

DEUTERONOMY

Deuteronomy is the fifth book in the Torah, the five books of Moses. All except the final chapter are attributed to Moses. It's likely that his successor Joshua wrote the last chapter which records the death of Moses.

The book was written around 1406 BC at the end of the forty years of wandering in the desert. At the time the people were camped on the east side of the Jordan River on the plains of Moab, across from the city of Jericho. They were on the verge of entering the land that had been promised to them centuries earlier. The children who had left Egypt were now adults, ready to conquer and settle the Promised Land. Before that could happen God reiterated, through Moses, His covenant made with them.

Deuteronomy means "second law" a term mistakenly derived from the Hebrew word *mishneh*, but it's not really a second law but an adaption and expansion of much of the original law given on Mount Sinai. The Hebrew title of the book is *Haddebharim* meaning "The Words" taken from the first verse of chapter one. Deuteronomy has also been called "The book of remembrance". Some commentators have nicknamed the book "The gospel of love" since the word love is repeated 21 times. Deuteronomy is referred to 350 times in the Old Testament and 95 times in the New Testament. Jesus quotes from the book more than any other in the Torah

Moses is writing to the second generation of the exodus. Their faithless parents had all died in the wilderness as a punishment, but God had spared their children to preserve His holy people and keep His promises to their forefathers. Since Moses was forbidden to enter the Promised Land, it was necessary for him to restate Gods law in order to guide them in covenant renewal with Joshua the successor of Moses. With the first generation gone, Moses needed to exhort the new generation to avoid the sins of the previous one, and commit to the law so that blessings would come in the future.

Deuteronomy consists of three speeches or sermons given by Moses over a period of about one month at the end of his life. These can be broken down as

1. First Sermon: What God had done for Israel(Chapters 1-3)
2. Second Sermon: Regulations for the present (Chapters 4-26)

3. Third Sermon: Looking ahead (Chapters 27-30)

First Sermon (what God had done for Israel) (Chapters 1-3)

“These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on this side of the Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain opposite Suph, between Paran, Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab. ² It is eleven days’ journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea. ³ Now it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spoke to the children of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him as commandments to them, ⁴ after he had killed Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who dwelt at Ashtaroth in Edrei. ⁵ On this side of the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses began to explain this law, saying, ⁶ “The LORD our God spoke to us in Horeb, saying: ‘You have dwelt long enough at this mountain. ⁷ Turn and take your journey, and go to the mountains of the Amorites, to all the neighboring places in the plain, in the mountains and in the lowland, in the South and on the seacoast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the River Euphrates. ⁸ See, I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to give to them and their descendants after them.’ (Chapter 1:1-8)

Just an eleven day journey ended up in wilderness wandering for forty years. They were promised about 300,000 square miles, but they had to possess, it indeed fight for every inch. Even at the peak of the kingdom under David and Solomon they only possessed about 10,000 square miles. It seems that the promises of God have to be appropriated.

Peter writes in his second book chapter 1:3-4 **“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, ³ as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, ⁴ by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may**

be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust” Paul writes in Ephesians 1:3 “**Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ”** and he writes again in 2 Corinthians 1:20 “**For all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.**

I remember an illustration I heard years ago. A man died: God took him to a large warehouse with big double doors and the man asked God why He had brought him there. God opened the doors, the warehouse was crammed with parcels with the man’s name on them. Look, said God, all these promises and all this grace was available to you on earth and you could have had much more. May we take this to heart, and see to it that we live in a way pleasing to God and thereby appropriate what that He has secured for us in Jesus Christ

Moses recounts the experience of Israel under his leadership and how God cared for His people during that arduous journey. He mentions their defeat both spiritually and militarily at Kadesh Barnea, and the defeat of Kings Sihon and Og. These two kings are specifically mentioned in chapters 2 and 3. Verses 8-11 of chapter 3 describe the land in the North where you recall two tribes (Reuben Gad and half of Manassah) wanted to settle rather than cross the river Jordan. They really were guilty of compromise and were first of the tribes to fall into idolatry, isolated as they were, unprotected, surrounded by pagans.

Verse 11 is interesting. “**For only Og king of Bashan remained of the remnant of the giants. Indeed his bedstead was an iron bedstead. (*Is it not in Rabbah of the people of Ammon?*) Nine cubits *is* its length and four cubits its width, according to the standard cubit”** Given that the cubit was 18 inches this really was a super King bed for the giants we have referred to in earlier studies. Moses concludes this sermon with exhortations to be loyal to the Lord

Second Sermon (Regulations for the present. Chapters 4-26)

There is a very severe warning in the first verses of chapter 4 **“Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you. ² You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you”** Sometimes people say “well I quite like the New Testament but don’t like the Old”, or they choose those parts of the Scripture which suites them. Remember what Jesus said **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them”** (Matthew 5:17). An even more severe warning is found in Revelation 22:18-19 **“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.**

We as humans have a tendency to forget and need to be reminded repeatedly and this we read in chapter 4:9 **“Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren”**.

