

SESSION TWENTY

MOTIVATION AND STIPULATIONS FOR THE RENEWED COVENANT

Deuteronomy 1:1–26:19

PART A

THE EXHORTATION TO OBEY

Deuteronomy 1:1–4:43

I. OVERVIEW OF 1:1–4:43

This initial part of the book does not focus upon the actual specifications of the Law (as does 4:44–26:19). Primarily, this initial section is motivational with the focus upon their covenant history. But the purpose of the historical review is to help them understand the need for obedience (ch 4). Thus, before detailing the stipulations of what they are to obey, they need to see the cruciality of obedience. This obedience must involve the conquest of the land as well as faithfulness to YHWH once they settle in the land. One wise old saint was asked to summarize the content of Deuteronomy and he replied, "I can sum up Deuteronomy in three words: obey! obey! obey!"

II. THE STRUCTURE

PREAMBLE	HISTORICAL PROLOGUE				ADDENDUM
	Motivation to Enter and Conquer the Land			Motivation to Obey In the Land	
	Command Based on Abrahamic Covenant	Negative Example – Failure to Obey at Kadesh	Positive Example – Military Success Against Amorites & Bashan	Instructions Concerning the Conquest	Cities of Refuge East of the Jordan
1:1-5	1:6-8	1:9-46	2:1-3:17	3:18-29	4:1-40
	1:6—3:29			4:1-40	4:41-43

III. PREAMBLE (1:1-5)

The first five verses introduce the one mediating the covenant and remind the second-generation Israelites where they have come from. The time involves the 40th year, 11th month, 1st day. It has been nearly forty years since Israel made the exodus from Egypt, but less than six months since the terrible sin at Peor (Num 25). The men of the first generation who were eligible to fight have now all died off, but the bitter remembrance of Peor lingered on in the minds of the new generation. Although the older generation has died off, the new generation is quite aware that they have wayward hearts also. The question in Moses' mind is this: will this generation make the same mistake as the previous one did at Kadesh-Barnea? Poised at the border to the land, will they also slack away in unbelief? Furthermore, if they do enter the land and conquer, will they serve and obey YHWH as He has instructed them? These were crucial questions. Had the people learned from their history?

In hopes that this new generation would not repeat the same mistakes, Moses undertook to expound the Law (1:5). This is the Hebrew word *bē'ēr* (בִּיעַר), meaning to "explain" or "make clear." The hortatory material of Deuteronomy, especially chapters 1–4 was to make clear the importance of the Law to the nation with the stress upon obedience. Thus, the opening chapters are not simply an historical review (Israel knew the events); they are theological, reminding the people what kind of God they have. He will not treat lightly unbelief and rebellion as at Kadesh-Barnea. On the other hand, He will grant success to the nation when they seek to obey His will (e.g., against the Amorites). The Law was not given to punish the people but to protect them and show them the way of blessing. Love of YHWH was foundational to obedience (Deut 6).

IV. MOTIVATION TO ENTER AND CONQUER THE LAND (1:6–3:29)

The historical prologue (1:6–4:43) is divided into two basic parts: (1) the motivation to enter and conquer the land of promise (1:6–3:29) and (2) the motivation to obey when they settle in the land (4:1-40).

The first major part is not meant to recount all of Israel's history during the past 40 years. The material is very selective, and primarily concerns their failure at Kadesh and the recent successes against the Amorites and Bashan. One is a negative example, the other a positive one. The people must obey and conquer the land; God will certainly give them success!

A. The Command to Possess the Land (1:6-8)

The section on the conquest begins with a restatement of God's command to enter the land and possess it. This reaffirmation to give Israel the land clarifies that the previous failures have not nullified this intent of YHWH. The key idea, however, is in vs 8: why must the people take the land? Answer - God is still dealing with them on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant.

B. The Negative Example of Kadesh-Barnea (1:9-46)

This section opens with a recounting of the delegation of authority to assist Moses. This was necessary because of the burden of the people and their strife (1:12). This thought is a prelude to Kadesh-Barnea: the unbelief and rebellion that climaxed at Kadesh had its roots in the behavior of the people from the outset at Horeb. The finest administration that could be implemented did not change that.

