

Exposition of Deuteronomy

(Reading: Deuteronomy 7:1-11)

Today we begin a journey through the book of Deuteronomy. It may seem like an intimidating prospect to work our way through this large book, but we are going to try it. Deuteronomy is a major OT book and a very important one. It might take us a while to make our way through the book, but the benefits will be worth the efforts.

We'll not be doing a thorough, detailed, verse-by-verse exposition of the book; that would take years to complete. We'll be hitting the highlights of the book and moving rapidly as possible.

Some might question the value of preaching through Deuteronomy. But remember that "all Scripture is given by inspiration and is profitable..."

Rom 15:4 *For whatever things were written before were **written for our learning**, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*

Deuteronomy is a long book, but it's very practical and not very hard to understand. It really is one of the greatest OT books. You should develop an appreciation of this book if you don't have one already.

We'll start our journey as we often do with a survey/overview of the book. We'll try to get a good look at the forest before we examine individual trees. We'll also consider some important principles regarding interpreting the book.

I. A survey (overview) of the book of Deuteronomy

A. The name:

1. Deuteronomy derived its name from two Greek words, "deuteros" meaning "second," and "nomos" meaning "law."

We get our English title from the Latin Vulgate which calls it *Deuteronomium*.¹

2. It's not another law or a second law but a further explanation of the law that God had given to Moses previously. The book is really a record of Moses' sermons on the Law.² Moses wanted to remind Israel of what God had said previously.

¹ Utley, intro to Deuteronomy.

² Jack S. Deere, *Deuteronomy* in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 259.

3. 1:5end “Moses began to *explain/declare* this law” – the word means “to make clear, to make plain, to expound.” So Moses is explaining what the law means, exhorting the people to obey it, and warning them about the consequences if they disobey it.
4. The Hebrew name is “these *are* the words” (אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים), the first two words of the book.

B. Contents:

1. Deuteronomy provides a *review* of the nation’s history and a *renewal* of the covenant made between God and Israel concerning the Promised Land, Canaan.

Read 29:1, 12-13

Quote: The book is a renewal/restatement of the covenant that God had made with Israel previously. It restates, clarifies, expands, and even modifies the laws of the covenant made by God with Israel at Mt. Sinai forty years earlier.³

A covenant is an agreement, almost like a treaty—I will do this if you do that. God gave Israel a list of laws to keep, and if they kept them, God promised to bless them. So in Deuteronomy, Moses is reviewing the OT law, explaining it more fully, and exhorting the people to obey the covenant, to make a fresh commitment to the Lord.⁴

2. Such a re-commitment to God was necessary for several reasons:
 - a) The majority of the adult generation who had left Egypt were now dead;
 - b) The 2nd generation needed to hear the Law and make their own commitment to God;
 - c) They were about to enter Canaan and attempt to conquer it;
 - d) After conquering the PL, they needed to know how to live in this new setting;
 - e) Moses was about to pass off the scene, and Joshua was about to take over as leader.

³ Roy E. Gingrich, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Memphis, TN: Riverside Printing, 2000), 4.

⁴ Deere, p. 260.

- C. Writer/composer: cf. 1:1; Moses wrote the book

31:9 “Moses wrote this law...”

So these are Moses’ final words, his farewell address, his last remarks to the people that he’s been leading for the last 40 years. We may notice a sense of urgency here because Moses is speaking at the end of his life.

Quote: The book takes on the form of a prophetic last will and testament of Moses, Israel’s great lawgiver.⁵

- D. Original audience: “all Israel” (1:1); “the children of Israel” (1:3b). These are God’s commands to a certain, definite group of people—the Hebrews who came out of Egypt. This is God’s will for them.

As we study the book, we want to recognize what specifically pertains to Israel as a nation and what principles pertain to us as the church. We have to recognize that difference.

- E. Theme: summarized in Deuteronomy 10:12–13 *And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?*

Theme: As you conquer and settle the Promised Land, be careful to love, fear, serve, and obey God. God will bless you if you hear His word, obey it, and love God from the heart.

Quote: The fact that Israel was soon to enter the Promised Land is indicated by almost 200 references to the “land” in Deuteronomy (1:7). Moses repeatedly urged the people to “take possession” of the land (1:8), encouraging them not to be afraid of the enemy (1:21).⁶

- F. Time: The events of Deuteronomy happen in the 40th year after the exodus out of Egypt (1:3). Moses is preparing the people to conquer the Promised Land, and he spoke these words just before the conquest, c. 1405/6 BC—almost 3500 years ago.

⁵ Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 103.

⁶ Jack S. Deere, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 260.

