



## Deuteronomy—At a Crossroads

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### Deuteronomy's Relevance to Today

How is a book written so long ago to Jews in a distant land relevant to us today?

**First, we learn of our spiritual DNA.** Christianity has its origins in Judaism. Jesus Christ came as a Jew in fulfillment of promises made to Abraham and his descendants, the people of Israel, centuries ago. So Deuteronomy is more than a history lesson; it provides us understanding of our spiritual heritage in Christ. We learn of our roots, our spiritual DNA.

**Second, we face a crossroads in life.** Israel was at a crossroads with God who set before them the choice of life or death. Like them, we too are faced with a choice: will we choose life or death? Jesus Christ stands at that crossroads, beckoning us to choose life, that is, to choose *him*.

**Third, we realize how much we need Christ.** The story of Deuteronomy provides us with insights into human nature. The few victories and mostly failures of Israel are like looking in a mirror at ourselves. And through this, we begin to understand our need for a covenant better than the one given to Israel through Moses; we need the new covenant of Jesus Christ.

### Background and Setting

**The first five books of the Old Testament**, often called The Pentateuch and penned by Moses, provide rich spiritual and historical insight into God and his chosen people. As we understand the basics of this background, our faith can grow as we see how God has unveiled his plan for mankind.

**Genesis:** In Genesis 12, God made a momentous promise to Abraham, that Abraham's descendants would inherit the land of Canaan. Thus the name, "The Promised Land." Abraham's grandson Jacob (a.k.a., Israel) and his family end up in Egypt following a series of startling events.

**Exodus:** Then 700 years later in about 1400 B.C., Moses came onto the scene, and God delivered his chosen people from slavery in Egypt through one of the most significant events in the Old Testament: the parting of the Red Sea. Both then and now, this event provides a lasting marker of God's power and love. And on Mt. Sinai, God makes a historic covenant with his people.

**Leviticus:** As a complement to Exodus, Moses records instruction for Israel's worship of God through the service of the priests and Levites, the people from the tribe of Levi, one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

**Numbers:** Though Israel was now free from bondage and poised to enter this long-awaited Promised Land, they stumbled badly, rebelling against the Lord and rejecting his covenant. He then judged them sternly, committing them to wandering in the wilderness until all the adults alive at that time had died... all of them except for two: Joshua and Caleb.

**Deuteronomy:** Nearly forty years later, Israel is finally ready to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. But first, they faced a decision at this metaphorical crossroads: would they choose to trust and obey the Lord, or would they be like their parents who, 40 years earlier, rebelled? In Deuteronomy, Moses penned his final words to them in three magnificent sermons.

### Themes in Deuteronomy

The title "Deuteronomy" is based on a Greek term meaning, "Second law," i.e., the second time Moses lays out the details of God's covenant and laws to his people. (The first time is in Exodus when Moses received the covenant directly from God at Mt. Sinai.) Here are a few themes in Moses' exhortative sermons:

**First, wholehearted obedience.** Moses repeatedly calls the people to wholehearted obedience to the one true God, to love him and keep his covenant. (See Deut 6:4-5 and 10:12-13 below.)

**Second, choice between life and death.** Moses laid out for the people a fundamental choice, and he phrased it in various ways, such as the choice between life or death, blessings or curses, and obedience or disobedience. So Israel was standing at a metaphorical "crossroads:" which direction would they choose to travel? (See Deut 30:15 below.)

**Third, taking possession of the land.** Moses commanded them to humbly, faithfully, and courageously conquer this land promised so long before, taking it as their own possession as a gift from God. (See Deut 1:8 below.)

## Key Passages

Here are some passages that reflect key themes of Deuteronomy.

*Deut 1:8 ESV "See, I have set the land before you. **Go in and take possession of the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their offspring after them.**"*

*Deut 6:4-5 ESV "**Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.**"*

*Deut 10:12-13 ESV "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, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good?**"*

*Deut 30:15 ESV "**See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.**"*

## Outline

Chapters 1-4 **First sermon:** Approaching the land, historical review

Chapters 5-28 **Second sermon:**

Chapters 5-11 Call to love the Lord

Chapters 12-26 Call to obedience to the Law

Chapters 27-28 Admonition of blessings and curses

Chapters 29-30 **Third sermon:** Call again to the covenant

Chapters 31-34 Epilogue. Transition from Moses to Joshua, and a look ahead.

## Covenants in the Bible

The Bible is split into two major units: the Old Testament and the New Testament. So we ask, "**What's a testament? And why is there an old and a new one?**"

A testament is simply a covenant, and in biblical history, **God has established covenants between himself and his people.** Let's look very briefly at these "Old" and "New" covenants.

In Exodus on Mt. Sinai, the Lord issued a covenant with the descendants of Abraham, the people of Israel. **This covenant was conditioned upon Israel's faithfulness to their God with three major tenets. First**, if they trusted, loved, and obeyed him, he would richly bless them. **Second**, if they rebelled and disobeyed, he would bring judgment—curses—upon them. And **third**, even after this judgment, if they would humble themselves and repent, he would mercifully restore them into his blessings.

As part of this covenant, the Lord gave them very detailed commands, the most foundational and representative of them being the **Ten Commandments.**

From the giving of this covenant all the way to the end of the Old Testament period, we see that **Israel largely failed to keep their end of the contract with God. Something "new" was needed.**

So God unveiled a radically different covenant, a "**New Covenant**" (recorded as the New Testament). This covenant is not written on tablets of stone but on hearts, and it is revealed in fullness through the person of Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah of God. Instead of being delivered from Egypt through the Red Sea by Moses, **we are delivered from sin and death through the death and resurrection of Christ.** The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world has come and will return to earth soon to usher his followers into their eternal Promised Land! Amen!