The remainder of the chapter (19-46) centers directly on the events at Kadesh:

1:19-25 Decision to Send Spies

1:26-33	The Rebellion and Unbelief of Israel
1:34-40	YHWH's Response to Forbid the Land
1:41-46	Presumptuous Act to Take the Land

The present generation needed to be reminded of how rebellion against the LORD proved to be the downfall of the initial generation before embarking on the land again. Their action at Kadesh was rebellion, an insult to God's love for them, and a lack of trust despite His proven faithfulness.

1:26 - "Yet you were not willing to go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord"

1:27 - you said, "Because the Lord hates us . . ."

1:32 - "For all this, you did not trust the Lord your God"

The response of the Lord was anger upon their rebellion. For several years, God had been waiting the opportunity to further the divine program begun with Abraham. Now He had the nation and had given them a constitution; for the nation to back-out on YHWH was treason. They justly deserved discipline:

1:35-36 - "Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land which I swore to give your fathers, except Caleb . . . and Joshua."

This declaration of discipline is significant. The Lord is not forever casting off the nation from His program; rather, that particular generation lost the privilege they could have had. Even now, Israel has not been set aside totally from God's program. God will even yet fulfill all His promises to Israel. The covenant with Abraham will have its fulfillment. The church (with its origin at Pentecost) has not replaced Israel. Israel is now under discipline and the Church is the focal point of God's redeeming activity. But there will be a generation of Israel in the future that is restored and through whom God will fulfill all His promises to Israel.

C. The Positive Example - Military Success (2:1–3:17)

The present generation should not only be careful so as not to repeat the blunder of Kadesh, but they should be of good courage in that God has shown them His power to triumph over their enemies. They are not being asked to go in and conquer all the Canaanites on blind faith. In only the last few months they have conquered the kingdoms of Sihon king of Heshbon (the Amorites) and Og the king of Bashan. This was to demonstrate that God would give them divine help and enable them to conquer the inhabitants of the land:

"And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying, 'Your eyes have seen all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings; so the LORD shall do to all the kingdoms into which you are about to cross. Do not fear them, for the LORD your God is the one fighting for you.'" (Deut 3:21-22)

V. MOTIVATION TO OBEY IN THE LAND (4:1-40)

The material in chapter four anticipates that Israel will go in and conquer the land. But then what? Clearly, God is letting them know that obedience is a prerequisite for blessing!

A. Exhortation to Obey (4:1-8)

Chapter four opens with an exhortation to obey YHWH, and is followed by four reasons for doing so. First, obedience is the way to "live", i.e., experience YHWH's blessing (4:1). Second, disobedience, on the other hand, will result in discipline as in the case of Baal-Peor (4:3). Third, other nations will be closely observing Israel, particularly in light of the spectacular way which they have come to possess Canaan (the crossroads of the ancient world). To follow YHWH will mark Israel out as a wise and understanding people, and this will catch the eye of other nations, thereby giving Israel an opportunity to bear a testimony to YHWH (4:6). Fourth, Israel has been given a unique privileged opportunity among the nations: "*For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him?*" (4:7).

B. Exhortation to Not Forget (4:9-14)

Forgetfulness will be one of the worst enemies Israel will face as they settle in the land. As marvelously as YHWH had performed His miracles before them, they stood in danger of forgetting and letting these things depart from their hearts (4:9). They must be on guard and watch themselves closely, for they have a responsibility to pass their faith on to their children.

C. Exhortation to Avoid Idolatry (4:15-24)

God is very jealous of His glory and will share it with no other. Therefore, His people must avoid idolatry at all costs. This command is crucial, for the Israelites were about to enter a land that was saturated with every form of idolatry. Facing them at every corner would be the temptation to indulge in this common everyday practice of the Canaanites. Would the Canaanites influence Israel? The nation had not been particularly successful thus far in this regard. The exodus generation under Aaron's authority had made the golden calf, and the new generation had sacrificed and worshipped the gods of the Moabites at Peor (Num 25). In this section, Moses makes mention of his own sin of striking the rock. This sin, like that of idolatry, served to rob God of His glory.

D. Anticipation of Future Disobedience and Exile (4:25-31)

This is a crucial passage, not only because of what it foretells of Israel's exile but also what it reveals about their restoration. That the passage is prophetic, none can deny; but to pinpoint the exact events is another matter over which scholars will debate.

