

Old Testament Survey - Part 21

by Dick Woodward

The Book of Deuteronomy is a book of exhortations to love God and obey His Word, and to pass these values on to children, with the foundation of the educational process being the absolute Word of God.

Duration: 27:34

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Deuteronomy 11:19, Psalm 78:4-6, Psalm 127:3, Proverbs 1:8, Proverbs 22:6, Isaiah 38:19, Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21

Topics: "Biblical Obedience", "Faith Formation"

Description

The sermon focuses on the Book of Deuteronomy, highlighting the transition of the second generation of God's people entering the promised land of Canaan after the first generation perished due to unbelief. Moses preaches important sermons to prepare the new generation, emphasizing the need to love and obey God's Word with all their being and pass these values on to their children. The core message is about nurturing a generation that loves and obeys God, with a key emphasis on the foundational aspects of revelation, responsibility, relationship, and reality in the educational process.

Transcript

Now as we continue our survey of the Old Testament, having completed our survey of the Book of Numbers, we come to the Book of Deuteronomy. The word Deuteronomy means the restating or the repetition of the law, but as we'll see when we get into the Book of Deuteronomy and survey it somewhat, that it's more than just a restating or repetition of the law that we have in the Book of Deuteronomy. It's a repetition of the law with application, and the application is a very special application to the second generation of the people of God.

In the Book of Numbers, we had the awesome message of the death of a generation. A whole generation, the first generation of God's people, died in the wilderness because of their unbelief. Now, as we come to the Book of Deuteronomy, they are about to cross the River Jordan and enter into the land of Canaan, and this, of course, is the second generation of God's people.

Remember, God said to those people who had no faith in the wilderness, when God told them to invade Canaan and tried to assure them that He would enable them to conquer Canaan, they said, "If we go over there and invade Canaan, why, our children will be slaves of all those people over there." Well, that so grieved the Lord that the Lord said to Moses, remember in Numbers 14, He said to Moses, "Because they said that, because they said that their children would be slaves if they invaded Canaan, those children are

going to be the ones to enter the land of Canaan and conquer it, but all of those people who said that are going to die in the wilderness. Now, this is that second generation of God's people. This second generation of the people of God, the children of those who perished in the wilderness, are about to cross the Jordan and enter the land of Canaan. The Book of Deuteronomy is a record of the great sermons Moses preached to them before they crossed Jordan and invaded Canaan.

In the opening statement of the Book of Deuteronomy, based upon the Living Bible prayer phrase, we have this description of the Book of Deuteronomy, and it helps us to understand what the Book of Deuteronomy is. It says, "This book records Moses' address to the people of Israel when they were camped in the valley of Arabba in the wilderness of Moab, east of the Jordan River. The speech was given on February 15, 40 years after the people of Israel left Mount Oreb, though it takes only 11 days to travel by foot from Mount Oreb to Kadesh Barnea, going by way of Mount Seir." What this is saying to us, of course, again, is a reminder of the fact that they had been on a wilderness march now for 40 years, and remember we said they marched in precise formation.

They had a military formation that looked something like this. Certain tribes were located in the north, certain in the south, some in the east, some in the west, and they moved like a military army in formation across that wilderness. Now it's important to remember that as they experienced that wilderness wandering in the Book of Numbers, remember they came out of Gershon, they came out of Egypt, went down to Mount Sinai, over to Kadesh Barnea, because the Philistines occupied this territory, and then they went over here and went around in circles for 38 years, and then finally went up here to the east of the Jordan River.

Now they are camped right here to the east of the Jordan River, just about to put their feet in the Jordan River and cross the Jordan River and invade the land of Canaan when Moses preaches the great sermons that we have in the Book of Deuteronomy. The Book of Deuteronomy is more than just a repetition of the law or a restating of the law. It's a repetition or a restating of the law because it's necessary to restate the law.

