

8-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

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VIDEO
ACCESS
INCLUDED

*Forever
for Our
Good*

A STUDY OF THE BOOK
OF DEUTERONOMY

SESSION TWO

*Remembering
God for
Our Good*

DEUTERONOMY 1-3

During one of the best weeks of my seminary life, I got to visit some of the greatest historical sites in Baptist history throughout Germany, Switzerland, and the Czech Republic. The architecture, the stories, the incredible realization that everywhere I walked had witnessed centuries of history—I soaked it all up.

Tucked in the city of Lucerne, Switzerland, is the Kapellbrücke, or Chapel Bridge—the oldest covered bridge in Europe. The bridge’s ceiling is adorned by triangular paintings that depict Switzerland’s history, which make you feel like you’re walking through a story. The bridge’s location is what really makes it so meaningful though. Chapel Bridge connects the “old town” that dates back to the Middle Ages with the “new town” of modern and developing Lucerne. The bridge stands in the gap, not just between two points in the city, but between hundreds of years of the city’s life. Standing in the middle of Chapel Bridge, you can look in one direction to see what represents the past and look the other direction to see what represents the future.

The book of Deuteronomy is a lot like this bridge. In one direction, we see Israel’s past: the Lord’s blessing to Abraham and his descendants in Genesis, the liberation of those descendants in Exodus, the holy worship of God in Leviticus, and Israel’s unbelief and rebellion in Numbers. But in the other direction, we see Israel’s future: the imminent conquest of the promised land (Joshua), Israel’s future demand for a king (1 Samuel), their unrepentant disobedience (1 Kings), the tragedy of the exile (2 Kings), the promise of their return (Jer. 23; Ezek. 36), and the coming of the Messiah who would be Prophet, Priest, and King (Hebrews). Undergirding the entire landscape of Israel’s story, past and future, is the unfailing love and covenant faithfulness of the Lord their God.

Deuteronomy looks back to Israel’s past and forward to the coming of the Messiah.

WEEKLY READING

- Deuteronomy 1
- Deuteronomy 2
- Deuteronomy 3

Deutero-What?

MAIN IDEA

Deuteronomy is about God's covenant faithfulness to His people, with whom He has an exclusive relationship and from whom He desires loyal obedience.

The book of Deuteronomy is often referred to as “the Second Law,” a term that comes from the Latin version of the Bible known as the Vulgate. *Deutero* means two, and *nomos* means law, giving it a name that nods to its place in the Bible after the books of Exodus and Leviticus, where God’s laws first appear. The New Testament quotes Deuteronomy approximately forty-four times, and it’s one of the Old Testament books Jesus quoted during His ministry. Clearly, the message of this book matters.

This book of the Bible contains rich theological depth and a framework to understand God’s redemptive acts. Despite what you may be thinking, this book of the law is about so much more than a list of rules. “Like the Gospel of John,” says theologian Daniel Block, “Deuteronomy functions as a theological manifesto, calling on Israel to respond to God’s grace with unreserved loyalty and love.”¹

Long before the Israelites became a nation of slaves in Egypt and escaped with Moses across the parted Red Sea, God made a promise to their forefather Abraham that they would become a great nation with their own special land (Gen. 12). Now, after forty years of wilderness wanderings and centuries of anticipation, God’s promises to His people were about to be fulfilled. But before they could put one foot into the promised land, the Lord spoke to Moses a message they needed to hear. Let’s orient ourselves with the beginning of this book.

READ DEUTERONOMY 1:1-5. As you read, take note of the following basic observations.

Who Moses is speaking to (v. 1):

Where Moses is speaking from (vv. 1,5):