The structure of 4:25-31 is quite apparent:

1. Future Apostasy (25)
2. Discipline from YHWH (26-28)
3. Restoration (29-30)
4. Basis of God's faithfulness to Israel (31)

The passage begins by alerting the nation concerning apostasy in the future. Moses had just been exhorting the nation to obey the LORD and not fall into idolatry. Only then will they have YHWH's blessing. But now he warns them that each generation has this responsibility to obey. Furthermore, he assures them that a future generation will turn away and commit apostasy. The specifics are vague, but enough to make each generation stop and think: will we obey the Lord or will we be the generation that apostatizes? This apostasy will include (1) acting corruptly, (2) idolatry, and (3) provoking YHWH to anger by doing evil in His sight. The time is indefinite but will at least be after

they "have remained long in the land." The vagueness of the nature and time is purposeful, so as to make each generation stop and think: "will we be that generation?"

YHWH will not let the nation's apostasy go unchecked: He will bring discipline eventually (vv 26-28). Actually God's discipline will come in cycles, each progressively harsher so as to turn the people back to the LORD (comp. Lev 26). Here, only the general aspects are mentioned: (1) destruction on the land, (2) exile from the land and scattering among the Gentile nations, (3) reduction of the population (recall Gen 15:5), and service to the gods of the pagans.

Following this discipline and exile into foreign nations, God will restore His people (vv 29-30). Israel will have a time when they "return to the LORD" . . . when the nation (as a nation) repents and looks to the LORD. This restoration will take place under certain conditions:

1. Israel will be in exile (vs 29--"from there")
2. The repentance must be genuine, deep, from the heart
3. While Israel is "in distress"
4. This will take place "in the latter days"

Peter Craigie translates the phrase "In the latter days" as "in the days ahead" and comments elsewhere, "although these words have a prophetic ring . . . their immediate reference is still to a point in the near future and in the promised land".¹ This conclusion, however, is quite doubtful. This whole scene must involve exile. The Jews were exiled to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, and they were exiled again after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (the dispersion of the northern kingdom in 722 BC is distinct in that there was not a clear return of the people who retained their identity). Although the Babylonian exile partially fulfilled this pattern, it did not exhaust the prophecy. Israel's return from Babylon does not seem to have been preconditioned on national repentance (although Daniel models it; Dan 9:1-23). Zechariah, writing after the exile, does look forward to a national repentance that is connected with the return of Christ to reign as King (Zech 12:10 ff). This is more appropriate to the Deuteronomic passage and more sensible in regard to the phrase "in the latter days" (בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים).

The phrase is used 14 times in the OT: Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Deut 4:30; 31:29; Isa 2:2; Jer 23:20, 30:24, 48:47, 49:39; Ezek 38:16; Dan 2:28, 10:14; Hos 3:5; and Mic 4:1. Seebass concludes that the phrase can be used in a general sense of "some future time" or in a technical sense for "the end time."² It would be difficult to prove that all the references were used in the technical sense of the "end time," but that possibility certainly exists for Deut 4:30. Other passages (many of which are in the context of the kingdom blessedness) are certainly looking at that period closely connected with the return of Christ at the end of this age (e.g., Isa 2:2, Jer 30:34; Dan 2:28). The evidence seems to favor the idea that this passage in Deut 4 anticipates another restoration from exile for the Jews today (God is not finished with them yet). They will be brought back to the land again (to say that the Church=Israel would make no sense to the idea of returning to the land).

¹Peter Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, NIC, 139.

²Seebass, *TDOT*, 1:210-211.

Finally, vs 31 gives the reason why YHWH promises a restoration for the nation even after exile, namely, the Abrahamic covenant! God will not "*forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them.*" Once again, we see that God continues to deal with Israel on the basis of this covenant. Their unfaithfulness never abrogates the covenant. The Abrahamic covenant is still valid today and assures Israel of a future.

E. Conclusion: Appeal to Obey (4:32-40)

The final section of Deut 4 restates the exhortation to Israel to obey. Israel has had a unique and privileged relationship with YHWH; they should obey (vv 32-34). Israel was created that they might know YHWH God and His glory (vv 35-38). Finally, vv 39-40 sum up the need to obey: God's glory and Israel's blessing are at stake. But if Israel refuses, God will still manifest His glory.

The chapter closes with an addendum concerning the three cities of refuge in trans-Jordan (Deut 4:41-43).

