

Learning from History

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you again for your word. We thank you that you continue to speak to us through it. And so, Father, we pray that you would help us to understand what you are saying to us today, that we might be encouraged to keep trusting in you.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I'm not a huge history buff. I mean, I enjoy it, but I don't know lots about history.

But there is some history that is worth knowing. Because some history shapes us. As Martin Luther King said on the next slide, we are made by history.

It shapes us. But some history also teaches us, and we can learn from it. And so on the next slide, the 18th century Irish statesman, Edmund Burke, said, those who don't know history are destined to repeat it.

That is, we are to learn lessons from history. And we know this all too well in our own lives. Don't we? When we make mistakes and things like that. We learn things from our own history.

[1 : 0 3] I mean, when I wash clothes now, which is not very often, I must admit. But when I wash clothes now, I separate the colours from the whites. Because one time I didn't. I've learnt from my history.

In fact, I remember one person telling me about his history of washing his woollen jumper. And he made the mistake of hanging his woollen jumper up on the line. And the weight of the water stretched the jumper three or four sizes.

And it became like a nightie. I won't mention any names. Alan Rash. History teaches us things.

And today we're going to go back in history as we start the book of Deuteronomy and consider some of Israel's history. And I wanted to suggest that Israel's history is worth knowing because it teaches us things.

But more than that, it is part of our history. In fact, you'll notice in the book of Deuteronomy that Moses addresses the current generation as though they were there 40 years ago because of this connection they have.

[2 : 0 8] And we have a connection with them. And not as Australians or Asians or whatever, but as God's people. You see, what happened to them has actually impacted us.

After all, Jesus came from Israel and saved us. Their God is our God. And we are both called the people of God. We have this connection, you see.

And so their history ought to matter to us. Their history has shaped us and it can still teach us. And what's more, the book of Deuteronomy actually begins with Moses giving the current generation a history lesson.

But before we get to that history lesson, we need to remember the story so far. And so it's about 470 years before Deuteronomy, God called a man called Abraham and made three big promises.

Now, we've got some tennis players here, don't we? I know Arthur plays tennis. I know there's a few tennis players here. What's the shot called when it goes over someone's head? Lob.

[3 : 11] And that's the way to remember the three big promises. So on the next slide, three big promises, land, offspring and blessing. That were the three big promises that God made to Abraham.

And in the rest of Genesis, God blesses Abraham with wealth and a growing family, ends up about 70 at this point. But then they go down to Egypt because there was famine in the land, you might remember. And only Egypt had food because God worked through Joseph.

Now, while in Egypt, Israel grew from 70 people to thousands of people. And so on the next slide from Exodus chapter 1 verse 7, we read that the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly.

And in case we haven't quite got the idea, they became exceedingly numerous so that the land was filled with them. Get the idea? There were loads of them.

You see, God was keeping the O part of Lob, the offspring, the descendants. So many, in fact, that the new king of Egypt got scared and decided to make Israel slaves.

[4 : 17] But then God rescued them from Egypt to bring them into their own land, the E part of Lob. And so in the rest of the book of Exodus, we have the 10 plagues that forced Pharaoh to release the people and the parting of the Red Sea.

We have the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai or Horeb at same place, two different names. And that's the book of Exodus with more laws in Leviticus.

And the Israelites then came to the promised land, which was called Canaan. And the first time they came to the southern border of the land to a place called Kadesh Barnea. And so on the next slide, I've got a map for you.

And Kadesh Barnea is where the red dot is. Canaan is the place on the coast in the top right hand corner there. And so they're really at the bottom, far southern part of the border.

But this first generation of Israelites got scared and so they refused to trust God. Instead of entering the land, they entered back into the desert and wandered around for 40 years.

[5 : 19] Until that unbelieving generation died out and a new generation grew up. And now it's this new generation that Moses is speaking to. And this time they're where the green dot is on the east side.

That's the right side of the Jordan River facing Jericho, as Heather mentioned before. And it's at this point, as they are parked on the east side of the promised land, that Moses speaks to them.

And in fact, he gives them what is really a sermon, a big sermon, which is what the book of Deuteronomy really is. It's a long sermon to this new generation to encourage them to trust God and enter the land.

To not be like their parents who did not trust. So if you've got your Bibles there, look at how it's described, this beginning, this introduction to this book. Verse 1, these are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the wilderness east of the Jordan.

Or verse 3, in the 40th year, after the 40 years of wandering, on the first day of the 11th month, Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that the Lord had commanded him.

[6 : 25] Or verse 5, east of the Jordan, the territory of Moab, Moses began to expound this law, saying dot, dot, dot.