The rest of this section is a recap of the law

1. Chapters 5-11 The ten commandments repeated and reviewed
2. Chapters 12-16 deal mainly with the ceremonial law
3. Chapters 17-20 deal mainly with the civil law
4. Chapters 21-26 deal mainly with social laws

The Lord is one

Chapter 6 vs 4 **“Hear O Israel The LORD our God, The LORD is one!”** This is a central teaching in Judaism. *Shema* (“hear”) is the Hebrew word that begins the most

important prayer in Judaism, and is taken from this verse. The whole Shema prayer, which includes verses 4-9 of chapter 6, is spoken daily in Jewish tradition. You will recall that Jesus Himself used it at the beginning of His answer to the “great commandment” question in Mark 12:28-30. For us to understand the phrase “The LORD is one” we must look more closely at the word “one”

The word “one” is the Hebrew word “*echad*” which means a compound unity rather than meaning just singular. The Hebrew word for a singularity is different. *Echad* would be used in Hebrew, for example to talk about a bunch of grapes. Israel would be spoken of a “one nation” with different people included in that. We have the same idea in Genesis 2:24 “**Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become *one flesh***”. Surely this points to the trinity, “the LORD is one” that is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons, but one God

A Prophet

Chapter 18:15 “**The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst from your brethren Him shall you hear**”. No prizes for guessing who this Prophet might be, but John the Baptist wasn’t one hundred percent sure, so he sent some of his people to his cousin to check “Are you Coming One” they asked (Luke 17:18-23). Philip on the other hand felt pretty sure and told his brother Nathaniel “**we have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote— Jesus of Nazareth son of Joseph**” (John 1:45)

Let’s look at the similarity between Moses and Jesus

1. The Prophet must be Jewish and the heritage of Jesus was from the tribe of Judah
2. Both were shepherds – Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd”, and Moses also tended sheep – figuratively and literally.
3. Both were sent to bring salvation after 400 years of apparent inactivity from God. The Israelites had been enslaved for 400 years in Egypt, and the 400 years before Jesus came had been notably silent years from God.
4. Both fasted for 40 days and nights – Moses while on Mount Sinai, and Jesus in the Judean desert, when being tempted by Satan.

5. Both spent time in Egypt as children. Jesus had to hide there as a baby to escape Herod.
6. Both were born at a time when evil kings pronounced death to all Jewish baby boys in the area – Pharaoh had commanded all Hebrew baby boys to be drowned at birth, and Herod had issued a command to kill all baby boys under the age of two. Both were miraculously rescued from that threat.
7. Both were called by God to lead and save
8. Both did miracles to testify to their God-given authority
9. Both instituted a covenant of blood that brought salvation for many – Moses with the Passover lamb's blood on the doorposts, Jesus the Lamb of God, brought in the new covenant in his blood spilled on a cross
10. Both were given God's public stamp of approval with an audible voice from heaven, heard by the crowd – Moses at Sinai, and Jesus at his baptism.
11. Both gave up great riches to lead a humble life of service and poverty – Moses from the palace of the King of Egypt, Jesus from the heights of heaven.
12. Both were noted for their great humility (Numbers 12:3, Hebrews 11:26-27, Philipians 2)
13. Both were criticized by their own families – Mary and Jesus's brothers in Mark 3:20-21, and Moses' sister and brother in Numbers 12:1.
14. Both were willing to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of those they were leading, and to pay for the sins of their people – Moses in Exodus 32, and Jesus's own readiness to die on our behalf.
15. Both miraculously provided the people with bread to eat – manna was sent from heaven for the Israelites, and Jesus famously fed the multitudes twice.
16. Seven weeks (50 days) after the Exodus, the Israelites waited upon God to receive the law. God gave Moses His covenant and instructions on how to live as a faith community. Seven weeks (50 days) after the resurrection, the disciples waited as Jesus instructed them to receive the Holy Spirit, and the church was born – a new faith community, and a new way to live as believers.

17. Both of their faces shone with the glory of heaven, as was noted by people who saw them – Moses had to wear a veil over his face because it was beaming so much, and Jesus’s disciples saw His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration.
18. Moses choose 12 spies to explore Canaan, and Jesus choose 12 disciples.
19. Moses appointed 70 rulers over Israel, and Jesus sent 70 disciples out to share the gospel.