It's remarkable that we have the record of events that happened so long ago.

G. Place/setting (vs. 1): These events occur on the plains of Moab on the east side of the Jordan River, opposite of the land of Canaan, just north of the Dead Sea (**consult the map**). The nation is at the end of their wilderness wanderings and on the brink of crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

H. Genre—type of literature⁷

Deuteronomy is a mixture of several genres.

1. historical narrative – 1-4, 34 (beginning and end)
2. exhortations pertaining to the OT law – 6-28
3. poetry – 32
4. blessings – 33

I. Importance: The book of Deuteronomy is important for a number of reasons.

1. Jesus quotes from it (Mt 4:4), as do many of the OT and NT authors.
2. Deuteronomy tells us much about God and his will. It shows us God's standards for righteous living.
3. Understanding Deuteronomy helps us understand the rest of the Bible.

Quotes: One scholar (J. A. Thompson) said: "Deuteronomy is one of the greatest books of the Old Testament. Its influence on the domestic and personal religion of all ages has not been surpassed by any other book in the Bible."⁸

Deuteronomy stands as the wellspring of biblical historical revelation. It is a prime source for both OT and NT theology.⁹

Sadly, Deuteronomy is one of those books that people commonly skip over or neglect. Not many would claim the book as their favorite. But skipping the book is a big mistake.

⁷ Utley, intro to Deuteronomy.

⁸ Tyndale OT Commentary Series, "Deuteronomy," 11. Quoted in Utley's intro to Deuteronomy.

⁹ Earl S. Kalland, *Deuteronomy in Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 10.

I've come to appreciate Deuteronomy over the years. It contains much valuable and practical content; we should not neglect this book or fail to appreciate its importance. I think we can gain much from a study of this book. The book is relevant for us today.

Have you read it? When was the last time you read it?

- J. Structure: Deut is a series of messages or sermons that Moses delivered to the nation just before his death. Almost all of it is a record of what Moses said just before he died.
- K. Key words: do/keep/observe/obey (187), hear (50), love (16), remember (14)
- L. Other unique or interesting features
 - 1. You'll notice that many of the commands are put in the future tense. Moses is saying, "When you cross the river and settle in the land, here's what you are supposed to do." So the material often reflects a future viewpoint.
 - 2. Some of the language of the book deals with rather personal, delicate issues. The book refers to marriage and divorce, various diseases and personal infirmities, various sinful behaviors that we'd rather not discuss; so we might find some of the material somewhat awkward or uncomfortable in a few places.
 - 3. As I was reading Deuteronomy, I came to
Deut 11:30 *Are they not on the other side Jordan, by the way where the sun goeth down, in the land of the Canaanites, which dwell in the champaign over against Gilgal, beside the plains of Moreh?*

עֲרָבָה 'arabah AV-plain 42, desert 9, wilderness; *Arabah* usually refers to the valley between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea.¹⁰ This is the only time the KJV translates the word this way.

I think it will be helpful for us to do this study out of the NKJV.
- M. Outline of the Deuteronomy
 - 1. The Historical Setting and Review of Israel's History (1:1-4:43)
 - 2. Review of the Law, Commands and Warnings (4:44-26:19)

¹⁰ Keil and Delitzsch (K&D hereafter).

3. Blessings and Cursings (27-28)
 4. Summary of Covenant Demands: Obedience Yields Blessings (29-30)
 5. Transition from Moses' Leadership to Joshua (31-34)
- N. Dynamic Direction from Deuteronomy (key themes)

1. God is faithful. God has provided everything the nation needed as it left Egypt, and God will provide everything needed as the nation enters the Promised Land—if they will only love and obey him.

Read Deuteronomy 7:6-9.

Quote: In the first several chapters of the book, Moses reminds the people of God's goodness to them in delivering them from slavery in Egypt, how He had sustained them through the wanderings in the wilderness, and how He is preparing them to enter the Promised Land. He urges them not to forget the LORD and the great things He has done for them. Israel had a privileged position with God, and Moses urges the people to serve God faithfully and be holy because of it.¹¹

App: We should do the same. Because God is faithful and good, we must be loyal to him. We must love, serve, honor, and obey God.

2. God desires genuine commitment.

Deuteronomy stresses the importance of a genuine love for God (4:37; 6:4-6). The book also emphasizes the heart: God's Word must be in their hearts (5:29; 6:6); ... they must love and serve God from the heart (10:12).¹²

Deuteronomy says much more about loving and obeying God than it does about the sacrificial system. God desired genuine faith and obedience much more than adherence to a ritual.

