

**DEUT 2****THE OLD AND NEW WAY****21<sup>st</sup> Nov 2021**

Deuteronomy is the sort of book we could love!

Now I know you may be surprised by this, but...

If we read it, if we could understand it and took it to heart...

When you get past the cultural and historical complexities...

And the laws you can't fathom and don't like!

It is the sort of book that we seem to be keen on!

Why do I say this?

Because it resonates with how we operate, how we function, how we try to live.

Its premise appears simple and its application specific...

If you want life to work...

If you want life to go well and things to work out...

If you want a long life, a happy life, a prosperous life, a healthy life...

If you want God to bless you and to avoid pain, disaster and judgment ...

Deuteronomy tells us how...

Listen to What Moses says: *Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do what I am telling you, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly... (Deu 6:3)*

*"The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give. (Deu 8:1)*

And just to make it crystal clear, after spelling out all God's laws and commands

Moses states near the end as he is wrapping up his Sermon: *"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today... then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. (Deu 30:15-16)*

We all love to be told clearly - what we need to do and how we need to do it.

We like knowing how to behave in order to make life work

Especially if it means being in the good books with God!

And Deuteronomy appears to do this, and then goes even further...

It not only tells us that things will go well if we listen and obey...

It goes on to spell it out in detailed and explicit ways...

exactly what we are to do!

Allow me to give you just a few examples:

*"All flying insects that swarm are unclean to you; do not eat them" 14:19*

*"Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year" 14:22*

*"At the end of every 7 years you must cancel debts" 15:1*

*"Do not move your neighbours boundary stone set up by your predecessors..." 19:14*

*"Designate a place outside the camp where you can go to relieve yourself" 23:12*

*"Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain..." 25:4*

With such clear instructions – there is now no excuse. It is crystal clear.

Almost every and any scenario is covered.

What we should do has been spelt out!

But wait – there’s more...

For not only does Moses tell us how what we need to do  
 He also tells us with passion, enthusiasm and conviction what will happen as a result  
*“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God... Blessed shall you be in the city, and  
 blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your  
 ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock.  
 Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in,  
 and blessed shall you be when you go out. (Deu 28:1-6)*

Without a doubt, Deuteronomy, is written to motivate you to be the best you can

It is just like the thousands of self-help books available

And the ‘how to live the best life God wants for you’ articles you can find,  
 or you tube clips you can watch,  
 or TV preachers you can listen to.

Deuteronomy fits right in.        PAUSE

But terrifyingly, it also tells us what we can expect if we can’t.

If you are not up to it,

don’t have the willpower or resources to be able to keep it together  
 and follow the plan

It warns you about what will happen if you don’t

It makes it clear what awaits you if you won’t!

*But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods  
 and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the  
 land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. (Deu 30:17-18)*

And here’s the rub... This is a problem. It is certainly difficulty for me!

And my guess is, if you are anything like me – it is your problem too!

I know myself, I am fully aware of what I am like.

How weak, fickle and frail I am

How easily I give in to temptation, or revert to sinful ways.

And my guess is – you are just the same.

While Deuteronomy makes it clear what we should do, must do, need to do...  
 to secure God’s blessing.

The bottom line is - we can’t...

And if we are honest – we won’t!

For example - at the moment I am attempting, once again, to loose weight.

I know exactly what is required

And if I am committed – I can do it... I will sustain it - for a bit!

But then I get tired, I do some vigorous exercise and feel I deserve a treat,

I convince myself this little bit won’t hurt

and before you know it – I am back to my old bad habits.

Or when I think about my relationship with those I love - My wife, my children...  
 I love them dearly, but know that I don't always give them the attention I should  
 or respond to them in a lovingly appropriate way  
 I confess this to God, resolve to be different, try really hard to get it right!  
 But then, within a day or to – it happens again!

Simply knowing what is the right thing to do, and the blessings that come if you do...  
 and the problems it will cause if you don't.  
 Even committing yourself to change, to be better... Doesn't work!

And this is where Deuteronomy is just so good.  
 Because in it we see that Moses knew this... God knows this!  
 While Deuteronomy makes it clear what we should do!...  
 It also understands that we don't, we can't, we won't!

Listen to what God told Moses to say after making the expectations clear: *“Take this Book of the Law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against you. For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are. Behold, even today while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the LORD. How much more after my death!... For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly and turn aside from the way that I have commanded you. And in the days to come evil will befall you, because you will do what is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger through the work of your hands.”* (Deu 31:24-29)

This is a problem!!!

Is there any hope for the people of Israel? For us?  
 Why take 30 chapters to tell people what they must do – knowing they won't!  
 Why promise blessing – when they will not deserve it? PAUSE  
 Why is it even included in our Scriptures if it is just bad news!

Well, fortunately this is not the whole story  
 Rather than being depressing and hopeless... PAUSE

Because God knows us...

Because God understands that we are frail...

That our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked

Deuteronomy – along with spelling out what we should do  
 and warning about what will happen when we don't do it

Deuteronomy also hints at another way

It points to what **God** will do...

To when we no longer need to get it right to be in right relationship with God  
 And when life is no longer dependent on how well we follow the rules.

Challenges and struggles - do not mean we have failed

And blessings do not mean we have got what we deserved!

And God's love for us, delight in us...

is not something that we can earn or need to work for.

This good news is hinted at in a number of ways in the book.

Allow me to spend the last few minutes pointing out how?

How does this book help us find hope, encouragement and comfort!

**Firstly**, Deuteronomy makes it clear that ultimately there are only 2 ways to live.

There is the **Old way** – The way most of us think life works.