Notice the word spoke, proclaimed, expounded God's law. God's law refers to the first few books of the Bible that Moses had. In other words, Moses expounded or explained God's word to them.

And he calls them to trust God and to choose life. In other words, he preaches a sermon to them. After church, one day, a little boy came up to the pastor and said, when I grow up, I'm going to give you all my money.

The pastor said, well, thank you. But why? And the boy responded, because my daddy says you're the poorest preacher he's ever heard. Moses, though, is not a poor preacher.

But that's what he's doing in the book of Deuteronomy. He's preaching. And he begins his sermon with a history lesson for this current generation to learn. And this history lesson begins with the command to go to the promised land.

[7 : 30] So point one, verse six. And we'll work through these points pretty quickly. The Lord our God said to us at Horeb, you have stayed long enough at this mountain. Break camp and advance into the hill country of the Amorites.

Go to all the neighboring peoples in the Arabah, in the mountains, in the western foothills, in the Negev, and along the coast. In other words, everywhere. To the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river of the Euphrates.

Why? Well, verse eight. See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land the Lord swore he would give your forefathers.

That is, Abraham, Lob, remember, Isaac, and Jacob, and the descendants after them. And now Moses is talking about that first generation who left Egypt, the parents.

And he reminds the current generation, the children, about how God commanded their parents to leave Horeb, or Mount Sinai, and to go to the promised land. But it's a pretty, well, relatively speaking, boring bit of history, isn't it?

[8 : 36] I mean, why does Moses start here and not the spectacular parting of the Red Sea or the plagues? I mean, that's where Hollywood would start. So why does Moses remind the current generation about this particular history?

Well, it's because that's the point in time they're at. Let me explain. You see, they've already been liberated from Egypt.

They don't need to hear about the parting of the Red Sea anymore. They're already past it. But they're not in the land yet. And so they need to remember God's promise about the land.

In other words, Moses starts with the past promise that is most relevant to their present situation, you see. The land. So that they might remember that it is their land.

And might be encouraged to go in and take it. The question is, though, can they trust that promise of God? Can they trust God to make good on his promise of this land?

[9 : 36] Because at face value, taking the land looks impossible. And so the next bit of history Moses reminds them about is the appointment of leaders, which is meant to encourage them to trust God's promises.

So point to verse nine. At that time, Moses also said about the first generation. You are too heavy a burden for me to carry alone.

The Lord, your God has increased your numbers so that today you're as numerous as the stars in the sky. May the Lord, the God of your ancestors, increase you a thousand times and bless you as he has promised.

But how can I bear your problems and burdens and your disputes all by myself? So choose some wise, understanding and respected men from each of your tribes and I will set them over you.

And you answered, what you propose to do is good. And so it goes. Now, again, this is an odd bit of history to remind the current generation about, isn't it?

[10 : 35] I mean, do they really need to know about how their parents had disputes and how Moses had to create leaders amongst them? Again, it's a bit of a boring bit of history at face value.

So why does Moses remind this current generation about their parents' history at this point? Well, so that they realize that God does keep promises.

You see, why does Moses need to appoint leaders? Why does he need help? Because, verse 10, the Lord has increased their numbers.

So that they are as numerous as the stars. In other words, God has kept the O part of the promise to Abraham, the offspring part. He has increased their descendants.

In fact, the language here is very similar to how God put his promise to Abraham in Genesis 22. So on the next slide, Genesis 22 says, and look out for the similarities. I will surely bless you, Abraham, and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky.

[11 : 42] And here in Deuteronomy, verse 10, Moses deliberately uses the same language to remind them that God has actually kept one of his promises already.

In fact, in verse 11, Moses even uses the word promise so they don't miss the connection. And he prays that God will do even more than he has promised because he knows God's character is generous.

But the point is, God has kept the promise already. And so God can be trusted with another promise about the land. That's why Moses picks on this bit of history, you see.

But the question then becomes, will they trust God's promise about the land? Well, to encourage them to do so, Moses then moves to some more history, namely the response of their parents, the first generation.

Point three, and then we'll pick it up at verse 19 over the page. We don't have time to work through every verse, unfortunately. So verse 19. Then as the Lord our God commanded us, we set out from Horeb, Mount Sinai, and went towards the hill country of the Amorites, through all the vast and dreadful wilderness that you have seen.

[12 : 54] And so we reached Kadesh Barnea. Then I said to you, you have reached the hill country of the Amorites, which the Lord our God is giving us. See, the Lord your God has given you the land.

