

BIB103 OT:1 Creation and Covenants

Unit 6c New Commitment for a New Generation

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We're finished with a view of Chapter 6, this anchor section that we wanted to take some time to focus on as parents. Now I want to pull back to that 30,000-foot view again but talk a little bit more about the bigger chunks of Scripture that we have. In chapters 29 and 30, we see that there's a move to commit themselves, the Israelites, as a nation to stand apart for God. This consists of not only knowing the many laws that God has commanded, but also obeying them and placing God first. I find it again relevant as you look at Deuteronomy to the world in which we currently live. We live in a world where more than ever before, we are going to stand apart as Christians, just like the Jews stood apart from those that they lived with. Why? They ate differently. They worship differently. They live differently because God told them to do that. We're going to live in a world where some hot button issues are going to become more and more prevalent and we're going to stand out more and more. The key is that as the Israelites were challenged, you are called to stand on truth. We are called to stand on truth. We are called as Christians that if the world changes the definition of marriage, the world changes the definition of gender identification, the world changes the definition to their emotional ends of the things that we value and hold to as Christians that are doctrines, we have to be aware and understand that emotion can't dictate us. We are called to stand on truth.

Now, understanding that, we as Christians have a responsibility on standing on that truth, just like he pointed out here, the truth that they were told to stand on is that we can still do it in a loving way. The way the receiver receives it, we can't control. But we can control the way that we deliver it, and we can control the content in which we deliver. The Deuteronomy focus with the "no idols" is really best about knowing God then. Apologetics is best taught by knowing what we understand and believe as Christians much more than what another cult or other religion believes. In understanding more and more what the real thing looks like, that helps us to identify the faults better. And Moses was stressing how important it was for them to know the real thing. When they teach federal agents to identify fake currency, they do not teach them by showing them fake currency. They teach them by showing them the authentic real deal. If they can understand what the real deal really looks like, they will easily pick up the fakes. And Moses wants the Israelites to know "Don't worry about trying to identify how those cultures are different. But what you need to focus on is how can you be obedient to God?" And we see that strongly emphasized as they wrap up the Book of Deuteronomy in those last few chapters.

And that's chapters 31 to 34 where now as they lay out those promises, we see this change in leadership in Israel with the emphasis of things won't change from truth, but they'll change from who will be leading things. Moses, the one who'd been leading the entire time, hands over his authority to

Joshua and he commissions him. Moses blesses the tribes, which reminds us of Jacob's blessing to his sons almost 450 years earlier. In the very last chapter, we see God shows Moses the Promised Land. Although he can't enter it after this, Moses, the servant of the Lord, dies on Mount Nebo. How sad and difficult to see this great man of God who knew God so well have to face the punishment of choosing to accept some of the glory and recognition that should only be reserved for God. Let's never ever get to a point and be reminded of Moses' life that God is God and no other. And when we think that success as a parent, as an employee, as a pastor, whatever your role may be, is never about us. It's always about how God has blessed and worked through us. Moses teaches us a great lesson in that as he was able to look and see the Promised Land, could possibly see the cities and see the vineyards and see the fields, knowing he would never have the privilege of entering in.

Now, I want to break down these chapters a little bit more for us as we've broken up these big sections, so we might be able to understand the elements of the individual chapters a little bit better. We see, first of all, in Deuteronomy 1:6 to chapter 3 that this was the first address of Moses, which was that historical overview. Then we see in chapter 4 that there's an appeal there, the first one of their commitment to God. It's also called the second address by Moses. Then in 5:1-21, we see God's covenant with Israel. A message about the first commandment is given in chapter 6 through 9:6. And then in 9:7 through 10:11, we see a survey of the laws that were given on Mount Sinai. Remember Mount Sinai? That's where God himself literally etched with his hand, as he put a cloud around the mountain, the commandments that he wanted the people of Israel to obey. And we see a survey here of the laws that were given there.

