

Deuteronomy Chapter 1

The book of Deuteronomy was the fifth book penned by Moses. It is the fifth book of the Pentateuch. Deuteronomy is taken from 2 Greek words. Deuterous means second. Nomos means law. This is a stating of the law the second time. It is not exactly like the law stated in Leviticus, but is giving a practical use of the law, now that they are entering the Promised Land. In the last book, we saw the older generation of the Israelites die in the wilderness. This takes place at the end of the 40 years of wandering. Moses will expound the law to the new generation. Obedience to the LORD and His law is stressed. They must remember the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. They must, also, remember the mistakes their parents made, and not make them again. This is actually a book on the blessings they will receive, if they obey the LORD, or the curses that will be theirs, if they do not obey the LORD.

Verses 1-5: “These be the words”: These verses form a preamble to the entire book, much like that of preambles in ancient Near Eastern treaties. In this case, they are the words of Moses (compare Exodus 20:2a). They identify the suzerain or “great king” in terms to inspire awe and fear. “Horeb” is another name for Mount Sinai (Exodus 3:1, 12; compare Exodus 19:1). The journey would normally have taken 11 days, but it has taken them almost 40 years! “Kadesh-barnea” was the place where rebellion seized the camp and they refused to enter the Promised Land (Num. chapters 13 and 14). Verse 4 relates some victories which had been granted by God supernaturally, and thus anticipates further victories in the future (2:26-37) over Sihon and (3:1-22 over Og). “Declare” has the sense of making something absolutely clear or plain. The same verb is used (in 27:8), to indicate the clarity or legibility with which the words of the law were to be inscribed in stone (Hab. 2:2). “On this side Jordan”: “East of the Jordan” or “across” occurs 18 times in Deuteronomy and Joshua. It refers 12 times to the eastern and 6 times to the western side of the Jordan. “Law” comes from the word meaning “to direct”, “to teach”, and so is rendered “instruction” (Torah). Here it refers to the discourses that follow, the exposition and application of God’s Word to the people.

Verses 1-8: Moses spake to the people all the Lord had given him in commandment. Horeb was but eleven days distant from Kadesh-barnea. This was to remind them that their own bad conduct had occasioned their tedious wanderings; that they might the more readily understand the advantages of obedience. They must now go forward. Though God brings his people into trouble and affliction, he knows when they have been tried long enough. When God commands us to go forward in our Christian course, he sets the heavenly Canaan before us for our encouragement.

Deuteronomy 1:1 These [be] the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain over against the Red [sea], between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Dizahab.

These opening “words which Moses spake unto all Israel” form an “inclusion” (a frame), of sorts with the words at the end of the book, “Israel . . . and did as the Lord commanded Moses” (34:9). The Lord established a relationship of grace with the people of Israel, using an international treaty format to prepare the world and His people for His salvation plan.

“The words which Moses spake”: Almost all of Deuteronomy consists of speeches given by Moses at the end of his life. (According to verse 3), Moses acted upon the authority of God since his inspired words were in accordance with the commandments that God had given.

“Unto all Israel”: This expression is used 12 times in this book and emphasizes the unity of Israel, and the universal applications of these words.

Most of the areas named (in 1:1), is not known with certainty, although they may have been along Israel’s route north from the Gulf of Aqabah (compare Num. chapter 33). The plain referred to is the large rift valley that extends from the Sea of Galilee in the north to the Gulf of Aqabah in the south. Israel was encamped to the east of the Jordan River in this valley.

This is giving the location of this nearly three million people, who are poised to go into the Promised Land. This is one of the last things that Moses does. He wants this generation to fully understand the law of God. This says he gave the message to all the people, not just the elders. These laws are for all the people. This is before they cross over Jordan to the Promised Land. They were between the Red Sea and the place where they will cross over Jordan. We dealt with all of these places in our book on Numbers.

Deuteronomy 1:2 "([There are] eleven days' [journey] from Horeb by the way of mount Seir unto Kadesh-barnea.)"

The 11-day journey took Israel nearly 40 years to complete because of their disobedience (Num. chapters 13 and 14). “Horeb” is another name for Mount Sinai (4:10, 15; Exodus 3:1), where God revealed His glory and gave the law.