Go up and take possession of it, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, told you. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. But then some of you came to me and said, let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us and bring back a report about, you know, which route we are to take and the towns that we will come to.

The idea seemed good to me, said Moses. So I selected 12 of you, one man from each tribe. They left and went up into the hill country and came to the valley of Eshkol and explored it.

Taking with them some of the fruit of the land, they brought it down to us and reported, it is a good land that the Lord our God is giving us. But you were unwilling to go up.

You rebelled against the command of the Lord your God. You grumbled in your tents and said, the Lord hates us. So he has brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us.

[14 : 03] Where can we go? Our brothers have made our hearts melt in fear. They say the people of the land are stronger and taller than we are. The cities are large with walls up to the sky.

We even saw the Anakites there, a race of giants. So here we read the response of that first generation.

And on the next slide, we have our map again. Now remember that first generation is where the red dot is. They travelled from Mount Sinai to Horeb.

Sorry, so they travelled from Mount Sinai or Horeb to Kadesh Barnea. And then if you click next, then you should see some more arrows into the promised land and back.

That's the spies going in, coming back. And they said, it's a good land, just as God said. But they also reported that the people in the land were giants and the cities were fortified.

[15 : 02] And so verse 26, the first generation were unwilling to obey, you notice. Verse 26, they rebelled. Verse 27, they grumbled. Now to be fair, it was a daunting job to go in and take this land.

I mean, taking the land looked like an impossible task. And so Moses encouraged that first generation again. And he tried to persuade them to trust God. In other words, he gave them another chance to trust God.

You see verse 29 in your Bibles? Then Moses said to you, do not be terrified. Do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God who is going before you will fight for you as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes and in the wilderness.

There you saw how the Lord your God carried you as a father carries his son all the way you went until you reached this place. Do you see what Moses is saying?

Remember what God did back in Egypt. Remember your own history. Remember the spectacular way in which God rescued you. That first generation were there. They saw it with their own eyes.

[16 : 09] And so Moses is saying if God can part the Red Sea, if he can bring hailstones down on Egypt, if he can lead you by a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire by night, then he can deal with those giants in the land.

He can deal with those fortified cities like Jericho. And so this first generation has every reason to trust and obey. But verse 32, in spite of every reason to trust and obey, you did not trust the Lord your God who went ahead of you on your journey in fire by night and in cloud by day to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go.

So this is the heart of the matter. Despite all they had seen, despite all God had done for them, they still did not trust. And because they did not trust, then they did not obey.

And they missed out on the land. I remember when I was younger, mum had put out some afternoon tea for some visitors we were having. There was some biscuits and cake. And she told us kids, myself and my two brothers, don't eat it.

I have something better for you. Of course, what do we do? We ate some of it. I mean, it was right there and we weren't really sure what mum had in store for us, whether it was actually going to be better for us, whether we'd like it more.

[17 : 33] You know, it might not have been as good as biscuits and cake. And so because we did not fully trust mum, we did not obey mum. And we took some. And because of this, we rightly missed out on what mum had got for us, which was some fairy floss from the church fete that morning.

And for primary age children, fairy floss is like pink gold. OK. But you see, we did not fully trust her. And so we did not obey her.

And we missed out. So to the Israelites. See verse 34. When the Lord heard what you said, he was angry and solemnly swore, no one from this evil generation shall see the good land I swore to give your ancestors, except Caleb, son of Jephthah.

He will see it. And I will give him and his descendants the land he set his feet on, because he followed the Lord wholeheartedly. And Joshua gets a mention in verse 38 as well.

You see, they will miss out on the land. But not Caleb, who is one of the spies. Why? Well, because he followed God wholeheartedly. In other words, he trusted God completely.

[18 : 46] Of course, the Israelites then acted like kids. I mean, when mum caught us with the biscuits and cake and told us we were missing out on what she had, my brother and I tried to put everything back and make things fix it up.

In fact, my brother tried to even spit half a biscuit out of his house, put it back on the table. But it was just too late, wasn't it? Well, so too for the Israelites. In verse 41, they try and put everything right, but it's too late.

Skip down to verse 41. Then you replied, we have sinned against the Lord. We will go up now and fight as the Lord commanded us. And so every one of you put on his weapons, thinking it easy to go up into the hill country.

But then God warns them. The Lord said to me, tell them, do not go up and fight because I will not be with you. You will be defeated by your enemies. And so they listened.

No, they didn't. Verse 43, Moses told them, but they would not listen. They rebelled again against the Lord's command. And in their arrogance, they marched up into the hill country.

