

## Deuteronomy's Major Themes

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Today we are going to get more involved in the book of Deuteronomy. For those of you who may not be aware, this is the third time that I will have gone through portions of the book of Deuteronomy—the third time since the Church of the Great God came into existence. It is my attempt to do something that is commanded by God to be done. I want you to see the source of my authority here in Deuteronomy 31:6-11.

**Deuteronomy 31:6-11** Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you." Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed." So Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying: "At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing.

That phrase, "read this law" is defined in other portions of the Bible. It is not merely a matter of my sitting down or standing up here and just reading right through the book. It means, "to expound upon, give the sense of," so that at least portions of it are understood.

I feel, in looking back at the first time, that I made a very poor effort at it. That was in 1994 when we were holding the Feast of Tabernacles in Kansas

City. The second time was in 2001, not long after the World Trade Center had been destroyed. At that time I think I did it with a little bit of improvement over what I did in 1994. This time I hope I am able to raise the level of instruction somewhat higher again.

The importance of the book of Deuteronomy is intensified by the fact that this is the only book in the entire Bible that God *commands* it to be read. It is not unimportant despite the fact that the book has a funny name. I will explain a little bit later. If He gives a command, you ought to understand that there is good reason behind His giving that command. The instruction contained within it is invaluable to those who are striving for the Kingdom of God.

As I was preparing the sermons this year I rediscovered that there is far more in this book for one man and one Feast of Tabernacles than I can cover. Therefore I am apologizing, because so much is going to be left out.

One man's comment on this book was, "Deuteronomy is the longest farewell speech in the history of the world." That is exactly what it is—a farewell speech, commanded by God, given by Moses at the end of his life, at the end of the 40-year journey across the wilderness.

Another little interesting thing about the book of Deuteronomy is that most Old Testament books cover a great deal of history, and in some cases pretty long expanses of time. The book of Genesis, for instance, covers about two thousand years of history. Exodus covers roughly about 80 years; Leviticus seems to have been written within a several months period as the Tabernacle was being constructed. The book of Numbers covers no more than 38 or 40 years.

Deuteronomy records a little bit of past history of God's involvement with Israel, and prophecies as well about some historical events that are even today being fulfilled. Deuteronomy literally covers only 70 days' worth of time—the final 70 days of Moses' life. However, it gets even narrower than that in terms of time, because 30 days of that 70 are passed over in one sentence.

The bulk of the book is devoted to what was said by Moses in about the final 30 days of his tremendously meaningful and tumultuous life. It was a most important life. In fact one commentator stated that he believed Moses' life was, apart from Jesus Christ, the most meaningful life for good ever lived by any other person in history. What Moses said in those 30 days is so important that God ordered it to be read every seven years so that it is indelibly impressed during a lifetime in peoples' minds.

**Deuteronomy 17:14-15** When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,' you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.

**Deuteronomy 17:18** Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites.

Not only is the book of Deuteronomy to be read to the people every seven years, the king had to personally write in his own handwriting every word that is in this book as a copy. Did they do it? I doubt it very much, and it may be one of the reasons why Israel never really obeyed God except when they had a king who probably *did* do it, like a David, like a Josiah, like a Hezekiah; but most of them did not. I think the evidence is in the historical record that is left in this book, because they were not impressed to rule the way God said they should.

**Deuteronomy 17:18-19** Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites, and it shall be with him, and he shall read it **every day of his life**, . . .

It does not quite say that. It says "all the days of his life," so we know, at the very least he was commanded to read it frequently. I added my "every day" because I think that would be even better, because I know how forgetful I am.

**Deuteronomy 17:19-20** And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, [Why?] that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

Are you beginning to get a feel for how important this book is in terms of rulership? Brethren, it may be that we will never rule over anything in this life. We are looking forward to rule in the Kingdom of God, but everybody is responsible before God to rule his own life. That is where its importance lies for you and me. We are to *personally* be paying attention as if we are already a king and responsible to God for what is written in this book.