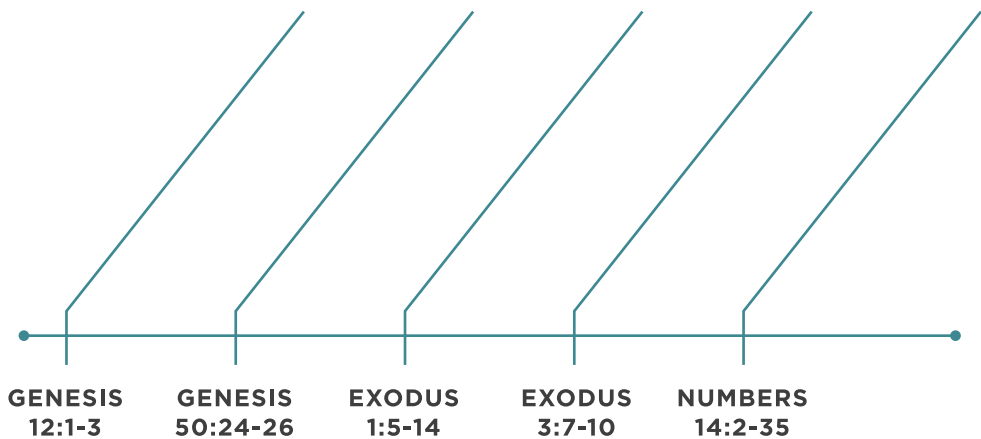
What message Moses is communicating (v. 3):

Before we can understand the significance of Deuteronomy and the future God’s message was preparing Israel to receive, it’s helpful

for us to look back briefly at Israel's past and how they came to the point of the book's opening scene.

We all have events in our family histories that had ripple effects into the present, both positive and negative. I think of my grandfather who was a prisoner of war in World War II. He prayed that if the Lord allowed him to survive the war, he would devote the rest of his life to ministry. He preached his first sermon in that POW camp on Easter Sunday, 1945, and shared the gospel with American and Russian soldiers. That event changed the course of future generations in our family (and likely other families as well). I had nothing to do with it, but as a descendant of my grandfather, it's part of my family history and it shaped my future.

Read the verses noted on the timeline, and then label them with the correct event from the word bank.



WORD BANK

Slavery in Egypt

Abrahamic covenant

Joseph's death

Forty years in the wilderness

Moses sent to lead Israel

**How would you describe the story of Israel at this point in the Bible?
Write a short summary of their family history.**

Israel was finally about to step into the inheritance the Lord had promised to Abraham in Genesis 12. This was a time to look forward in anticipation of God's faithfulness and power. Yet Moses reminded them of their collective past, specifically an event they would probably rather not recall.

READ DEUTERONOMY 1:19-46. What happened thirty-eight years before this point in Israel's history? (See Deut. 2:14 for help.) In light of that event, why was it necessary to give Israel the law a second time?

Moses wasn't rubbing their noses in the failures of their mothers and fathers (v. 39). The next generation of Israelites stood on the edge of the promised land, and Moses was exhorting them to the kind of faith-filled obedience their parents should have chosen. The Lord was renewing His covenant with Israel before they entered the land He had promised to give them.

So, what is this "Second Law" all about? The book of Deuteronomy is about God's covenant faithfulness to His people, with whom He has an exclusive relationship of all-redeeming, obstacle-overcoming, never-ending love, and from whom He desires loyal obedience. We can visualize it this way:

COVENANT —————> **RELATIONSHIP** —————> **OBEDIENCE**

COVENANT FAITHFULNESS

The Lord is a covenant-making, covenant-keeping God.

READ DEUTERONOMY 7:9 in the CSB (Christian Standard Bible) translation, and fill in the blanks:

Know that the LORD your God is God, the _____ God who keeps his _____ covenant loyalty for a thousand generations with those who _____ him and _____ his commands.

Covenants are solemn oaths. They are mutual commitments that bind each party together. A covenant relationship depends on whether the mutual obligations to the covenant have been accepted and pledged by both sides of the commitment.² The Lord was, and would continue to be, faithful to the covenant He made with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), despite Israel's persistent unfaithfulness. Centuries before Israel would experience the full consequences of their unfaithfulness, God committed to uphold His promises.

Why is it good news for you today that God was faithful to His promises to Israel back then?

The God revealed in the written Word of Deuteronomy is the same God revealed in the incarnate Word, Jesus. James 1:17 tells us that His character is unchanging. The security of our relationship with Him doesn't depend on the degree of our obedience, but on His freely given favor.

EXCLUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

Because of the Lord's covenant, Israel had an exclusive relationship with Him. They were set apart—made holy—for Him alone. He had claimed Israel for Himself and would be their only God and King. But this relationship was not one of slavery or fear; He had already liberated Israel from that. Instead, it was a relationship based on His steadfast love. Because of this exclusive relationship, God would accomplish and establish everything on Israel's behalf. He would give them military victory, bring the rain their crops required, and make them the envy of the world. The Lord would demonstrate that He alone is truly God and has all power and all authority. The life of Israel was like a stage on which He would tell His story to the nations.

READ 1 PETER 2:9-10 and compare the relationship we have with the Lord through Jesus with the relationship Israel had with Him. What is the purpose of this relationship, according to verse 9?

LOYAL OBEDIENCE

Because of Israel's exclusive, covenant-established relationship, the Lord required Israel's exclusive worship. They were to serve Him alone. Just as He would be faithful to them, they were to be faithful to Him. To break His commandment didn't just break a rule, it disrupted a relationship of love and, consequently, broke the covenant. Don't miss the order of this: first came the covenant, which established the relationship and was expressed by obedience. Obedience was a response to God's promises, not an attempt to earn them. Reverse the order of that and you get every other religious system but the gospel of grace.

This demand for total obedience to Yahweh emphasizes how serious sin really is. Israel was called to absolute loyalty to the Lord in every aspect of their lives—their survival as a nation depended upon it. Their choices revealed loyalty that would bring life, or disloyalty that would bring death. There was no middle ground.

How does the pattern of Covenant ► Relationship ► Obedience impact your relationship with God? How does this pattern inform your view on obedience (and disobedience) to God's commands?

The Lord redeemed Israel. He chose to love them, set them apart as His people, and be their God. This love changed not only Israel's relationship with the Lord; it also changed their relationship with sin.³ God's law was a gift to His beloved children. And like all of God's gifts, it is "holy and just and good" (Rom. 7:12). The words we read in the book of Deuteronomy reveal to us a covenant-making, covenant-keeping God whose commands are "for our good always" (Deut. 6:24, NKJV).

Jesus's Favorite Book

MAIN IDEA

*Deuteronomy
is a book
of grace.*

We live in a completely different context than Old Testament Israel. We live in countries with man-made governments, not a theocracy with Yahweh as king. We don't follow Israel's sacrificial system requiring animals and grains. We wear clothes made up of multiple fabrics. Most of us had nothing to do with the crops that produced our food. So, what is the value in studying a Bible book written to a different group of people, in a vastly different time and place, that is full of rules we don't have to follow? I'm so glad you asked.

Imagine you walk into a movie theater several minutes late. You fumble your way to your seat and try to catch up on what you missed. Despite not knowing how the story began, you seem to be keeping up with the plot and the characters—until the last ten minutes. The audience (minus you) gasps in astonishment. The entire story comes together, resolving unanswered questions and tying loose ends. But because you missed the setup of the story, you didn't know what questions needed to be answered or loose ends there were to tie. You needed the story's foundation laid in the beginning to grasp its meaning at the end.

The Bible works much the same. Yes, sixty-six books make up its pages, but the story is one big narrative. We can't fully grasp the depth of who Jesus is, or all He has (and will) accomplish for us, without studying the first five books of the Bible—the Law. In case you're not yet convinced, Jesus is also an advocate for knowing the Old Testament. He taught on the importance of connecting the Old Testament laws to New Testament realities, and it's been said that Deuteronomy was His favorite book because of how often He quoted it.

READ MATTHEW 5:17-20. Summarize the relationship Jesus had with the Law.

How would you explain the relationship Jesus expects His followers to have with the Law?

Jesus perfectly fulfilled God's Law—all roughly 613 of its commands—and He is the direct fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies in the prophetic books. The word *fulfill* means “to accomplish or carry into effect.”⁴ Jesus not only obeyed the Law completely, but through His life, death, and resurrection, He brought about the fulfillment of everything the Law (along with the Prophets) had been pointing toward—God's work of redemption, the setting right of everything that broke when sin destroyed God's perfect creation.

When Jesus fulfilled the Law on our behalf, He inaugurated our redemption and advanced a kingdom in which God's law would be written on the hearts of those He came to save (Jer. 31:31-34). Even more, every “jot and tittle” (Matt. 5:18, NKJV) would be fulfilled in the future, including at the end of all things, when the Lord brings complete justice and restoration (Isa. 66).

READ MATTHEW 22:36-40. How did Jesus summarize the Law?

