

## Message #3

## Deuteronomy 1:6-18

The man who is considered by many Hollywood actors and actresses to be the greatest most versatile actor ever was Mickey Rooney. Marlon Brando called Mickey Rooney “the best actor in films.” His career spanned more than nine decades and he appeared in more than 300 films. He was a top box office draw and he made millions of dollars. At one point his salary was \$65,000 per week. Mickey Rooney made many movies and made a lot of money, but when he died at age 93, he died broke. He left behind medical bills and back taxes and his total net worth was only \$14,000-\$18,000 dollars so the funds were solicited from the public to pay his bills. Now you may ask how do you earn millions of dollars and end up broke at the end of your life? You make a lot of wrong choices. In fact, one magazine called Mickey Rooney, “the original Hollywood train wreck.” He made wrong choices in relationships; wrong choices in alcohol and drugs. He made a wrong choice in financial management. He made wrong choices and ended up with nothing.

That is the story of the nation Israel for over 3,000 years and that is the story of many people’s lives. They made one wrong choice after another. When you look at Israel today, you must wonder how in the world a nation, who had all of the blessings of God, ends up such a train wreck. The answer is she makes wrong choices and does not make right choices. Israel refuses to obey God and His word and, as a result, she has missed out on the rich blessings of God.

We saw last time that the last thing Moses was going to do for Israel was to carefully expound the word of God to the people of God. That is what they needed. That is what he decided to do. To begin his exposition, he starts off by telling them that I am going to show you where you really messed up because you will need to come to terms with this if you want God’s blessings. Your problem is you rebel (v. 26), you grumble (v. 27), you don’t really trust God (v. 32) and you refuse to listen to God’s word (v. 43).

It has been well observed by many students of history that those who forget the past are destined to repeat it. But we may also conclude when you look at Israel that those who remember the past may also go ahead and repeat it anyway. **Just because someone remembers the past is no guarantee they won’t repeat it and do the same thing again.**

Moses wanted the people of God to remember the past so they would no longer disobey God. He wanted them to obey God and experience the blessings of God. But quite honestly for Israel it still hasn’t worked. No matter what Moses taught them, it didn’t take too long and they forgot.

What Moses decided to do was to start off by looking back in time to tell this new generation of people where the previous generation went wrong and what they should have done.

He presents a series of chronological historical facts that show what happened:

Notice **verse 5**, Moses “undertook to expound this law.” That word “expound” means to make something absolutely clear and plain. So the emphasis, as the book of Deuteronomy opens, Moses wants to be very clear on what a mess these people were.

**GOD'S PEOPLE NEED TO LISTEN TO ALL THE WORD OF GOD EXPOUNDED SO THEY MAY OBEY THE WORD AND NOT MAKE THE SAME MISTAKES OTHERS MADE, WHO MISSED THE BLESSINGS OF GOD.**

That point is clearly seen from the opening verses of the book of Deuteronomy. This is the first speech that Moses gives to this new generation of people who are on the verge of going into the Promised Land. The first point is that when God directs you by His word, you need to follow that direction.

**HISTORICAL FACT #1 – God told Moses and Israel it was time to move. 1:6**

God determined they had stayed at Sinai long enough and it was time to go to the Promised Land. Moses said we had a clear mandate to go to the Promised Land. We did not come up with the idea, God directed us to do it. Think about this relationship God says time to move.

When Moses begins this overview of what God had done, he does not start it with the Exodus, but he uses his starting point as Mt. Horeb (Sinai) where God gave His word to His covenant nation. They had been there about a year and during that year they had been given God's word and had seen God do amazing things.

Notice how this opens, "The LORD **our God** spoke to us." God is the covenant God of Israel. This is "our" God and this is our God's word to us. By using the pronoun "our," Moses is stressing that God is in a Personal and Covenant relationship with Israel. This important phrase "the LORD our God" or "the LORD your God" occurs some 260 times in this book of Deuteronomy.