“Eleven days’ journey”: The distance from Horeb to Kadesh-Barnea was about 150 miles. Kadesh was on the southern border of the Promised Land. This trip took 11 days on foot, but for Israel lasted 38 more years.

“Horeb”: The usual name in Deuteronomy for Mt. Sinai means “desolation”, a fitting name since the area around Sinai is barren and uninviting.

“Mount Seir”: South of the Dead Sea in Edom.

The journey to the Promised Land was just a very short journey. Their unfaithfulness caused the 40-year delay. Kadesh-barnea was the place where they would camp, just before entering the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 1:3 "And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first [day] of the month, [that] Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that the LORD had given him in commandment unto them;"

“The fortieth year”: The 40th year after the Exodus from Egypt. The years of divine judgment (Num. 14:33-34) were ending.

“The eleventh month”: Jan. – Feb, 1405 B.C. Numbers chapters 20-36 records the events of the 40th year.

Forty years have passed. Their wandering is over. The eleventh month is very similar to our February. The message coming from Moses' mouth for these people is actually the message of the LORD.

Deuteronomy 1:4 "After he had slain Sihon the king of the Amorites, which dwelt in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, which dwelt at Astaroth in Edrei:"

“Sihon ... Og”: The two kings of the Amorites whom the Jews defeated in Transjordan (see 2:24 to 3:11; Num. 21:21-35).

Moses knew before the battle with the Amorites, that he would not enter the Promised Land. The latter chapters of the book of Numbers tell of this little matter of these evil kings being dealt with before Moses died. Og and Sihon had planned to stop the Israelites from entering the Promised Land. Israel, commanded of God, destroyed them both. Astaroth and Edrei were places where the evil kings resided.

Verses 1-5 to 4:43: These verses are mainly Moses' first speech. Moses introduced his explanation of the law with a call to enter the land of Canaan (verses 6-8), which had been promised by the Abrahamic Covenant from God (compare Gen. 15:18-21). Throughout this book he refers to that covenant promise (1:35; 4:31; 6:10, 18, 23; 7:8, 12; 8:1, 18; 9:5; 10:11; 11:9, 21; 13:17; 19:8; 26:3, 15; 27:3, 28:11; 29:13; 30:20; 31:7, 20-23; 34:4). He then gave a historical review of God's gracious acts (1:9 – 3:29), and a call to Israel for obedience to the covenant given to them by the Lord at Sinai (4:1-40). This introductory section ends with a brief narrative recounting the appointment of the 3 cities of refuge east of the Jordan (4:41-43).

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

Moses explains the “law” that God had already given them in the Books of Genesis through Numbers. In fact, Deuteronomy means “the second [giving of] the law”. Those who heard the “first law” were now dead, so God's law was specifically addressed to the new generation; there would be no excuse for ignorance or disobedience.

“Declare”: To make clear, distinct, or plain. The purpose of the book was to make the sense and purpose of the law clear to the people as they entered the Land. It was to be their guide to the law while living in the Land. Moses did not review what happened at Horeb (Sinai), which is recorded by him in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers (compare Exodus 20:1 – Num. 10:10), but rather gave Israel instruction in how to walk with God and how to fulfill God's will in the Land and be blessed.

Moses will not cross over Jordan, so the law was to be given to the people by him before they entered the Promised Land. They are in the plains of Moab, when Moses gives them the law. They are near Jericho.

Deuteronomy 1:6 "The LORD our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount:"

This verse begins the historical prologue which extends through (4:43). The historical prologue in the ancient Near Eastern treaties (and in Deuteronomy and Exodus), surveys the “great King’s” relationship, and especially his benefactions, to the vassal king (God and Israel). So in Deuteronomy the covenant tradition of promise, from Abraham to Moses, is rehearsed. Then there is the experience of observing God in history, working out the events of the promise (1:6 to 3:29).

The LORD is speaking of Jehovah. The LORD speaking to the people shows that they are His people, and He is their God. The Israelites had remained at Horeb about a year. The following is part of the covenant God made with Israel.

Exodus 19:5-6 "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth [is] mine:" "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These [are] the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel."

We will see in the following Scripture, that Israel agreed to the covenant.

Exodus 19:8 "And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD."

