

The First Sermon of Moses

Deuteronomy 1

Deuteronomy 1:1-4 – *“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, Hazereth, and Dizahab. ² It is eleven days’ journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea. ³ 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, ⁴ after he had killed Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who dwelt at Ashtaroth in Edrei.”*

Background Notes

The book of Deuteronomy is important, not just to the Jewish people of the Old Testament but to believers of all times, because the book of Deuteronomy was quoted frequently in the New Testament. In fact, in refuting Satan during His time of temptation, the Lord Jesus quoted three times from Scripture, and all three quotations were from the book of Deuteronomy! (By the way, how many of us would be able to quote three verses from the book of Deuteronomy?)

Deuteronomy is a series of three or four sermons or major addresses that Moses gave to prepare the children of Israel to enter the Promised Land. The children of Israel were situated in the plains of Moab on the east side of Jordan River as Moses spoke to them (v1). In these messages he reviewed God’s covenant with Israel. It was a preview of what was to come as they entered and conquered the Promised Land God was giving them. Verse 4 refers to the victories they had already gained over the Amorites on the east side of the Jordan River.

The trip from Horeb (Mt Sinai) to Kadesh Barnea (where the spies were sent out to survey the Land) should normally have taken only eleven days. The eleven days in verse 2 is obviously placed as a contrast to the forty years in verse 3. What should have taken only eleven days travel time took a total of forty years because of the people’s sin of unbelief.

What a lesson for us! How much time do we wander around in circles in our Christian lives? How often do we fall short of maturity and growth because of our lack of trust and our sin?

Doctrinal Points

1. Moses reviewed Israel’s sojourn at Mt. Sinai.

The children of Israel were at Mt. Sinai for about a year, and the Lord said that this was long enough. *“The Lord our God spoke to us in Horeb, saying: ‘You have dwelt long enough at this mountain’ (v6).* The Lord wanted His people to move on to the Promised Land.

Moses gave a description of that Land in verse 7: *“Turn and take your journey, and go to the mountains of the Amorites, to all the neighboring places in the plain, in the mountains and in the lowland, in the South and on the seacoast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the River Euphrates.”* The land that God gave to Israel included all of Canaan, from the Negev in the south to the Euphrates River in the far northeast, and from the Mediterranean Sea on the west side to the Jordan River and the Arabah on the east side. God had promised this land to Abraham hundreds of years before this time, when He established the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 15).

All this land was Israel’s for the taking - by divine right: *“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”* (v8). God promised them victory, and all the children of Israel had to do was to go in and possess the land. Genesis 15 revealed that God was using Israel’s conquest to cleanse the land of the idolatry and immorality of the Canaanites. Unfortunately, Israel never possessed all the land that God promised them. Under King Solomon they controlled all this land, but they never *fully possessed* it. But prophetic Scriptures reveal that they will fully possess this Land in the future, when the Lord returns.

Deuteronomy 1:9-18 - *“And I spoke to you at that time, saying: ‘I alone am not able to bear you.’¹⁰ The Lord your God has multiplied you, and here you are today, as the stars of heaven in multitude.¹¹ May the Lord God of your fathers make you a thousand times more numerous than you are, and bless you as He has promised you!¹² How can I alone bear your problems and your burdens and your complaints?¹³ Choose wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you.’¹⁴ And you answered me and said, ‘The thing which you have told us to do is good.’¹⁵ So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and knowledgeable men, and made them heads over you, leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, leaders of tens, and officers for your tribes.¹⁶ “Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, ‘Hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him.’¹⁷ You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man’s presence, for the judgment is God’s. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.’¹⁸ And I commanded you at that time all the things which you should do.”*

During the year or so the children of Israel spent at Mt. Sinai, Moses appointed a number of good men to help him with the burden of leading and judging such a great number of people (Exodus 18). There would have been about two million Israelis at this time (Numbers 1). Moses reviewed significant events and transactions in this sermon that was given on the plains of Moab, when the Israelis were about to cross over the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land.

