

Deuteronomy 1-4

1. What is the main thing that motivates/would motivate you to trust and obey Jesus?

Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Bible, consists mainly of 3 speeches given by Moses. The people of Israel are camped on the eastern side of the Jordan River and are about to enter the Promised Land. Forty years earlier, the previous generation had also been on the verge of receiving the land. They however, failed to trust God and were condemned to perish in the desert (see Numbers 14). Now the new generation, having experienced God's discipline, is ready to try again. Moses, now an old man and soon to die, reminds the new generation of God's character, of his gracious and powerful actions on behalf of his people, and of his law. (The name 'Deuteronomy' means second law – as it repeats, for a new generation of Israelites, the law first given to his people at Mount Sinai). While large sections of the book consist of lists of laws, the book is primarily a passionate appeal by Moses to the new generation to trust and obey God, and thereby enjoy his blessing on them. The climax comes in chapter 30 where the options are made very clear – how we respond to God is a matter of life or death!

Here's a broad summary of what's in the book...

1:1-5	Introduction
Ch 1-4	First Speech (History & appeal to obey the one and only God)
Ch 5-28	Second Speech (10 Commandments, responding to God, detailed laws & blessings/curses)
29:1-30:20	Third Speech (Renewal of the Covenant and choice of life or death)
31:1-34:12	The final words and death of Moses (with provision for the future)

2. Read Deuteronomy 1:1-8. Imagine yourself as an Israelite. You've just spent 40 years taking an 11 day journey through the desert. You know the promises of God to you and your people – to give you possession and enjoyment of the Promised Land. You know the previous generation failed to receive it. How would you be feeling on the verge of entering the land? What might be your hopes and/or fears?
3. Skim read chapters 1-3. Moses sets out the history of the failure of the previous generation to trust and obey God, of God's gracious provision for them in the desert, of the defeat of 2 kings, and of 2 ½ tribes already receiving their land allocation east of the Jordan. This is evidence of God's power and faithfulness, even to his rebellious people – and functions as an incentive to respond rightly to God (and not make the same mistake as the previous generation!). What evidence do we have of God's faithfulness and power to us?
4. Moses begins his appeal in chapter 4. Read the whole chapter and summarise...
 - a. What does Moses urge the people to do?
 - b. What reasons are given to support his appeal?
 - c. What seems to be the main reason in this chapter?
 - d. Which reasons still apply and should motivate us to trust and obey God?
 - e. Are there any differences between Israel's situation and ours?
5. Why is it wrong to worship other gods or make representations of the true God for use in worship? How do we see this today, and how might we be tempted to make the same mistake?
6. How does Deuteronomy 4 deepen our appreciation of Jesus, and desire to serve him?

Deuteronomy 5

1. Do you think churches should write/hang the 10 commandments on the walls of their buildings? Why or why not?

2. Moses second speech on Deuteronomy begins at 5:1. Read the introduction to it in 4:44-48. From this introduction (and from your memory of what was in chapters 1-4 generally) what is the situation into which Moses is speaking?

3. Read the actual introduction to Moses' words in 5:1-5. What reasons does Moses give for the Israelites to keep the commandments? How can Moses say that God spoke to them on the mountain (Sinai)? What does this imply about the nature of God's words?

4. Read through the commandments (from verses 6-21).
 - a. What do you notice about the order/structure of the commandments? To what extent are Jesus' words in Matthew 22:34-40 a summary of the commandments?

 - b. How does reading these commandments make you feel? (eg. Bored? Burdened? Liberated? Joyful? Guilty? Proud? Happy? Sad? Angry?)

 - c. Imagine what life would be like if our society actually lived by these commandments! What would be some of the main differences?

 - d. Which of the commandments do you find the most challenging for you to live by?

5. Read verses 22-33.
 - a. What was different about the way the 10 commandments came to Israel, compared to all the laws and decrees (cf. v 22 & v 30-31)?

 - b. What motivations does Moses give here for the people to keep the law?

6. Read Matthew 5:17-20. What does it mean that Jesus has come to 'fulfil the law'? Does this mean that law no longer applies to us?

7. Pray together that your hearts might be inclined to keep God's laws fulfilled in Christ. Pray for each other about specific areas of struggle in this regard.

Deuteronomy 6

1. Deuteronomy calls on God's people both to love and to fear God. Which of these two responses do you think comes most easily to us? What might this say about us and how we think about God?
2. Read Deuteronomy 6.
 - a. List all the ways that Israel are called to respond to God.
 - b. What incentives/motivations are Israel given to encourage them in these responses?
3. Verses 4 & 5 are known in Jewish tradition as the "Shema" (which means 'Hear' or 'Listen'). Some devout Jews recite this daily. The heart of Israel's response to God is to love him with all they've got. Jesus repeated these words as the greatest and most important commandment (Matthew 22:34-40)
 - a. What do you think it means to love God?
 - b. What aspect of loving God seems to be most prominent from the immediate context of Deuteronomy 6? What is the connection between the command to love God and the instructions of verses 6-9?
 - c. What might it look like for us to love God with all our heart, soul and strength? (It might help to think about what it would look like for a Christian not to love God in this way. Some guidance is also given in 1 John 4:20-5:4).
4. In John 14:15 Jesus says "if you love me you will obey what I command". Look back over Israel's incentives to obedience. In what ways are our incentives to obey Jesus similar or different, smaller or greater?
5. Israel is also called to fear God (v 10-19). What might it look like in practice to both love and fear God? Why do you think that both of these responses are called for?
6. Spend time praying to God? From what you've seen in this study, for what can you...
 - a. Praise God
 - b. Confess to God
 - c. Thank God
 - d. Ask God

Deuteronomy 7-11

When do you think most people find it easiest to trust God to keep his promises? When do people find it hardest?

