

Read the Bible in a Year

Week 14 – September 5th, 2021

Read on Your Own this Week:

Psalm 40-42

Luke 9-12

Readings in Class:

Deuteronomy 1-17

Introduction to Deuteronomy

“These are the Words.” That is the Hebrew name for this book that we call Deuteronomy, or what means “second law.” This book is the fitting end to one of the most important sections of the Bible: The Torah, or the Books of Moses.

It begins on the banks of the Jordan River as the People of Israel are close to crossing over in order to take possession of the Promised Land that God has given them. But this is not the same group that began the journey from Egypt. What normally takes about two weeks to do, the Israelites took forty years. The old generation is now gone, having resisted God’s promises, they were left to die in the wilderness. It is now the next generation that is poised to receive God’s promised land.

There is but one hold over remaining before the people can cross over: Moses himself. Besides Joshua and Caleb, Moses is the last link to the past. And as the representative of God to the people, he has one last message to them and one final task: giving the covenant to a new generation of Israelites, most of whom do not remember Egypt nor the covenant.

Deuteronomy is Moses clarifying, teaching, and giving the new covenant to the new generation. He is preparing them to receive the Promised Land and to live faithfully within it as God’s chosen people. Moses takes a look at their chaotic last forty years and uses that as the basis for what he sees will happen to this people moving into the future.

As Moses looks ahead, he also sees Jesus. In several points we are told that Moses tell the people that one day, God will send someone “like him” from “among their own brothers” whom “they should listen to.” At the end of Deuteronomy, we are given a note that makes us aware that “There has not appeared a person like Moses, who talked with God face to face.” In Jesus, we see that this promise has come when Jesus notes that no one had ever seen God except the only one who comes from God.

Outline of Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy is a set of four speeches or sermons from Moses. Here is an outline of how it plays out:

1. Preamble (1:1-5)
2. Historical Recap 1:6-3:29
3. Retelling the Covenant (4:1-11:32)
4. Specific Laws of the Covenant (12:1-26:19)
5. Interlude: Preservation of the Covenant (27:1-26)
6. Blessings for keeping the covenant and Curses for forsaking the covenant
7. Moses' last words and final blessings (29:1-33:29)
8. Moses' Death (34:1-12)

Retelling the Law: With a new generation means a renewal of the covenant between God and his people. Moses makes it known to them through the bulk of the book that the job of the people is to remember God and hear God. Perhaps one of the most quoted verses in the Old Testament comes during this admonition, which is called "The Schema." "Hear O Israel. The Lord our God the Lord is one." The call for the people to 'hear' is an important theme in the Old Testament and as the story plays out in books to come, one that the people fail to do. This becomes an important theme in the New Testament when Jesus calls and says, "he who has ears to hear, let him hear."

The King: Noteworthy in chapter 17 is the stipulations that Moses gives for the king the Israelites will no doubt one day want. This will come to fruition in 1 Samuel 8, but here Moses knows that this is where the people will go. So he lays out for them rules for how the king is to be king. This becomes the foundation for the critique of the failure of the Israelite kings that are presented in 1 & 2 Kings. Some higher critics think this section was added later by editors of the Old Testament, but it is better and faithful to say that Moses anticipates their future in his prophetic proclamation.

Idols: The warning that is given to the people of Israel throughout the book is the admonition to flee from idolatry, lest the people's around them that they are going in to dispossess should become a snare to them. To combat the pagan tendency to worship anywhere, the Lord sets up one place of worship where He himself promises to be. Moses sets up the command for the future placement and building of the temple, that God himself elected to choose. 2 Samuel 24 notes when this comes to fruition when David buys the land that will be the location that God chooses for his temple and name to be placed.

God's Election: Israel will not conquer or occupy the Promised Land because of their might or righteousness. Repeated over and over throughout the letter is the call from Moses to note that God has been faithful. God had chosen them because of his promises that he made to the Patriarchs. God doesn't choose based on their success and ability but because of their good graces. This theme is the bedrock for what we would call "saved by grace alone." Here in the Old Testament, God works still in the same way. Through Christ then, is how we come to know this salvation as well.