesus! Only Jesus can bring us into a “Promised Land” relationship with God.