

# God's Message to Us in Deuteronomy 1-34

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## **Introduction**

As we make our way through the books of the Bible in our *God's Message to Us in Every Book of the Bible* sermon series,

- I hope that you are seeing how relevant the Old Testament is to us.
- Today, we come to the last of the five books of Moses: Deuteronomy.
  - If ever there was a book with much to say to us, it is Deuteronomy.

It is the book that Jesus Christ referred to more than any other when He came into this world—except possibly the Psalms, depending on how you count it...

- If you think about it, He was really in quite a similar position with Moses as far as His prophetic ministry.
  - Both Jesus and Moses preached the word to the people to prepare them for the inheritance that God had given them.
  - In Deuteronomy, we have Moses preaching (explaining the law as it says in Deuteronomy 1:5) to the people on the plains of Moab after forty years of wandering in the wilderness.
    - The forty years of wilderness were a punishment to them for not going into the Promised Land because of their unbelief.
    - And in Deuteronomy, we have Moses preparing the new generation to do what their parents had failed to do.
    - He is telling them how they are to live as God's people, taking their inheritance, and then serving God in the land—loving Him and remembering Him as their God.
  - Likewise, Jesus was calling the people with whom God had established His covenant to enter the kingdom that God had prepared for them.
    - Of course there was a great difference in that Jesus Himself was the One who obtained this kingdom for them by His obedience and death for sin.
    - But as far as His prophetic ministry, like Moses, He was calling them to receive the kingdom and to continue faithfully in covenant love and service to God.
  - In both cases, there was a blessing for those who obeyed the call and curse for those who rejected it.
    - Both Moses and Jesus were earnest in making this clear.
    - And both were also earnest about making it clear that many would fall away, and that there would even be a general falling away...
      - but that God would restore the kingdom again and that His mercy would not fail to those who continued in His grace.
  - We ourselves stand on similar ground.
    - We are God's people who have made a covenant with Him.
    - We are called to establish His kingdom through preaching the gospel.

- We have before us a blessing in the covenant for us and for our children if we continue in faith and obedience; and a curse if we disobey our calling and reject our Saviour.
- Though many fall away, He will always preserve a people and in the end they will have dominion over the whole earth.

Let us now turn to this great book of Deuteronomy and look at its message for us today.

**I. First, it calls us to go forward in taking the inheritance that God has given to us.**

A. Look at the opening words to this great book in chapter 1:5-8

- **Deut 1:5-8: On this side of the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses began to explain this law, saying, <sup>6</sup> “The LORD our God spoke to us in Horeb, saying: ‘You have dwelt long enough at this mountain. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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.’ ”**

1. Don't you love the way Moses begins in chapter 1 verse 6 with the words, “you have dwelt long enough at this mountain”?
  - a. They should have already been possessing the land by this time.
    - It was only because of their disobedience that they had not been allowed to go forward to take their promised inheritance of the land of Canaan.
  - b. So it can be said of us.
    - If the church had been faithful, we would surely have taken the whole world for Jesus Christ by now.
    - Just think how different it would be in our nation if nothing more had been done than parents reaching their own children for Christ!
2. But the message is clear—it is time to go and possess your inheritance.
  - a. It had been promised to them from God.
    - As we have seen, for Israel, it was the promise of the land of Canaan.
    - God was accomplishing two purposes by giving them this land.
      - He was bringing judgment on the Canaanites for their extreme rebellion against Him—He was using Israel to wipe them out completely.
      - And He was providing a place for Israel to live, a place where they could live as His people, in obedience to Him, until the time came that He brought forth His Son that would bring salvation to the world.
    - It was time for them to go and take this land that God had promised them.
      - It was high time.
  - b. With us, the call of God and the promise of God is to make disciples of the nations for Jesus Christ.
    - God has exalted Jesus to sit at His right hand until the nations are made His footstool because He has come as our righteous Saviour and King.

