

LEADER GUIDE

DEUTERONOMY

A CHALLENGE TO A NEW GENERATION

GOD'S CHARACTER REVEALED

BIG IDEA: God is faithful despite our failures.

DATE: Sunday, June 7, 2026

SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 1:1-4:43

OPENING QUESTION

Have you ever taken a trip where you experienced delays? What happened?

Everyone has probably experienced the frustration of travel delays. But we will have a hard time complaining about any delay when we think about the 40-year delay the children of Israel experienced in their journey toward the promised land. Moses pointed out in Deuteronomy 1:2 that it was an 11-day journey from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea. A trip that could have taken 11 days instead took 40 years.

We can only imagine the joy and relief when God finally said, "You have stayed at this mountain long enough. Resume your journey" (Deut. 1:6-7). Remember, **God's delays are not God's denials**. With God, timing is much more critical than time. The story of the Israelites reminds us that God wants to receive the greatest possible glory in our lives, and sometimes that involves waiting on His perfect timing.

In what area of your life have you experienced the frustration of delay? Deuteronomy opens with God telling the Israelites that it is time to move forward in faith. How do you know when God is telling you to move forward in faith?

SETTING THE STAGE

The first section of Deuteronomy reveals both the power and patience of God. The Israelites didn't have a copy of the Bible to read to learn about the character of God. They had something better than a book. They had the opportunity to witness God's loving provision for them and learn firsthand about His character.

According to Numbers 1:46, the Hebrews numbered into the hundreds of thousands. There were more than 600,000 men, not counting their family members. Some scholars have estimated that the size of the wandering nation could have numbered as many as two million people. Marching 50 abreast, they would have formed a line 30 miles long!

Share a brief overview of the Book of Deuteronomy:

- Written by Moses, his last messages to Israel

- Written after the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness; written before entry into the promised land
- Themes addressed include:
 - The nature and character of God as highlighted in His holiness, sovereignty, graciousness and love
 - The covenant relationship between God and His people
 - The response of faith by God's people to God
 - Sin and its consequences
- After the Books of Psalms and Isaiah, Deuteronomy is the most quoted book in the New Testament
- Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy three times while tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matt. 4:4-10)

SCRIPTURE READING

Deuteronomy 1:26-32; 4:1-9 (CSB)

²⁶“But you were not willing to go up. You rebelled against the command of the LORD your God. ²⁷You grumbled in your tents and said, ‘The LORD brought us out of the land of Egypt to hand us over to the Amorites in order to destroy us, because he hates us. ²⁸Where can we go? Our brothers have made us lose heart, saying: The people are larger and taller than we are; the cities are large, fortified to the heavens. We also saw the descendants of the Anakim there.’

²⁹“So I said to you: Don’t be terrified or afraid of them! ³⁰The LORD your God who goes before you will fight for you, just as you saw him do for you in Egypt. ³¹And you saw in the wilderness how the LORD your God carried you as a man carries his son all along the way you traveled until you reached this place. ³²But in spite of this you did not trust the LORD your God...

4:1-9 “Now, Israel, listen to the statutes and ordinances I am teaching you to follow, so that you may live, enter, and take possession of the land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. ²You must not add anything to what I command you or take anything away from it, so that you may keep the commands of the LORD your God I am giving you. ³Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal-peor, for the LORD your God destroyed every one of you who followed Baal of Peor. ⁴But you who have remained faithful to the LORD your God are all alive today. ⁵Look, I have taught you statutes and ordinances as the LORD my God has commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to possess. ⁶Carefully follow them, for this will show your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the peoples. When they hear about all these statutes, they will say, ‘This great nation is indeed a wise and understanding people.’ ⁷For what great nation is there that has a god near to it as the LORD our God is to us whenever we call to him? ⁸And what great nation has righteous statutes and ordinances like this entire law I set before you today? ⁹“Only be on your guard and diligently watch yourselves, so that you don’t forget the things your eyes have seen and so that they don’t slip from your mind as long as you live. Teach them to your children and your grandchildren.

DISCUSSION

LEARN FROM YOUR PAST FAILURES

The biggest reason the Israelites had to wander for 40 years was their lack of faith in God when they first came to the Promised Land at Kadesh Barnea. This story is told in Numbers 13-14 and Moses recounts it here in Deuteronomy 1:19-36. Moses sent 12 spies into the Promised Land. 10

returned with a fearful report that the people there were too powerful for the Israelites. Only 2 spies, Joshua and Caleb, came back trusting that God would give them victory over their enemies in the Promised Land. Because the Israelites chose the fear of the 10 spies over the faith of the 2 spies, they wandered for another 40 years until everyone in that fearful generation died out. But even though they rebelled against God, He did not forsake them and brought them back again to the Promised Land to give them another chance to follow Him to victory.