This is the word of our God. Since it is the word of God, we must not ever change it. It is not our job to try to change the word, modify the word, correct the word, amend the word, improve the word, add to the word or subtract from the word. Our responsibility is to carefully and accurately understand the word, teach the word and apply the word.

Israel had stayed about one year at Horeb (Mt. Sinai) (Ex. 19:1/ Num. 10:11-12). God told His people it was time to move. God has never said that to any of us. He has never come to you and actually said time to move, but He did to Israel. So obedience to God's word at this point was to move. If Israel had not moved, it would have been in disobedience to what God wanted. If you are Israel, this should be an exciting and happy time. You should want to obey God.

Although God does not directly speak to us and direct us like this, it is very clear that God knows where His people live. When we track the life and ministry of Paul, there is no question that God was specifically directing him to various places at various times. The key for us is obedience to the word of God and the realization that the Holy Spirit works in harmony with the written word to direct us.

Two points are critical to observe from this verse:

- 1) When we are faced with new challenges and situations, we must remember God is our God.
- 2) When we are faced with new challenges and situations, we must know and obey God's word.

**HISTORICAL FACT #2** – God gave them the specific route they were to take. **1:7**

Not only did God tell them it was time to move, He also told them the route they were to take and all the land they were to take. Can you imagine that? Not only does God actually tell you to move, but He gives you the route to take.

You would think the people would say this is fantastic. We have God actually moving with us and directing us every step of the way. It was true that there were some obstacles, but if God is with you, so what?

This is absolutely fascinating. God says it is time to break camp and head to the Promised Land. God was very precise in the actual route they were to take. He was leading them and directing them every step of the way.

They were to travel through and take the land of the Amorites, which is land east of the Jordan River. They were to travel through the land of all their neighbors in the Arabah and the Negev and follow up the coast into the land of the Canaanites, which is land east of the Jordan. They were to travel north through Lebanon all the way to the Euphrates River.

In other words, God was on the verge of giving Israel every inch of land He promised. This was more land than she even had under David and Solomon.

All she had to do was to “turn” and take the journey that He was leading. The specific command is to “turn” and head a different direction. The word “turn” (panah) means to break camp and head a new direction. It was time for new action. It’s time to go a different direction.

Sometimes in life that is what we must do. We must turn from the old ways and apply the word and head in a new direction of obeying God. It will lead us into His blessings. We will admit that sometimes in life the route is not always easy, but we need to remember God is sovereign over the route we take in life and we need to stay steady and faithful to Him, because if we do that, we will reach where God wants us to be.

**HISTORICAL FACT #3** – God is going to give all of the land He promised to Israel. **1:8**

God says go in and possess that land. It was time to “take possession” of the Promised Land. That word “take possession” (yarash) appears some 50 times in the book of Deuteronomy. This was what God’s people were supposed to do. The land was promised to them, but they needed to go in and take it. The verb often means to take something by force.

God specifically wanted His people moving forward into that land and accomplishing His will by forcefully taking it. Remember this is God’s land. He created it. He can determine where He wants people to live and He wanted Israel to live in a very specific land. The key to them being the recipients of His promises was their obedience.

This land was promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the dimensions of the land given in **verse 7** are identical to the dimensions given to Abraham in Genesis 15:18-21.

It includes all the hill country of the Amorites, the Arabah, the western foothills, the coast, Lebanon, the Negev all the way to the Euphrates River. It includes land east of the Jordan and west of the Jordan. That is the land God promised to Abraham and that was the land He was on the verge of giving to Israel.

God never forgets any of His word or promises. Now the totality of the dimensions of this land has never been under Israelite control. So we believe it is yet to be fulfilled. Every inch of this land will one day belong to Israel.

God said it is time to go to that land and take possession of it. If you do not obey the basics of what God says, you will miss out on the whole of what God wants to do.