Horeb is the name of a range of mountains, of which Sinai is one of the summits. This is the place they received the Ten Commandments from God. Horeb was also, the place of the Rock which gushed forth water. It would be advantageous to read the whole 19th and 20th chapter of Exodus on this subject.

Deuteronomy 1:7 "Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all [the places] nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates."

“The land” (see verse 8), which the Lord set before Israel to go in and possess was clearly described (in verse 7). The hill country of the Amorites referred to the mountainous territory west of the Dead Sea. The Aqabah was the land in the rift valley from the Sea of Galilee in the north to the Dead Sea in the south. The hill country referred to the hills that run through the center of the Land north and south. These hills are to the west of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. The lowland referred to the low rolling hills that sloped toward the Mediterranean coast (Shephelah). The Negev described the dry wasteland stretching southward from Beer-sheba to the wilderness. The seacoast referred to the land along the Mediterranean Sea. The boundaries

of the Land of the Canaanites were given (in Num. 34:1-15). Lebanon to the north marked the northwestern boundary on the coast. The northeast boundary of the Land was the Euphrates River. Compare Num. 34:1-12).

Lebanon was the furthest point on one side, and the lands this is speaking of are near the entrance of the land near Jericho.

Deuteronomy 1:8 "Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them."

The patriarchal promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: God chose Abraham, and then promised him a land, posterity and that he would be a blessing (Gen. 12:1-3). Note its use (in Deut. 1:35; 4:31; 6:10, 18, 23; 7:8, 12; 8:1, 18; 9:5; 10:11; 11:9, 21; 13:17; 19:8; 26:3, 15; 28:11; 29:13; 30:20; 31:7, 20-21, 23; 34:4). All of these references to the land are based on God's grace, "which the Lord sware unto your fathers".

"The LORD sware": God's command to take possession of this Land by conquest was based upon the promise of the Land that had been given in a covenant to Abraham (Gen. 15:18-21) and reiterated to Isaac and Jacob (Gen. 26:3-5; 28:13-15; 35:12). These 3 patriarchs are mentioned 7 times (in Deut. 1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27; 29:13; 30:20 and 34:4). The Lord sealed His promise to the patriarchs with an oath (swore), indicating that He would never change His plan (compare Psalm 110:4).

This is the same land that their fathers had spied out, and decided they could not take. The LORD tells them to go into the land and take it for their own. This is the land the LORD had promised Abraham, and in turn, Isaac, and Jacob.

Genesis 13:14-15 "And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:" "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever."

Verses 9-18: Moses reminds the people of the happy constitution of their government, which might make them all safe and easy, if it was not their own fault. He owns the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham, and prays for the further accomplishment of it. We are not destitute in the power and goodness of God; why should we be destitute in our own faith and hope? Good laws were given to the Israelites, and good men were to see to the execution of them, which showed God's goodness to them, and the care of Moses (see notes on Exodus chapter 18 for the background).

Deuteronomy 1:9 "And I spake unto you at that time, saying, I am not able to bear you myself alone:"

About that time; for it was after the rock in Horeb was smitten, and before they encamped at Mount Sinai, that Jethro gave the advice which Moses took, and proceeded on it, as here related. (see Exodus 18:1).

"Saying, I am not able to bear you myself alone": To rule and govern them, judge and determine matters between them. Jethro suggested this to Moses, and he took the hint, and was conscious to himself that it was too much for him, and so declared it to the people, though it is not before recorded (see Exodus 18:18).

It appears from this, that Moses had spoken to their fathers, when they decided to send the spies into the land.

Deuteronomy 1:10 "The LORD your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye [are] this day as the stars of heaven for multitude."

"The stars of heaven": The Lord had promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky (see Gen. 15:5; 22:17). The nation's growth proved both God's intention and ability to fulfill His original promises to Abraham.

The "multitude" fulfilled the promises of (Genesis 15:5 and 22:17).

God's promise to them was fulfilled in the fact, that they were a large number compared to the number of stars in heaven.

Genesis 15:5 "And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be."

Deuteronomy 1:11 "(The LORD God of your fathers make you a thousand times so many more as ye [are], and bless you, as he hath promised you!)"

"Of your fathers" emphasizes the continuity of relationship, stressing the theme of the covenant with the patriarchs.

"A thousand times": A Semitic way of saying "an infinitely large number".

