

## Deuteronomy (Part 1) (1994)

### Importance and Vision

John W. Ritenbaugh

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If you would please open your Bibles to Deuteronomy 31 and we are going to begin in verse 9.

**Deuteronomy 31:9-13** 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. Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.”

I do not know whether this is a year of release, but we have got to begin somewhere. Did you hear what it said there? It said that the book of Deuteronomy is to be read every seven years in the hearing of the people of God, the people of Israel.

I have been trying to figure out whether this is really a 7<sup>th</sup> year and I will tell you what I have come up with. Mr. Armstrong's ordination was around 1931. Subtract 1931 from 1994, it comes out to 63 years. 63 divided by 7 divides equally to 9. According to that calculation, this would be a year of release.

Looking at it from another direction. Yesterday, the 19<sup>th</sup> of September, was Evelyn and my 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our baptism. That is also divisible equally by seven. Coming from that perspective, this is also a year of release. A third

way: I was ordained as a local church elder in April of 1966. 1966 subtracted from 1994 is 28 years, and that too is the divisible by seven equally. From three different witnesses it looks propitious.

We are going to go ahead with this. Far more important than that, really, is whether the book of Deuteronomy has ever been gone through as God commands. I have asked discreetly several people whether they have ever had it done within their memory in the church of God. God said do it every seven years in the ears of the people of Israel, and so far, nobody has responded in the affirmative. Everybody has said no. So, looking at it from that direction, maybe it is good that we do something like this. All I know for sure is that God commands it be done.

I understand that the book of Deuteronomy occupies a significant place in the Scriptures. I think as we begin this, the first thing we have to do is establish some of that significance in your mind, so we have a foundation from which we are working. Let us turn to Deuteronomy 5. Deuteronomy 5 contains a reiteration of the Ten Commandments. And it says:

**Deuteronomy 5:22** "These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly, in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and He added no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.

We are going to be looking at quite a number of scriptures here. I will not be doing a great deal of expounding at first. Like I said, we are going to try to establish at least part of Deuteronomy's unique position. We find here that God is reiterating the things that occurred on Mount Sinai, and we find that God Himself wrote on two tables a stone and then He gave them to Moses. In Deuteronomy 10, we find out a little bit about what Moses did with those stones.

**Deuteronomy 10:1-5** "At that time the LORD said to me, 'Hew for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to Me on the mountain and make yourself an ark of wood. And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke; and you shall put them in the ark.' "So I made an ark of acacia wood, hewed two tablets of stone like the first, and went up

the mountain, having the two tablets in my hand. And He wrote on the tablets according to the first writing, the Ten Commandments, which the LORD had spoken to you in the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly; and the LORD gave them to me. Then I turned and came down from the mountain, and put the tablets in the ark which I had made; and there they are, just as the LORD commanded me.”

Moses took the two tablets that God Himself had written on and came down the mountain, and he put them in the ark. Now what is the ark? We have got to establish its significance. Let us go back to the book of Exodus in chapter 25. We will begin in verse 10.

**Exodus 25:10** “And they shall make an ark of acacia wood; two and a half cubits shall be its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height.”

We have got something there using an 18-inch cubit that is 45 inches long, 27 inches high, and 27 inches wide. Some people argue over the length of the cubit. It does not matter whichever it is.

**Exodus 25:11-14** “And you shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and shall make on it a molding of gold all around. You shall cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in its four corners; two rings shall be on one side, and two rings on the other side. And you shall make poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, that the ark may be carried by them.”

This was done because nobody was supposed to touch the ark. It was an object of extreme holiness, and we will see why in just a bit.

**Exodus 25:16** “And you shall put into the ark the Testimony which I will give you.”

Testimony is a witness. We have already seen what that testimony is. The testimony is the Ten Commandments, and they were put into the ark. Then He says,

**Exodus 25:17** “You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half cubits shall be its length and a cubit and a half its width.”

Two of its dimensions are exactly the same as that of the ark.

**Exodus 25:18-20** “And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat.”

In other words, bowed.

**Exodus 25:21-22** “You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.”

The ark was a chest of wood very similar to the kind of cedar chest that we might have in our home. One of the big differences being it was originally made of wood that formed it, then gold was laid over top of it. As far as I am able to see, the only thing that you could actually see was the gold. You could not see the wood at all because it was completely covered by the gold.