I would have to say, from God's own inspiration of this word, that we are dealing with a book of major significance to our lives. This book contains significant actions and events and their meaning to Israel and to our purpose in God's plan. Why is this so important to Christians? Because Israel is the most significant biblical type of the church.

I wrote myself an interesting little note in the margin, which might have some application here in this day and age regarding verse 15. It says, "You may not set a foreigner over you who is not your brother."

Is Barack Obama really a citizen of the United States? There are very interesting questions about that—that he is *not* a citizen of the United States. He was born in Kenya. He was adopted and raised in Indonesia, receiving a Muslim education. He did not move to Hawaii until he was seven or eight years old. Even though his mother apparently was from Hawaii, that does not confer citizenship simply because he was born to an American woman. He was born in Kenya, and their law says he is a Kenyan.

Interesting things are occurring. I do not know how it will be worked out, but the powers that be—the privileged ones—will be able to get things done. We shall see.

Let us touch on an important verse that concerns you, me, and the church.

**Galatians 6:16** And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

The "Israel of God" is the church. In Romans 9 the Apostle Paul makes it clear that there are two Israels in existence today—at least in the mind of God and in the mind of you and me as well. There remains Israel, scattered over the northwest nations of Europe, the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand. They are all Israelitish in racial quality, but the other Israel is the church, and God specifically says it is His. It is the Israel of (possessed by) God.

There is a physical Israel—a carnal Israel. There is a spiritual Israel. The book of Deuteronomy applies to you and me every bit as much as it applied anciently to the physical nation of Israel. We are to take from it the spiritual instruction that is contained within it. That is where its significance and value lie. The spiritual Israel—the church—is the body of Jesus Christ. It is the Christian community. It is the holy nation of I Peter 2:9.

Adam Clarke said the following in his introduction to his commentary on the book of Deuteronomy. "It may be safely asserted that very few parts of the Old Testament scripture can be read with greater profit by the genuine Christian than Deuteronomy." The very first sentence in the Deuteronomy volume of *"The Bible Speaks To Us"* commentary series says this: "No Old Testament book has exerted a greater influence on the formation and development of both Jewish and Christian thought and practice than Deuteronomy."

The very first sentence in the introduction to *The New International Biblical Commentary* says, "Deuteronomy has been aptly described as the heartbeat of the Old Testament. Feel the pulse of Deuteronomy, and you are in touch with the life and rhythm of the entire Hebrew Bible."

The New Testament contains eighty-six quotations from Deuteronomy, scattered through 17 of the New Testament's 27 books. Jesus, and Paul especially, quoted from it frequently. Deuteronomy's message is clear and unequivocal because Moses communicated *living* words, not detached truths

from a distant past. That is why these men say what they do about the book of Deuteronomy. There is just not a more valuable book for a Christian in the Old Testament than Deuteronomy. The "words are living," is the way they describe it, and have every bit the application to the church as they did to Israel.

I mentioned that Deuteronomy is quoted 86 times. Do you know in that very famous Matthew 4 and Luke 4 where Satan challenges Jesus, that every answer Jesus gave to those temptations was quoted from Deuteronomy? Every one. I think there is a message there, because what was Satan trying to create in Jesus? An idolatry. There is no book in this Bible that hammers on idolatry more than the book of Deuteronomy. That was Israel's main stumblingblock, and that is the church's main stumbling block—getting other gods before the true God, submitting to *those* gods rather than to the true God, and giving *them* our love and devotion rather than the true God.

John A. Thompson, author of *The Deuteronomy Volume of the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* said, "Even though the great principles of Deuteronomy are expressed in terms which are at times strange to us in the twentieth century, we may grasp the principles and give them a present application. The results will be startling. Let the twentieth century man place himself under the sovereignty of God in every area of his life, and he will have begun to understand the import of the book of Deuteronomy."

Its overall message is foundational in that it lays a solid platform of basic doctrine for all Christian living to be built upon. But at the same time, it also is exposing human nature's self-centered drive to do its own thing despite the great body of evidence within it of what God has given us and what we do not deserve. It is filled with concepts as to why we should be humbled before Him, and eternally thank Him that He has given us such great gifts.