Deuteronomy 7-11 is an extended appeal to Israel to remain faithful to God – to love him by trusting him and obeying his commandments. There are several passionate appeals and beautiful descriptions of God and his faithfulness (eg. 7:7-10 & 10:12-22). In this study we will focus on chapter 8.

For something different – you could choose to abandon the study below and read right through the whole section. Try to summarise the main themes and talk about how each of these helps us in following Christ.

Otherwise... read chapter 8.

1. Look back to the desert (v 1-5).

What must Israel 'remember' about their experience in the desert?

Why is this important?

In what ways is verse 5 an encouragement to us when we suffer as Christians?
(See also Hebrews 12:4-13)

2. Look forward to the land (v 6-9).

What can Israel look forward to if they trust God and keep his commands?

What hope is held out for us as Christians? (If you need help - see 1 Peter 1:3-6)

To what extent are you conscious of, and looking forward to the future that God has promised? How do you think a greater anticipation of this would make a difference to your life? What pitfalls might be avoided?

3. Look up to God (v 11-20).

When must Israel take particular care to 'remember' God? Why?

In what circumstances are we most tempted to forget God and exalt ourselves?

4. In what ways does Jesus fulfil Deuteronomy 8? To whom/what can we Christians look back, forward and up?
5. What practical things can you do to apply Deuteronomy 8 to your own life – so you will keep trusting and obeying God, through good times and bad?

Deuteronomy 12-30

1. Read Deuteronomy 21:22-22:12. What is your immediate reaction to reading this kind of law?

In Deuteronomy Moses second speech extends from chapter 5-28, and the third from 29-30. Chapters 12-26 contain detailed laws to guide Israel's life in the land. Some of these laws become very significant as the story of the Bible unfolds (eg. laws regarding the one place of worship (12), regarding kings (17:14ff), the promise of a prophet like Moses (18:14ff)). Others seem very detailed and sometimes obscure. In overview 4 main themes emerge¹...

- The laws cover a broad range of issues – no area of life is irrelevant to God.
- Many extend/apply the Ten Commandments (eg. no other gods, making idols, adultery, etc)
- Many are a reminder of the holiness of God (eg. see 23:9-14)
- Many reflect the character of God (eg. 24:19)

2. Look again at 21:22-22:12. What might we Christians learn from these laws?

3. Read Deuteronomy 30:11-20.

- a. What do you think is the command referred to in verse 11? (See also v 16)
- b. What do you think it means when Moses says this is not too difficult for you? (v 11-14)
- c. What are the choices for Israel? What are the consequences of each? (v 15-19)
- d. If the command is not difficult, and the choice seems obvious – why is the history of Israel one of failure to love God and keep his commands?

4. Read Romans 10:1-21. Two kinds of righteousness are contrasted here – that which the Jews zealously tried to establish on their own (righteousness by law), and that which comes from God and is established by Christ (righteousness through faith).

- a. What do you think it means that “Christ is the end of the law”? (v 4)
- b. Comparing Deuteronomy 30 and Romans 10 – what is similar and what is different between how people can/do respond to God under the old and new covenants?

5. To what extent do you think we Christians generally see our own and other people's responses to God as a matter of life and death? How might we be different if we saw the outcomes as starkly as in Deuteronomy 31?

6. From what you've learnt or been reminded of in this discussion, for what can you thank God? For what should you pray? Respond to God in thanks and prayer now.

¹ These are taken from Bryson Smith's analysis in "The One and Only: Deuteronomy", Matthias Media, 1993.

Deuteronomy 31-34

1. When a great leader retires (or especially if he/she dies suddenly) people can wonder “what now? How will we survive without him/her?” Can you think of any examples from history of this happening?

Moses led the people of Israel for 40 years. As we have seen, most of the book of Deuteronomy consists of three long speeches Moses gave to the people as they prepared to enter the land. However, due however to his own sin, he was not able to enter the Promised Land (see Deut 32:48-52). The closing chapters of the book record the preparations for, and the account, of Moses’ death. Could there ever be anyone as great as Moses!

2. Read Deuteronomy 34.

- a. From this passage (and also from your wider knowledge of the Bible) why was Moses so great?

- b. How might the Israelites have felt when Moses died?

3. Read Deuteronomy 31 (or perhaps read it in sections – v 1-8, 9-13, 14-18, 19-23 & 24-30). What different preparations are made for the future? What do we learn here about God, about Israel and about the future?

4. Earlier in Deuteronomy there is a promise about a future prophet like Moses. Read Deuteronomy 18:14-20. See how this is fulfilled in Acts 3:17-26. Think – in what ways is Jesus a prophet like Moses?

5. Read Hebrews 3:1-6. From this passage...

- a. What do Moses and Jesus have in Common?

- b. What is different?

- c. What implication follows for us?

6. As you come to end of this series of studies from Deuteronomy ...

- a. What have you learnt or been reminded of?

- b. What should you express to God – Praise? Confession? Thanks? Requests?