The top or the lid, called the mercy seat, served two purposes. The first is it was the lid for the chest. In chapter 31, a confirmation of something.

**Exodus 31:18** And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

There must be something quite important about that, because now this is in three places already, he has told us—God Himself wrote on it what was on the tablets and where those were placed when God was done.

**Exodus 32:15-16** And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand. The tablets were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other they were written. Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets.

Even the selection of doing this on stone, as well as having God Himself doing the writing, is symbolic of the eternal and enduring character of what was written on those stones.

In chapter 40, another confirmation. In this chapter, the building of the tabernacle was completed. All the furniture is completed. The tabernacle is erected. It is just about ready for the installation of the priesthood, and we find in verse 17.

**Exodus 40:17-20** And it came to pass in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was raised up. So Moses raised up the tabernacle, fastened its sockets, set up its boards, put in its bars, and raised up its pillars. And he spread out the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent on top of it, as the LORD had commanded Moses. He took the Testimony and put it into the ark, inserted the poles through the rings of the ark, and put the mercy seat on top of the ark.

We are going to leave this area of the Bible for a little bit and go to II Chronicles 5. We are about 300 to 400 years later from the date that was given in Exodus 40.

**II Chronicles 5:10** Nothing was in the ark except the two tablets which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they had come out of Egypt.

At the time of David the tablets were still on the inside of the ark. Let us go all the way back, practically to the end in the book of Revelation.

**Revelation 11:19** Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.

At the very end, the ark of the Covenant is focused upon, and though it is unsaid, I would have to assume that His law is still understood to be inside. I want you to notice the context in which the ark is shown. It is at the time of the end. It is at the seventh trump. If you will recall the sermons on September the 3rd, the fall festivals show God's judgments.

Let us add a little bit more to this. We are beginning to close in on something. We are going to turn to Hebrews 4.

**Hebrews 4:14-16** Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

What Paul does here is associate the throne of grace with mercy. The inference is beginning to become quite obvious. The mercy seat and the throne of grace are one and the same thing. The mercy seat is the place from which God governs. That is, God judges. If we can think of this symbolically and try to put it into a literal context, we might say that God sits on the Ten Commandments. They are directly under Him. That place is symbolic of both judgment and mercy being dispensed from the very seat of God's

government. The basis of both judgment and mercy are the Ten Commandments.

I did not say that those were the only factors that are included in judgment and mercy. I am saying that because of the symbolism that is given to us, we can understand God's law, which provides, as it were, a foundation underneath His judgments. Whether it be a merciful judgment in the sense of extending grace to someone, or whether it is a judgment in which extends a great deal of pain upon someone, the basis of that judgment is going to be the Ten Commandments.

In Matthew 23, we find a statement that Jesus made in the presence of the scribes and the Pharisees:

**Matthew 23:23** "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

If we say, "law," to anybody in the church of God, there is going to be an immediate reflex. They are going to think of the Ten Commandments, and those Ten Commandments are the basis of both judgment and mercy. It is so interesting that mankind, at the very end, is going to be judged against the very law that they claim is being or has been done away.

Obviously, there is much more to God's law than the Ten Commandments. Let us go back to Deuteronomy again, this time in the 31st chapter.

**Deuteronomy 31:24-26** So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying: "Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark [The Ten Commandments inside, the book of the law on the outside, but...] of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there as a witness against you."

If you care to do any research on what is meant by the Book of the Law, I think that you will find most of the people who do that kind of thing say in all probability that Book of the Law was the book of Deuteronomy, and it was placed beside the ark.

If you care to do some research into the reforms of Josiah there in II Chronicles, you will there find that a book of the law was recovered. It was taken to Josiah. He read it, tore his clothing, and then apparently immediately began ordering reforms to take place within Judah that transformed that country into a godly nation for a period of time.

You have to understand who Josiah was in a way because he was the son of the most wicked king that Judah ever had. He was the son of Manasseh, who, for 55 years terrorized anybody who was godly inside of that nation. The longest reign in the history of the people of Israel was held by this horrible man who, incidentally, appears to have repented toward the end of his life. Josiah was the son of this horrible man, and you would think Josiah's background must have been anything but what we would call godly. He began reigning when he was only eight years old. He was apparently a man, or a young man, or a boy, of unusual insight and ability, gifts having undoubtedly been given to him by God.