Deuteronomy is a condensed outline of what we must do in order to be prepared for the Kingdom of God. In one sense, it is all in one book—and an Old Testament book at that. That kind of shakes you up! It is not in the New Testament. It is in the *Old* Testament that this significant writing exists. I personally believe, that as important as this writing and preaching was to Israel, it is exceedingly more important to you and me.

The book of Hebrews in the New Testament appears to be directly addressed to the end-time remnant of the church. Well, the book of Deuteronomy lays the foundation for starting and propelling the Christian down the road to salvation that is being faced by those at the end time, to whom the book of Hebrews was written. It is literally filled with timeless truths, and it expounds key moral and spiritual themes that are always relevant to the lives of God's people. While technology gradually changes the appearance of the world so that it looks different, human nature, Satan, and God never change.

Technology changes appearances, but it does not change people. That is why what Moses said is *living*. It is not directed at the computer or any other electronics, or to automobiles, buses, or airplanes, or rockets to the moon. It is addressed to people regardless of when they live, whether it was 1500 years before Christ, whether it was in Christ's day, whether it was in the Reformation, or whether it is right now in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The spiritual concepts that are within it are just as alive as when he spoke them.

Christopher Wright, author of *The New International Bible Commentary* said, "Deuteronomy is particularly pregnant with implication and reflection on what it means to be the people of God, to be entrusted with the knowledge of the living God, and to be challenged to live out that knowledge in the sight of the nation."

I have broken the rest of the sermon down into some segments, and the first one has to do with the title "Deuteronomy."

## **THE TITLE OF THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY:**

It was a common practice of the Jews to title the Old Testament books by the very first words appearing in the book, and thus Deuteronomy's first title appears to have been "These be the words." Those are the first words in Hebrew in the book of Deuteronomy. At another time, a little bit later in history, it was simply named "Words." A third title was, "The Book of Admonition." That of course is derived from Deuteronomy 17:18 which says, "Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself *a copy* of this law in a book."

By the time the title had been changed to "The Book of Admonition," we were beginning to get to time when others who were not Israelitish people began to translate the Bible. So when the Old Testament was translated first into Greek, thus giving birth to the Septuagint version, that phrase in Deuteronomy 17:18 (which literally means "to *copy* this law"—in other words, "Here it is, you make your own copy.")—was mistranslated into "Second Law." Surely there would be two copies. We will say the original and the one that the king wrote.

However, the instruction says only to *copy* the law. It does not say anything about "this is Deuteronomy." When those scholars translated the Greek Septuagint into Latin, which became the Vulgate Bible prepared for the Catholic Church, its title was "Deuteronomium." That is the Latin synonym for the Septuagint word "copy." So it became, in Latin, "Second Law." In the English language it became "Deuteronomy," and that is what stuck.

Let us consider one more thing here, and that has to do with the word "Torah," most commonly translated into the English Bibles as "law." However, that word really means "instruction." It *can* mean law, but that is a specific usage of the word "Torah." It literally means "instruction," not law as it appears in most places in the Bible. Sometimes "law" *is* the correct translation, but I think it is far better for us most of the time to think of it in terms of instruction rather than specifically centering in on law. Of course everything in one sense that God says should be law to us, but the word "instruction" is broader and more literally correct. So let us apply this now to the book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy is not a book of codified law. Leviticus is. There is a difference between the two. Leviticus definitely is a book of codified law. Deuteronomy is a book of instruction on how to live life and why it should be lived in this manner.

Not only that, Deuteronomy is different, let us say, in that it is a clear contrast with the book of Leviticus, which is truly a law book. Though the book of Deuteronomy does have some specific laws, which are, in most cases, repeated from other portions of the Bible, those sections are interspersed with long periods of instruction that is nothing more than Moses' sermon. These things were all given to Israel verbally.



