

D E U T E R O N O M Y

study one : getting our bearings (Deuteronomy ch 1)

Introduction

For lots of us, the book of Deuteronomy (Dt) is like most of the OT: very long, daunting and hard to understand! For example, how should we apply Dt 22:6 or 22:11 ...?!

But actually, Dt is a book written for Christians (read Romans 15:4 to check this out)! It is a book about our God ... about how our God does things ... and about how people ought to be responding to our God.

 *Stop and Think!*

In what ways might the OT encourage us to have hope (to use the words from Romans 15:4)?

Getting started

Read Dt 1:1-8

Where is this taking place? Use a map (some places in v1 are unknown; Horeb is another name for Mt Sinai).

How long can it take to travel from Horeb to the edge of Kadesh Barnea? How long has it actually taken (3)?

Israel has apparently taken over 40 years to travel what should have taken only 11 days!

Something has obviously gone wrong ... and the short explanation is that Israel messed up a previous attempt.

Getting stuck

Dt 1:19-46 explains what has gone wrong. Read it, and summarise in your own words what happened the last time Israel tried to enter the Promised Land. Spend some time looking at this as there are several explanations.

 *Stop and Think!*

What made God angry (34 cf 26-27, 32-33)? Is there a general principle here of what always makes God angry?

Promises, promises

To understand the significance of what is going on here, we need to go much further back into Israel's history.

Turn back to Gen 12:1-9 which is ...

- a solution to the problem which Gen 1-11 has just described. Sin is running out of control – a good world (Gen 1) has been spoilt by people's rebellion (Gen 3), so God would be quite justified in wiping out the whole lot and starting again (Gen 6-9, especially 6:5-8). The world is experiencing God's 'curse' (3:14-19).
- the start of the nation of Israel, who always look back to Abraham as their original 'father'.

In Gen 12:1-9, what three things does God promise to Abra(ha)m?

Essentially the promise is 'blessing' instead of 'curse', and this blessing is to spread outwards from Israel to 'all nations'. God had already started to fulfil these three promises since that time (ie before where we are now joining the story in Dt):

- many descendants (which is why the Egyptians became scared of Israel and made them slaves in Exod 1);
- to bless them (as God had done in rescuing them from Egypt under Moses in a blaze of miracles, and in speaking to them directly at Horeb/Mount Sinai);
- a land which stretched up the eastern side of the Mediterranean, to be known as 'The Promised Land'.

Here are the many descendants, blessed by God and now on the edge of The Promised Land for the second time!

The previous time they'd failed to trust God and refused to enter (Dt 1:26-33). As a punishment, just as we might send a disobedient child to his bedroom, God sent Israel into the wilderness to think over her 'attitude problem' (Dt 1:34-40). Now the forty years of discipline are over, the original generation has all but died out and this new generation is to receive what God promised Abram.

 *Stop and Think!*

If you were one of the Israelites coming to these borders for a second time around, what would you think of God? What would be your hopes and fears for the future?

What might you think of the past forty years?

So far ...

What have you learned from this chapter about the character of God?

What can we learn about what he is like from what this chapter tells us that he has done?

Are there any parts of his character that are surprising to you? or different from how you like think of God?

Put on your NT spectacles

Dt 1:3 summarises the whole book of Dt. Moses is passing on God's instructions, as Israel is about to make her second attempt to enter The Promised Land. The structure of this book of Dt is a series of three 'sermons' (ch 1-4, 5-28, 29-30), which Moses preached to check that Israel has learnt from her previous mistakes.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

This big OT story of God's dealing with Israel is an example for us (6, 11): we should learn from her mistakes too. What should we learn from the punishment of Israel in the desert?

In what ways do we think that we are 'standing firm' (12)?

What does it mean to 'fall' (12)? (NB the word translated 'fall' is exactly the same word as in 8.)



Stop and Think!

If you were to summarise the lessons for Israel from her history, what should she learn?

If you were to summarise the warning for us from Israel's history, what should we learn?

Do you think this warning is really necessary?

The Big Idea

God promised his people a land, but he did not allow those who were rebellious to enter it.

Digging deeper

This chapter is organised in a complicated way, with a whole series of speeches recorded:

A	at Horeb	6-8	God			
				9-13	Moses	
						14 the people
				15-17	Moses	
B	at Kadesh Barnea			20-21	Moses	
						22 the people
						25 the spies
						27-28 the people
				29-31	Moses	
		35-36	God			
C		37-40	God			
				41	the people	
		42	God			

This is difficult to set out clearly (!), but the point here is to show that the emphasis falls on what the Lord says in 6-8 and 35-36, with a high point of the chapter in what the spies say in 25. (The concluding 37-42 show that Israel's attempt to enter the land by themselves, without the Lord giving it to them, fails.) If you re-read those particular verses now, you'll see that the chapter is about ...

6-8 I give you this land, the land I promised to Abraham

25 the Lord is giving us a good land

35-36 none of you will see this good land (except Caleb [and Joshua 38]).

In other words, the whole chapter is about God giving / not giving the good land he promised. This structure explains why these study notes concentrate in this theme: this is what we should learn from this chapter.

Psalm 95 provides a good cross-reference for this chapter. In verses 7b-11, the writer refers to the story of God providing water from the rock for a thirsty Israel. This story comes twice (Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:10-13), at the start and at the end of Israel's time in the desert, as if to say that they were the same from start to finish. As a result of Israel's rebellion there, God promised, in his anger, that that generation would never be allowed to enter the promised Canaan. Hebrews 3:7-4:11 applies this story to Christians (as 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 does). We must watch ourselves (3:12) and one another (3:13) lest we rebel against God as Israel did. How do we rebel like that? By hearing God's voice (3:7, 15; 4:7) and yet not believing it (3:12). Instead, we must 'strive to enter that rest' (4:11) which we do by continuing to trust in Jesus and in Jesus alone. [NS]