

In God We Trust

We are starting another series today that we'll pick up from time to time throughout the next several months. For the past few weeks we have been in the New Testament Book of Galatians, a 10-part series that I have scheduled into October. We have a number of other things scheduled, including our special guest next week (Dave Pedde), an African Children's choir in June as well as others throughout the summer. **And...** we will be walking through the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy, starting with today's message.



I'm calling this series from Deuteronomy ***God in the Midst***. We are going to get into many of the specifics of the text as we walk through the book of Deuteronomy in chunks (often a chapter at a time)... so we will get *close up*. But I have in mind to make sure that we take the wide view as well; I want us to see both the ***trees*** and the ***forest***.

By choosing a series title like *God in the Midst*, I am trying to identify *at least one* of the big themes of the Book of Deuteronomy. Actually... I'm trying to identify one of the big themes of the Old Testament (and the entire Bible I suppose... but my focus is the Old Testament).

One might ask, "What is the Old Testament for? What is the point?" I'll admit it; I tend to linger in the New Testament, both for my preaching and my personal study. But what about the Old Testament?

There are many who take a *product-development* approach when it comes to Theology. Here's what I mean... I have an iPhone 6 these days. It isn't the *latest and greatest*; there is an iPhone 7 and 7 plus, with rumors that the iPhone 8 will be released before the end of the year (in time for Christmas). This isn't my first iPhone; I've lost track, but I think it is my fourth. I did have the first iPhone; we just called it the iPhone then since it would seem silly to call it the iPhone 1. Besides... who would need anything more than that first iPhone? ***It blew our minds.***

With new technology and new ideas, there was another iPhone... and then another, and another, and another. (For the record, there have been 15 models of the iPhone, including the current ones.)

With each new version it has gotten better and better, with some old stuff dumped in favor of new features. Some of the first ideas were scrapped because they didn't work that well, while new features are added because we never thought of that before... or never thought the technology would be powerful as it is or affordable like it has become.

This is how product development often goes... whether it is a smartphone or a car or a piece of software or even food, we improve as we go, making better things even better.

Like I said, some have a *product-development* approach when it comes to theology. We could start with the beginning of the Bible, Genesis 1:1 and consider everything before Creation as merely the R&D or *beta* version... nothing tangible existed as we know it; everything was merely in the mind of God.

And then... BANG! God Created the Heavens and the Earth and everything in it, including us humans and a place for us to dwell in Eden: Version 1.0.



Adam and Eve, and *God in the Midst*, this seems like God's **plan A**... but we humans *messed it up* with disobedience. Our sin was incompatible with version 1.0... so

Version 2.0... which seemed to work until around the times of Noah. God determined that a *reboot* was in order, so with a flood came (you guessed it)...



Version 3.0. God led His people, with prophets as His voice, priests as His hands, and judges as His leaders... until the people wanted a King like all the other nations... and thus



Version 4.0 with Saul as the first King, but David as a *model* King. This sustained God's people, sometimes on the *mountain tops* with victory and provision, and other times in the *valleys* with defeats and division...until, finally...



Version 5.0 when the true King, Jesus, walked the earth. The One who had been prophesied from the very beginning, the Messiah, Emmanuel, the Son of God walked among mere humans, teaching and healing. The true King to whom all others pointed was also the true and lasting Sacrifice... suffering, bleeding, and dying to take away our sin. AND living again, Resurrected as He promised and was foretold by Scripture. Version 5.0 made the way for...



Version 6.0 when the Church was established on that Day of Pentecost with the power of the Holy Spirit, and version 6.1 as the Church *continues on* today, empowered by the same Holy Spirit... spreading the Gospel in both word and deed. The Church, the Body of Christ, we Christians are spreading the Gospel, and doing God's work in His world.



Version 7.0 is just around the corner... it could be released at any moment (in the twinkling of an eye), when Jesus returns and the end of this earth, as we know it, is replaced with a New Heavens and a New Earth, and our bodies are resurrected and fit for all eternity.

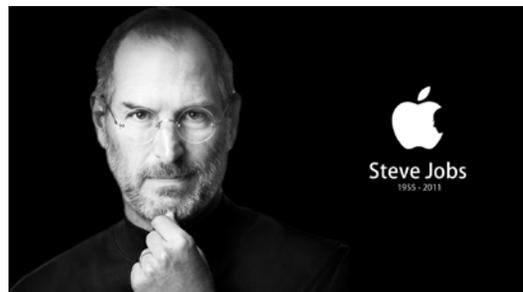


Here we are in version 6.1, eagerly waiting for version 7.0. That *sort of makes sense...* right? If that is our view, then what is the point of the Old Testament, or a book in the Old Testament like Deuteronomy? (Which, in this scheme I just ran through, would be around version 3.1. or *Plan C.*)

If this is our way of thinking, then wouldn't a study in Deuteronomy be something like introducing someone to *the wonderful world of smartphones* by handing them an iPhone 3, or introducing them to the world of personal computers by giving them a Commodore 64? Is Deuteronomy as *irrelevant* as in iPhone 3? It might be if we have a sort of product-development theology. If we have a product-development theology, then we might as well jump in with the latest and greatest version (or *dispensation*). Since version 7.0 is not yet available, then we might as well have version 6.1... and who really cares about any earlier *version*?