Moses *preached* this book to them in those thirty days before he died. John Ritenbaugh only gets a couple of days. Moses at least got thirty. This is what I mean about we are tackling something here so significant that it cannot be done. I do not know how much Moses expounded beyond what is actually recorded here. He undoubtedly did, but God saved the essential sections of what he said, and that is good enough.

The king was commanded to write a copy of this instruction contained in the book of Deuteronomy, and he was to read it all the days of his life so that he would be familiar with it. Then he would be prepared to administer to the nation, using the book of Deuteronomy as his guide.

In what God commanded the king to do in making a copy of Deuteronomy for himself lies some of the most helpful aid to Christian life because Christians are being prepared to be kings and priests, both of which require administrative training and responsibility of making judgments. So there is some repetition of laws in Deuteronomy. For example, the Ten Commandments are given in a somewhat modified form in the book of Deuteronomy. Some changes were made from Exodus, and the changes were made in order to accommodate the situation the people were going to face in the land once they were in it.

There is a good logical reason for the repetition of the things contained in the other books of the law, and that is that everybody who came out of Egypt over the age of twenty was now dead. You remember what happened in the second year from Egypt. Everybody at the time this book was written who was over the age of twenty when they came out of Egypt was now dead, except for Joshua and Caleb.

Those born after the thing that happened at the end of the second year had missed very much of the experiences of the events that occurred in Egypt, the dividing of the Red Sea, the providing of whatever God provided them while they were going through, and then they also missed much of the significance of what happened when the Israelites refused to go into the land at the end of the second year.

Thus Deuteronomy serves an important purpose for both Israel and us. It is, to collect in one book, a first-hand account of the most important elements of the relationship between the God of creation and Israel for those born in the wilderness and their physical and spiritual descendents. It provides background for both their and our reason for being God's chosen spiritual nation, and that reason is God's grace.

There is very much about grace in the book of Deuteronomy. In addition, it contains condensed basic instruction for what God expected them, and expects us, to do with this knowledge. That reason, brethren, is two-fold: (1) to be His witnesses, and (2) to prepare for the kingdom.

We will now go into the next section of the sermon, which regards the structure of the book of Deuteronomy.

## **THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY:**

It was not until archeologists digging around there in the Near East uncovered remnants of Hittite and Assyrian treaty documents that biblical scholars could identify that the book of Deuteronomy was written in a form similar to those treaty documents. Similar it is, but not exactly the same. Those treaty documents contain instruction from a suzerain to his vassals, or his subjects.

A suzerain is a feudal lord who could even be a king, and the vassals are those who owe him their faithfulness because he allows them to live and work on his land. The suzerain will be responsible to carry out certain stipulated things for their benefit, and the vassals have obligations to him, which must be met. Thus Deuteronomy is a self-contained covenant document.

A simple overview is somewhat like this. Deuteronomy begins with a 5 verse preamble. This is followed by a historical prologue that runs from chapter 1, verse 6 to roughly around chapter 3, verse 29. Can you picture a king saying to his assembled subjects, "This is how we came to be related in what we are doing here"? Then there is a long section of both basic and specific stipulations to the treaty that encompasses from chapter 4, verse 1 to chapter

27, verse 26. Some of the commentators broke that up a little bit, and perhaps as we are going through these sermons we will see why they broke it up a bit.

After chapter 27, verse 26 comes chapter 28—the blessings and curses chapter, and that pretty much stands on its own, but not entirely, because the structure of the book can be arranged in such a way that the section actually begins in chapter 26 and not end until chapter 30, verses 15 through 20. Everybody ought to know what it says in Deuteronomy 30, verses 15 through 20. That is where God says "Choose." He says, "I set these things before you now—the blessings, the curses. What I require of you is to choose." That is our responsibility.

The remainder of the book of Deuteronomy has to do with some blessings, some prophetic things on the tribes, and concludes with chapter 34, with Moses dying.

I want to stress again, as I mentioned last night, which we should not think of Deuteronomy most assuredly as a cold legal document whatsoever at all. It is a graciously preached offer from our God, with many heartfelt appeals for our freely given cooperation so necessary for our being created in Christ's image.

