

Bible Study October 28, 2020
Exodus 35:4 – Deuteronomy 34:12
[text Deuteronomy 34:1-12]

In our study so far we have looked in some detail at the stories of our forbears in faith – Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah and Sarah. We saw many of their escapades and struggles and failings and, despite all of that, God’s persistent covenantal presence with them. We followed the stories of the release of God’s people from Egypt and their entry into the wilderness where they would wander for years. There were the accounts of God’s provision of food and water, the struggles of this band of nomads as they were learning what it meant to be a community of God’s people. While Moses was on Mt Sinai receiving the holy law contained on the two tablets, God’s people sinned greatly and the relationship with God was damaged and then restored.

We are covering a very large portion of the Torah to get to our focus text for today. Let me summarize a bit so that we can see some of this large portion that we are not going to study in detail and also see the continued movement through the wilderness to the land of promise. The end of Exodus describes the tabernacle, its construction and appointments in detail. Exodus 40:36 describes how it is that the people would know when to resume their journeying and when to set up camp.

The book of Leviticus is more a description than it is a narrative. The book is divided into two major sections. The first describes in detail various laws and rituals pertaining to corporate worship. Perhaps the culmination of this is Leviticus 16 that describes The Day of Atonement, one of the most holy observances. The second section follows and is known as the “Holiness Code” and describes all manner of things that mark the ritual holiness of one’s life.

The narrative seems to resume in the book of Numbers. It has this name because it describes two different censuses – one of the first generation to come out of Egypt. This census is followed by a narrative of the wilderness wanderings. In these wanderings we see the death of Aaron and of Miriam signifying also the death of the others of this first generation. The second census begins in Chapter 26. In the chapters that follow we see the Israelites coming closer and closer to the land of promise and beginning to engage in military battles. At the end of Numbers, they are in the land east of the Jordan. See the map attached.

The book of Deuteronomy brings us right to the point of entering the promised land. The website “Enter the Bible” sponsored by Luther Seminary describes Deuteronomy in this way:

Deuteronomy is couched in the form of a farewell discourse delivered by Moses on the plains of Moab (1:1-5). It opens with a review of how God had brought the people to the verge of the Jordan (1:1-4:43). In a second discourse, Moses explains the significance of the covenant (chapters 5-11) and introduces the Deuteronomistic Law Code (chapters 12-26), the heart of the book. This is followed by instructions for the renewal of the covenant (chapter 27), a list of blessings and curses (chapter 28), and a final exhortation to observe the covenant (chapters 29-30). The Song of Moses (chapters 31-32), his final blessing of Israel (chapter 33), and the account of his death on Mt. Nebo (chapter 34) bring the book to a close.

These are Moses’ last words. Reflect for a moment on the relationship between Moses and the people of Israel. What are some of the key events? Describe the relationship.

In Deuteronomy 31, Moses announces that his mantle will be passed to Joshua. Notice Ch 31:7-8. Moses speaks words of personal encouragement to Joshua; he then describes the task; this is followed by assurance of God's support through it all. Think about a task you are facing personally or that we are facing as a community or a country. Please write a modern version of 31:7-8 speaking to the task or the challenge. Think about how you might build this into your prayer life in the coming days.

Deuteronomy 33 recounts the blessings of Moses on each of the tribes of Israel. It is interesting to note that Moses' blessing is not bestowed upon his own children but on the tribes. What do you think about this? Think about your loved ones, friends and family alike, those closest to you. Think about the words of blessing you may offer them as part of your last words. Let this be part of your prayers in the coming days.

Deuteronomy 34 is a touching description of Moses' last days. Describe the events that are recounted here. Read Chapter 32:42-52. What do you think about God's decision that Moses would not enter the Land of Promise. Was this only a punishment or might there have been some other reason?

What other images in this focus text are meaningful to you?

It is difficult to talk about endings and transitions and seemingly unfinished work. Are there any words of comfort or good news to be found here? If not, what words might come to your mind from other parts of scripture?

Let us pray: *Holy God, the journeys that we have taken seem challenging and sometimes daunting. Some of these journeys seem successful and some do not. Thank you for the faithful leaders who have come before us to help show us the way. Thank you for being with us in the midst of it all. In the name of Jesus, Amen.*