Moses is explaining to them that the near three million people they were now, is nothing to the amount they will increase to.

Genesis 22:17 "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which [is] upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;"

Verses 12-18: This relates to (Exodus 18:13-27). The necessary organization of the Israelites was dictated by God's blessing the people and multiplying them, so he includes this portion of their history.

Deuteronomy 1:12 "How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife?"

His meaning is, that he could not hear and try all their causes, and determine all their law suits, and decide the strifes and controversies which arose between them. It was too heavy for him, and brought too much trouble and encumbrance upon him.

"Cumbrance" means burden or trouble. The troubles that came on Moses as their leader had been tremendous. It was almost more than one man could bear.

Deuteronomy 1:13 "Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you."

"Take ... wise men": The fulfillment of God's promise to give to Abraham such a large posterity created a problem for Moses. The nation had become too large for Moses to govern effectively. The solution was the appointment by Moses of men to help him lead the people (see Exodus 18:13-27). These men were to be:

- (1) Wise, men who knew how to apply their knowledge;
- (2) Discerning, those who had understanding and so were able to judge; and
- (3) Experienced, knowledgeable and respected (compare Exodus 18:21).

These are the men that are to take on the tremendous task that Moses had endured by himself. These men will be their leaders. Jethro has advised Moses to do this, to help him bear the load. The people themselves, decide who their leaders are.

Deuteronomy 1:14 "And ye answered me, and said, The thing which thou hast spoken [is] good [for us] to do."

As the speech of Moses to the people is not expressed before, so neither this answer of theirs to him.

"The thing which thou hast spoken is good for us to do": To look out for and present persons to him as before described. This they saw was for their own good and profit, as well as for the ease of Moses, and therefore readily agreed to it.

This greatly pleased the people, because they had not liked many of the decisions Moses had made.

Deuteronomy 1:15 "So I took the chief of your tribes, wise men, and known, and made them heads over you, captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens, and officers among your tribes."

The principal persons among them, that were remarkable and well known for their wisdom and understanding, whom the people presented to him.

"And made them heads over you": Rulers of them, as follows.

"Captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens" (see Exodus 18:21).

"And officers among your tribes": Which Jarchi interprets of such that bind malefactors and scourge them, according to the decree of the judges, even the executioners of justice. And so the Jews commonly understand them to be, though some have thought they were judges also.

It appears, each tribe chose their own leaders. Moses approved their choices and set them over hundreds, or thousands as their ability warranted.

Deuteronomy 1:16 "And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear [the causes] between your brethren, and judge righteously between [every] man and his brother, and the stranger [that is] with him."

When they were appointed and constituted, even the heads and rulers before spoken of. This charge is also new, and not recorded before.

"Saying, hear the causes between your brethren": Hear both sides, and all that each of them have to say. Not suffer one to say all he has to say, and oblige the other to cut his words short, as the Targum of Jonathan paraphrases it. But give them leave and time to tell their case, and give the best evidence they can of it.

"And judge righteously": Impartially, just as the case really appears to be, and according to the evidence given.

"Between every man and his brother": Between an Israelite and an Israelite.

"And the stranger that is with him": Between an Israelite and proselyte, whether a proselyte of the gate, or of righteousness; the same justice was to be done to them as to an Israelite.

The judges of these people were to judge them on most matters. The only time something was to be settled by Moses, was if it were of great magnitude. These judges were like the lower court of our day, and Moses was like the higher court.

Deuteronomy 1:17 "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; [but] ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment [is] God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring [it] unto me, and I will hear it."

The call not to "respect persons in judgment" is one of many warnings against discrimination in the Old Testament (10:17; 16:19; Lev. 19:15; Prov. 24:23; 28:21). These warnings are reiterated in the New Testament (Rom. 2:11; James 2:1-13).

These judges were responsible to God for the decisions they made. They were to judge the rich and the poor in the same manner. They were not to respect the person, because of his wealth or position. The major things they could not decide, they brought to Moses. This would take the trivial problems off Moses.

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

There really was no question what they were to do. God had given commandment covering every aspect of their lives.