Can you get some kind of a picture in your mind as if God Himself, (though He did it through Moses), standing on a hill speaking to these people in an amphitheater below Him, and saying, "Look, I am your King. I am your God. You exist because of what I have done for you. I chose you to be here. You are to submit yourself to me, and if you do, things are really going to go well for you. I have the power to make you wealthy. I can heal you when you are sick. I can cause healthy babies to come out of your bodies. I can keep the enemies away from you because I am powerful enough to do that. But in return I want you to devote your life to loving Me." That is what the book of Deuteronomy is presenting to us.

Last night I said that chapter 28 is not to be considered as being prophetic, but it is God, having His children sitting before Him, saying, "Look, if you do this, things are going to go well for you. If you do that, you are going to get messed up, and I can guarantee it is going to happen." He is not

*prophesying* those things are going to happen, He is just laying it out for His children so they have the opportunity clear before them to make the choice. That is what He says in Deuteronomy 30. "Okay. Here it is. Choose." "Which way will you go?" "Will you rebel against Me even though I love you?" "Will you break My law?"

## THE TIME SETTING OF THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY:

What about the time setting of the book? To me the time setting of the book is of special importance to the end time generation, which is us, because we are poised on the edge of going into our inheritance even as those people who first received the book of Deuteronomy were that close to the Promised Land.

Recall also I mentioned before that Deuteronomy is a book of condensed basic instruction, and so God briefly rehearses His requirements, and He thus gave them a last minute opportunity to refresh their minds, their memories. That of course is for us too, to try to spot weaknesses and to overcome them during our final time of final preparation.

Let us go back to Deuteronomy 1 and we will read those first five verses.

**Deuteronomy 1:1-5** 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. It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea. 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, after he had killed Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who dwelt at Ashtaroth in Edrei. On this side of the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses began to explain this law, saying.

Verse 3 says "the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year" of the wilderness journey. Aaron, the high priest, through that journey, had died just several months earlier, and was replaced by his son, Elieazar. Miriam, a leader among the women, was also a fairly recent death. Moses, except for

Joshua and Caleb, is the last remaining of those twenty and over when Israel left Egypt, and he would die in about thirty days.

Israel was located in that day just east of the Promised Land. It was the east side of the Jordan River. If you can, get a picture of where Israel lies today in relation to the Mediterranean Sea, Egypt and the Jordan River. When they came out of Egypt by a circuitous route, they came around the backside of Israel. In other words, the east side of the Jordan River.

I want to relate now what I just said to the sermon on Eden I gave last year. It is very interesting, because God was the One who was guiding them as to the direction in which He wanted them to come into the land. In the book of Exodus it says that He could have taken them from Egypt and headed in a direct line northeast, and they would have been in Israel in a matter of a few days. But He did not. He took them on this real circuitous route.

It says He did not want them to have to face war, and so He took them in a way that they would not have to face war. However, I think there was another thing. God connects everything together so that we can see that there was a common hand, a common mind, a common thought, and a common way that is being done. Therefore, He had them approach Israel from the east.

Do you remember the sermon last year? Early in the book of Genesis it begins to show you that when people went away from God they went from west to east. However, when people were coming toward God, they were going from east to west, because Eden was located in what is today Jerusalem.

When Abraham came into the land, he came into the land from east to west. Now here are the descendents of Abraham, and God is leading them so that they come into the land from the same direction Abraham did—from east to west.

When Jesus Christ returns, if we can understand the configuration of the Temple and of the walls around Jerusalem, He is going to approach the Temple area from east to west. He will come from the east and He will head to the west. As I said, these may not be really significant things, but every word of God is important. This is one of those things that shows you that

God's hand is involved even in this little thing about what direction they were going to head into the land. They were going to approach from east to west.