When he made that decision based, apparently, on the reading of the book of Deuteronomy, he was only 16 years old and he turned that nation around. I think had he lived longer he probably would have gone down as their greatest king. But as it was, he had a failing too, he stuck his nose in business that was not his, and was killed even though he was warned by a prophet or somebody to not go in there. He did, and it seems like a stray arrow found its way through his armor and killed him. The *Keil and Delitzsch Commentary*, Volume one, page 462 says in regard to these verses in Deuteronomy 31:24-26:

The tables of the law were deposited in the ark and the Book of the Law was to be kept by its side. As it formed by its very nature an elaborate commentary upon the Decalogue, it was also to have its



place outwardly as an accompaniment to the tables of the law for a witness against the people, in the same manner as the song in the mouth of the people.

The song that he is referring to is in Deuteronomy 32 and has to do with The Song of Moses. You will find that given in Deuteronomy 31:21 where references are made to that.

Deuteronomy contains, besides the Ten Commandments, quite a number of statutes, judgments, health laws. It has the blessings and curses, the ceremonies too—every one of which amplify the Ten Commandments, and they are binding on your life unless otherwise shown in some other portion of the Bible.

There is very good reason why God commands us to review the book of Deuteronomy once every seven years. It contains teaching on the most essential elements of His purpose. What we are going to do here is isolate dominant themes. We are not going to go through it verse by verse. We are not going to be here for a year, or even two weeks. I was overwhelmed trying to prepare these sermons to keep them as narrow as I was able to.

When I was done, it led me to come to the conclusion that the book of Deuteronomy is the New Testament of the Old Testament, if you can understand what I mean. At the very least, it is the New Testament of the law. The teaching in it is so far advanced spiritually, if I can put it that way, to other books in the Old Testament it is almost like there is no comparison between it and the others. This is not in any way to denigrate the teaching that is in the others. It is just that the book of Deuteronomy summarizes the whole law and puts it into an encapsulated form. As *Keil and Delitzsch* said, “It forms an elaborate commentary on the Ten Commandments.”

What we are going to do, then, is isolate dominant themes appearing in Deuteronomy that are parallels to our experience as a Christian. We cannot go into them in detail because of the lack of time. I am going to give you the responsibility to use it as a study guide later on. I am sure that if you do, you are going to find ample time being burned up in study trying to chase some of these things out.

Our first point is that Deuteronomy gives vision for this critical period of time.

Deuteronomy means “once again.” Some say it means “second law,” or a little bit more general, it means “second teaching.” It is a summary of some wilderness experiences and the updating and modification of some laws. I do not know whether you are aware of it, but the Ten Commandments are modified in the book of Deuteronomy. If you care to compare Deuteronomy 5 with Exodus 20 you will find that the fourth commandment is significantly changed between the two. I believe also, the tenth commandment is also changed in Deuteronomy 5. It is an updating and a modification of some laws.

Deuteronomy is given—this is important—to prepare people for living in the land. Here is where the vision comes from for you and me. *Given to prepare people for living in the land.* I cannot emphasize this enough. We are not there yet. They were not there yet. They were right on the edge of the land, even as we, time-wise chronologically, might be on the edge of the Kingdom of God.

Do you understand the things we go through in our life are given to prepare us for the Kingdom of God, not just to prepare us for the Millennium? It is to prepare us for the Kingdom of God. It is not just for this life. Certainly, it can amplify and make this life better. What God is putting us through are disciplines that are designed to train us and prepare us for what He wants us to do in His Kingdom, for what He wants us to be in His Kingdom.

In His Kingdom, you are going to need faith. In His Kingdom, you are going to need love. In His Kingdom, you are going to need everything that covers the scope of what God is. We are never going to reach that in this life, but He nonetheless wants us to strive for it. So, what we have here in the book of Deuteronomy is a summary to prepare us for living in the land.

While they are being given, Moses sets forth some powerful themes containing within them many of the principles that are later expressed more clearly, and in greater detail, in the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and that which is being worked out through the New Covenant.

Let us go back to Deuteronomy 1:

**Deuteronomy 1:1-3** 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.

This was given to them in the last two months in the wilderness. They left on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the first month, and it is now the 40<sup>th</sup> year. Actually, 39 years and 10 months later. The first day of the month that is called today Shebet/Tevet. It corresponds to our January/February period. What we are talking about here is most likely about mid to late January.