Now of course the first time God told His people to do this, they didn't do it. That previous generation refused to obey God and take the land. Now it was the next generation's turn.

**HISTORICAL FACT #4** – God had blessed the nation to the point that Moses could not bear the burden alone. **1:9-12**

When you are on your way to the finals, your team doesn't need a bunch of drama. You would think this would be the best moment of these people's lives. God tells the entire nation that He is taking them to their Promised Land and they are to take it. You would think the people would be excited and happy and unified. But not these people. These people were not the easiest people to lead. **They were not yet near the Promised Land and they already have major problems.**

The historical background of all of this is found in Exodus 18. Moses had to listen to the problems of the people from morning until evening (Ex. 18:13). Every day he had to listen to the nonsense of these people.

Notice **verse 12**, Moses said God's people were a load and a burden and they were people of "strife." Instead of them being happy and holy and unified people, they were a bunch of people with a bunch of problems. Some people are like that. They are always arguing and bickering. Their life is a life of drama. As Ajith Fernando said in his commentary, "these people were certainly a headache to Moses" (*Deuteronomy*, p. 47).

According to **verse 9**, Moses was stressed out. There is tremendous humility and honesty in **verse 9**. They weren't to the Promised Land and he was already stressed out. The burden was too heavy for him to carry alone. He couldn't handle it.

According to **verse 10**, the enormous size of the nation was still too much for him. More people just brought more problems.

At the time Moses was telling the people this, that first generation of people were dead. But there were still 601,730 men, 20 years of age and above, plus the women and children. So God was still blessing Israel.

It was not the number of people that was the problem for Moses; he knew the numbers were blessings from God. It was the problems of the people that became the weight.

God was blessing Israel. Moses did not want to stop that growth. He prayed in **verse 11**, may the LORD, the God of your fathers richly increase you. She was growing. He was fulfilling His promise to Abraham that He would make him numerous as the stars (Gen. 15:5). Moses loved the numbers, but he was bogged down with the problems.

The number of people's problems became overwhelming for Moses and presented him with too many problems.

Moses came to realize I cannot possibly govern these people alone. J. Vernon McGee says this is where Moses made his first mistake. He lost sight of the fact that God was bearing Israel. He started to think it was all on him (*Deuteronomy*, p. 536).

As a result, he decided to listen to his father-in-law and teach others the word of God and let them implement it in regard to people's problems.

**HISTORICAL FACT #5** – Moses asked the people to choose wise and discerning and experienced men as leaders. **1:13**

There are three words that Moses uses for qualifications of the kind of men that should lead God's people. **The true success or failure of any enterprise depends on right kind of God-honoring leadership who will work with God's key leader. You do need leaders who will obey God and His word and submit themselves to it.**

People who lead need to be wise. People who lead need to be discerning. People who lead need to be experienced. People who lead need to be respected. That is what God said and that is what Moses said.

Now no one of his own ability has the ability to lead the people of God. There are many who are viewed as successful, who are in no position to lead the people of God anywhere.

Being a leader has nothing to do with seniority, popularity, charisma or natural ability. What is needed are wise men of God who can govern themselves. This is the kind of person who will be able to also govern others.

The word "wise" (hokma) is a word often used in Proverbs. It describes one who is very skilled and crafty in his ability to judge things in light of God's word (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 277).

The word “discerning” (bin) is a word that refers to one who can understand things and distinguish things and separate things perceptively and in an intelligent way (*Ibid.*, p. 113). God did not want His people governed by a bunch of gullible buffoons. They needed to be led by men who could sort out things from God’s word in a very God-honoring, intelligent way.

The word “experienced” (yada) refers to discerning and knowledgeable men who know how to analyze things with their minds to discover what is true and right (*Ibid.*, pp. 333-334). This word is found some 873 times in the Old Testament in various contexts. It certainly implies that one has a reputation for having a discerning mind.

Moses said these were the kinds of men that God’s people needed to select and then they were to bring those men to Moses for his approval.

