

## CHAPTER 7: Deuteronomy and Joshua 1 thru 5

**So it was in the Transjordan, in Moab, that Moses began to deliver these words...** (Deuteronomy 1:5) The Book of Deuteronomy is a series of speeches from Moses. He calls upon the new generation of Israelites, those who are about to go into the Promised Land, to be faithful to their covenant with God. Moses repeats many of the laws and instructions that were given to their parents, the Exodus generation, at Mount Sinai. This is where the book gets its name. It combines two Greek words, "Deutero" and "Nomos," meaning "Second Law." While it is NOT technically a second Law, it is the second GIVING of the Law. It is a repetition of what the people have already heard.

Moses begins by reminding the people how the previous generation had been unfaithful. He contrasts their lack of faith with God's faithfulness. He recalls how God graciously had provided for and protected the people in the wilderness. While God did eventually bring judgment on that rebellious generation, He did not abandon His covenant promise to Abraham.

Moses exhorts this new generation to be more faithful to God's covenant than their parents and grandparents had been. In Deuteronomy 5 he repeats word for word the Ten Commandments that were given at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20).

Moses tells the people... **"Listen, Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You must love the Lord your God with your whole mind, your whole being, and all of your strength. These words I am commanding you today must be kept in your mind."** (Deuteronomy 6:4-6) This is fundamentally important. They must remember God's commandments!

Israel is to be wholeheartedly devoted to God. Obedience to God's laws is what makes Israel a unique people. As God told the people at Mount Sinai, **"And you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."** (Exodus 19:6) Israel is to be different from all the other nations. In fact, they are to reflect the very character of God to the world.

Israel is to be devoted to the Lord God and worship Him ONLY. Why is it so important for the people to understand this? They are about to enter into the land of Canaan which is a very pagan and evil land. There the inhabitants worship many false gods. Israel is NOT to do this.

**“You must revere the Lord your God, serve Him... You must not go after other gods, those of the surrounding peoples, For the Lord your God, who is present among you, is a jealous God and His anger will erupt against you and remove you from this land.”** (Deuteronomy 6:13-15)

Many of the laws given originally at Mount Sinai are now restated. They are arranged by topic. There is one whole section devoted to how Israel is to worship God. Worship is to take place in a central location, the Tabernacle. Israel must not adopt any of the pagan worship practices. They must strictly follow God’s pattern for worship.

Worshipping God extends far beyond just meeting together corporately. It involves the way the Israelites treat each other. They are to take care of the poor. This includes foreigners, widows and orphans. **“For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty, and awesome God... who justly treats the orphan and widow, and who loves resident foreigners, giving them food and clothing. So you must love the resident foreigner because you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.”** (Deuteronomy 10:17-19) The basic message for the Israelite people is this: **“Remember Who you belong to and where you came from!”**

Worship is also to be done through their act of giving. For starters the people are to give one tenth of their annual income to support the work of the priests and Levites. The grateful heart of an Israelite bringing his or her gift to God can be summarized like this: **“So now, look! I have brought the first of the ground’s produce that You, Lord, have given me.”** (Deuteronomy 26:10)

But giving doesn’t stop there. The Israelites as a people group are to be generous to everyone who is in need. Israel is to stand out as a nation of compassion.

A large portion of the book of Deuteronomy outlines the character qualities that Israel’s leaders must possess. They are to be people of integrity. They must be committed to God. They must keep His covenant laws. God places all of Israel’s leaders, whether they are priests, judges, elders or rulers, under the authority of God’s laws. God will enforce this by sending various prophets who will hold the nation’s leaders accountable.

Moses tells the people... **“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you – from your fellow Israelites; you must listen to him. The Lord then said to me, ‘...I will put My words in his mouth and he will speak to them whatever I command. I will personally hold responsible anyone who then pays no attention to the words that prophet speaks in My name.’”** (Deuteronomy 18:15, 17-19) So then, someday God will raise up a special prophet in Israel who will be similar to Moses.

God even addresses Israel's future kings. God knows that at some point in the future the people are going to want a king. **"When you come to the land the Lord your God is giving you and take it over and live in it and then say, 'I will select a king like all the nations surrounding me,' you must select without fail a king whom the Lord your God chooses. From among your fellow citizens you must appoint a king – you may not designate a foreigner who is not one of your fellow Israelites."** (Deuteronomy 17:14-15)

Moses points out some of the dangers of having a king that the people need to be aware of. **"Moreover, he must not accumulate horses for himself... he must not marry many wives lest his affections turn aside, and he must not accumulate much silver and gold."** (Deuteronomy 17:16-17) It is also very important that Israel's king – whoever that might be – fear God, know God's Law and obey it. Generally speaking as the king goes, so go the people.