Seventy days later, on the opening of the book of Deuteronomy 1, verse 3, on Nisan 10, or Abib 10 (if you prefer that name), Israel would enter the Promised Land under Joshua. On Nisan 11 the mass circumcision of the males born in the wilderness would begin. On the 14<sup>th</sup> Israel would observe its first Passover in their new homeland, and on the 15<sup>th</sup> celebrate their first festival—the first Day of Unleavened Bread.

I want you to connect something here. I said they would have that mass circumcision, which they most certainly did. This gives us a little insight about some of the things that were going on or were not going on while the children of Israel were in the wilderness.

**Exodus 12:43-48** And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it. But every man's servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it. A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat it. In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it.

For a man to take Passover he had to be circumcised. The first order of business when they came into the Promised Land, since they were coming in on the 10<sup>th</sup>, on the 11<sup>th</sup> they had a huge mass circumcision. I mean a *huge* mass circumcision. That tells you, first of all, that they were not keeping Passover in the wilderness except for those who were still alive and who of course were circumcised. But by the time we get to this, there are only three circumcised men—as far as we know—in the whole camp of Israel: Moses, Joshua, and Caleb.

I bring this up because people had objections to what I said that there were long periods of time when Israel, even under Moses, or Joshua, did not keep the Holy Days by God's command. They could not keep the Holy Days. They could not keep Passover because they were not circumcised.

They came into the land on the tenth. On the eleventh they had the mass circumcision. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, the 13<sup>th</sup>, and the 14<sup>th</sup> they were healing, but on the 14<sup>th</sup> the men were now able to keep the Passover. Therefore, Passover was kept in the land and it was probably the first time it was kept like that with that many people involved in it for who knows how long. Maybe decades of time. There are little things here and there you can put together, because they give signals to a better and clearer understanding of what was going on.

On the fourteenth they kept the Passover. On the fifteenth they kept the first day of Unleavened Bread—their first Holy Day in the land, and then on the sixteenth something truly significant occurred. No manna appeared. So what does that signal? Well, it was a pretty strong sign from God [as saying] "So long, fellows. You are on your own right now as far as food is concerned. You are going to have to live on what you produce out of the ground of this land that I have given to you."

God timed this. Understand though that they came into the land in the springtime, and so there were barley and wheat crops they could eat that the Canaanites had planted. When the Canaanites saw the Israelites coming, they abandoned their fields and got out of there. The Israelites were then free to eat of those crops.

**Joshua 4:19** Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho.

We know, at least basically, the location they are in. It was just on the east border of Jericho.

If you were counting, you would find that at this period of time we have gone through the entire last 70 days of Moses' life. We are somewhat beyond

it. In fact, it is determined by most of the commentators that he very likely died right on or right near to the first day of the twelfth month. Then Israel spent thirty days mourning his death. Then on the first day of the first month, which is Nisan, or Abib, Joshua began moving the people into position to get ready to go across the Jordan. I am heading for something here I think is kind of interesting. Remember, they are still on the east side of the Jordan River. They have not crossed it yet.

**Joshua 1:10-11** Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, "Pass through the camp and command the people, saying, 'Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you will cross over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess.'"

They are now on the seventh day of the month of Nisan. Did you notice what he said there? He said, "Prepare provisions for yourselves." Those provisions could not be manna. He was telling them to prepare food, but it could not be manna because manna spoiled. It was there for one day, and when they would wake up in the morning there would be a new crop there, or whatever you would want to call it. They could eat that, but if they tried to keep manna over, then it spoiled. Joshua is telling them to prepare provisions for going across into the Promised Land, and it would have to be things that would not spoil.

I bring this up because that gives us a pretty good view that Israel was already harvesting the crops growing in the Canaanite areas, or the Amorite areas—either one of them—and that they were already eating of those things. They did not have to make a Wave Sheaf offering for those things because those things were not acceptable to offer to God. They were able to cut it and eat it lawfully. So their provisions then had to be either things they were already carrying with them, or things they were already harvesting and eating from the land in which they were already occupying. That little thing is very important to the counting to the correct date for Pentecost when Passover falls on a weekly Sabbath.