- He has fulfilled all righteousness for the kingdom He came to establish.
  - He has done it by His obedience and by His death on the cross for His people's sins so that all who come to Him are righteous through faith.
  - And God has called us to take the good news of the kingdom to the nations of the world—to take possession of the inheritance that He has given us.
    - This is something we should have finished a long time ago.
    - Our lack of faith and our disobedience have hindered our progress.
      - Nevertheless, God's promise still stands and will not fail.
3. Moses highlights the fact that it was their own fault that they were not already in the land. He rubs it in.
- a. He goes over the history in 1:19-46 of how, forty years before, they had refused to go and take the land that God had given them.
    - Instead of trusting God, who had promised to give them victory, they concluded that the task was impossible for them and refused.
    - That was why they were in the wilderness.
  - b. We need to feel this rebuke too.
    - 1) When we look at the records of church history, we can see how the church has made great progress in taking the world for Christ,
      - but it has taken us much longer than it should have to make this progress.
    - 2) But even more, we should be especially ashamed from where we stand in North America that we have been not possessed our possession.
      - God has taken away our dominion and given it to our enemies because of our unfaithfulness.
      - Much of Deuteronomy (as we will look at later) is filled with warnings about serving God faithfully after He has given us our inheritance.
        - That is where we have especially failed in Canada.
  - c. Why is it helpful to see this? Why does Moses rub it in?
    - It is to humble us so that we will repent.
    - And it is to vindicate God, who has been faithful to His promise.
      - If the problem is with His faithfulness, we would have no hope in going forward.
      - We would not be able to trust Him or rely on Him.
    - Whenever we fail, it is easy for us to rewrite history in a way that makes us look faithful and the mere victims of circumstance.
      - But that is not the way it is!
      - We have no one to blame but ourselves for our unfaithfulness.

TRANS> So God commands us to get on with the work of possessing our inheritance.

- For Israel, it was taking the land—for us, it is spreading the gospel and reforming our lives and what is left of the church in accordance with God's calling.

B. Look at how God not only commands, but also encourages His people to take the inheritance that He has given to them.

1. In Deut 2 & 3, Moses points out to Israel how the LORD led them through the wilderness.
  - He especially highlights how God had given them victory over their enemies—over Sihon, king of Heshbon, and Og, king of Bashan.
  - If God could bring down these great nations, then He could give Israel victory over the Canaanites too.
    - By this, they are encouraged to go in and take the land of their inheritance!
2. The message for us is to look at what God has done in our day.
  - We can do this in several ways.
    - a. We can look at the amazing progress of the gospel in the world so far!
      - It started out with a few trembling disciples of Jesus, and now you can find people all over the world who are praising God.
    - b. And we can look at how our brothers and sisters are upheld by God in places like Iran and Iraq, China, and parts of Africa, where the gospel is advancing even in the face of persecution.
    - c. And when it comes to reformation, we can look at the progress that the reformers made in reforming the church after the great apostasy that came when the Pope set himself up against Christ...
      - And we can see how reformation has made progress in our day among our people.
      - We need to be encouraged by this and keep moving forward in faith.
    - d. We can even look on a smaller scale and see growth in our own lives and in the lives of others in the congregation.
      - God is faithful and He is ready to help us.

TRANS> So Deuteronomy begins with this call and wonderful encouragement to get on with possessing our inheritance from God...

- After this, we come to the portion of Deuteronomy that takes up the most ink.

## II. We are told how we are to live in our inheritance from God.

- For Israel, how they were to live in the land, and for us, how we are to live in the church... how to possess our possession—the area in which we have failed.
    - This is predominant focus chapters 4-26.
- A. Look at how we are introduced to this beautiful life we are live as heirs of God in chapter 4.
1. It is summed up for us in verses 5-10—chapter 4, verses 5-10:
    - **Deut 4:5-10:** “Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according *to them* in the land which you go to possess. <sup>6</sup> Therefore be careful to observe *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.’ <sup>7</sup> For what great nation *is there* that has God *so* near to it, as the LORD our God *is* to us, for whatever *reason* we may call upon Him? <sup>8</sup> And what great nation *is there* that has *such* statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? <sup>9</sup> Only take heed to yourself, and diligently

**keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, <sup>10</sup> especially concerning the day you stood before the LORD your God in Horeb, when the LORD said to me, ‘Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and *that* they may teach their children.’ ”**

2. What a warm call this is from our heavenly Father to obey His commandments.
    - He wants our lives to be filled with the beauty and wisdom that comes from obeying His commandments.
      - He wants everyone to see our beauty and to see the way He blesses us and to see how He loves us and is near to us when we call on Him.
- B. God makes it very clear in chapters 4-6 that most of all, He wants us to love Him.
- That is the aim of everything.
1. After the warm introduction in chapter 4, the LORD urges us not to reject Him by making idols to represent Him.
    - a. Idolatry is the thing that we humans gravitate to when we don't love God.
      - Because we know Him through the word, we have the power to change what we say about Him.
      - This is how people move away from the truth and start serving idols.
    - b. God shows us that His primary way of revealing Himself to us is through His redemptive acts—His saving of us from sin and Satan.
      - He urges us not to alter this magnificent revelation.
        - You can see this in Deut 4:32-35: **“For ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and *ask* from one end of heaven to the other, whether *any great thing* like this has happened, or *anything* like it has been heard. <sup>33</sup> Did *any* people *ever* hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live? <sup>34</sup> Or did God *ever* try to go *and* take for Himself a nation from the midst of *another* nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? <sup>35</sup> To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself *is* God; *there is none other besides Him.*”**
      - He is known by His redeeming work for His people.
        - He saves us that we might be His people.
        - This is all the more the case now that Jesus has come to redeem us!
          - Who could have ever dreamed that such a thing would be done as that God would come and die for His people that they might serve Him.
      - The foundation of His relationship with us is love.
        - He has taken us to be His people because of His great love for us.
        - That is the reason He sent Jesus and that is the reason he calls us to come to Him.
    - c. His yearning for us to keep His commandments is seen in 5:29: **Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!**

- Instead of revising God and revising His commandments, He wants us to love Him as He is and to keep His commandments as they are.
  - He wants us to love Him and to obey Him—not our own idol versions of Him.
- 2. In chapter 6, His desire for us to love Him is directly expressed.
  - a. He does not want mere rule keeping, but for us to truly love Him as the God who has redeemed us by His grace!
    - That is at the heart of it all.
    - Look at chapter 6, verse 1-7: **“Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe *them* in the land which you are crossing over to possess, <sup>2</sup> that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. <sup>3</sup> Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe *it*, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the LORD God of your fathers has promised you—‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’ <sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”**
  - b. This theme beautifully permeates the teaching of Jesus in the gospels.
    - Love is the theme of His instructions about how to live in His kingdom.
    - He always presented the commandments in this very warm way as being an expression of our love for God.
      - Jesus had such a great love for the Father, and that is why He said that He always does what pleases Him.
      - It is His constant delight to delight Him!
    - It is such a distortion to take the commandments and turn them into harsh rules—or look at them in that way.
      - We should desire to have them permeate every fibre of our being.
      - They will make us beautiful and near to God—as Jesus said,
        - **Joh 14:21: “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”**
  - c. Keep in mind as well that the moral commandments of God do not change when Jesus comes—not at all.
    - The difference is that now we have His amazing beautiful example to follow as one who perfectly kept them...
    - Plus, we have the Holy Spirit poured out in a fullness they did not know in the Old Testament so that God’s law, this same moral law, is now written on our hearts.
- C. All through Deuteronomy, Moses applies the commandments as commandments saturated with love for God and for others.