I'm convinced that a *product-development* approach to theology is inherently flawed, mostly because it reveals a misunderstanding of the Developer (the Creator).

The reason we have an iPhone 7 is because there are new ideas and new technologies. When Steve Jobs thought up and released the original iPhone, it was the best he could do; if he could have thought up and produced the iPhone 7 then, he would have. But he couldn't because he didn't have the ideas or the available technologies.



Apparently Steve Jobs thought he was God... but he wasn't.

God is altogether different. God is eternal, all powerful, all knowing, ever present, and does not change. He does not have new ideas like we have new ideas; He is not *learning on the job*. God is not getting smarter and more powerful over time; He created time and therefore stands outside of time. God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and immutable. He is everything, always has been everything, and will always be everything; that does not change.



There is no version 1, 2, 3 or 77. There is no such thing as God's Plan A, B, C... or even Z. There is only **God's Plan**.

So with that view... how are we to take the Old Testament? The Old Testament isn't a matter of *versions 1-4*, or *plans A-D*... the Old Testament is just as much God's Plan as the New Testament. It turns out that the Old Testament, and the Book of Deuteronomy is infinitely more relevant than an iPhone 3... it is part of God's plan.



Thus the title for the series: *God in the Midst*. I am confident that we will learn important lessons from a walk through Deuteronomy, specifically I think we will learn lessons about what it means for a People to walk with God... to have *God in the Midst*... to have *God in the Midst* of life and family and government... to have *God in the Midst* of decisions and strategies and justice... to have *God in the Midst* of victories and defeats and our every days.



Like I said, I think this is a significant theme of the entire Old Testament, and the entire Bible... but I think Deuteronomy gives us a unique opportunity to dwell on this theme.

The Book of Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Bible, the final book in what scholars often call the Pentateuch. Don't worry... you don't have to know what the Pentateuch is; I didn't until I had a college class on it... and I wasn't precisely sure what it was until at least a few days into the class.

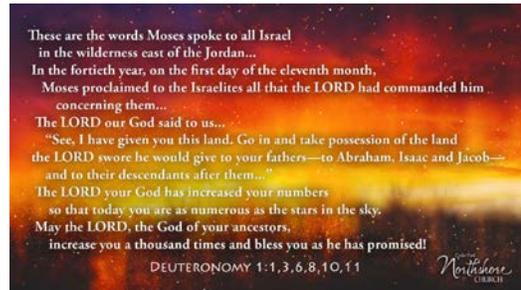
Pentateuch was my first class at North Central University (it was NCBC back in those days). It met in the chapel, three days a week at 7:20 in the morning. I was a transfer student from Purdue; I thought I would go to Bible College for a year to help me figure out my new found faith (having been a Christian for a little less than a year). It turns out that most everyone else had been *at it* for a while longer so I had some *catching up* to do. And it turned out that I'd stick around for longer than a year, graduating and then working for North Central, which led to a few other jobs in Christian Higher Education.

We credit the Pentateuch to the pen of Moses, inspired by the Holy Spirit of course. Moses wrote down the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Genesis chronicles everything from the beginning up until Moses, while Deuteronomy serves as the other *bookend*... as it summarizes and restates Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.

It begins by saying:

These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the wilderness east of the Jordan¹

³ In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that the LORD had commanded him concerning them.²



That *fortieth year* would have been forty years after being liberated from the bondage of Egypt and its Pharaoh, a month before the death of Moses. The Book of Deuteronomy is a sermon, a final sermon and sort of *last will and testament*, delivered by Moses to the people God freed under the leadership of Moses.

⁶ The LORD our God said to us³

See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land the LORD swore he would give to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—and to their descendants after them.”⁴

¹⁰ The LORD your God has increased your numbers so that today you are as numerous as the stars in the sky. ¹¹ May the LORD, the God of your ancestors, increase you a thousand times and bless you as he has promised!⁵

Moses was confident that God was blessing, and would bless. He proclaimed God’s blessing, saw God’s blessing, and experienced God’s blessing. God blessed in liberating His people from Egypt. God blessed in leading His people. God blessed in providing food and water and victories in battle. Moses knew God would bless, and Moses knew that reminding the people of God’s past blessing would strengthen their faith for the days and years ahead.