**HISTORICAL FACT #6** – God’s people agreed that what Moses wanted was good. **1:14**

They apparently went to work on finding the men who met the prerequisites and met the criteria set forth by Moses.

Now of course one thing to observe here is that what these people say and agree to did not seem to really work. Even though at the time, this all seemed so good and right. It did not end up working.

They felt important because they got to choose their men. But the men they chose will not really lead them to the blessings of God.

**HISTORICAL FACT #7** – Moses approved the men they selected. **1:15**

From each of the tribes of Israel, they selected men and brought them to Moses, and Moses appointed them to be leaders of the people.

He broke them down into leaders by numbers—thousands, hundreds, fifties, tens and officers. So these leaders had both military and civil responsibilities to oversee their people.

**HISTORICAL FACT #8** – Moses instructed how the leaders were to govern. **1:16-18**

All of these men were to submit to Moses, but Moses did not have to handle every problem. One person does not have to confront all of the issues. There needs to be a team of leaders approved by Moses who could help him. These leaders would not undermine him, but help him and assist him in directing people the right way.

Moses knew of the potential dangers in elected leadership. People who get elected may tend to play favorites and that has no place in the government of God. By the way, this is the pattern of government that should be adopted by any nation that wants the blessings of God.

Now one question that comes to my mind is if the people are obeying God, why do you need a bunch of leaders? Why don't the people go hear the word and then go home and implement it? The answer is people don't obey the word. So you have problems. People have problems and when they do, they need someone who can resolve the problems by telling them the truth of God. But even when they do that, most won't listen.

**Responsibility #1** - They had the responsibility to hear the cases of God's people. **1:16a**

Leaders have the responsibility to objectively hear cases that affect people. There are two sides to the story and a wise leader must hear both sides.

**Responsibility #2** - They have the responsibility to judge righteously in each case. **1:16b**

What that means is that they have a responsibility to judge what is right in accordance with the Word of God. In other words, a leader has a responsibility to be a righteous judge and give righteous judgments.

There are leaders in power today who know that there are people who are doing evil, illegal and wrong and they do nothing about it. They turn their heads and even turn against someone who points out the truth.

**Responsibility #3** - They have the responsibility not to show partiality. **1:17a**

Powerful and rich people often are exempt from prosecution that would put most people in prison. But one of the most important things leadership can do to heal a sick nation and get it back on track is to not show partiality. A God-honoring judge has the responsibility to base judgments on fact and truth.

**Responsibility #4** - They have the responsibility to hear cases of the small and great. **1:17b**

Social status is not to determine judgment. It is not to sway judgment. There are attorneys who will only take clients who are rich and famous. They will not even consider a case of some poor unknown.

**Responsibility #5** - They have the responsibility not to fear man. **1:17c**

Those in leadership have responsibility to make judgments without fearing any man. The reason is because the judgments are being made in behalf of God.

God knows the guilt and innocence of parties. Fairness in judgment is not just a judicial matter, it is a theological matter.

**Responsibility #6** - They have the responsibility to bring difficult cases to Moses. **1:17c**

Judges need to be men who know their own limitations.

**HISTORICAL FACT #9** – Moses commanded all these things. **1:18**

At the time God told the nation to go take the Promised Land, this is what Moses told the people. Moses said you need to listen to “all the things that you should do.” Listen to all the word of God and obey it.

God’s people need to be carefully taught “all the things” of the word of God. The more they know and the more they obey, the more God will bless them.

Well what happened? What went wrong? They would not listen to all the word of God.

You can flop around life for years and miss out on the blessings of God. It is time to get serious about knowing and obeying the word of God. Don’t do what you’ve done in the past and watch what God will do for you.

In the final years of his life, Mickey Rooney trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior. He said, “teach your children about Jesus Christ and God” if “Jesus Christ is your personal Savior...leave the troubles to Him and everything will work out.”