I think Deuteronomy can be misunderstood when we think of the relationship between God's law and God's grace. We can easily associate *law* with the “God of the Old Testament” and *grace* with the “God of the New Testament.” But this perception makes two mistakes: first, believing that law and grace are somehow in conflict; and second, forgetting that the God who gave us the law is the same God who died for our sins.

One scholar explains it this way: “God's law shows us our need for a savior, and that we can't possibly fulfill the demands of a holy and righteous God. But the pattern of the Old Testament is the same as the pattern of the New Testament: first comes the covenant. Then come the commands.”⁵



When Jesus says not “one jot or one tittle” will pass away from the law (Matt. 5:18, NKJV), He is referring to the smallest markings and details of the Hebrew alphabet. Jesus is making a statement that the entire law of God will be fulfilled. Even the smallest detail will be proven true.

The truth is, Scripture doesn't pit law and grace against each other the way we often do. From the beginning, God saves His people only by grace. His laws come *after* He establishes a relationship with them. In other words, the covenant relationship is not a result of Israel's obedience to Yahweh's laws. Obedience to God's laws is the result of Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh. Remember:

COVENANT —————> **RELATIONSHIP** —————> **OBEDIENCE**

At every point in God's plan of redemption, God saved His people by grace. Whenever you see this graphic throughout our study, remember God's grace. The grace of God pervades the law of God. I love how Warren Weirsbe makes this point:

The Lord didn't give Israel His law to save them from their sins, because 'by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified' (Gal. 2:16). Under the old covenant, people were saved by faith just as sinners are today (Rom. 4:1-12; Gal. 3:22; Heb. 11). The law reveals the sinfulness of man and the holy character of God. It explained what God required of His people if they were to please Him and enjoy His blessing. The civil law allowed Israel to have an orderly and just society, and the religious laws enabled them to live as the people of God, set apart from the other nations to glorify His name.⁶

Go back to the main idea of this session and read it a couple more times. Now write a few notes on your opinion about the book of Deuteronomy and how you feel about completing an entire study of Old Testament law. Be completely honest with yourself; it's a judgment-free question.

“Christ Himself is the key that unlocks the riches of the Old Testament.”⁷

The book of Deuteronomy is brimming with God's grace to His people, and once you see it, you can't unsee it. We typically talk about law in contrast to grace. Inasmuch as we're talking about how to be forgiven and made right with God, that's true. No one can earn or accumulate righteousness through obedience. Our only hope is the grace of God in Christ (Rom. 3:23). But from God's law, we also see a beautiful expression of His attributes, like His justice, holiness,

mercy, and unfailing covenant love. And we see the expression of a righteous, blameless life that is set apart as His representative to the world.

Because the Bible was written within a specific time, place, and culture, we'll have to dig a little deeper to understand the "why" behind the "what" of some laws. But don't miss this: Deuteronomy shows us what loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength looks like; it shows us what loving our neighbor as ourselves looks like; it shows us what true worship looks like. To love God is to obey Him, and to obey God is to love Him (John 14:15; 15:10).

The apostle Paul (previously named Saul) was an expert in the law. Prior to being an apostle to Jesus, Paul was a Pharisee, part of the Jewish cultural elites. He would have memorized the law and followed it stridently: the original 613 laws plus an extensive addition of man-made rules and practices religious leaders heaped on top of God's law.

After Paul encountered the risen Christ, his relationship to the law radically changed. He no longer tried to be righteous through his obedience, which, as he taught the churches in Rome and Galatia, was impossible (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:11)! He understood he was free from the penalty of breaking God's law and no longer judged by his failure to fulfill God's law. He received complete righteousness not by anything he did, but by faith in the work and person of Jesus Christ on his behalf.

Paul wasn't done with the law, and neither are we. Far from it.

READ ROMANS 13:8-10. According to these verses, which of the following reflects how we are to relate to God's law?

___ *Forsake it as no longer required*

___ *Follow it through repenting of sin*

___ *Fulfill it through loving one another*

On the next page, you'll find some helpful tips to keep in mind as you—a woman saved by grace through faith in Jesus and living as part of His New Testament church today—study and interpret the laws included in the book of Deuteronomy. Write these down somewhere you'll see them easily, keep them in the back of your mind, and above all, open every day of study with a prayer to our heavenly Father, asking Him to make known to you the riches of His Word.