**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.'

This is very important to us because it sets the tone for the entire book, and for us too in this period of history. The land is before us. This is so important to the vision of inheriting the land. The word land is used 160 times in the book of Deuteronomy alone. Over 130 references are to the Promised Land itself.

Let us go to Genesis 12:

**Genesis 12:1-2** Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing.

This is the beginning of the promise we just read of there in Deuteronomy 1: 8, but that promise is gradually expanded to include more.

**Genesis 15:18-21** On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

Instead of just being a vague promise of land, now we have some dimensions that are set, and those dimensions go all the way from the River Nile to the River Euphrates. I am not going to go through the whole promise as it has expanded from time to time, but we are going to jump all the way to Romans 4 and update this into New Testament, New Covenant times.

**Romans 4:13** For the promise that he [Abraham] would be heir of the world.

The promises expanded out of the land of Palestine from between the two great rivers, the River Nile and the River Euphrates, and now we find Abraham is going to inherit the entire world. It gets even greater than that because we find in the book of Hebrews:

**Hebrews 2:8** "You have put all things in subjection under His feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him.

Well, that includes, if we can believe what the Bible says, everything that God has created, that has been inherited by Jesus Christ, and we are coheirs with Him. Think of that in terms of what is said all the way back there in Deuteronomy. The land is before you. And brethren, the land is before you, but now it is exceedingly greater than it ever was all the way back in that time. God is not offering us some puny and unusable knickknack, but we are to be coheirs with Christ of God's awesome creation, and eternal life in addition so that we might enjoy it forever! That is something that is almost too big. It is impossible for my mind to encompass that. But in Hebrews 11:

**Hebrews 11:8-10** By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

We heard this morning about the city that is going to be our home.

**Hebrews 11:13-16** These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

What God is preparing for us is, as I said, too big for our minds to contain that it is virtually incomprehensible. God knows that too, but what He has done is designed a way of life. Then He hopes through our understanding and the living of this way of life, a life of such quality and promise, that we will never want it to end. Even though we cannot comprehend the enormousness and the beauty of what it is that we are going to inherit, there is something we can relate to, and that is the life that we are living right now.

If we can make the changes in our life that God is requiring of us, begin to submit to Him in a way that we never have before, if He is able to feed us by His Spirit so that there is a continuity that begins with Him and comes down through us and flows back out from us to other people back up to God, in submission to His will, we will begin to feel in our life the effect of that way of life, and we will not want it to end. It is so good that when we taste of it we never want to let it go.

That is what the book of Deuteronomy is about. It is about that life He wants us to relate to, and that is what I was kind of implying last night. We can have a foretaste, not of the World Tomorrow and the way life can be in the Millennium. Oh yes, we will get some of that. That is not the real important point. The important thing that God wants us to get out of this is life the way it is intended to be lived eternally in His Kingdom.

That is not impossible, that we can have a foretaste of that. From that taste, we want more and more. We want that to fill our lives. We want to get to the place where we want to give it to others so that others might enjoy it. And that there really be the kind of peace for us to begin working toward.

Let us go back to Deuteronomy again, this time in chapter 4. We are still on this vision thing.

**Deuteronomy 4:1** “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you.”

“That you may live.” Two connotations to that, are there not? One implication is that you can live eternally. But what good is it to live eternally if you are living eternally in anger, in depression, in despair, in hatred, and in bitterness. It would not be any good to live eternally that way, would it? That is the very kind of thing that we want to get rid of. The other implication is not length, but quality. That you may *live!* How should we then live? “As I live,” says the Lord.

**Deuteronomy 4:1** “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you.”

**Deuteronomy 4:4-5** “But you who held fast to the LORD your God are alive today, every one of you. Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess.”

That is pretty blunt.

**Deuteronomy 4:14** “And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess.”

Are you getting the picture? God’s law, God’s teaching, God’s commandments, God’s statutes, and God’s judgments are given to us for the purpose of His Kingdom. That is their real purpose. Yes, they serve some good now, but the real reason has to do for His purpose—that we be born into His Family.