1. In chapter 7, love is the reason we do not give our daughters in marriage to those who are not His people... we don't want alliances with those who do not love our God.
2. In chapter 12, love is the reason we worship Him as He commands and not as the nations worship their gods—our worship is for Him—it is not for us.
3. In chapter 13, love is the reason we will not tolerate anyone among us calling on us to worship other gods—even if the one doing it is a near relative.
  - Israel was instructed to stone them—and we are instructed to remove them from the church.
4. In chapter 14, love is the reason we keep ourselves distinct as God's people—
  - for Israel, it was maintaining the ritual purity that distinguished them, for us it is living a holy life of love in imitation of Jesus who said, “by this all men will know that you are my disciples—if you love one another.”
5. And in chapter 14:22-29, love is supporting the worship of God with our tithes...
6. And in chapter 15, love is caring for the poor.
7. In chapter 16, love is remembering to keep that days that God has appointed for us holy—
  - for Israel, it was the annual feast days and the weekly Sabbath, for us it is the Lord's Day which is our weekly Sabbath when Jesus rose.
8. In chapter 18, love is supporting the Levites and listening to the prophet that God has sent to us—who is like Moses...
  - And of course that coming prophet is Jesus Christ who speaks through His Word in the Holy Scriptures.
9. In chapter 19-26, all sorts of various laws are given, all with reference to loving God... and the whole is summed up in 26:16-19: **“This day the LORD your God commands you to observe these statutes and judgments; therefore you shall be careful to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>17</sup> Today you have proclaimed the LORD to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice. <sup>18</sup> Also today the LORD has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, <sup>19</sup> and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the LORD your God, just as He has spoken.”**
  - It is all about being God's own special people and having the privilege of living for Him because we love Him.
    - That is what permeated Moses teaching in Deuteronomy...
    - And that is what permeated Christ's teaching in the gospels.

TRANS> And closely connected to God's call to love and obey Him, we see a third thing in Deuteronomy that stands out...

### **III. The LORD urges us not to forget Him when He blesses us in the inheritance He gives to us.**

- He is not interested in giving us an inheritance if we do not love Him in possessing it.

A. It is one of the most disturbing things about us that as God's people, we tend to forget Him when He blesses us.

1. This is what happens:

- He delivers us from bondage to Satan and sin that we might serve Him.
- We start out doing that and, in time, are richly blessed by Him...
  - But then it seems to go to our head—we become proud.
  - Instead of giving thanks and remembering that the blessed lives we have are from God, we start to think that we did it all ourselves.

2. Deuteronomy is full of warnings about this.

a. You can see this here in Deuteronomy 6—right after the LORD calls us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, He says.

- Deut 6:10-12 says: **“So it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, <sup>11</sup> houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full—<sup>12</sup> then beware, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.”**
- He goes on pressing this point, urging them (and so all of us) to continue to keep His commandments...when we receive our inheritance.

b. In chapter 7, He reminds them that they were chosen, not because they were better than other nations, but out of free grace...

- They are urged to remember that so that they will live in humble faith, not presuming that they can prosper without God.

c. In chapter 8, He tells them not to say in their hearts, after He has blessed them, (8:17): **“My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.”**

- Instead, as verse 18 says, **you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.**

➤ This call to remember and forget not is very dominant in Deuteronomy and it certainly applies to us. The LORD knows our weakness.

3. He even goes so far as to tell us that we *will* forget Him when He blesses us.

a. In chapter 31, the LORD comes to Moses and He tells him this:

- **Deut 31:16-18: And the LORD said to Moses: “Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. <sup>17</sup> Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, ‘Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?’ <sup>18</sup> And I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they have done, in that they have turned to other gods.”**



- And indeed there was such an apostasy.
  - It began with many rebellions that God addressed and corrected over the years—and eventually it led to the great falling away that led to the exile... and the even greater apostasy when Israel rejected Christ.
- b. So also for us in the New Covenant, we were told, even as we saw in this morning's sermon in 2 Thessalonians 2, that there would be a great falling away—a great apostasy.
  - And so there have been many rebellions over the centuries...
  - Including the great apostasy that came with the rise of the papacy where the pope took the authority that belongs to Christ to save people—even in exchange for money.
- c. It is very helpful to know that the LORD told us these things would happen so that our faith will not be destroyed by them.
  - Many people are troubled when they see how the whole church can go wrong—not the elect, but the general body of the church.
  - Even in such times, God always preserves a people to receive His promised inheritance in Christ.
    - As Elijah learned, there were 7000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal...
    - And as Paul taught, there is always a remnant according to election of grace...