2. Moses reviewed Israel’s sojourn at Kadesh Barnea.

Deuteronomy 1:19-40 - *“So we departed from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw on the way to the mountains of the Amorites, as the Lord our God had commanded us. Then we came to Kadesh Barnea.²⁰ And I said to you, ‘You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the Lord our God is giving us.’²¹ Look, the Lord your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the Lord God of your fathers has*

*spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.*²² *“And every one of you came near to me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.’*²³ *“The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from each tribe.*²⁴ *And they departed and went up into the mountains, and came to the Valley of Eshcol, and spied it out.*²⁵ *They also took some of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought it down to us; and they brought back word to us, saying, ‘It is a good land which the Lord our God is giving us.’*²⁶ *Nevertheless you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God;*²⁷ *and you complained in your tents, and said, ‘Because the Lord hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.’*²⁸ *Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, “The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.”*²⁹ *“Then I said to you, ‘Do not be terrified, or afraid of them.’*³⁰ *The Lord your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes,*³¹ *and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.’*³² *Yet, for all that, you did not believe the Lord your God,*³³ *who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day.*³⁴ *“And the Lord heard the sound of your words, and was angry, and took an oath, saying,*³⁵ *‘Surely not one of these men of this evil generation shall see that good land of which I swore to give to your fathers,*³⁶ *except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and his children I am giving the land on which he walked, because he wholly followed the Lord.’*³⁷ *The Lord was also angry with me for your sakes, saying, ‘Even you shall not go in there.’*³⁸ *Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.*³⁹ *‘Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.’*⁴⁰ *But as for you, turn and take your journey into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea.”*

When the Israelites came to Kadesh Barnea, they were on the southern edge of the Promised Land. Moses challenged them to go in and take possession of the Land, and not to be afraid because the Lord had promised them victory. But the people hesitated. They wanted to send out a few spies first, to check out the Land so they could plan military strategy. Moses approved, and twelve spies - one from each of the twelve tribes - were sent out.

The fact that the people wanted to check out the situation - even though God said it was a good Land and promised He'd give them victory - indicates a lack of faith on Israel's part. However, God graciously tolerated their lack of faith and allowed them to send out the spies. The spies reported that indeed the Land was good and fruitful. But because of fear and unbelief, ten of the spies were convinced that the giants who lived in the Land would defeat them. So the rest of the people refused to enter and possess the Land. Only two spies, Joshua and Caleb, had the faith to go ahead - and of all that generation of the Israelites, they were the only two who eventually made it into the Promised Land. Even Moses did not get into the Land (v37) because he disobeyed the Lord by striking the rock when he was angry with the people (Numbers 20).

Because they refused to trust the Lord, Israel would have to wander in the wilderness for a total of forty years from the Exodus to the Conquest, until that whole unbelieving generation died. Only the little ones (about whom they were so worried) would get into the Land. How sad to read verse 40: *“But as for you, turn and take your journey into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea.”*

As believers, let's not be characterized by unbelief as the Israelis were, and end up wandering in the wilderness of Christian experience. Let's move on in faith, trusting in God's promises.

Practical Application

Always distinguish between confident faith and presumptuous pride.

Deuteronomy 1:41-46 - *"Then you answered and said to me, 'We have sinned against the Lord; we will go up and fight, just as the Lord our God commanded us.' And when every one of you had girded on his weapons of war, you were ready to go up into the mountain. ⁴² "And the Lord said to me, 'Tell them, "Do not go up nor fight, for I am not among you; lest you be defeated before your enemies."⁴³ So I spoke to you; yet you would not listen, but rebelled against the command of the Lord, and presumptuously went up into the mountain.⁴⁴ And the Amorites who dwelt in that mountain came out against you and chased you as bees do, and drove you back from Seir to Hormah.⁴⁵ Then you returned and wept before the Lord, but the Lord would not listen to your voice nor give ear to you. ⁴⁶ "So you remained in Kadesh many days, according to the days that you spent there."*

When the children of Israel were told that they could not enter the Land, they tried to change their minds! Against the Lord's direct command, they entered the Land to fight the enemy. But the Lord had told them it was too late, and they were soundly defeated.

It might appear that their willingness to fight for the Land was confident faith - but God saw it as presumptuous pride and sin. Why? Because the Lord had told them He would not be with them, but they thought that they could defeat the enemy in their own strength!

Confident faith is defined as looking to the **Lord** and to **His** power. But trusting in yourself and thinking that you don't need the Lord is presumptuous pride. From the outside, both may look the same - but not from God's point of view! Let's make sure we have God's point of view in our walk of faith. Always distinguish between confident faith and presumptuous pride.