Let us carry it a little bit further. I want to go back to the New Testament again because Jesus added something here in the Sermon on the Mount. This is going to be in Matthew 7. Jesus was ever aware the difficulties that people were going to face in following His way, but it was not going to be easy in a world, as I mentioned, that is becoming increasingly hostile. And so, He tells us,

**Matthew 7:13** "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Jesus speaks of difficulties in living this way, and yet back in the Old Testament, He tells us that He wants us to live it because it is going to be so good. There is no contradiction here, as you will begin to find through this series, as we go through it. In Matthew 24 we can add to this verse 13 where Jesus said.

**Matthew 24:13** “But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”

Another warning this time in the midst of the prophecies indicating a very desperate and dangerous period of time. For someone to live through that period of time and endure it, there is going to be a great deal of difficulty doing that. We find ourselves in that period of time. Let us go to Luke 14. This is a scripture that we go through very frequently when we are on the

verge of baptizing someone. It is a *warning* to those who are going to be baptized. It is also *instruction* to those who are going to be baptized—that they take the advice that is given to us here.

**Luke 14:25-27** Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother [Hate is not an absolute term there, it is talking about loving less by comparison.], wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

**Luke 14:33** "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."

I want us to reflect back on Israel's position as Moses spoke to them in Deuteronomy 4:4-5 and 14 and other scriptures as well. They were very near to their inheritance. Some of the people had spent very close to, maybe all the way up to, 40 years in the wilderness preparing to enter the land, and to make it their homeland. If we listen carefully to what Moses said, he is saying that all that labor merely prepared them for the most important part of their calling—that much yet remains to be done. They still did not possess the land and history shows it was quite a number of years before they actually did. There was many a battle to be waged against the people of the land. Those people of the land had to be overcome before the land would really be theirs.

Please brethren, begin to put yourself in that same position. We are not in the land. We are on the verge of being there. Many of us have spent many years in the church of God. All of those things have helped to prepare us for where we now stand, but the battle is not over yet. It is he that endures to the end. Difficult and narrow is the way that leads to life.

Though we stand on the verge of going in, there is still much yet to be done. Much had to be overcome before the land would actually be theirs. Now with the calling of God, the way had been opened before us. Jesus warned us, did He not, that the way is going to be very difficult. It is going to take a burning vision. It is going to take perseverance. It is going to take a deep-



seated loyalty to Christ, because we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against wicked spirits in high places (Ephesians 6:10-12).

Think of yourself again in relation to the people of the land. We are in a war with beings who are spiritual, and because they are spiritual, we cannot even see the real enemies. But you can know this: They are a great deal stronger than the people that the Israelites were afraid of. The Anakim, the giants, great walled and defended cities that they were afraid to go in and face. Are you fearful with the battle we are in? The land is before us, and it is going to take a burning vision. It is going to take a deep-seated loyalty. It is going to take perseverance. That is not John Ritenbaugh saying that. That came right out of your Savior's and my Savior's mouth. It is he who endures to the end.

Look at what has happened in the last couple of years. I do not think very many of us ever thought what has occurred would occur. I mean we might have had a passing thought on it, but we never really chased it out. We never thought of the kind of apostasy that is taking place. We never thought of the church of God splitting into a multitude of different groups. We never thought of losing the friendship of people that we were in congregations with for maybe long periods of time. We never thought that the time might come in our own family when husband would go one direction, wife would go in another direction. Parents would go in one direction, children in the other direction. All supposedly within the church of God.

It is an emotional thing. Emotions play very heavily on whether we are going to endure, whether we are going to persevere, whether our loyalty is going to crack, or whether we are going to keep trudging on. You know, there is even a place where God says, "I know your trudgings."

I remember a sermonette many years ago what Bob Hoops said in a sermonette. He said, "the plodders are going to be in God's Kingdom," and I believe it. Those who, day in and day out, put one foot in front of the other, take each day as it comes, live for it, strive to do the best they can, go to bed, wake up the next day, and go through the same thing. That is what Israel did. They trudged through the wilderness.

We are facing beings that are far more powerful and are set to try to defend their turf the best they can. Though we cannot see them, we understand

through the eyes of faith that they do move people and circumstances against us in order to keep us from going on to perfection and actually becoming inheritors of the land.