In 10:12 through chapter 11, we see reminders specifically of God's laws that are there. Now, what were those laws? How were they broken out? What were the specific ones in which God wanted them to be covering? Well, we see, first of all, that they get the specifics of the sacrifice in Deuteronomy 12. We see in chapter 13 giving into idolatry. We see in 14:3-21 what was acceptable and what was forbidden foods. That's probably one of those that we get a lot of questions on as well. Why was God so specific about the foods? Although we don't know specifically why all those are, the greatest speculation from reading the historians of that time period was that you see that God was protecting them from animals that caused the most disease during that time. Today, if you have raw chicken that you're cutting up, for instance, on your counter and you get done, you can put it in the refrigerator. It will keep it nice and safe. Germs will be on your counter if you don't take some sort of disinfectant and wipe it off. Their storages were different. The way they stored, the way the animals was bred was different. The way that they cut up the animals was different. So God, in order again to protect his people, did that very thing by

trying to lay out animals is what the scholars believe, that would have the greatest potential to cause them disease and death, if not treated properly.

I read that and what hits me when I do that is the concept of the “no’s” of God. How many times do I focus on what God says no about rather than what God says yes? As children, we’re the same way. Remember back in those times? Mom and Dad said, “No, don’t do this.” What’s our reaction usually? Well, we want to do it. Because we’re told no, “Don’t touch this wall. Don’t touch that socket. Don’t play with that,” our immediate reaction as human beings is we want to do it. And that goes all the way back to Genesis again when God said, “Every tree you can eat from but this one.” And what was the draw then for Eve and then Adam as well is, well, if God says no and then the serpent says this is why, he’s trying to hold out on you, they immediately want to eat from that, and they do, causing sin to come on all mankind. God was trying to lay out to the Israelites here in Deuteronomy the very importance of them understanding that these “no’s” were not so that God could somehow stop them from doing the fun stuff of life, but so that he could preserve them to have the best quality of life that they could possibly have. And so we see that in Deuteronomy 14, those foods that were laid out there.

And then we see ties in Deuteronomy 14:22-29. We’ve always been designed as a people that God expects us to participate in the giving financially, in the giving of our resources to help the cause of the Lord as well as to be obedient to what he sets out for us to do with the resources that he gives us. Some things that we don’t really hear practiced as much, we see in 15:1-11 as he talks about the year of release. People were released from bondage, from slavery. Now, remember, back in the Bible days, slavery was basically two ways that it was utilized. First of all, you could have been conquered from another tribe and then either sold into slavery or brought into slavery, or because of the debt load that you had or the life that you lived, you knew that it would be best for you or you and your family to live underneath someone that had more finances, more money, more food, more ways to take care of you and your family, and so you would put yourself into that servanthood, that slave hood. And this year of release was done every seven years so that they might be able to be free from their debts, free from the bondage that they had. And we see that again in Deuteronomy 15:1-11.

We also see the guidelines behind releasing slaves in 15:12-18. The first thing is of cattle and sheep. God’s overview of that is in Deuteronomy 15:19-23. The yearly pilgrimage feasts and festivals is in Deuteronomy 16:1-17. Again, what I love about God that I don’t think we do enough is he knew how forgetful we were. He knew that and he purposely set up things along the way for us to remember. In fact, in the Old Testament, one of the things we probably think of the most is when an altar was set up,

when a well was dug. They were reminders to the Israelites of the promises of God. The one that sticks out to me the most is if you can imagine the altar that was in the Jordan River before they crossed over. It was all this running water. And God said that he wanted them to cross over the Jordan River to get to the city of Jericho, and he stopped the water from coming down and they were told to put an altar in the middle of that river. For years, for as long as those rocks stood up, can you imagine families going by, going “Let me tell you the story about why there’s an altar in the middle of that river”? And God does that a lot with feasts and festivals to remind them of significant events that had taken place in their history so that they not forget both again the times of punishment as well as the times of blessing that God had for them. So we see a lot of those laid out there in chapter 16.

We see the structure for the leaders of the nation in Deuteronomy 16:18 through 28:22, that section of Scripture. The right of asylum is in Deuteronomy 19. You say, “Asylum?” Well, again, back in those days, if somebody were to kill somebody by accident, it was certainly not something intentional, they had an opportunity to go to a city of refuge where they could stay and be safe, if they were judged that it was an accidental death that they did to somebody else, for the rest of their life. And as soon as they left those cities of refuge, they were open season, so to speak, to possibly very hurting family members that even if they knew the person that they loved had died accidentally, they still have that anger in their heart towards the person that had been a part of that.