**Joshua 2:1** Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there.

**Joshua 2:22-24** They [the spies] departed and went to the mountain, and stayed there three days until the pursuers returned. The pursuers sought them all along the way, but did not find them. So the two men returned, descended from the mountain, and crossed over; and they came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all that had befallen them. And they said to Joshua, "Truly the LORD has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are fainthearted because of us." [This episode consumed at least three days of that final nine.]

**Joshua 3:1-5** Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Acacia Grove and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over. So it was, after three days, that the officers went through the camp; and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. Yet there shall be a space between you and it [the ark], about two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before." And Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves [which usually means clean yourselves, clean your clothes. Get ready. We are going to do something important.] for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you."

In other words, "Get ready. Royalty is going to come here."

I am giving you this partly because I want to impress upon you how much can be accomplished by a huge number of people in a very short period of

time, without modern technology, if the people will just cooperate. God does things in an orderly fashion, and when His people cooperate, miraculous things are accomplished.

Remember, we are talking here about two and one half million people getting ready to cross over that river and into the land. For those of you who are familiar with Charlotte, that is close to twice the population of the city of Charlotte and Mecklenburg county combined. The city population of Portland, Oregon is 537 thousand people. I am rounding these things off. The city of Boston is 591 thousand people. The city of Seattle is 582 thousand people. Denver is 562 thousand people. San Francisco is 744 thousand people. Detroit is 871 thousand people. Philadelphia is one million 450 thousand people.

We are talking about more people than any of those cities. It is not until we get to Huston, Texas with a population of two million 140 thousand people that we are beginning to get close to how big that group of Israelites was. Do these figures give you any better conception of the size of the movements and operations spoken of so blandly in this book? They accomplished this without any electronics, no central meeting halls, spread out over quite a long plot of ground requiring foot and animal transportation and time to traverse and communicate the messages. In addition, they had all their cattle, sheep, goats, and probably some carts and accumulated baggage as well.

**Joshua 3:14-17** So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest), [The river is in flood.] that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan. So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho. Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan

[Instantaneously that mud was turned into solid earth]; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.

Those cities mentioned—Adam and Zaretan—are sixteen miles north of Jericho, and Jericho is four miles north of the Salt Sea. They crossed over on dry ground. God not only damned the river, He also instantaneously dried the ground, and He opened up a breach that was twenty miles wide for them to march across. In one sense He had to do that. Do you know how long it would take two and one-half million people to go single file, or five in a row, or whatever, over any portion? So He opened up a river almost twenty miles wide, dried out the ground so that they could go over in an orderly fashion, but cross over that entire twenty-mile-wide stretch so that it did not take them all day, or two or three days to go across. There is a major lesson in this back in the book of I Corinthians, chapter 12.

**I Corinthians 12:7** But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.

It is that "profit for the common good." We are at one and the same time individuals called independently and separately, but we are also part of a body, a team, to which we have responsibility to deliberately act in agreement with. In other words, we must learn to cooperate willingly the way the Israelites did as they were crossing that river.

I believe one of the reasons they cooperated so willingly was because they were convicted that they were participating in something great, and that the realization of their hopes was just ahead. This massive movement of two and one-half million people came off without a hitch because everybody cooperated, and God did His part to make it possible.

As I said earlier, one of the major reasons God had this book written was to be an instruction for those who were in the age group where they did not witness the things that occurred in Egypt and the coming out into the wilderness. There had to be a record so they would understand who they were, and why they were, and they would be able to pass on that instruction

to each generation as it came along. Well, they did not do it. They were not faithful in carrying out that responsibility. Nevertheless, we have to understand that this *is* our responsibility.

I do not know whether you are aware of it, but as early as Deuteronomy's six chapters, God starts talking about parents' responsibility to their children. A major part of that responsibility is to bring up your children in the admonition of God so that they are aware of *who* you are, and *why* you are; what the church is, and what it is in relation to God; what God is doing on this earth and that they have a part in this.

The greatest of all the commandments appears in chapter 6: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul," and it goes right on into the instruction of parents to children from that point.