Another big section of the book deals with laws relating to Israel's civil life – laws about marriage and family and business. It also addresses the issue of social justice, the legal system and protecting the most vulnerable people among them. One example of this is a law concerning the harvest that is intended to help the poor. Harvesters are to leave a portion of their crop in the field for the poor to gather up. This is called "gleaning."

All of these laws have a specific purpose. They're not intended to burden the people down – rules just for the sake of rules – but rather they form the pattern that will set Israel apart. God is calling His covenant people to a higher level of wisdom, justice and compassion than is found in any of the other nations around them.

Moses issues a final challenge to the people: **"Today the Lord your God is commanding you to keep these statutes and ordinances, something you must do with all your heart and soul. Today you have declared the Lord to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways, keep His statutes, commandments, and ordinances, and obey Him. And today the Lord has declared you to be His special people (as He already promised you) so you may keep all His commandments. Then He will elevate you above all the nations He has made and you will receive praise, fame, and honor. You will be a people holy to the Lord your God, as He has said."** (Deuteronomy 26:16-19)

With that Moses concludes his review of God's laws. The new generation of Israelites formally ratifies their covenant with God exactly as their parents had done all those years ago at Mount Sinai.

In Deuteronomy 28 blessings and curses are tied to God's covenant with His people. If Israel listens to and obeys God, then things will go well for them. They will

receive divine blessings. But, if the people do NOT listen, if they rebel against God, then they can expect curses upon them – these could be things like disease, famine, defeat and enslavement. It is even possible that the people could be exiled away from their land.

The people must make a choice as to what they are going to do. Moses says, **“Today I invoke heaven and earth as a witness against you that I have set life and death, blessing and curse, before you. Therefore, choose life so that you and your descendants may live! I also call on you to love the Lord your God, to obey Him and be loyal to Him, for He gives you life and enables you to live continually in the land the Lord promised to give to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”** (Deuteronomy 30:19-20) If the people will just obey God, they’ll receive blessings. That seems simple and straightforward enough, right?

But then Moses adds this – **“For I know that after I die you will totally corrupt yourselves and turn away from the path I have commanded you to walk. Disaster will confront you in the days to come because you will act wickedly before the Lord, inciting Him to anger because of your actions.”** (Deuteronomy 31:29) Clearly Moses is not very optimistic about how things will turn out. He knows this people all too well having spent decades with them!

But Moses also knows God. So he says this to the people: “Even when God eventually banishes you from the land for your rebellious behavior... **Then if you and your descendants turn to the Lord your God and obey Him with your whole mind and being... the Lord your God will reverse your captivity and have pity on you. He will turn and gather you from all the peoples among whom He has scattered you.**” (Deuteronomy 30:2-3) What a compassionate God! Even if His people totally fail spiritually and are removed from their land, God promises to show compassion to them, to pick up the pieces and to restore everything they lost.

Moses is keenly aware that there is something spiritually wrong with Israel. Their hearts are stubborn and hard. The truth is that they’re not that much different from the rest of humanity. But God is so gracious and merciful! **“The Lord your God will also cleanse your heart... so that you may love Him with all your mind and being and so that you may live.”** (Deuteronomy 30:6) God promises that one day He will transform the sinful hearts of His covenant people.

As the book of Deuteronomy closes, Moses equips the new generation of Israelites with the knowledge of God’s character. The people are told how to live and behave rightly as God’s representatives to the nations around them.

Moses gives a copy of the Law to the Levites for safekeeping. He directs that the Law be brought out and read to all Israel every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Moses knows full well that after he's gone Israel will rebel against God. The Law will serve as a witness against the people.

The final words of Moses exhort the people of Israel to remain faithful. **When Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel he said to them, "Keep in mind all the words I am solemnly proclaiming to you today; you must command your children to observe carefully all the words of this law. For this is no idle word for you – it is your life! By this word you will live a long time in the land you are about to cross the Jordan to possess."** (Deuteronomy 32:45-47) Moses then pronounces blessings on each one of the tribes of Israel.

Moses ascends to the summit of Mount Nebo where God gives him an incredible view of the Promised Land. There Moses dies and Joshua, having already been commissioned by Moses as his successor, takes over as Israel's leader.

This takes us now to the book of Joshua.