ASK: Why did the people need to hear this recount of their history? How do these verses relate to our faith today? What have you learned from failure that you could not have learned any other way? What can we conclude about God's faithfulness today?

OUR GOD WILL CARRY US

READ: Deuteronomy 1:29-32

Moses claimed that God carried them as a man carries his son. That analogy should resonate with every parent or grandparent. When we pick up our child, we carry them with the same sense of love and protection. We will do anything to keep them safe from harm.

Remember that **the God who carried you this far is not going to let you down now.** For those of us who know Jesus as our Savior, God has been carrying us since the moment we placed our lives in His hands. There hasn't been a single nanosecond that we have been out of His care.

ASK: When was a time that God carried you through a tough situation? How did that experience impact your faith in Him?

GAIN CONFIDENCE FROM SMALLER VICTORIES

Leaders, summarize what happens in the next few chapters:

After refusing to enter the Promised Land, the Israelites wandered for 40 years. But during that time God gave them small victories to build their trust in Him so when they returned, they would follow Him. Moses reminds them in Deuteronomy 2:24-3:11 how they conquered several kings on their way back to the Jordan River and the Promised Land. Although these kings were not as great as what they would face when they entered the Promised Land, the victories taught them to trust God and follow His commandments. Big victories often come after we have experienced a series of smaller victories. As we are faithful to trust God in the little things, He increases our faith to trust Him in the big things. Jesus said it like this "Whoever is faithful in very little is also faithful in much" (Luke 16:10).

Ask: How has God used smaller victories, tests, and lessons in your life to prepare you for bigger trials?

How can we remind ourselves of the small ways God has been faithful to us when we are tempted to be overwhelmed?

DON'T FORGET WHAT YOU HAVE SEEN!

READ Deuteronomy 4:1-9

Ask: From these verses, how would you summarize Moses' main message to the people? What is the point of remembering our past experiences with God? How can those experiences help us face the future?

Some believers suffer from spiritual amnesia. They forget what God has done. Moses also warned against this malady in verse 9.

Hindsight isn't always 20/20 because we sometimes forget the past. Like the Israelites, each of us has a spiritual heritage. There are events in the past that have had an impact on our faith. There are people who have touched our lives in positive ways. We should never let this slip from our minds as long as we live.

We all have a spiritual legacy to leave as well. God commanded the Israelites to teach their children and grandchildren about His mighty acts. As a follower of Jesus, you should have stories of God's goodness as well. Are you faithful to pass them on to your children and grandchildren? Our role as Christian parents is to point our children and grandchildren to Christ, and then to launch them into life with a rich spiritual legacy. The best thing you can leave is a legacy of faith.

ASK: *How are you intentionally passing down a legacy of faith to your children, grandchildren or others around you?*

RESPONSE

The Israelites were now facing their greatest challenge yet — returning to the Promised Land and conquering it. They had already failed once at this. Moses reminded them how they could find the faith to follow God into the Promised Land.

What great test or challenge or hardship are you facing in your life right now? Apply Moses's lessons to your life:

1. What has God taught you from your past failures?
2. Remind yourself that God has promised to carry you through every circumstance.
3. What has God taught about His faithfulness and power in other trials in your life?
4. Remember how God has showed up in your life and the lives of others!

Lead your class through a guided reflection by reading each of these 4 steps and giving them a moment after each one to silently reflect or pray about it. Then close with prayer thanking God for His faithfulness in the past, despite our failures, and praising Him for what He's going to do in our future.

Or you could ask your class to take home this handout and take some time this week to write out their responses to Steps 1-4 during their time alone with God this week.

COMMENTARY

INTRODUCTION

When you open the Book of Deuteronomy, you meet an entire nation that is starting over again with the challenge of entering the promised land. After the action and narrative of Exodus and Numbers, we find the massive mob of Hebrews camped at the northern edge of the Sinai Wilderness. This new generation is once again poised to enter the land in which their parents had never set foot, though they had scouted it out 40 years earlier. The older, rebellious generation had made the mistake of

not trusting God's power and promise at Kadesh-barnea. As they wandered around in the wilderness, their dreams died along with their bodies, leaving their bones to bleach beneath the desert sun.