Now what Jesus was referring to in Matthew 7 is that in virtually every action in life we are confronted with the choice. It is almost as if at every choice that involves something moral, ethical, or spiritual, we are standing at a crossroads. In some cases, the way we choose to go will not amount to a hill of beans. What car we buy, what color car it is, or whether we buy this suit or that suit, those kinds of things.

But with moral issues, and within relationships, the consequences of our choices might be very great. Learn this: making a choice is not something we can evade. It is absolutely impossible to evade making a choice. If you can picture yourself standing at a crossroads, pondering a choice, you can see that even if you make no choice at all, you have made a choice. It is impossible to avoid. You can also see that if you do not make a choice to consciously go one way or the other, you get absolutely nowhere. You do not move. You are stopped on dead center.

We cannot avoid making choices. It is an impossibility. God has manipulated our lives into that position. He wants us to be confronted: "Go this way or that way. Are you going to choose to submit to My law? Are you going to choose to submit to My statutes, My commandments, or My judgments? Are you going to refuse or choose to submit to My way of life?" If you go one way you live, and if you go the other way, whoops, you have to repent. Go back to square one again, you might say, and get back on the path again.

What is so interesting is the right choice is almost invariably the one more difficult to make. It almost all the time leads us on the more difficult road to travel.

**Deuteronomy 30:15-20** "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and

are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. 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; 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."

We are commanded to choose life, obey Him, and cling to Him. Why should that be such a difficult choice? The alternatives seem clear enough. God is such a sterling character that obeying Him would seem to be the only choice, does it not? I mean, when you look at it logically, reading out of the Book, it looks like that is the only choice. Let us add a little bit more for this picture, right from the same chapter. This will almost confound you, I think.

**Deuteronomy 30:11-14** "For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it."

Do we understand what He is saying there? The wording is kind of funny, a little peculiar, a little bit difficult to come to an understanding of exactly what He is saying. You know what we are looking at are a number of Hebrew idioms. That might make perfect sense to somebody who was living in that period of time, but it is something we are not very familiar with.

They are all saying essentially the same thing. He is just saying, "Brethren, keeping My commandments is not impossible." In fact, He says it is not even difficult. Wow! He says it is not hard to understand. He is saying it is simple. You do not have to get some giant intellect to try to explain it to you. He said it is not inaccessible. It is not behind some great barrier somewhere. He says

you do not have to comprehend the universe; you do not have to be an Einstein before you begin to use it.

So, why then is it so difficult when God Himself says that it is not difficult? The answer is also very simple. It is because of sin.

Sin has so estranged (remember that word; it is going to become important later on in the book of Deuteronomy) our heart from God that keeping His commandments is very difficult. Did you notice that last verse? He said, “Keep My commandments, that you may love Me.” Do we love somebody that we are estranged from? Has not sin been described in the Bible as having built a wall between us and God so we are separated from Him? The way of sin has so ingrained itself into our thinking that it dominates our thinking processes, and for the most part, until God calls us, we are totally unaware of its dominance and do not even realize we are its slave.

That is the bondage that must be broken. Once that bondage is broken, we must strive with everything in us to keep it from being re-healed again. It would be good to go back and review John 8, where He told those people they were slaves. They were in bondage to sin. It is sin that makes the keeping of God's commands so difficult.

Can you understand what the apostle Paul wrote and said, there in in Romans 7? Let us turn to that. Here is a man who was mature in the faith, and yet we have a testimony of the things he is saying are going on and his mind, even though he was in an apostle, even though he was giving other people instruction in the way of God.

**Romans 7:15-20** For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

That is why it is so hard. This is why we need to be reminded before we go into the land, sin still dwells within us, and leads us down the primrose path, motivates us to make choices that take us in the wrong direction, and needs to be purged from us. If we are ever going to be like God, sin must be completely wiped away.

We have a small part in yielding to Him. Every time we yield to Him and make the choice that is the more different choice in almost every case—when we make that choice, sin's dominion over us is broken just a little bit more, because then God begins to be ingrained upon our hearts and we are learning to love Him rather than love self or love the world. This describes us even as that describes the apostle Paul, and it is as though sin is a living entity within us, making choices over which we seem to have little control.

Now, what is the answer? The answer is right in the context of Deuteronomy 30, but we are going to hold that in reserve for another day.

One of the first things that the book of Deuteronomy does is to establish a vision for those who are about to go into the land, and what they have to do to begin to prepare themselves for going into the land.