Verses 19-46: This section relates events at Kadesh-barnea. Moses reminds the Israelites of their march from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea, through that great and terrible wilderness. He shows how near they were to a happy settlement in Canaan. It will aggravate the eternal ruin of hypocrites, that they were not far from the kingdom of God. As if it were not enough that they were sure of their God before them, they would send men before them. Never any looked into the Holy Land, but they must own it to be a good land. And was there any cause to distrust this God? An unbelieving heart was at the bottom of all this. All disobedience to God's laws, and distrust of his power and goodness, flow from disbelief of his word, as all true obedience springs from faith. It is profitable for us to divide our past lives into distinct periods. To give thanks to God for the mercies we have received in each, to confess and seek the forgiveness of all the sins we can remember. And thus to renew our acceptance of God's salvation, and our surrender of ourselves to his service. Our own plans seldom avail to good purpose. While courage in the exercise of faith, and in the path of duty, enables the believer to follow the Lord fully. To disregard all that opposes, to triumph over all opposition, and to take firm hold upon the promised blessings.

Verses 19-21: "fear not, neither be discouraged" recalls encouragement given to the first generation. Fear that dominates a person's life may keep him or her from experiencing God's plan (see notes on Num. 10:11 to 12:16 for the background).

Deuteronomy 1:19 "And when we departed from Horeb, we went through all that great and terrible wilderness, which ye saw by the way of the mountain of the Amorites, as the LORD our God commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea."

As the Lord commanded them to do, when they were obedient.

"We went through all the great and terrible wilderness": The wilderness of Paran, called "great", it reaching from Mount Sinai to Kadesh-barnea, eleven days' journey, as Adrichomius relates. And "terrible", being so hard and dry as not to be ploughed nor sown, and presented to the sight something terrible and horrible, even the very image of death. To which may be added the fiery serpents and scorpions it abounded with (Deut. 8:15).

"Which ye saw by the way of the mountain of the Amorites": That is, in the way that led to the mountain.

"As the Lord our God commanded us": To depart from Horeb, and take a tour through the wilderness towards the said mountain.

"And we came to Kadesh-barnea": Having stayed a month by the way at Kibroth-hattaavah, where they lusted after flesh. And seven days at Hazereth, where Miriam was shut out of the camp for leprosy during that time.

This is speaking of that nearly 40 years of wanderings, where there was very little grass for the animals, and very little water. This could easily be called a desert land. God fed them miraculously, and when they were out of water, He provided water. The terribleness of this journey had to do with the hardships they endured. We must remember, they would not have had these hardships had they been obedient to God.

Deuteronomy 1:20 "And I said unto you, Ye are come unto the mountain of the Amorites, which the LORD our God doth give unto us."

Which was inhabited by them, and was one of the seven nations the Israelites were to destroy, and possess their land. And which lay on the southern part of the land of Canaan.

"Which the Lord our God doth give unto us": Not the mountain only, but the whole country of that people. And even all the land of Canaan.

This was a welcome relief from the desert land they had endured. Notice the statement, "The LORD our God". As long as they remember He is their God and obey His commandments, they will be blessed of the LORD. They get in trouble, when they do not have faith and turn from God.

Deuteronomy Chapter 1

1. Who penned the book of Deuteronomy?
2. Explain the name.
3. This is stating the _____ the _____ time.
4. Why is the law being stated again?
5. What is stressed by Moses to these people?
6. What must they remember?
7. Where did Moses speak this from?

8. Who was the law given to?
9. How many days' journey is it from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea?
10. Why was there the 40-year delay?
11. How many miles between Horeb and Kadesh-barnea are there?
12. Verse 3 says, Moses spoke to them when?
13. Their eleventh month is similar to our _____.
14. Who had they slain to get this far?
15. Where do we read more detail about the war with these two kings?
16. Where are they, when Moses gives the law?
17. LORD in verse 6, is who?
18. What special things happened at Horeb, or mount Sinai?
19. What city were they near?
20. God had sworn to _____, _____, and _____ that this Promised Land would be their descendant's?
21. How many were they for multitude?
22. The LORD God of your fathers make you a _____ times so many more as you are.
23. What does "cumbrance" mean?
24. Who advised Moses to get some help?
25. Who decided who the leaders were?
26. Who were made heads over the people?
27. How were they to judge?
28. The judges were like the _____ court of our day.
29. Who would decide the major things?
30. The great and terrible wilderness was actually a _____.
31. What statement in verse 20, must we take note of?