God's leader, Moses, is now 120 years old, yet he still has the strength and vigor of a young man (Deut. 34:7). Before he places the mantle of leadership on his replacement, Joshua, he is inspired by the Holy Spirit to repeat many of the laws and commands of God to this new generation. Deuteronomy is his final message to this new generation as they prepare to claim God's promises. According to one Hebrew division of the book, Deuteronomy contains eight "orations" or "sermons" that Moses delivered to the people. Early in my ministry I preached at an old-fashioned, outdoor camp meeting that went on for eight nights. Since the Israelites are camped out in the Jordan Valley, you might think of Deuteronomy as an eight-night camp meeting led by Moses.

The structure of Deuteronomy is simple. Like many preachers, Moses had three points. Chapters 1–4 are a REFLECTION on God's love and care for Israel in the wilderness. The largest section of the book, chapters 5–26, contain a REVIEW of the laws of God. Chapters 27–34 contain a REVELATION of the future for Israel.

The Hebrew name for this fifth book is Haddebarim, which means "words." This comes from the beginning verse, "The words Moses spoke" (1:1). The Jewish rabbis often referred to this book as Mishneh Hattorah, which means "the repetition of the law." In the third century, when the Septuagint translators rendered the Old Testament into Greek, they picked up on this theme and named it Deuteronomion Touto or "Second Law." This Greek phrase led to the English translation "Deuteronomy."

But the fifth book of the Bible is much more than a repetition of the Law. It is the last word from a mighty man who spoke to God face-to-face and was called God's friend (Ex. 33:11). The book closes with Moses going up to Mount Nebo, which overlooked the land of Canaan. Because he had disobeyed God in striking the rock with a rod rather than speaking to it, Moses was not permitted to enter the land.

Some have called Deuteronomy Moses' extended epitaph. It contains the final testimony of the leader who was a mediator between God and the people. His constant intercession for these sinful people provides a clear foreshadowing of the Mediator of the New Covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ, whoever lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25).

As we embark on our study of Deuteronomy, you'll soon discover the dual themes of the holiness and love of God. There is no contradiction between God's absolute holiness and His infinite love. As believers, we are free from the Old Testament Law, but we can never escape the fact that God is holy, and He requires holiness from His people.

Since Deuteronomy is such a comprehensive book, a verse-by-verse study will be impossible. So, we will be focusing instead on the major passages and themes.

The Israelites' story is our story. **The same God who delivered the Hebrews from the bondage of slavery in Egypt is the God who has delivered us from the bondage of sin.** The blood of the Passover Lamb deflected God's fatal judgment, just as Christ, our Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7), has absorbed God's justice in our place (Gal. 3:13). The Hebrew people were "baptized into Moses in the Dead Sea," and we have been baptized into Christ (1 Cor. 10:2). As God led them toward the promised land, they faced a variety of problems, obstacles, and enemies. Doesn't that sound like

the Christian life we live? Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey, is a picture of a life of spiritual warfare that is marked with victory that we achieve through our Joshua, Jesus. Everything happening in the Exodus experience is happening in our lives.

When you read your Bible using this key, it suddenly comes alive. An ancient book like Deuteronomy becomes more up-to-date than tomorrow's headline.

COMMENTARY

The Lord never changes; and what He showed Himself to be for Israel thousands of years ago, He is for us today. For Israel, He was a Rescuer, a Provider, a Judge who punished sin, and a Leader who guided His people unerringly to the promised land. Through Jesus, He is all of those for Christians today.

Deuteronomy 1:19-38

With God as Israel's supreme leader and a solid administrative structure in place, what could go wrong in Israel's journey to the promised land? At first, it seems as if the answer was nothing; Israel **set out from Horeb ... went across all the great and terrible wilderness**, and made it safely to Kadesh-barnea, in **the hill country of the Amorites** (1:19).

Once they arrived at Kadesh-barnea, Moses eagerly pushed forward with the next phase of their task. Reminding the people that the Lord had **set the land before** them, he ordered the fighting men to **go up and take possession of it** (1:21). The soldiers were **not to be afraid or discouraged** as they went in to perform the Lord's work.

Before fulfilling Moses' command, however, the people wanted some additional information about the task: What route should the invasion take? What were the cities like? The request seemed reasonable to Moses, so he **selected 12 men ... one man for each tribe** (1:23), with the exception of Levi, since it was the priestly tribe (see Num. 1:47-53; 13:4-15). The spies went out and then returned with **some of the fruit from the land** and a report that confirmed **the land the LORD their God was giving** them was **good** (1:25). So far so good.

But then the spies ruined everything; they poisoned the people's attitude by emphasizing details designed to scare the entire group. According to the spies, if Israel ventured into the promised land they would come face to face with two huge problems: **people who were larger and taller than they were**, and **cities that were large and fortified to the heavens** (1:28).