TRANS> God will always have a people in times of apostasy—we must be sure that we are among them!

**B. See how God pleads with us that we not depart from Him!**

- There are the warnings about forgetting Him that we just saw, but also...
- 1. He threatens to bring curses upon us if we depart from Him.
  - a. In chapter 27-28, the LORD gives us a mammoth list of curses for rejecting Him and a list of blessings for us if we follow Him.
    - These curses and blessing belong to everyone in the covenant.
      - If you were circumcised in the Old Covenant or if you are baptised in the New Covenant, you cannot escape these.
  - But why does He pronounce all of these?
  - b. He pronounces all of these to discourage us from departing.
    - With Israel, there was a very direct display of these curses depending on how they as a nation were responding to God.
      - God still judges Christian nations in this way when they, as nations, forget Christ... It has happened to us.
      - Jesus made these curses even more solemn, warning covenant people who rejected Him that they would be cast into the outer darkness with Satan and his minions if they did not repent.
  - c. This does not mean that people can lose their salvation.
    - Always remember that not all in the covenant have true saving faith.
    - The curses have a very different effect on the one than on the other.

- On the elect, the curses bring them to their senses so that they return to the LORD or never depart in the first place.
  - For the reprobate, they drive them deeper into bitterness and rebellion.
2. See how God graciously reaches out to all of His people so that even when the curses have fallen on them, there is forgiveness with Him!
- a. This is set forth beautifully for us in Deuteronomy 30 where, in verse 1-3, God says:
- **“Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, <sup>2</sup> and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>3</sup> that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you.”**
- b. This makes it clear that our rebellion is not the end of the story!
- The LORD graciously comes after us and brings us back to restore us to Himself.
    - He has redeemed us by the blood of the covenant, which we now know to be the blood of His Son...
    - And when we have departed and are chastened and broken, we can come back to Him through Jesus Christ.
    - Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 30 in Romans 10 where he speaks of this as the words of the gospel—the word we believe about Jesus.
- c. God’s great desire, all the way along, as is shown in Deuteronomy, is that we love Him and serve Him as our God.
- This desire is expressed at the end of chapter 30 where He says to us words that speak to us today more than ever before:
    - **Deut 30:19-20: “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; <sup>20</sup> that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”**
    - Come to Him and you will live—reject Him and you will perish forever.
      - Now that Jesus has come, He has given us the whole earth as our inheritance—and we are to possess it for Him!

### **Conclusion:**

Deuteronomy ends with the assurance of God’s blessing.

- The church will never perish.
- She will have times when many fall away and times of weakness, but the Lord will never forsake her. In the end she will inherit the whole earth for God.

In chapter 33, all the tribes are blessed and reminded of their place with God.

- In verse 3, it says of us: **“Yes, He loves the people; all His saints *are* in Your hand; they sit down at Your feet; *everyone* receives Your words.”**
- Then blessing is pronounced on all the tribes and these words follow, to encourage them (and us) that they will receive their full inheritance:
  - **Deut 33:26-29: *There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, Who rides the heavens to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds. 27 The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; He will thrust out the enemy from before you, and will say, ‘Destroy!’ 28 Then Israel shall dwell in safety, the fountain of Jacob alone, in a land of grain and new wine; His heavens shall also drop dew. 29 Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help and the sword of your majesty! Your enemies shall submit to you, and you shall tread down their high places.***

Wonderfully, chapter 34 follows, in which Moses dies.

- He is unable to lead Israel into the land because He did not hallow the LORD at the waters of Meribah, but it is clear that he dies with the Lord’s blessing and assurance that he will arise to inherit the land.
  - He is commended as a prophet like no other, and God Himself buries him, a true testimony of the hope of resurrection.
  - He will stand again upon the earth with all the saints in our Lord Jesus Christ.
    - In Jesus Christ, we will fully inherit the whole earth.