Since the Exodus from Egypt, Joshua has been serving as Moses's general. He has been Israel's military commander. Along with Caleb, Joshua was one of the two spies who gave a good report after investigating the land of Canaan. Now he is Israel's leader. Joshua is a man the people are very familiar with and one whom they greatly respect.

**After Moses the Lord's servant died, the Lord said to Joshua... "Moses My servant is dead. Get ready! Cross the Jordan River! Lead these people into the land which I am ready to hand over to them."** (Joshua 1:1-2)

The boundaries of the Promised Land extend west from the Mediterranean Sea; east to the Jordan River; north where Syria and Lebanon are located; south all the way thru the wilderness. It's a huge territory. God tells Joshua His plans to give this whole land to Israel. It is the very same land of Canaan that God promised to give to Abraham and his family 680 years earlier – part of the original covenant promise.

Joshua calls upon the people of Israel to obey the covenant commands given originally at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24) and recently reaffirmed in the plains of Moab (Deuteronomy 26).

He reminds the tribes of Gad and Reuben of their promise to Moses to cross the Jordan with the rest of their brothers and help them to conquer the land. **They told Joshua, "We will do everything you say. We will go wherever you send us. Just as we obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. But may the Lord your God be with you as He was with Moses! Any man who rebels against what you say and does not**

**obey all your commands will be executed. But be strong and brave!”** (Joshua 1:16-18)

The people are ready to possess the land!

Joshua sends spies into the land just as Moses had done 40 years before. But things turn out much better this time. We even see some Canaanites turning to follow the God of Israel. One of these is a resident of Jericho, a prostitute of all things named Rahab. While they are in Jericho, the two Israelite spies are discovered, but they are hidden by Rahab. She misleads the men of Jericho who are pursuing the spies and sends them on a wild goose chase into the hills.

Rahab explains to the spies about her newfound faith in the God of Israel. She requests that she and her family be spared when Jericho is attacked. The men swear an oath to save her and she lowers them down by a rope from her window. This is convenient since her house is located inside the city's exterior wall. To identify her house later during the siege, Rahab ties a scarlet cord in her window.

The two spies safely return to Joshua's camp. They recount their experience in Jericho. **They told Joshua, “Surely the Lord is handing over all the land to us! All who live in the land are cringing before us!”** (Joshua 2:24) This is a far cry from the negative report the ten spies gave Moses 40 years earlier!

The next morning Joshua leads the people of Israel into the Promised Land. The priests are out in front carrying the ark of God. The Jordan River is at flood stage. How will this large group of people get across?

In the same way that the Red Sea had parted for Moses and the people (Exodus 14) so now the Jordan River stops flowing for Joshua and the people. As soon as the soles of the feet of the priests carrying the ark touch the water, the river stands in a heap on one side and the riverbed becomes dry. The Israelite nation crosses the Jordan River on dry ground!

To commemorate God's miracle that day at the Jordan River twelve stones are taken from its riverbed and placed in the Israelite camp just east of Jericho at Gilgal. Joshua tells the people: **“The stones will be a reminder to you. When your children ask someday, ‘Why are these stones important to you?’ tell them how the water of the Jordan stopped flowing before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the water of the Jordan stopped flowing. These stones will be a lasting memorial for the Israelites.”** (Joshua 4:6-7)

Now that the Israelite people have crossed the Jordan and are finally in the Promised Land, they take time to reflect back on their history and their ancestry as

God's covenant people. Joshua circumcises the new generation of Israelite men. This is the same surgical sign of faith commitment to God that God had directed Abraham to do (Genesis 17). Here at Gilgal the practice is re-instituted. The people then celebrate the Passover. With the people in the Promised Land, an abundant land, the manna from heaven stops. It had been God's provision for years but now it is no longer necessary. The Israelites will never eat manna again. The nation is now prepared spiritually to move forward and possess the land. The heavily fortified city of Jericho is in their sights.

The next day Joshua goes on ahead to scope out the city of Jericho. He has an unusual encounter with a mysterious man standing in front of him with his sword drawn. **Joshua approached him and asked him, "Are you on our side or allied with our enemies?" He answered, "Truly I am the commander of the Lord's army. Now I have arrived!" Joshua bowed down with his face to the ground and asked, "What does my master want to say to his servant?" The commander of the Lord's army answered Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, because the place where you stand is holy." Joshua did so. (Joshua 5:13-15)**

This mysterious man is an angelic warrior sent by God. The upcoming battles for possession of the Promised Land will not be Israel's battles. They will be God's battles. This is all part of God's sovereign plan with Israel playing a role in it.