OLD TESTAMENT LAWS

One of the most challenging parts of studying God's Old Testament Law is knowing how to interpret it as Christians today. We know, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness," (2 Tim. 3:16), but we also know "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4). Understandably, it can be confusing to know what to do with what we read. Here are some helpful guardrails to keep in mind as you study.

- 1. BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT:** How does this law fit into the developing big-picture story of the entire Bible? We call this *redemption history* or the *meta-narrative* of Scripture.
- 2. COVENANT IMPLICATIONS:** How does this law relate to God's covenant?
- 3. NEW TESTAMENT PRESENCE:** Is this a command that is reiterated in the New Testament? Has the New Testament demonstrated that this law is no longer applicable, or does New Testament teaching amplify this command and its application for the Christian?
- 4. PERSONAL APPLICATION:** You can read the law as God's *Word* for you, even though most of the specific laws are no longer *laws* for you. Ask yourself, *What does this law tell me about God, about living for God, and about loving others?*

Above all, keep in mind that the purpose of God's law was to show God's people how they should live as those set apart for Him; it's a call to holiness: "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:1). Or in the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Holiness demands separation and distinction in every part of our lives, a principle that we can still apply today.

More Than Real Estate

DAY 3

The average American relocates about eleven times in the course of their lives. Gone are the days when we lived in the same hometown in which we were born, much less the same hometown as our parents and grandparents. And while we probably all have favorite places we've lived, few of us can say that we are tied to a specific location.

It's hard to convey just how significant the promised land was to the people of ancient Israel. Their entire identity, indeed, their national psyche, was wrapped up in their relationship to the land. Throughout the Lord's dealing with Israel, His favor was expressed by their security in the land. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob died. Moses died. The prophets and kings died. All but a remnant of the exiles died. But the land remained a central aspect of God's redemption story.⁸

After Israel's disobedience resulted in expulsion from the land (Deut. 28:36), their eventual restoration would mean a return to the land from exile. The promised land represented more than real estate. It tangibly signified God's covenant with Israel. It was the place where the Lord's desire for His people would be fulfilled—He would dwell among them in the temple, and they would worship Him (Ex. 8:1).

EFFORT, NOT EARNING

God gave the Israelites this land; it was a gift. But it's important for us to remember they still had to fight for it. God could have annihilated the Canaanites through a plague, or He could have dried up the land and forced its inhabitants to migrate away. But instead, He chose to involve His people in their inheritance. They had to apprehend it, take hold of it, conquer it. They had to go to war.

MAIN IDEA

Israel's conquest of the promised land is deeply significant for the Christian life.

READ THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES FROM DEUTERONOMY. For each one, note what God has done or will do, and then note what Israel must do.

VERSES	WHAT GOD HAS DONE/WILL DO	WHAT ISRAEL MUST DO
1:8		
6:10-12		
7:1-3		
7:22		
8:20		
9:4		
20:17		

The Lord promised He would fight on behalf of His people, but He expected His people to fight to lay hold of His promise as well. That may sound contradictory, but theirs was not primarily a fight of power and might, it was a fight of trust and allegiance. The book of Joshua describes Israel's conquest of the promised land, and with every battle Israel faced, they could only look to the Lord for victory.

Israel was not fighting to earn anything. In fact, they couldn't have earned anything if they wanted to (Deut. 7:7-8). On their own, they were no match for the military might of other ancient Near Eastern kingdoms. The only way they could inhabit the promised land was if

the Lord gave it to them. There was no *earning* the promised land, but there was a life-and-death *effort* to inhabit the promised land.

REDEEMED TO REFLECT

Perhaps you've heard the promised land compared to heaven or heard songs that talked about crossing the Jordan River to represent stepping into eternity. While that creates a beautiful picture for us, the truth is, in heaven we will live in God's perfect peace (which Israel failed to do in the promised land) and there won't be enemies of God to drive out (which Israel certainly faced). Instead, I believe the promised land represents our spiritual inheritance as God's children. For those who are united in Christ by faith, the promised land gives us a picture of the Christian life, a picture for here and now.

