

Defending Our Faith

By Matthew Day

Deuteronomy is probably one of my favorite books of the Bible. It is almost like a summary of the most important pieces of the Bible. It recounts the promises and history of Israel up to that point. It contains a repetition of the law including the ten commandments. It has one of the most explicit prophecies of Messiah (18:15-22). It establishes that salvation is not of our own works (9:1-12). It describes our Father's loving character. It contains the Shema which is recited twice daily by the Jewish people (6:4). It contains warnings against going after false prophets (12-13). It lays out the blessings and curses (27-28). It prophecies the sin, exile, and return of Israel (29-30, 32). And it lays out everything needed for us to defend our faith.

Have you ever asked yourself why you believe the way you do? Why do you believe in God? Why do you believe in the Bible? I asked these questions in a previous issue and I have been continuing to explore them. I think it is important to ask these questions. In fact, Moses says in Deuteronomy 6:20 "When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?' " We must be prepared to answer this question.

When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.'
(Deu 6:20-25 ESV)

The answer is quite simple. We used to be slaves to Pharaoh, but God saved us. We didn't save ourselves, another nation didn't save us—God did. Now we're God's servants—slaves to righteousness. Adonai has promised us life if we obey Him. So, we obey Him.

Ok, so the skeptic says how do you know the man we call Moses isn't just making all this up? How do we know it really happened? Let's go back to chapter 4:

"For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him. Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you. And on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire. And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day, know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. Therefore you

shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time."
(Deu 4:32-40 ESV)

First of all, you could interpret this first verse as a commandment to question our faith. It says “ask”; you won't find any other God like this. What other religion can claim that God spoke to a nation? Not just one or two prophets—an entire people. In chapter 5 we read that God “spoke with [Israel] face to face at the mountain.” What other nation can claim that God saved them from slavery with signs and wonders? None. All of Israel witnessed these things firsthand.

The skeptic may say it's just a grand delusion—a great hoax. Fine, explain to me how it was pulled off. Imagine someone coming up to you and saying “Your ancestors heard the voice of God on the mountain.” You've never heard of this. Your neighbors never heard of this. Is it reasonable to believe that someone could convince an entire nation to circumcise their sons and worship some God they had never heard of before if it never happened? No, because that nation could ask of the days past and see that they were being deceived. The Torah has been faithfully handed down from generation to generation and it goes all the way back to when God spoke face to face to 600,000 people from the mountain. Such a thing could not be forged—if it could, other religions would have done so.

The evidence doesn't end there. Verses 15-31 of chapter 4 warn us against leaving Adonai. Chapter 32 prophesied that we would forsake our God. And these things happened just as foretold. Israel was scattered, exiled to foreign nations. Time after time this happened, but each time Israel returned. Each time Israel turned their hearts back to the fathers, back to the LORD. And according to the promise in Deuteronomy 4:31, Adonai had mercy upon Israel. The fact that they are still alive today is a miracle.

There is one other thing I would like to draw your attention to in chapter 4 of Deuteronomy.

Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?
(Deu 4:6-8 ESV)

The Torah is our witness among the nations. People should be able to look at us and know that we are different because of our actions. People should be able to look at us and know that our God is near to us.

This is the foundation that I rest my faith in Torah on. As for the rest of the Bible, I believe it because it agrees with Torah.

Midrash Newsletter
June 2009