You might like to look for some more similarities. There are of course crucial differences. Moses was not sinless, nor did he cross into the Promised Land (that is until the transfiguration, when he entered it in his resurrection body). Jesus was sinless, and has gone before us sitting at the right hand of the Father. God through Moses saved one people group but through Jesus salvation is available to all people, all nations. Here is a Bible verse which sums up the difference **“For the law was given through Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ”** (John 1:17)

Third Sermon looking ahead (Chapters 27-34)

Chapter 27:11-13 **“Then Moses and the Levitical priests said to all Israel, “Be silent, Israel, and listen! You have now become the people of the LORD your God. ¹⁰ obey the LORD your God and follow his commands and decrees that I give you today.”¹¹ On the same day Moses commanded the people: ¹² When you have crossed the Jordan, these tribes shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin. ¹³ And these tribes shall stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali”**

When Israel came into the Promised Land they were to separate the tribes according to these two groups. One group would gather on Mount Gerizim and would bless the people. The other group would stand on Mount Ebal and they would curse those who disobeyed God. This dramatic scene was fulfilled in Joshua chapter 8:32-35. It happened a after a bitter defeat, then a dramatic repentance and recovery at Ai (Joshua chapters 7 and 8). After the victory at

Ai, Joshua wanted to do everything he could to walk in obedience, so he led the nation in obedience to the command in Deuteronomy 27.

Why did God choose these two mountains for this open air participation sermon?

1. It was the best place from a sound point of view. The area had a natural amphitheatre effect, because of the contour of the hills
2. The mountains were in the geographic middle of the Promised Land. Israel had to control the middle of Canaan, and the highlands, to have the luxury of access to these mountains
3. The mountains themselves were pictures of blessing and cursing. Mount Gerizim abounded with springs, gardens, and orchards, while Mount Ebal was barren and rocky

When all are found guilty before the law, and it is clear that they can't conform to all the words of the law, there is still hope. A clue to this hope is found in the beginning chapter 27:5 where God declared that an altar be built - not upon Mount Gerizim, the mountain of blessing, but upon Mount Ebal, the mountain of cursing. We need the covering and atoning sacrifice exactly at the point where our sin and failures are revealed and God's curse is pronounced on our sin.

It is important to recognize that we, in Jesus Christ, do not have an Old Covenant relationship with God. We expect to be blessed, not because of our obedience, but because of our position in Jesus. The curse we deserved was laid upon Him Galatians 3:10-14 **“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.”** ¹¹ **But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God *is* evident, for “the just shall live by faith.”** ¹² **Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.”**¹³ **Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree”),** ¹⁴ **that**

the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Though there may be an inherent curse of consequences in our disobedience, or even the correcting hand of God under the New Covenant, He does not curse us, because all that we deserved, past, present, and future, was poured out upon Jesus.

Some final instructions from Moses (Chapter 31)

Moses is 120 years old, and though in good physical shape, you will recall, God said he could not enter the Promised Land. He had struck the rock instead of speaking to it when the people needed water. The New Testament makes it clear that this water-providing life giving rock was a picture of Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:4). Jesus being struck once provided life for all who would drink of Him (John 7:37) but it was unnecessary and unrighteous for Jesus to be struck a second time (Hebrews 10:10-12).

It was now time for the nation to take courage in the Lord and not fear or be dismayed. Moses will pass from the scene but God will not abandon Israel. Moses calls Joshua in the sight of all Israel and encourages him to be strong. Because of the future idolatry of Israel, God instructed Moses to compose a song, a sort of national anthem, for ancient Israel. He wrote it the same day and taught it to the people. It was a strange song, because its purpose was to testify against them as a witness. The song is found in Chapter 32.

Moses dies on Mount Nebo (Chapter 34)

As Israel camped on the plains of Moab, Moses climbed Mount Nebo from where he could see the Promised Land. The list of places mentioned follows a large counter clockwise circle from the north to the south, and in this sweeping panorama Moses saw the scope of the entire Promised Land. What drama and inward pain, a sense perhaps of accomplishment mixed with disappointment must have been in his mind

Verse 5-12

So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. ⁶ And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day. ⁷ Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigour diminished. ⁸ And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. So the days of weeping *and* mourning for Moses ended. ⁹ Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. ¹⁰ But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, ¹¹ in all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, ¹² and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

May we be content and this be enough for us, that is when we die it can be said of us that we were “**servants of the Lord**”

Moses at the transfiguration of Jesus (Luke 9: 28-36)

“About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. ²⁹ As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. ³⁰ Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. ³¹ They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem. ³² Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. ³³ As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.)³⁴ While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, they found

that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

Jesus had just fed the hungry multitude multiplying the loaves and the fish, reminding of the Israelites being fed with manna in the wilderness. Also when Moses came down from Sinai with the Ten Commandments, his face was radiant just as was the face of Jesus on this occasion. Here in Luke we are told that Jesus, Moses, and Elijah **“were speaking about His departure”**. The Greek word for departure is the word “exodus” a clear allusion to the exodus of Moses and the people from Egypt.