The spies' verbal poison worked. The congregation of Israel panicked and became dispirited. Instead of wanting to advance boldly in faith to claim the Lord's promises, they stepped back in fear. Their fears quickly turned into mistrust and anger as the people **grumbled** (1:27). They accused God of hating them and bringing them out of Egypt just to **destroy** them at **the hands of the Amorites**.

Moses tried to put an end to this storm of negativity by reminding the people that Israel had nothing to fear. They would face tall enemies and strong cities, to be sure; but they wouldn't do it alone. The same Lord who had defeated Pharaoh **in Egypt** would accompany Israel's armies into Canaan and **fight for** them there (1:30). The Lord their God had **carried** His people safely through arid deserts **as a man carries his toddling son** (1:31). Israel's God lived unscathed in fire, and though unseen, had provided faithful guidance through a trackless wilderness (1:33).

But Moses' inspiring words fell on deaf ears; the congregation **did not trust the LORD** (1:32). As a

result, **the LORD ... grew angry and even swore an oath** (1:34). The unbelieving adults of that **evil generation** would never see the **good land** He **swore to give** their ancestors (1:35). Instead, they would die in the wilderness. Just Caleb and Joshua, the only two members of the group of spies who had encouraged the Israelites to go in and claim the promised land, would be spared. Even Moses, with whom the Lord had later become angry (see Num. 20:12), would **not enter** (Deut. 1:37).

God made it clear that outside of Caleb and Joshua, no Israelites 20 years of age and older (see Num. 14:29) would ever enter the promised land. When some from the older generation decided they would conquer Canaan anyway, in spite of God's command to turn back, they learned a powerful but deadly lesson; you can't do a God-sized task without God's help.

The day would come when the Lord would give the promised land to His people, but it would be when Israel's next generation—those who were still **little children** at the time of the divine oath—had matured. These would **take possession** of Canaan (Deut. 1:38), but they would need experienced and capable military leadership to pull it off. God knew that and provided the ideal person for that task; **Joshua son of Nun**, Moses' personal assistant and an individual who had been commanding Israel's forces since the nation's earliest days in the desert (see Ex. 17:9-14).

Deuteronomy 4:1-9

With the opening verse of Deuteronomy's fourth chapter, we enter into the theological throne room of Moses' first speech. In many ways the first three chapters were an introduction to this climactic portion of Moses' address. The first Hebrew word in this chapter, translated as **Now**, functions as a "focus particle," that is, a kind of spotlight aimed at the words and thoughts that follow. Moses ordered Israel to **listen** carefully; the Hebrew term translated as *listen* is a strong one; it carries with it the larger idea that the people were to "listen *and obey*."

The payback for hearing and heeding God's laws took the form of four major benefits. First and most basically, the Israelites would **live**. The Lord, who made all human beings, knows exactly what all of us need for life, and through His Word He has revealed key guidelines that we must follow to meet those needs, especially in the area of relationships with God and other people. The truth of God's Word really does set us free to live life as God intended.

Second, Israel needed to obey God's statutes and ordinances so they could **enter and take possession of the land** Yahweh was **giving** them (4:2). God would deliver on His promise of a homeland, but Israel had a part to play in bringing this to fulfillment; God's people had to follow the Lord's guidance. What's more, they had to follow it precisely: they **must not add anything** to the divine commands or **take anything away** from them—just **keep the commands of the LORD** their God (4:2).

Moses provided Israel with a powerful third reason to obey the Lord; they should obey God because the alternative was death. If any Israelite doubted that, all they had to do was to think back on **what the LORD did at Baal-peor** (BAY uhl PEE awr; see Num 25:1-9); He **destroyed everyone**—some 24,000—who followed Baal of Peor (4:3).

Finally, **carefully** following God's statutes and ordinances would demonstrate Israel's **wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the peoples** all around them (4:6). God's Word has a strong, practical edge to it; and yet it is much more than common sense—it is divine sense. As a result, when people follow it they experience positive outcomes. God's laws are also **righteous** (4:8). The Hebrew word translated as *righteous* has an ethical aspect to it; it suggests something that

carefully follows divinely prescribed moral standards. When people line up their moral lives with God's truth, they naturally do better than when they build their lives on foolish values. Moses knew that obedience to God's word had the power to transform a ragtag group of slaves into a **great nation** (4:7,8). Knowing and obeying God's Word has always been the secret to building and maintaining a great nation, and any nation that ignores or rejects that truth is condemned to suffer untold consequences. So important is this truth that every generation had the grave responsibility to **teach them to their children and ... grandchildren** (4:9).

[(2014). JBS 2015 Personal Study Guide Deuteronomy. LifeWay Press. Retrieved from <https://read.lifeway.com>]