[19 : 49] The Amorites who lived in those hills came out against you. They chased you like a swarm of bees and beat you down from Seir all the way to Hormah. You came back and wept before the Lord, but he paid no attention to your weeping and turned a deaf ear to you.

And so you stayed in Kadesh many days, all the time you spent there. And then we turned back from the promised land and set out toward the wilderness, the desert, along the road to the Red Sea.

As the Lord had directed me. And for a long time, about 40 years, we made our way around the hill country of Seir. And so on the next slide, we've got the, I can't even see, is the wandering.

I don't know if you can see it, but there's wandering around that bottom region underneath Edom. That's pretty much where they spent their 40 years, I think. And here in Deuteronomy, Moses ends the first part of his history lesson about that first generation who came out of Egypt.

You see, God's command to enter the land. He gave, he reminds them of that history to encourage the current generation to take the land. And then Moses reminds them of the history of the appointment of leaders to show this current generation that he's kept the promise of offspring.

[21 : 05] So he could be trusted to keep the promise of land. And then thirdly, Moses reminds the current generation about the history of their parents and their response to not trust God so they don't make the same mistake.

And I take it this history lesson teaches us the same thing. It did that new generation. It teaches us that God keeps his promises. And so we had to trust and obey him.

We had to be like Caleb who followed God wholeheartedly. Wholeheartedly. And we had to be like Jesus, the ultimate Israelite who trusted God completely. Who trusted God completely in the wilderness during his 40 days of testing.

Who trusted God completely in the garden of Gethsemane. That his death was the only way to pay for our sins. And his trust in his heavenly father meant that he obeyed God completely.

Even unto death on a cross. We had to follow Christ's example and learn from Israel's history. The same lesson that that current generation listening to Moses' sermon was supposed to learn.

[22 : 11] To trust God even when it's hard. To be on our guard and not make the same mistake that first generation made who missed out on the land. Because it's easy to do.

To not trust. And that's Paul's point from our second reading. He refers to this first generation of Israel who saw all that God had done for them. And yet did not trust God. And missed out on the promised land.

So on the next slide. Paul writes this from our second reading. These things happened to them as examples. And were written down as warnings for us.

On whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So if you think you are standing firm. Be careful. Paul implores. That you do not fall. If you are here today.

And you do not trust in Jesus. Then please hear what God has done for you. He has given his only son to die the death we deserve. To pay for our sins.

[23 : 10] So that we might be forgiven. And given entry into the heavenly promised land. If we would but trust or believe. Same thing. In him.

And so do you. Do you trust in Jesus? If you don't. Then like that first generation. You'll miss out on heaven. And for us who do trust in Jesus already.

Then we are to continue trusting in him. Even when it's hard. Even when life looks overwhelming. Sometimes it feels too hard to trust God. When we suffer or face challenges.

When we don't know why. God is allowing us to go through what we are going through. But we must not be like that first generation. Who saw the giant people. And the fortified cities.

And decided not too hard to trust God. Rather we are to be like Caleb. Like Christ. Who saw the difficulties. But continued to trust God.

[24 : 07] For God has kept his promises in the past. And he will keep them in the future. And promises like he will never leave us. Nor forsake us. And promises like that he works in all things. For our good.

To make us like Christ. And he will never leave us. Whether it feels like it or not. And promises like that he hears our prayers. Even if it feels like he doesn't. Promises that he only gives good gifts.

When we face difficult times in life. And it's hard to trust those promises. We are to remember. That he has kept them in the past. So he will keep them in the future. We are to keep trusting him.

Because he is trustworthy. Now let me finish. By telling you about. A member of our church. I won't use his name. But you may be able to guess who he is.

But that's beside the point. He comes and serves. The 1030 congregation. On a regular basis. Helping the kids sign in at the front.

[25 : 05] And yet. He suffers with leukemia. And Parkinson's. Just in case one disease is not enough. And his wife also suffers. From MS. In case they don't have enough. To struggle with.

And yet. Every time. Every Sunday. I see him. I ask. How are you going? And he says. One of two things. Still trusting the Lord. Or.

God is still good. Incredible isn't it? You see. He had learnt the lesson. That the first generation didn't. That God is trustworthy.

And we are to continue to trust and obey him. Let's pray. Amen. A gracious heavenly father. We do thank you.

For the history of Israel. We mourn. At their lack of trust. And obedience. But we do pray. That we. Who are no different.

[26 : 01] We. Who are still susceptible. To the same. Temptations and sins. That they are. That they were. We pray. That you would help us. To learn. From their history.

And to not make the same mistakes. Help us. We pray. To keep trusting. And obeying you. For we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.