READ HEBREWS 3:7-19. Then write verse 12 in the space below.

What is the context of the warnings given in verses 7-19? Is the writer of Hebrews talking about life after death, or life here and now?

Like the people of ancient Israel, we who are in Christ—we who belong to God by faith—are in a covenant relationship with Him (Luke 22:20; Heb. 9:15). Our relationship is entirely by God's grace, His favor to choose us, love us, and extravagantly lavish us with His promises and provision. We have this relationship because of the Lord Jesus who is our substitute, and who fully, freely, and forever paid for our sins so that we could be forgiven and restored to a right relationship with God. In theological terms, this refers to our *justification* in Christ.



In *justification*, God declares a guilty person righteous. It is a once forever event in which a sinner exchanges her record of sin for Christ's record of righteousness.

Sanctification is the process by which we are progressively conformed to the image and character of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Even when Israel sinned against the Lord, their status as God’s children didn’t change. When the Lord eventually punished Israel for their persistent rebellion, His judgment always came with the promise of restoration. Like the people of ancient Israel, our identity as God’s children calls us to live as God’s children. We too must expel every form of idolatry from our lives as we learn to reflect the God who redeemed us and to continually conform to the character of Christ. In theological terms, this refers to our *sanctification*.

Describe the difference between *justification* and *sanctification* in your own words.

THE PROMISED LAND AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Israel’s liberation from Egypt required them to receive their freedom through belief in God’s mercy. But Israel’s conquest of the promised land required them to wage war through belief in God’s power.

Over and over again, Scripture uses the language of battle to depict the Christian life. The New Testament uses language of conquest to describe the process of sanctification. (We’ll study this concept in depth during this week’s video teaching session.) One author explains the difference between our secure relationship (justification) and the command to conquer (sanctification) this way: “In justification, the word to be addressed to man is believe—only believe; in sanctification, the word must be ‘watch, pray, and fight.’”⁹

The promised land in the Christian life represents the full landscape of spiritual victory. Like Israel, we are claiming ground that rightfully belongs to the Lord, ground that was stolen by sin. One day, the Lord Jesus will deliver us from the presence of indwelling sin and the havoc it wreaks on our lives. Until then, we fight:

- knowing that every failure has already been paid for at the cross.
- for the rule of the Lord Jesus over every area of our lives on earth as it is in heaven.
- to make real in our experience what God has already made true in our identity.
- not *for* peace with God, but *from* the peace God has made with us through faith in Jesus (Rom. 5:1).

All of this we do by faith in the empowering and enabling grace of God.

We can't leave this conversation without noting how often we don't feel very victorious. We all, as James reminds us, "stumble in many ways" (Jas. 3:2). But we have an Advocate who stands before the Father to plead on our behalf (1 John 2:1). He has already paid in full the price and penalty for all of our sin—past, present, and future. You were reborn into a life of spiritual conflict, but you are fighting a battle that has already been won.

How does today's study inform your relationship with Jesus?

As you finish your study, pick one of the New Testament passages from this week to memorize. Write it in the space below, make it your phone wallpaper, and/or put it on a note you'll see often.

GOD WITH US

The theme of God dwelling among His people runs through all of Scripture, from the opening chapter of Genesis to the closing scene of Revelation. If we are united with Christ through faith, His presence is within us forever by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9, 1 Cor. 3:16). We are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20). And, at the end of all things, in the new Jerusalem, God will be with His people (Rev. 21:2-4). As we walk through these laws, we can keep in front of us that the point of it all is the relationship—the nearness—that the Lord wants with us.

Promises, Perspectives, and Prisms

MAIN IDEA

How we respond to difficulty reveals what we really believe.

Go back in time with me to elementary school science class. Do you remember learning about how a prism works? (Don't worry, I had to look it up too.) A prism is a multi-sided object, usually made of clear glass. When light passes through, it bends or refracts so that various colors separate and you can see all the colors of the rainbow. Depending on the angle at which you look through it, you'll see something different. Your perspective determines your view.

When Moses reminds Israel of their history, he reminds them of times when their perspective colored their view. When they encountered a struggle, they didn't see it as an opportunity to witness the fulfillment of God's promises. They saw it as proof-positive that God had misled them, even abandoned them.