PART B

THE STIPULATIONS OF THE RENEWED COVENANT

Deuteronomy 4:44–26:19

I. STIPULATIONS OF THE COVENANT AT MOAB (4:44–29:1)

In the preceding section, we examined the first four chapters of the book. We saw that these were primarily motivational in nature, so that the new generation would go in by faith and take the land of promise. The previous section underscored the fact that a response of obedience was essential to the nation securing YHWH's blessing and retaining that blessing. This section (the heart of the book) will focus on the details of the renewed covenant that Israel is being asked to respond to in obedience. Basically, this section (4:44–29:1) will show what is involved in the obedience that Moses has so forcefully argued for. In essence, the nation is being instructed in covenant lifestyle. [Chapters 27:1–29:1 will be treated in the next session].

A. Introduction to the Law Covenant (4:44–49)

Moses begins this section by stating: "*Now this is the law . . .*" (4:44). Actually, he will not deal with the specifics until 12:1ff. Yet this verse, when compared with 29:1, seems to bracket the major section dealing with the stipulations of the covenant at Moab. The introduction reaffirms the unique occasion at which the covenant offer was being entertained, i.e., in the plains of Moab across the Jordan. Before the nation crosses the Jordan, God wants to make sure they clearly understand what is being asked of them. Being a "unique nation" (recall Ex 19:5-6) certainly means a privilege, but it also means responsibility.

B. Review of the Covenant at Sinai (5:1–33)

Before proceeding further with the present call for covenant renewal, Moses recalls the former covenant which the previous generation of the nation had entered into with YHWH. The present call for covenant renewal is vitally related to this covenant at Sinai . . . it flows from it and is also based in the general commands of the Ten Commandments. The section goes on to review Israel's response to the first giving of the covenant law. Although Israel responded properly by expressing a willingness to bind themselves to YHWH under His law (5:27-28), they failed to comprehend their ability to keep that law. The LORD's response was a yearning for their obedience, yet with a more realistic outlook: "*Oh, that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all my commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever*" (5:29). He really does desire them to experience His blessing, but He recognizes that obedience only comes out of a "right heart." Moses is given the role of instructing the people in the proper response to the revelation of the Law. He is given the role of a teacher. Obedience is not simply a biological response. The people must not only know what the expectations are upon them, but also the basis from which obedience comes. Yet, the cart must not come before the horse. Learning what obedience is about (6:1–11:32) precedes the specific details of what is to be obeyed (12:1–26:19).

C. The Basis of Obedience (6:1–11:32)

Moses now takes up his role as teacher. Before instructing the people about the demands of the covenant, he takes time to clarify how true obedience can come from a human heart. True obedience involves both positive factors and negative factors. Without proper regard for these, the demand for obedience and commands of obedience are useless.

Positively, obedience comes from a heart that:

- 1) is totally in love with the LORD (6:1-9)
- 2) has accepted God's gracious acts of discipline as training for obedience (8:1-10)
- 3) focuses upon the character of God (10:12-22)
- 4) gives serious respect to the principle of blessings and curses (7:12-26; 11:1-32)
- 5) responds in gratitude to privileges that God graciously provides (7:6-11)

On the other hand, there are negative factors that can thwart obedience, and which must be guarded against lest the nation's standing with God be jeopardized:

- 1) Care must be taken to be on guard for "forgetfulness." Blessings from obedience can have an adverse effect of losing sight of dependence on the LORD (6:10-19; 8:11-20).
- 2) Care must be taken that the transmission of the faith continues to the children who form the next generation (6:20-25).
- 3) Care must be taken to remove those influences that will turn one away from YHWH, especially the wicked Canaanites (6:1-5).
- 4) Care must be taken to resist prideful attitudes that attribute success to one's own righteousness, when in reality history reflects a stubborn resistance to God (9:1–10:11).

D. The Stipulations of Obedience (12:1–26:19)

Now that the nature of obedience has been presented, Moses proceeds to detail specific commands that must be obeyed by the nation to enjoy success and blessings in the land. These included such areas as (1) the purity of YHWH worship, (2) the respect for the life and property of others, (3) the esteem for marriage and sexual purity, (4) the preservation of justice, (5) compassion for the oppressed in society, and (6) faithful stewardship in financial matters, both with God and man.

A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

Meditate upon Deut 4:9. How easy it is to forget! No matter what our spiritual victories have been or what privileges we have had in seeing God act, we can forget and drift away. Never take yourself for granted. A wise man is he who adopts the "buddy system" . . . having a faithful brother (or *brothers*) that you can be accountable to!