We see in chapter 20 and 21:10-14 and 23:9-14 the conduct of war. Nowadays, it doesn’t seem like there’s much conduct of war. But God wanted them to know that even in going out to fight their enemies, that there were certain guidelines that he expected them to go by. Marriage and family life. A big deal. Deuteronomy 21; 22; 24:1-4, and Deuteronomy 25:5-10. He had a lot to say about the interaction in both marriage and family. I encourage you to pay special note to that, especially as it ties into Deuteronomy 6. Then there were certain humanitarian regulations that were set out in chapter 21, 22, 24, and 25. And then, as we talked earlier, as we got to the end of the book, we see in chapter 27 blessings and curses on the people and in chapter 28 the results of observing them, but also the results of neglecting them. Then we come to the last days of Moses. His third and final address is in chapters 29 and 30. And then his last words and the acts that he performed is in chapter 31 to 33, with finally his death and burial in chapter 34.

As we wrap up some final thoughts in this book, Moses addresses his words, we see, for all Israel at least 12 different times. This phrase “all Israel” emphasized the nation’s unity initiated by their covenant with God at Mount Sinai and forged in the wilderness. Unity is such a valuable thing, not only as we see

stated with Moses emphasizing it 12 different times as he talked to all Israel, but also for us in the culture in which we live. Whatever part of the world that we reside, whatever the status of financial or cultural, elite or maybe the bottom, we feel like, of life that we're in, God wants us as Christians to have a standard of unity. He wants us to understand that the common cause that we have is that we are his children. He wanted the Israelites to be reminded, "You are special. You are chosen. You are loved by God. He cares for you deeply. And he wants you to stick together." How often do we let petty things tear us apart? God laid out meticulously the things that they needed to practice so that they could stay together in unity, folks.

Unity does not have to mean that we abandon truth. Unity does not have to mean that we ignore truth. Some of my very best friends are men who have come to me and had to confront me on things that I was doing wrong, or maybe things that I wasn't doing. I didn't always like it. And to be honest, I didn't always respond in the right way initially. But as I pondered and thought and understood the heart that they had and that their goal was for us to be unified in Christ, it drew me back to acknowledging the words that they said and pondering them, considering them, and evaluating them, and interacting, knowing this is my brother. Moses wanted them to know as they entered the Promised Land, there was going to be lots of tribes coming against them. There was going to be exposure to false gods. There was going to be pressures, both inside and outside, that would try to take their vision away from the unifying aspect they had as they wandered the wilderness. What was that unifying? That they would enter the Promised Land one day. Now that they were there, he didn't want them to forget the necessity of unity.

During this time, we see widespread polytheism was all around them. And Israel was distinct in that they worshipped one god, Yahweh. Their god was totally unique. There was none other like him, than any of the other little G gods of the nations surrounding them. We see that, again, in Deuteronomy 6:4. They worshipped him with codifying the Shema, the belief in the Shema, the basic confession of faith in Judaism even to today. "Hear, O Israel. The Lord Yahweh is our God. The Lord Yahweh is one." Shema. That was powerful for them. Our unifying thing is not in the fact that we travel in the wilderness together. Our unifier is not in the fact that we happen to be on the verge of this Promised Land. The unifier was that we worship Yahweh and Yahweh alone.

Deuteronomy also restates the Ten Commandments and many other laws given in Exodus and Leviticus. The book delivered to Israel God's instructions on how to live a blessed life in the Promised Land. Unlike the unconditional covenant that God had made with Abraham, the covenant between Yahweh and Israel was bilateral. It was a two-way street. God would keep his promise to bless this nation if the people

remained faithful. The adult Israelites were too young to participate in the first covenant ceremony at Mount Sinai. Therefore, Moses reviewed the law at the doorstep of the Promised Land, urging this new generation to re-covenant with Yahweh, to recommit themselves to his ways. We go back to the pep rally analogy. Guys, are you on our team? Are you going the direction we are? Are you going to fight with us? Are you going to embrace Yahweh as your God? In the first speech in Deuteronomy 1:1 through 4:43, Moses warns the people of Israel about the sins which kept their fathers from entering the Promised Land. He repeatedly encourages them to obey God and reminds them about the events that took place during those 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. He carefully explains what happens when there are difficult situations and they choose to not trust the Lord but rather act in obstinance, doubt, fear, and finally, disobedience.