READ DEUTERONOMY 1:25-32 and compare the Lord's promise with Israel's response.

Promise:

Response:

The Lord had liberated Israel from the most powerful empire on earth. He intervened in the laws of nature, separating water molecules and drying up a riverbed so they could walk—not stuck in the mud but on dry ground. He brought to fruition a promise He made hundreds of years ago. And, at the first sign of trouble, how did they respond? They had a meltdown. They accused the Lord of being false.

Their declaration, “because he hates us” (v. 27), may sound like the over dramatic tantrum of a teenager, but it signified Israel's spiritual condition. Throughout Genesis, God's blessing is connected to His electing love. He loved Israel because He chose them (we'll come back to that concept later in our journey). So, when they accused the Lord of

hating them, they were saying that He had actually rejected them, that He was unfaithful to His word and His promises, that He had dealt with them falsely and was untrustworthy. The moment they encountered difficulty, they blamed God.

Is there an area of your life where your experiences and fears have controlled your perspective of God, His character, and His promises? It's a vulnerable question to answer. You may need to ask the Holy Spirit to give you clear eyes and a courageous heart to see yourself accurately.

In her book, *Lies Women Believe*, Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth describes how often we believe that God isn't really good:

Few women who identify as Christians consciously believe this lie. Most of us would never say 'God is not really good.' We know better. Theologically, intellectually, we know that God is good. But deep in many of our hearts, there lurks a suspicion that He may not really be good—at least, that He has not been good to us.¹⁰

It's sobering to realize how much my response to the struggles in my life reveals my perspective of who God really is. Will I trust who God has revealed Himself to be (which He didn't even have to do in the first place), or will I trust what I derive from my feelings and my circumstances?

Israel paid a high price for failing to believe God. What did the Lord say after Israel refused to believe His promises? READ DEUTERONOMY 1:34-36 AND 1:41-46 and summarize God's response.

Things went from bad to worse: even after the Israelites heard the Lord's judgment, they were still rebellious and defiant. They tried to change their situation by their own efforts and on their own terms. Their response to their sin was *activity*, not *humility*. They were still viewing who God is from the wrong perspective. It would be thirty-eight years before the people of God moved on. A new Israelite generation would receive the promised land. Moses's hearers lived the rest of their lives as nomads in a Middle Eastern desert. The place where they settled was called Kadesh-Barnea, which means "the holy place of

wandering.” God didn’t abandon His people, but their unbelief disqualified them from receiving what He had given them and stalled the fulfillment of His plan. The Lord would remain faithful to His promise, but He would wait for an entire generation to die before fulfilling it.

READ HEBREWS 3:12-19. Why did the Lord prevent that generation from entering the promised land?

Unbelief is a recurring theme in Scripture. Primarily, unbelief has to do with a refusal to respond in faith despite what God has said and done. Unbelief, as Warren Wiersbe describes, is an act of the will, one that rebels against God and defiantly says, “I will not believe and obey!”¹¹ What happened at Kadesh-Barnea wasn’t a momentary weakness; it was a willful rebellion. And it was so seismic that the Bible would refer to it throughout the history of God’s redemptive work as a warning to later generations.

READ THESE VERSES: PSALM 81:7; PSALM 95:8; 1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-6. How would you explain the lesson of this event after reading these passages? (Note that Meribah is a specific location within the larger region of Kadesh-Barnea.)

The great twentieth-century preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote: “Faith is a refusal to panic.”¹² Having faith isn’t automatic; we must choose to exercise it. In fact, the times when it feels like God is rather unconcerned with us are when it’s most important for us to apply what we know about God through His Word to our situation.¹³

Imagine joining a gym and talking to a trainer about getting physically strong. You tell her how you want to build muscle, increase bone density, and improve heart health. If she’s a good trainer, she’ll give you a plan that includes one essential factor: resistance. Our physical muscles grow by enduring resistance. Pastor John Piper compares building faith to building muscle.¹⁴ It takes sustained resistance to grow strong faith. God loves us too much to make our lives free of challenges. He wants us to be spiritually strong. Like a coach who knows how to train an athlete, He knows the spiritual training we need to grow the muscle of strong, enduring faith.

READ HEBREWS 12:1-13 AND JAMES 1:2-3. How does this shift in perspective change your view of the biggest frustrations, doubts, and struggles in your life?