Israel failed to cooperate, except for a few people who did carry on with the instruction Moses gave to them. We begin to learn in the book of Deuteronomy that Israel—the conception of it—is a family operation. Do you get that? It is God's family operation, and so if you are part of *His* family, He wants you to train your children so that you bring them up with the knowledge so that *they* can become part of God's family as well. And they will be prepared with the understanding that you passed on to them. One of the strongest messages that comes through the book of Deuteronomy is that God's family is a family operation, and He is calling people into His family as children so they can become like their elder Brother.

You might wonder why the religion God insists we keep is so important, and that He is insistent upon it. That is, it is the only way, which will create people into the image of His Son. He wants to expand His family, and any idolatry that appears in our life is a distraction, a detraction of our becoming like He is and like His Son Jesus Christ is.

We are in a position here where once every seven years we have to go through things of this nature in order to be reminded of the themes that run through this book. This is done so we can use it as a handbook, as a guide to our life, and to be able to pass these things on to our children, because the process in a sense is ever repeating.

As we saw last night, God is always working, and He is working on His creation. The physical creation was done a long time ago, but when He got done with the physical creation, then the spiritual creation began. That is what He is working on, and He is serious about increasing the size of His family.

Therefore, we learn in the book of Deuteronomy He chooses each and every person individually and personally. That is another of the strong lessons, which comes through the book of Deuteronomy. Early it is being shown that He is personally involved from beginning to end, but He gives us a lot of rope once He calls us. He never ever takes His eyes, as it were, from us, and we are always in view to Him.

One commentator said that he personally believed that Deuteronomy 10 is the theme of the entire book. This is a beautiful chapter.

**Deuteronomy 10:12-22** "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good? Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it. The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer. For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name. He is your praise, and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen. Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as the stars of heaven in multitude."

Verses 12 and 13 provide us with five things He wants from us. He wants us to fear Him, to walk in His ways, to love Him, to serve Him with all our heart and soul, and keep the commandments and statutes. Fear, walk, love, serve, and keep. All five of these are attitudes that are under our control, and these qualities do not just magically appear in us because we are converted. We must choose to exercise them on the basis of our knowledge of God and our experience with Him. All these five are inter-related. Fear and love are basic to all obedience to God, and those who possess these attitudes will walk with God. They will serve Him and keep His commandments.

Note that God specifically states that His laws are not a burden, but a gracious provision for our good. And those who neither fear nor love Him will not obey Him.

Verses 14 and 15 show why we should exercise these five requirements. It is an overwhelming reason. It is because God loved our fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and because He loved them. He loves us, and therefore chose us.

As we find in Romans, Paul shows that God's choosing of us is completely under His authority, and it is personally and individually done. What a privilege! It is not just something that is scattered like so much seed all over the place. He says, "I want you," and "I want you," and "I want you," and He never tells us why except that He loves us. That is pretty interesting, and as Paul again explains, He loved us when we were absolute downright rats, and hated Him.

The contrast between the greatness of what He is, compared to our insignificance, is so startling it is beyond belief. He is absolutely independent of everything and everybody, and yet He, on the basis of His own considered choice, chose us to share life, and all that He owns and rules, with Him.

Verses 17 and 18 provide another description of God's greatness that again exalts His uniqueness. He is above anybody that the carnal might call to declare God. Israel's God alone is worthy of worship and devotion. We must love the stranger, because God loves them just as much in a way as He loves us although He is not as intimately involved with those as He is with the chosen ones.

Verse 19 reminds us that there must not be in any of us any sense whatever of racial superiority, and that we must look to exercise love toward the stranger, or we might say, to the unconverted.

Verses 20 through 22 carry us back in thought to verses 12 and 13 that God must be the object of our praise, for this is for our good because it helps us get our mind off ourselves and helps greatly to set the relationship as one based in humility.

That gives us an overview, and it is not as complete as I would like to give, but it is sufficient for today. The next sermon will go onto another part of this wonderful writing.