The whole generation of people who were living when the law was originally given are dead except for Caleb and Joshua. Now their children must hear this law, and before they invade Canaan, Moses wants to make sure as his last act on earth, he wants to make sure that they hear this Word of God that God gave him on Mount Sinai. Now again, to continue the allegory of salvation through these first books of the Bible, Genesis gives us the beginnings of our salvation.

Exodus pictures our deliverance from slavery or bondage. Exodus is a beautiful picture of salvation because it's a picture of deliverance, and as we've said before, the word deliverance and the word salvation mean the same thing in the Old Testament. The Book of Numbers was that awesome account of how they did not come out of the bondage of Egypt and invade the land of Canaan, which is what they should have done and what they could have done.

Allegorically, we've said several times now, that's a picture of the fact that when we are delivered from our sins, we're supposed to enter into life more abundantly. The promised land of abundant Christian living with all of its blessings, with all of its charisma, with all of its spiritual gifts, we're supposed to enter into that, but many of us do not. We go around in circles for 40 years like they did in the Book of Numbers.

Now let's assume, following the allegory a little bit further, that we've had our wilderness wandering experience, and we have come to our senses, and we do want to get from God everything he has for us,

and we're about to enter into it. The Book of Deuteronomy is filled with messages for someone just like that, someone who has decided to become part of the committed minority and not part of the apathetic majority, someone who has said, God, I want to get it all. I'm sick and tired of the wilderness wandering, and I want to enter into everything you have for me.

Now the Book of Deuteronomy is for you, if that's where you are, because the Book of Deuteronomy is a book of exhortations to somebody who's about to go get it all, and the exhortation is make sure you do get it all. This is the theme of the Book of Deuteronomy. Now another important theme in the Book of Deuteronomy, in all these sermons of Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy, has to do with the Word of God first of all being a reality to these people, and then he exhorts them to make sure they pass this Word of God on to their children.

God wants a people who will love him with all their being, and he wants a people who will obey his Word with all of their being. Now the exhortations here in the Book of Deuteronomy will say again and again to these people, make sure you obey God, and make sure you love God with all your being, and make sure you communicate to your children these values about loving God and loving and obeying God's Word. I believe each book of the Bible has a definitive chapter, just as Numbers 14 was a definitive chapter in the Book of Numbers, I believe the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy is a definitive chapter in the Book of Deuteronomy, because this great sermon of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 6 is definitive.

It gives us a picture of what all the other sermons are about. Not only does the content of the sermon set the pace for all the other sermons in the Book of Deuteronomy, but the objective of this sermon is also like the objective of all the other sermons. Now in Deuteronomy chapter 6, especially verses 4 through 9, you have what the old rabbis have always considered the greatest sermon Moses ever preached.

In fact, this is considered Judaism's basic confession of faith, this passage of scripture in Deuteronomy chapter 6. Here's the heart of it. Hear, O Israel, the Lord is 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 might.

And these words which I am commanding you today shall be on your heart, and you shall teach them diligently to your sons, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets on your forehead. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Now there's more to the sermon than that, but that's the heart of the sermon, which I believe is the heart of the Book of Deuteronomy. What Moses is really saying to these people just before they cross the Jordan and invade Canaan is this. Listen, God has called you to be a people who love him with all your being.

Now in order to express your love for him, you must obey his word. In order to obey his word, you have to know his word. Now God wants your children to be a generation of adults one day who will love God with all their being.

And in order to love God with all their being, they must know his word and they must obey his word. Therefore, I'm charging you, first of all, see to it that you love God with all your being, and that you know and obey his word, and make sure that you pass these values on to your children. You see, what he's really telling them is how to nurture their children to be people who love God and obey God.

And he spells out here a process, an educational process, within the context of which this miracle is to take place. How can parents see their children become adults one day who will have their spiritual values and love God and obey God? That's what this sermon, this great sermon, is all about. Now as you look at this educational process described by Moses here, it's an educational process that rests upon four foundations.

The first foundation upon which this educational process rests is the foundation of revelation. What he's saying to these parents about the nurture of their children is this. If you're going to educate your children to love God, then the basis of all the education you want them to have has got to be the word of God.