App: Mere outward religious tradition is not acceptable to God. We must have a genuine relationship with Him and serve Him out of a heart of love.

¹¹ Paul Benware, *Survey of the OT*, p. 72.

¹² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Expository Outlines of the OT*, p. 99.

Deuteronomy encourages us to examine our own faith—is that faith genuine and from the heart, or is it merely tradition?

We sang the song *Trust and Obey* earlier. That’s virtually the theme of Deuteronomy. This book is a great reminder to us of the importance of loving God and obeying his commands.

3. God expects His people to obey His Word.

The main emphasis of the book is that God’s people must love, fear, obey, and serve God (cf. 10:12-13). God blesses his people when they faithfully obey him and he chastises them when they don’t.

Moses repeatedly emphasizes the importance of obeying God’s Word. Words like “do, keep, observe, and obey” are very common throughout the book.

The Israelites had been guilty of forgetting His Word, turning to idols, and neglecting the Law. They had just spent nearly 40 years wandering around in the desert because of their disobedience. Now, on the threshold of entering the Promised Land, they must return to God’s Word and commit themselves to obey it.

Quote: Each of Moses’ messages revolves around the same command: “Obey.” Everything—possession of the land, victory over enemies, prosperity, and enjoyment of life—depends upon Israel’s obedience to God.¹³

Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” We need the reminder that God expects us to obey his word. We are not saved by obedience; we’re saved by faith. But if that faith is real, it will result in obedience to God’s word.

4. Transmit the faith to the next generation.

The previous generation had died in the wilderness, and now a new generation was standing on the border of the Promised Land. They needed to understand who God is and what God required of them. They needed encouragement for the great task in front of them.

¹³ John C. Maxwell and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 5, The Preacher’s Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1987), 14.

Deuteronomy (6:7-8) contains the famous passage about parents teaching the things of God to their children when they sit in the house, walk by the way, lie down or rise up. Moses frequently exhorts the people to teach the next generation to obey the Lord.

Likewise, it is critical that parents seek to pass on their faith to the next generation.

Trans: Now that we've done a basic survey of the book, we can briefly consider some important rules for...

II. Interpreting Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy is a mixture of history and law. It's a description of what happened to the nation of Israel and a series of messages explaining and applying the law.

A. Rules for interpreting narrative literature

1. Narrative literature is an account of what happened, a narration of historical events. The beginning and the ending of the book are a historical record of what happened—a narration of events.
2. The key interpretive rule: narrative is *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. I.e., the fact that something happened does not mean that it should have happened or that it was good or bad; it's just a record that it happened.
3. Further, the fact that something happened to *Israel* does not mean that such things should or will happen to *us*. E.g., the command to cross the Jordan and possess the land.
4. Some things related in narratives are culture-bound, i.e., applicable in that time and place but not applicable today.
5. We are looking for timeless principles from these historical events. We are looking for what the stories tell us about God and about ourselves.

B. Rules for interpreting OT law

Rom 6:14 ... *ye are not under the law, but under grace.*

1. As NT Christians, we are not under the stipulations of the OT law. Israel was the original audience for this material. The church is not Israel; we are under the new covenant, not the old.

Still, we find much that is beneficial and applicable for us here. We find out much about God and his work in our world. God does not change, and many of the requirements that he has for his people also do not change. So we have to be careful about interpreting what applies to Israel and what principles apply to us.

2. The stipulations of the OT law pertain to us if they are repeated in the NT. E.g., 9/10 of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the NT. Much of Deuteronomy does not apply to us *directly*, but most of it is very instructive and helpful for us.

Many of God's commands for Israel still pertain to us today; they are timeless principles that are repeated in the NT.

3. So we have to discern whether the commands of the OT law pertain directly to us, if they pertain to us in principle, or if they don't pertain at all.
4. The law often reflects unchanging moral principles that still pertain to us. But sometimes the stipulations of the law pertained only to Israel and not to us as the church.

That's a lot of information to take in all at once, but these introductory matters are critical to understanding the contents and the meaning of this book. It's good to survey the entire book before we begin looking at the text itself.

Deuteronomy, like many biblical books, is not written directly *to* us, but is *for* us. It's the God-breathed, inerrant, unchangeable word of God, and is thus profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction. We read it so that we may become mature and fully furnished for every good work. Like every other part of the Bible, Deuteronomy is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword. It's a source of instruction, rebuke, blessing, and encouragement.

If you have not read Deuteronomy recently, start. I think you'll understand and appreciate the messages on Sunday more if you are familiar with the book.

Deuteronomy 10:12–13 *And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?*