That brought me back to the memory of being a dad when my children were younger. I have adult children now, but I remember telling my children, “Don’t run. Walk.” My children perceived that as “You’re holding back on me,” but I knew that they didn’t have the coordination yet, that they wouldn’t soon trip and fall and scrape up that knee or that hand or bump their head. And how many times as a father did I have to not only warn them but come to comfort them as they would unsteadily try to run and trip and fall in a crack on the sidewalk, a bump along the way, and they had that wound as a reminder to them? Moses was trying to tell the people, “Avoid the times where God will have to come and punish you by being obedient to keeping him in front of you.”

The second speech, Deuteronomy 4:44 through 26:19, goes into the details about the law. And it really is the main message here that Moses gives them. The first speech was more of an introduction and a preparation for this message. It deals mainly with the legal aspects of the law: moral, civil, and ceremonial. It deals first with the Ten Commandments, Deuteronomy 5 through 11. And secondly, it deals behind God’s laws with the emphasis on following God’s statutes, religious ordinances in living with one another as the people of God, in Deuteronomy 12 through 26.

And then we see the final speech. It’s a shorter one, starting in 27:1 and going all the way to 31:30. It’s primarily a message about the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience. As the father figure that Moses was, can you imagine as he knew his death was coming and knew that this was his final speech, and what does he focus on? As he did in the intro, obey God, Follow him. Moses mainly directs his message here, though, we find, to the elders and the priests and the Levites and the leaders who were responsible to carry out the ceremonies. Why? Because everything rises and falls on leadership. If the leadership would embrace these, he knew the people would. The place chosen for

these ceremonies was a spot in the center of the land of Israel where the first altar to God had been erected. Once they've crossed over to the Jordan River, they were commanded to set up great stones on Mount Ebal, with the law of God inscribed and to build a great altar there. The 12 tribes of Israel were to be divided between the two hills. Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin were to gather themselves on Mount Gerizim to recite the blessings which God promised them if they would obey him. Across on Mount Ebal was Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they were to speak the curses which God had promised them if they would disobey him. The blessings and the curses, verbalizing them from mountain to mountain, shouting them so they could understand. If I obey, here's the blessings. If I disobey, here's the cursings. He used all these different tools to remind them about what was most important and what they should avoid.

Moses finishes his discourse and encourages the people to follow the next leader, Joshua. The leader that would cross the Jordan with them and take them into the land which had been promised to their father, Abraham. Moses wrote down the law in a book. He gave it to the priests who were to keep it as a perpetual reminder to the people of Israel. And he wanted them to understand and grasp on to these and have them for their generation to generation to generation to come. They read it every seventh year when the people assembled for the feast of tabernacles. And we see this in Deuteronomy 31:9-13. God told Moses and Joshua to come before him at the tabernacle, and he told them something that must have been hard for them to hear. He told them of the future infidelity of the children of Israel and instructed Moses to leave the people a song as a witness against them which they were to learn. I would have struck my heart.

Now, I've had children that have battled with obeying God. And it's hard when they're disobeying him. It's beautiful when you see them restored back to a relationship with him in the way that it should be. Can you imagine as Moses has led these people through thick and thin, and Joshua as he looks to the future being told by God? They're going to wander away again. Moses, that's why this song is so important. Much like the slaves in the South during the civil war that had songs of promise that would remind them that someday God would free them, he wanted them to have a song that would remind them that one-day God would free them again if they did what? If they kept his commandments and his laws. So he wrote that song, as God told him to, that they would have it. And that's recorded in chapter 32. And it speaks about the blessings which God had bestowed on the people and the corrupt ways in which they responded to those blessings. Deuteronomy 33, as he wraps up, again speaks about Moses' blessing on the people. And chapter 34 records, as we mentioned, his death.

His conclusion to it all is this. I'm going to read a couple of passages. Deuteronomy 30:19-20 again. "I have set before you life and death, the blessings and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying his voice, and by holding fast to him. For this is your life and length of your days." Again, Deuteronomy 30:19-20. This word "this" in verse 20 refers to loving the Lord your God, obeying and holding fast to him. That is life. Our relationship with God is to be marked by faithfulness, loyalty, love, and devotion. Think of an ideal marriage. That's the picture of how God wants us to cling to him. We see that even in the New Testament. He lays it out for us in Ephesians 5:28-32. How closely do you and I cling to God? As we wrap up this overview of Deuteronomy, I encourage you to pray and recommit your heart to that all-important relationship. This rich book is one that can be valued today as well as it was for the Israelites at the time that it was written then.