The thinking of Moses here is simply this. God is. And if God is at all, then God is totally.

God is absolute. In philosophy we ask the question, are there any absolutes? Or is there any such thing as an absolute? Now Moses is saying here, as he tells us about this educational process, God is your absolute. God is absolute.

And this absolute God has said something. Now anything that an absolute God says is absolute. Therefore, if an absolute God has given you an absolute word, then there are such things as moral absolutes that you ought to teach your children.

The idea of his thinking here is this. There's an absolute God, there's an absolute word, and therefore there's an absolute way that your child should go. The Scripture will say later, train up a child in the way that he should go, and even when he's old, he will not depart from it.

Train a child in the way he should go. Is there a way that a child should go? Many people debate that. Moral relativity says, well, it's all relative.

There are no absolutes. I remember when I was a social worker attending a seminar where some great authorities on juvenile delinquency were lecturing, and it was a discussion group, and the opening statement by the man who was leading the seminar was, now first of all, let's get this straight, there are no absolutes. And I remember raising my hand and I said, but doctor, I just left a 14-year-old girl who's absolutely pregnant.

Now how can you possibly tell young people there are no absolutes? Consequences are absolute. They're absolutely good and they're absolutely bad. If consequences are absolutely good or bad, there must be some absolute moral choices back there along the way somewhere.

You see, this educational process Moses describes to these people involves absolutes. He says, God is absolute. God's Word is absolute.

And so there is an absolute way that your child should go. There are moral absolutes for your child, and you should teach them that. Now if you catch the vision of this, it will affect, I believe, your approach to the nurture of your children.

I heard a Christian psychologist ask this question once to about 600 women who were mothers and homemakers. He said, how many times do you tell your child to do something before you really mean it and make them do it? And the average was three to five. You know, it's time for Johnny to go to bed and get his pajamas on, you know, so you say to Johnny, Johnny, it's time to go to bed, go in your room and get your pajamas, get your pajamas on.

Well, you know, three minutes later you look at Johnny, he hasn't even paid a bit of attention to you, he hasn't made a move toward the bedroom. So you say it again, Johnny, I said it's bedtime now, go get your pajamas on. Well, the average woman would say that three times to five times before they really meant it.

When they really meant it, they would probably scream or just, you know, jump up out of their chair and snatch him up and take him in the bedroom or something, you know. Now, little Johnny is a genius at ignoring the first four if he knows you always tell him five times before you mean it. He just ignores the first four.

He knows you don't mean it, not what that tone avoids. I came from a family of 11 children and our mother wasn't even five feet tall, and I believe just the sheer economy of her time and energy made it necessary for her to learn some things about the nurture of children. She never had a course in psychology, but you know, she never repeated a directive.

She told us one time, and if we didn't do it, she never repeated the directive, she always acted. There was action to follow up, you know, that first directive. Now, that's pretty good discipline, I believe, because if you think about it, if this directive I'm giving my child, even if it's just go into your bedroom and get on your pajamas, if that's coming from this perspective, there's an absolute God, Johnny, and this absolute God has given us an absolute word, and that means there's an absolute way for you to be raised, and he's charged me with the responsibility to train you up in that way.

That means there's an absolute walk, Johnny, from here to the bedroom, and that's not open to debate. I'm not going to argue it with you. I'm not even going to repeat it.

I'm just going to tell you one time. You see, the educational process Moses describes here is based upon revelation, the Word of God. I'm amazed as I look up the charters of great universities in this country.

For instance, you look up the charters of some of our oldest universities, and look in those charters for the founders of those universities to express the purpose of that university being founded. You know what they will often say, some of our oldest universities? I want my child to know God. God is the source of everything.

He's the power behind everything. He's the purpose for everything. He's the most important thing in the world.

I want my child to know God. I want my child to know God's Word. Therefore, I want my child to be able to read.