¹ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Dt 1:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² *The New International Version*. (2011). (Dt 1:3). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Dt 1:6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁴ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Dt 1:8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Dt 1:10–11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

That same reminder is available to us to deepen our understanding of God and strengthen our faith.

God chose a people through whom to bless all people. God chose a nation, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob... He chose Israel to demonstrate what it means to be a people with *God in the midst*. He chose Israel to bear this special testimony, and to also bear the seed of the Promised Messiah, Jesus. **We** are His People **today**, we who believe in Jesus, trusting Him with our lives and our eternities.

Just as remembering God's dealings with those ancient people of Israel would deepen their understanding of God and strengthen their faith, we will be strengthened as we remember God's dealings with His people. By focusing on the part of God's plan that Moses retells in the Book of Deuteronomy, we will have a deeper understanding of God's plan for us.

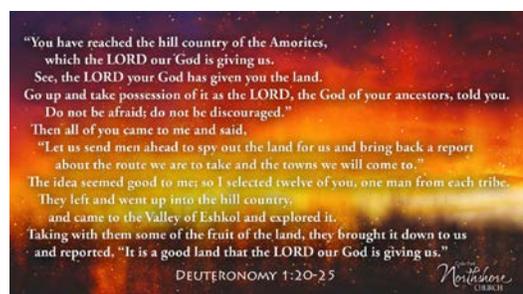


Standing there, east of the Jordan River, with a view of the Promised Land in the distance, after a forty-year journey... I suppose it was obvious to Moses where to start, reminding the people that they had been there before (at least their ancestors had been there before). After God liberated the people from Egypt, parting the Red Sea and defeating their enemies, Moses led the people to the edge of the land God had promised them... but that was forty years prior to the speech recorded in Deuteronomy, when Moses reminded the people what he said a generation earlier:

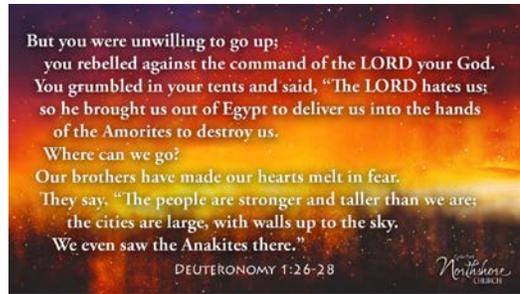
²⁰ “You have reached the hill country of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us. ²¹ See, the LORD your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

²² Then all of you came to me and said, “Let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us and bring back a report about the route we are to take and the towns we will come to.”

²³ The idea seemed good to me; so I selected twelve of you, one man from each tribe. ²⁴ They left and went up into the hill country, and came to the Valley of Eshkol and explored it. ²⁵ Taking with them some of the fruit of the land, they brought it down to us and reported, “It is a good land that the LORD our God is giving us.”



²⁶ But you were unwilling to go up; you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God. ²⁷ You grumbled in your tents and said, “The LORD hates us; so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us. ²⁸ Where can we go? Our brothers have made our hearts melt in fear. They say, ‘The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the sky. We even saw the Anakites there.’ ” ⁶

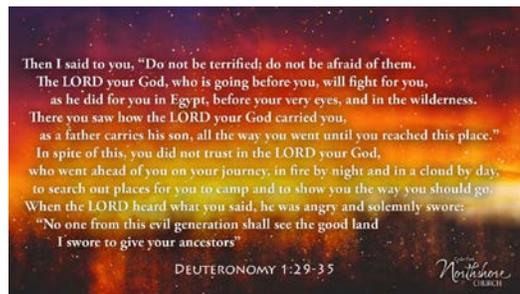


Anakites! What would you do if you even thought you saw a bunch of Anakites? Of course they were afraid!!! (Anakites, the descendants of Anak, were surrounded by legend that they were the offspring of humans and gods... **giants** with supernatural powers. I actually heard a sermon once that supposed the Anakites and others like them were proof of life from other planets... a sermon that I immediately, and rightfully, believed to be nuts... which is a testimony that you shouldn't believe everything said from a pulpit.)

What started out as a mission to *navigate a plan* to receive God's promise, turned into grounds to doubt God.

Moses continued:

Then I said to you, “Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. ³⁰ The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, ³¹ and in the wilderness. There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place.”



Are we seeing a pattern here? When faced with challenges, even fear, God's plan is for us to remember and *look back* to see His faithfulness; that perspective through the rear-view-mirrors of our lives, and rear-view-mirrors of how God has always proven Himself faithful, strengthens our faith for whatever is ahead.

