

Pentateuch: DEUTERONOMY

INTRODUCTION

In the weeks right before the Israelites finally entered the Promised Land, while they were still in Moab, God spoke to them through His aging servant Moses. In a series of three lengthy sermons, Moses reflected on the forty years that had passed since their rescue from Egypt and on the laws God had given them during that time. Those sermons make up the entire book of Deuteronomy.

Although the name “Deuteronomy” means “Second Law,” these commands were not new; it’s more like a review and restatement of the laws God has already given them. Moses is the named author of the speeches, although Joshua or other faithful scribes may have assembled the written collection and contributed the final chapter, which deals with Moses’ death¹.

Rich in fundamental theological truth, Deuteronomy is the biblical book that Jesus quotes most often in the New Testament. It talks about God’s character—his holiness, faithfulness, compassion, jealousy, and so on—and what that character has looked like when expressed in relationship with His people. Significant space is devoted to the ways God will bless His people’s obedience, and conversely, the curses that will accompany disobedience (Deuteronomy 28). And a great deal of the book has to do with the covenant God made with His people, their inability to keep their side of it, and the promise of a future covenant that will overcome human weakness once and for all.

IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING

When an author writes a sequel to a book they’ve already written, they usually work on a recap of the events of the first book. Readers need to know what happened in Book 1 to appreciate what comes next. If it’s been a while since the last book came out, fans might have forgotten what happened. Or maybe someone didn’t realize this book was a sequel and accidentally skipped Book 1 entirely.

The book of Deuteronomy serves a similar purpose. Moses reminds the Israelites—both those who may’ve forgotten and the new generation who did not experience it—of the ways God had revealed his laws and his power to them in the past. And just as a book may foreshadow what will happen in future installments, Deuteronomy hints at what is to come for the people of God.

BOOK ORGANIZATION²

DEUTERONOMY: Review

What God has done for Israel (Chapters 1-4)

What God expects of Israel (Chapters 5-26)

What God will do for Israel (Chapters 27-34)

JESUS IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

The book of Deuteronomy outlines the first covenant God made with His people—a conditional agreement spoken to Moses on Mount Sinai that outlined the laws Israel needed to obey—and the Israelites’ failure to keep that covenant (Deuteronomy 1:26-32, 6:16, 9:7-16, 31:16-22). The animal sacrifices that paid for the people’s sins pointed to the need for a better sacrifice, one that would be perfect and final. Jesus would be that sacrifice, the expression and means of the New Covenant. Moses spoke specifically of the coming prophet/Messiah in Deuteronomy 18:15-19.

People tend to think of the God who gave Moses these laws as somehow being different in character than the God we read about in the Gospels. But because Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:17)

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Deuteronomy.html>

² <https://www.biblecharts.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Deuteronomy.pdf>

and the exact representation of the Father's being (Hebrews 1:3), everything the law reveals about the Father's character and nature is the same character and nature that Jesus displayed in His life, death, and resurrection. Interestingly, even as it speaks of the "old" covenant, Deuteronomy emphasizes the importance of obeying the law as a grateful response to God's faithfulness. God's grace to Israel, both past (Deuteronomy 1-4) and future (30-33), should've been the context and motivation for their obedience. This is also the appropriate Christian response to the grace God has shown us through the saving sacrifice of Jesus: joyful obedience that is motivated by love and gratitude, not by self-righteousness, perfectionism, or legalism. Keeping the law does not save; those who have been saved keep the law.

BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: HOW TO APPROACH THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

OBSERVATION

- What is God teaching us in the text of the Book of Deuteronomy?
- Location: Where are we?
- Events: What is happening?
- Purpose: Why is it happening? Or do we know?
- People: Who is speaking? What is their point?
- Time: When did this happen?
- Literary Devices to Look for:
 - **Discourse:** Formally structured thoughts and ideas. In Deuteronomy, these are in oratory form.
 - **Poetry:** Chapter 32 is a song composed by Moses.
 - **Narrative:** Much of the book of Deuteronomy is a recounting of the history of the nation. It closes with the events surrounding and following Moses' death.
 - **Chiasmus:** A structure that introduces ideas and then repeats them in reverse order.
 - **Repetition:** a key word or phrase used multiple times, like "Hear, O Israel"
 - **Conditional Statements:** Deuteronomy includes many examples of if/then statements (if Israel obeys, then they will be blessed; if Israel disobeys, then they will be cursed) and cause and effect (for example, Deuteronomy 10:17-22 describes God's character and faithfulness; Deuteronomy 11 opens by saying that they should *therefore* love and obey Him).

INTERPRETATION

- It is easy to dismiss Mosaic laws as irrelevant to modern Christians, but just because we are not under Mosaic law does not mean we cannot learn from it (Matthew 22:36-40).
- The book of Deuteronomy is structured like Ancient Near Eastern treaties between feudal lords (suzerains) and their subordinates (vassals). These treaties usually began by recounting the history of the relationship between the two parties.
- Famous Last Words: Moses knew he was near the end of his life. Consider the extra weight that knowledge gives to his words here.
- Compare the laws given in Leviticus and Numbers with those repeated in Deuteronomy. Which are not included in this second giving of the law? Why might that be?

APPLICATION

- **Resist the urge to rush to the application, "doing something," or moving on from each day's reading. Before you move on, spend some time sitting in silence with the Lord. Enjoy his company.**
- When has God been faithful in your life so far?
- How can remembering His past faithfulness to us encourage us toward present obedience?
- What does God's law teach us about His character?
- In what ways are we susceptible to the same moral failings as the Israelites when we attempt to obey in our own power?
- How can we keep God's Word constantly on our hearts?
- How does the new covenant differ from the one God established with Israel?
- What blessings do we receive as participants in the new covenant?

PRAYER

- Deuteronomy places high value on the memorization and application of Scripture: “Take to your heart [...] all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life” (32:46-47). Pray that the Bible will not be idle words for you.
- Throughout this book, God is described as “jealous” for us. Pray that God will reveal anything other than Him that is fighting for the top place in your heart.
- Love and obedience are described as being the logical and appropriate response to a holy and all-powerful God. Ask God to show you where you need to increase in obedience and to empower you to do it.
- Deuteronomy highlights the importance of remembering who God is and what He has done. Take some time to thank God for His character and how you have seen Him in your life.

CHURCH HISTORY: WHAT HAS CHURCH HISTORY SAID ABOUT THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

“Moses in no ways pertains to us in all his laws, but only to the Jews, except where he agrees with the natural law, which, as Paul teaches, is written in the hearts of the Gentiles (Rom. 2:15).” – Martin Luther³, 1525

“Thus we see in effect, what the groundwork of this Book is: that is to wit, that God having erst already given his law to the people of Israel, and warranted it as much as was requisite: vouchsafed because of their hardheartedness & stubbornness, to give a larger declaration thereof, than Moses had put in writing as yet. And he has not only opened the meaning of the Law, but also exhorted the people to keep it better than they had done before...” – John Calvin⁴, 1555

“The gospel is a kind of Deuteronomy, a second law, a remedial law, a spiritual law, a law of faith; by it we are under the law of Christ, and it is a law that makes the comers thereunto perfect.” – Matthew Henry⁵, 1706

“The entire law of Christ depends upon charity. And charity depends on two precepts, one of which concerns loving God and the other concerns loving our neighbor. Now God, in delivering the law to Moses, gave him Ten Commandments written upon two tablets of stone. Three of these Commandments that were written on the first tablet referred to the love of God; and the seven Commandments written on the other tablet related to the love of our neighbor. The whole law, therefore, is founded on these two precepts.” – Thomas Aquinas⁶, 1723



³ Martin Luther, “How Christians Should Regard Moses,” in *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 35, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), p. 161.

⁴ <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin/Sermons%20on%20Deuteronomy%20-%20John%20Calvin.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/deuteronomy/intro.html>

⁶ <https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/TenCommandments.htm>