It's the way of law, obedience, discipline.

Its ultimately up to us!

“Life is what I make it to be...!”

“What happens is up to me...”

And for some of us this works ok...

For those who are particularly skilled, capable or supported... this can sort of work!

We can do Ok!

And for those of us in the rich west, with good families

and satisfying well paying jobs and no damage from our past...

We get on well enough to convince ourselves that if we only try harder...  
everything will work out.

But for many of us – this doesn't work. It fails.

Life falls far short of our hopes and expectations.

It leaves us disappointed, despondent, despairing...

For some of us – it just doesn't work at all!

We have made a mess of our lives, made choices with significant cost,  
or just had some really really bad luck...

I couldn't tell you how many people I had in my office who know this all too well.

I could speak of the man who told me the story of how things were going well...

until a mental health condition flared up...

As a result their wife left them,

lost contact with their children,

they lost their job, lost their mind...

Or the man who as a successful salesman gained the whole world...

but lost his family.

Or the woman who poured everything she had into her family, but once independent  
they left and now have far too limited contact...

Or the family that worked together to build their dream home – only to lose it all in  
a bush fire...

Or the person who was a fitness fanatic, only to be struck down by cancer...

Our response to this, when things like this happen...

is to wonder what we have done wrong? “Why is God punishing me”?

or we just buckle down, try harder, make resolutions, seek support to do better...

BUT If we are honest – this, the Old Way - doesn't work!  
 Doing what you should – doesn't guarantee blessings!  
 When Bad things happen – it doesn't mean you somehow deserved it!

For those of us who are faced with this reality - Deuteronomy is good news.  
 And we see this Good news in how the book is structured

For while the centre of the book, the majority of the book is occupied with laws  
 Laws about eating...  
 laws relating to how we interact with others...  
 laws to help us in our worship...  
 laws that cover most aspects of our life...  
 While most of Deuteronomy is about the benefits of keeping laws...  
 and the consequences of breaking them

These laws are surrounded by, encased in stories about the graciousness of God  
 All that God is and all that God has done for his people:

*Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal-peor, for the LORD your God destroyed from among you all the men who followed the Baal of Peor. (Deu 4:3)*

*To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him. Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you. And on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire. And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day, know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. (Deu 4:35-39)*

Ultimately Deuteronomy is not a book about what we must do to come to God.  
 It is a book about God and what God has done for us to know Him  
 How God loves those he chooses.

How God looks after those he loves

How Gracious, merciful and faithful He is:

So that if, when, you fail – even then God will still act so that we may know Him.

*“When you... have grown old in the land... there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.(Deu 4:25-31)*

So the real choice Deuteronomy is giving us is not obey or disobey  
 The choice it gives is - we can live the Old way...  
 thinking that life is up to us to get it right!

Or the New Way - which is about responding to the God who has chosen us,  
 The God who loves us and will restore us.  
 Because God is merciful, faithful and trustworthy.  
 The New Way is about trusting Him!

**Secondly**, Deuteronomy is good news, because it makes it clear that it is impossible  
 for us to fully do what God expects. Absolutely beyond our reach!  
 I challenge anyone to be able to read through this book and declare honestly: –  
 “I can do that. I can do all that God requires of me”!

Paul in his letter to the Romans tells us that God’s law is good... it is a gift...  
 because it reveals our own sinfulness.  
 It makes it clear we are completely unable of meeting God’s expectations  
 And in doing so it reveals our desperate need. (Rom. 7:7),  
 Our need for God to intervene and act!

God’s law forces us to face the reality – I don’t have what it takes to please God!  
 But it doesn’t leave us there – it teaches us that being right with God...  
 What the Bible calls “righteousness”  
 Is something that God will do for us...  
 In fact has now done for us through His Son Jesus  
 It has been made possible by God...  
 It is achieved by Him and offered for all.  
 So that now it can be received – as a gift, by faith (Rom. 10:6–8, 19)  
 A gift that completely changes us!

Moses looked forward to this, listen to what he promised: *And the LORD your God will  
 circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God  
 with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live... And you shall again obey the voice  
 of the LORD and keep all his commandments that I command you today. (Deu 30:6-8)*  
 On our own we have no hope – but when God acts – Through Jesus...  
 We are made right with God and welcomed into His family as his daughters  
 and sons

**Thirdly** Jesus believed Deuteronomy was good news  
 Quoting from it extensively (more often than any other OT book) he also used it  
 in his own life  
 The best example of this was when he was asked, “Which commandment is the most  
 important of all?” (Mark 12:28), Jesus answered by including a quote from *Deut*  
 6:4–5: “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And  
 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all  
 your mind and with all your strength’” (Mark 12:30).  
 And in doing so, makes it clear what is really required of us to be right with God.

Known as the Shema, quoted daily by God's people

We are reminded that true love of God is not achieved by what we do...

It is not by how well we keep all the laws listed in Deuteronomy...

But where our heart is.

What captures us

Who is our first love!

And remember – as John reminded us in his letter: *“This is love – not that we love God – but that he loved us and gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins...” 1 John 4:10*

He is not our God because we love him

But because He loves us

As John went on to say: *We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).*

## CONCLUSION

And it is to this wonderful reality that Deuteronomy brings us.

At face value it is a book of laws which guarantee God's pleasure if we do them and his displeasure if we don't.

But in reality it is a book that reminds us of God's unconditional and incredible, unrelenting love towards us.

And how, when we experience this – it changes everything.

It changes what I want from life,

It changes how I act

And most importantly it causes me to be completely secure  
in the love of God for me.

Convinced that my relationship with Him is no longer up to me!