⁶ The New International Version. (2011). (Dt 1:20–28). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

I'm calling this message *In God We Trust*, because the first rule of living as people with *God in the Midst* is that we are called to **trust** God. Not just a motto or slogan, not merely something we put on our currency, but to truly trust God.

Moses combatted the fear of the people with a reminder of God's demonstrations of power, faithfulness, and care. The God who delivered them from Pharaoh's tyranny, the God who vanquished Egypt's pursuing armies, the God who led and protected and fed... this God could be trusted to complete His promise, regardless of what was ahead.

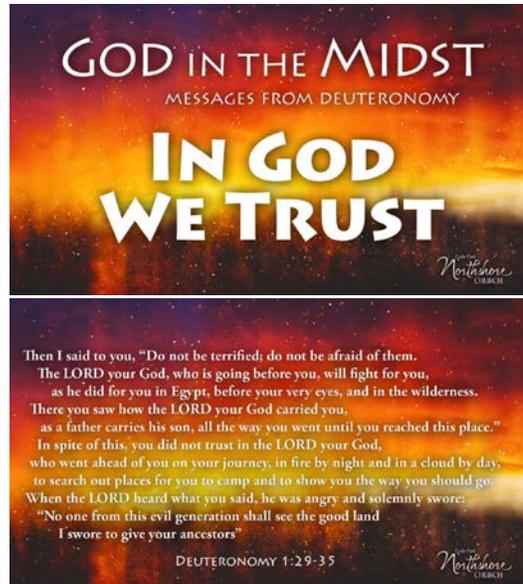
God was in their midst, they knew it because of the way He fought for them, carrying them like a father carries children. Think of that picture, just as a father swoops up a toddler, a helpless one in the arms of the powerful one. They knew God was in their midst because in that day God led with a literal presence, a demonstration of fire by day and cloud by night. There was no denying that God was in their midst. Nevertheless...

³² In spite of this, you did not trust in the LORD your God, ³³ who went ahead of you on your journey, in fire by night and in a cloud by day, to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go.

³⁴ When the LORD heard what you said, he was angry and solemnly swore: ³⁵ "No one from this evil generation shall see the good land I swore to give your ancestors"⁷

They made a decision out of *fear* rather than **faith**. They chose what they thought would be the easy way, the safe way... their way. As a consequence, God would allow a generation to pass before His promise was fulfilled. Not even Moses would take possession of the Promised Land, only the two of the twelve spies who had faith to proceed would receive the land: Caleb and Joshua.

The people failed... but we would err if all we saw was failure in this scene from Deuteronomy.



⁷ The New International Version. (2011). (Dt 1:29–35). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

We must remember, that in Deuteronomy, **they were back**. God's promise would be fulfilled, and God continued to show Himself trustworthy, even **through** the 40 years of wandering. Throughout those 40 years, God continued to lead, protect, and provide. Sure, a generation *lost out* on enjoying God's promise... but what is a mere generation to God? His promise was proven to be trustworthy; His promise was fulfilled.



And so it goes for us. We want to be a people with *God in our midst*. We want *God in the midst* of our country and communities. We want *God in the midst* of our lives, our businesses and schools and families. We certainly want *God in the midst* of our Church.

The first rule of people with *God in the midst* is that we are called to **trust** God. That trust is attacked in all sorts of ways, ways by which are being experienced by us, by people in this congregation:

- Sickness – In our own bodies and those around us.
- Broken relationships – Faith is always intertwined in community.
- Questions and fears – It wasn't just those Israelites who couldn't reconcile what they couldn't see by faith with what they saw with their own eyes.
- Scarcity of resources – It is hard to trust God when we can't balance the books, seeing how He is going to provide that which exceeds our grasp in the natural.
- The good ol' days – Again, it wasn't just the Israelites who thought they might like to return to the past... romanticizing what was behind when the future seems so scary.

Today is a day to believe; today is a day to trust God.

Know that He is faithful. We know it by the testimony of Scripture. We know it by the testimony of those around us. And many of us know it by the way God has proven Himself over and over again in our lives.

Perhaps you have never really trusted in God. Perhaps you have never believed God's plan, believing in Jesus as savior... trusting in only what He can provide. Today is a day to believe.

I suspect that all of us, if we would simply quiet ourselves for a moment and listen for the call of the Holy Spirit, would find areas in our lives where we are not fully trusting in God. Today is a day to believe and trust God. We can do just as Moses instructed, looking back to see How God has proven Himself faithful over and over again... and allowing that to strengthen our faith for whatever lies ahead.