

DEUTERONOMY

STUDY TWO | CHAPTER 4 : 1-40

THE PRIVILEGE
& PURPOSE
OF GRACE




 ST. JOHN'S
VANCOUVER

INTRODUCTION

Last week we started our series near the end of the book, in chapter 27, with the covenant renewal ceremony at Mt. Ebal, which is a rare appearance of descriptive action. Most of the book of Deuteronomy is actually a series of sermons preached by Moses to Israel on the threshold of entering the Promised Land.

Here in our second study, we're getting the tail end of Moses' first sermon in Deut 1.6-4.40. Not only is he recounting Israel's most recent history, but he is also laying out many of the major themes of the book. Moses will not be going into the land with Israel, so he appeals to them one last time as their pastor, in the hope of preparing them for a huge transition under the new leadership of Joshua. Will they choose to live as the faithful people of God by hearing and keeping His word, or will they follow in the steps of their immediate forebears? They have the choice of their lives to make.

STUDY FRAMEWORK

-  Bible Passage
-  Study Notes + Study Questions
-  Prayer

Bible Passage

DEUT 4 : 1-40

- 1 And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.
- 2 You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.
- 3 Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal-Peor, for the LORD your God destroyed from among you all the men who followed the Baal of Peor.
- 4 But you who held fast to the LORD your God are all alive today.
- 5 See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. 6 Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'
- 7 For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?
- 8 And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?
- 9 Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children—
- 10 how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may

let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.'

- 11 And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom.
- 12 Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice.
- 13 And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone.
- 14 And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess.
- 15 Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire.
- 16 Beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female,
- 17 the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air,
- 18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth.
- 19 And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.
- 20 But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day.
- 21 Furthermore, the LORD was angry with me because of you, and he



swore that I should not cross the Jordan, and that I should not enter the good land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

- 22 For I must die in this land; I must not go over the Jordan. But you shall go over and take possession of that good land.
- 23 Take care, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you.
- 24 For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.
- 25 When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, so as to provoke him to anger,
- 26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed.
- 27 And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you.
- 28 And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.
- 29 But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.
- 30 When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice.
- 31 For 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.

- 32 For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of.
- 33 Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live?
- 34 Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war; by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?
- 35 To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him.
- 36 Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you. And on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire.
- 37 And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power,
- 38 driving out before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day,
- 39 know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.
- 40 Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time.”

Study Notes

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A covenant is a solemn commitment made between two parties. Deuteronomy is a covenant document. Israel is being delivered from an oppressive political relationship (under Egypt and sin) into a life-giving and personal relationship with the LORD God.

STRUCTURE

This is a big passage. Moses reminds Israel not only of their rebellion, but also of God's grace in calling them, rescuing them, revealing Himself to them, and fighting for them. Everything He has done for them is because of who He is (v.37). This brief history of the relationship between God and His people frames the laws which come immediately after this. Here's one way you could divide the passage up:

- vv.1-8: Israel's purpose and identity
- vv.9-15: Remembering the encounter with God at Sinai
- vv.16-24: The danger of idolatry
- vv.25-28: The consequence of idolatry
- vv.29-31: The faithfulness of God despite idolatry
- vv.32-40: God in all of human history

IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

- Deut 4:1-40 is the last phase of Moses' introductory speech at the beginning of the book.

- Before this passage, we get a detailed account of Israel's rebellion in the wilderness. It is not just an account of their sin, but of God's continuing with them despite their sin.
- In Chapter 5 we get the Ten Commandments, God's first laws.

IN DEUTERONOMY

- v.1 "so that you may live" is a frequent theme (see 4.40; 5.16; ;8:1; 12.25; 16.20; 30.19). God's Law leads to flourishing!
- v.36 "Out of heaven he let you hear his voice" is a remarkable and terrifying statement. See also 5.22-28 and 18.16.

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- v.3 "the Baal of Peor" refers to the grim episode in Numbers 25
- v.6 "in the sight of the peoples..." takes us to Gen 12, when God promised to bless all nations through Abram and his family.
- v.10 "On that day..." refers to the episode at Sinai in Exodus 19.
- "...at Horeb..." Horeb is the name the writer of Deuteronomy gives to Mt. Sinai, where Israel first received the law.
- v.22 "I must die in this land" refers to the judgement God gave to Moses in Numbers 20:2-13.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- v.24 "The LORD your God is a consuming fire" is found in Heb 12.29. Jesus' ministry is also described similarly e.g. Matt 3.12.

Study Questions

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

What are some of the repeated commands Moses gives Israel?

What are the questions Moses asks Israel to consider?

How does Moses conclude his speech? Pay attention to v.39 in particular.

What major themes do you notice in the passage?

STUDY TIPS

Ⓐ Pray

Ⓑ Look closely

- Commands
- Descriptions of God or His People
- Words and phrases
- Repetitions, Contrasts, Surprises
- Big Bible Words
- Characters
- Dialogue – who is talking to whom?
- Setting (timeline and place) – does it change?

Ⓒ Look at the context

- What kind of writing is this? (eg. narrative, poetry, teaching)
- How does the dialogue progress?
- Divide the passage into its natural sections, looking for transitions in setting, speaker, or theme can help with this
- Create a heading for each section
- Summarize the section in your own words

Ⓓ Share

- In your small group share something you noticed



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Read chapters 1-3 for the immediate context. If time does not allow, read Deut 1:1-8, and 4:44-49. Why do you think Moses has recounted this history here?

What does v.1 tell us about why God gives His Law? Why do you think God is giving Israel the law before they enter the land?

Why is idolatry forbidden? What does idolatry lead to?

STUDY TIPS

Ⓐ Look at the context

- ▶ Read the passage immediately before and after
- ▶ How does the context help us understand the meaning of the text?
- ▶ Look up cross references.
- ▶ How do they help us better understand the passage?
- ▶ In your small group share how the context has added to your understanding of this week's passage.

Ⓑ Summarize the big idea

- ▶ So, what's the main idea of the passage? How would you title this passage?
- ▶ In your small group share the main idea

Ⓒ Stop to pray

- ▶ Thank God for all he has already revealed to you, and ask him to help you see Jesus more clearly, and love him more deeply, through the next steps of your study.

WHAT DOES IT REVEAL?

Moses spends a great deal of time recounting what God has done for his people, and these scenes reveal significant details. What does God want them to know? How does He want them to respond?

What do we learn about what covenantal love looks like for God and for us?

Read John 15:1-17. Jesus tells us that He is also committed to “living with His people” or “abiding with them.” What does Jesus reveal about what it means for us to love Him as His covenantal people?

Take some of the truths you have learnt about God and His purposes for you, and turn them into a prayer to Him before moving on to reflect on how you will respond.



HOW WILL I RESPOND?

Why does God ask us to watch ourselves (vv.9, 15, 23)?

What is so disastrous about idolatry?

What do you find hardest about loving Christ in the way he calls us to?

What helps you to love Christ like this?

Prayer

Our hearts chase after all sorts of unhealthy things. God calls us and invites us to be healthy and whole, in relationship with Him. Take the convictions and encouragements which the Holy Spirit has helped you to see, and offer them as a prayer to God. Invite Him to be at work in your life.