I want him to be educated so he can know God's Word so he can know God. That kind of thing is in the charters of some of our greatest universities in this country. Now, it's, of course, sad to say that many of those universities today don't teach the Word of God or anything that's absolute, but that's still in their charter.

The foundation of this educational process described by Moses is the Word of God, the absolute Word of an absolute God. Now, a second foundation upon which this educational process is based is responsibility. Who has the responsibility for the nurture of these children? As Moses charges these people who are about to cross the Jordan and invade Canaan, according to his perspective in this great sermon here, who has the responsibility for the nurture of the children? A lot of people think the

responsibility for the education of the children is the state's.

When I was growing up, if I didn't go to school, a truancy officer came after me, and I got the impression as a young person that the state who employed that truancy officer was responsible to make sure I went to school. A lot of people get the impression because of public schools that it's the state's responsibility to educate the children. Some are, of course, more mature than that, and they say, no, it's the church.

The church has the responsibility to educate my children. I take my child to Sunday school every Sunday and drop them off there for 30 minutes, and it's their responsibility to educate my child to love God and love God's Word and obey God's Word. That's their thing.

Of course, that's ridiculous. If you consider the fact that there are 8,760 hours in a year, and if your child never misses Sunday school, he's going to spend about 26 hours in Sunday school. Do you think that's really going to shape his life, just 26 hours out of 8,760? Well, many people say, well, I put my child in a Christian school, in a parochial school.

That's 1,080 hours that he's going to get. That's their responsibility. The Christian school.

Let them produce my child to be the kind of an adult that will love God and love His Word and obey His Word. Well, you know, if you add the number of hours he spends in that parochial school and in Sunday school, he still spends about seven-eighths of his time with you. It isn't any wonder that Moses, here in this passage, places the responsibility for the education of the child upon the parents.

He says, you have this responsibility, and he's especially charging the fathers when he says, let these words dwell in your heart and then you teach them to your sons. I believe it's very emphatic here that the father is supposed to do this teaching. If a child always learns about God from a woman, is it any wonder that that child will grow up thinking that it's sissy to be religious? If he always hears about God from a woman, I believe God wants the men to teach the scripture to the children.

Isaiah the prophet said, the fathers to the children shall make known my truth. So the responsibility really is given to the father in the home, especially the parents. Now, just as the commanding officer of a ship never delegates responsibility but only delegates authority, the father or the father and the mother in a home never delegate the responsibility for their children's education to anybody.

They may delegate authority to people to help them with this responsibility, but they never delegate this responsibility to anybody. The commanding officer of an aircraft carrier delegates authority to the supply officer to run supply, and he delegates authority to the gunnery officer to run the guns, and the catapult officer to see that the catapult launches the planes. But if something goes wrong in one of those areas of that great aircraft carrier, who meets the board of inquiry? The commanding officer, because he never delegated his responsibility, only authority.

And in the same way, parents can delegate to the church and the school, public and private. They can delegate to many people the authority to help them with the education of their children, but they never delegate that responsibility to anyone because God has given it to them, according to Moses. A third foundation upon which this educational process rests is relationship.

When you get up in the morning with them, when you sit in the house with them, when you go out into the way with them, when you lie down at night with them, teach them the word of God, fathers. I've heard a lot of fathers say, that's not realistic, because I'm not there when they get up, and I'm not there when they go

to bed. I don't ever sit in the house with them, and I never go anywhere with them.

And as a pastor, I say, you've missed the point. You see, that is the whole point. That's doing what a lot of people do.

That's interpreting your culture and the scripture in reverse order. You see, many people come and interpret the scripture in the light of their culture. Well, my culture says, I leave before they get up, and I get home after they go to bed, and I don't ever sit in the house with them, and I never go anywhere with them.

The word of God is supposed to be the factor that interprets your culture. You should interpret your culture in the light of the scripture, and not the scripture in the light of your culture. You see, the word of God is saying, you must have a relationship with that child.