When we hit a struggle—when we encounter difficulty that tempts us to panic—we can blame God or we can build faith. Like the people of Israel, we can easily allow what is in front of us to color our confidence in who God is, what He has promised, and what He is worthy to receive. But, also like the people of Israel, we can choose between willful unbelief and humble trust. May we be women who choose trust over and over again.

Spend a few minutes reflecting on the following question as you wrap up your study time today. *Are you seeing your fears through the prism of God's character, or are you viewing God's character through the prism of your fears?* Ask God to highlight ways you need to be reminded of His faithfulness to His promises. This week, share with someone else what you learned and where the Lord is building your faith.

A PAINFUL PICTURE OF UNBELIEF

In a moment of frustration, Moses disobeyed the Lord in front of the entire nation of Israel (Num. 20:1-13). As a result, the Lord prevented Moses from ever crossing into the promised land. Understandably, Moses pleaded with the Lord to see this promise fulfilled (Deut. 3:23-25), and while the Lord didn't change the consequence of Moses's sin, He did have mercy on Moses and allowed him to go up to a mountain and see the land. Then the Lord told Moses he still had leading to do. It was time to turn his attention to his successor, Joshua (Deut. 3:26-28). We probably all have a regret like Moses—something we wish we hadn't done or wish we could go back and do differently. I believe God's response to us is much the same. While we are not able to undo or redo the past, He has mercy on us and wants to use us in His kingdom and for His glory. Let Him turn your eyes forward to what's next—the people in your life who are waiting on your next step of faith. Forgetting what is behind, and reaching forward to what is ahead, we press on in faith (Phil. 3:13-14).

Reflection

In our study of Deuteronomy 1–3 this week, we learned that God’s law is a demonstration of His unfailing love and covenant faithfulness to His children. Psalm 119, the longest psalm in the Bible, is one psalmist’s love song back to God in response to the goodness of His law. Each week of this study, we’ll wrap up with a devotional reading of a portion of Psalm 119, beginning today with verses 1-25.

READ PSALM 119:1-25. As you read:

- Circle words or phrases that describe the psalmist’s relationship to God’s law.
- Put a box around words or phrases that refer to God’s law.
- Underline words or phrases that describe God’s relationship with you.

I’ve marked a few to get you started.



PSALM 119:1-25

¹ How happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk according to the LORD's instruction!

² Happy are those who keep his decrees and seek him with all their heart.

³ They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways.

⁴ You have commanded that your precepts be diligently kept.

⁵ If only my ways were committed to keeping your statutes!

⁶ Then I would not be ashamed when I think about all your commands.

⁷ I will praise you with an upright heart when I learn your righteous judgments.

⁸ I will keep your statutes; never abandon me.

⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure?

By keeping your word.

¹⁰ I have sought you with all my heart; don't let me wander from your commands.

¹¹ I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you.

¹² LORD, may you be blessed; teach me your statutes.

¹³ With my lips I proclaim all the judgments from your mouth.

¹⁴ I rejoice in the way revealed by your decrees

as much as in all riches.

¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts and think about your ways.

¹⁶ I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

¹⁷ Deal generously with your servant so that I might live;

then I will keep your word.

¹⁸ Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction.

¹⁹ I am a resident alien on earth; do not hide your commands from me.

²⁰ I am continually overcome with longing for your judgments.

²¹ You rebuke the arrogant, the ones under a curse, who wander from your commands.

²² Take insult and contempt away from me,

for I have kept your decrees.

²³ Though princes sit together speaking against me,

your servant will think about your statutes;

²⁴ your decrees are my delight and my counselors.

²⁵ My life is down in the dust; give me life through your word.

WATCH & DISCUSS

Watch the Session Two video and take notes or write down any lingering questions you want to discuss with your group. Discussion questions are included in the free Leader Guide PDF available for download at lifeway.com/foreverforourgood.

REFLECT & DISCUSS: What is a lie you have believed about yourself or about God? What is a truth you learned in this session to help combat that lie?

**TO ACCESS THE VIDEO SESSIONS, USE THE INSTRUCTIONS
IN THE BACK OF YOUR BIBLE STUDY BOOK.**