Many times when a young man becomes a young adult, the father and the son have what they used to call a generation gap. There's a generation gap between me and my son. I just don't understand him.

And if you get into that, it really isn't a generation gap. It's a relationship gap. There's no way you can fulfill the nurture described here by Moses and not have a relationship with your children.

The relationship is a vital part of this process. I don't think we have any idea as men how important the time we spend with our children really is. I can remember in our home having a sort of a prayer time in the morning where we prayed for our children and asked them how we could pray for them that day, and they prayed for each other.

And then at night we had a thing called round table, where we asked each child these questions. Did you have a good day or a bad day? What was the best thing or the worst thing that happened to you today? And do you have anything you want to ask or show or tell? Well, one night my youngest son, who had just started school, had a picture under his chair. We said that they had to bring it to the table if they were going to show us something.

So under his chair he had this picture he had drawn in school that day, and he held it up. And my wife is a teacher, and she trained me not to say, what is it, but to say tell me about it. So I said, tell me about this picture, Dwight.

He had just started kindergarten. He said, well, the teacher told us to draw the greatest thing that ever happened to us in our whole life. And so this is what I drew.

Now what he drew was this. I had gone out to jog a few months before he started school, in that summer before he started school. And as an afterthought, I put him and his little sister in the back seat of the car and sat them on the steps of a health spa.

And I said, I'm going to run around this building, and you count my laps. And so as I jogged around the building, they would sit on the steps there and count my laps. Now two and a half months later, he goes to school, and they ask him to draw a picture of the greatest thing that ever happened to him in his whole life.

And he said, my daddy took my sister and I to the health spa, and we sat on the steps and counted how far he ran. And that was the greatest thing that ever happened to him in his whole life. I don't think we have any idea, especially as men, how important it is that we spend time with our children.

And if you understand this educational process, relationship is a very important foundation in this process. The fourth foundation upon which this process of the nurture of children is based, I call reality. Notice Moses says, let these words dwell in your heart.

You love God with all your heart, and then teach these words diligently to your children. Don't miss that. You see, we do not communicate or convey to our children our lectures about values.

We communicate our values to our children. If you want to know what your values are, Jesus said, show me your treasures and you'll show me your values. Show me your values and you'll show me your heart.

In plain language, what that means is, show me your check stubs for the last five years. And show me your old used calendars for the last five years. Show me how you have spent your time and your money and your energy.

You'll show me your values if you do that, and you'll show me where your heart is if you do that. That's the kind of thing that we convey to our children. Not lectures about values, but values.

I remember jogging with one of my children one day. She was a girl who was very, very industrious. I remember when she was a baby, I was very, very busy putting in 18-hour days as a busy pastor.

One morning at 6.30 when I was shaving, she was wearing diapers. She was about 18 months old, and she came up and handed me my hat. And what she was saying was, you know, you're just the guy who scrapes that white stuff off and then puts the hat on and leaves.

Well, here's the hat. You know, here's the next thing. Well, years later, she was very active in school and had such an active schedule, she was coming down with migraine, headaches all the time.

My wife asked me to get with her and talk to her about her schedule. So as I brought up the subject of her schedule while we were jogging, I said, you really do have a full schedule, don't you, Sydney? She said, oh, I'll tell you, Pap, I learned that from you. She said, I've been watching you for 20 years, and you're up at 6 o'clock in the morning and you're gone, and you come back, well, you see what had happened there? My lectures about values were meaningless.

I communicated my values to her. Now, later on, I was jogging with my oldest son, and he said one day, as he mentioned different men that we both knew, he would mention a man and say, what he does is really important, what he does is really important, and I would not comment. And finally, after mentioning a half a dozen of our mutual friends, he said, but I don't know anybody who's doing anything more important than what you're doing.

He said, I believe God wants me to spend my life doing what you're doing. He's studying for the ministry, graduating from college this year. You see, plus or minus, what we convey to our children is not our lectures about values, but our values.

This foundation upon which this nurture of children is based involves revelation, responsibility, relationship, and reality.

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