

# Introduction and Recounting the Journey (Deuteronomy 1)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Deuteronomy

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## I. Introduction: Why Study the Book of Deuteronomy?

- a. I have encountered a number of Christians over the years who consider **Deuteronomy** either their favorite book, or else the most important single book in the Old Testament.
- b. In an online class I was teaching about a year ago, during the Q&A afterward, a brother from Ohio asked me a question I didn't particularly want to answer. His question: "What do you think is the most important part of the New Testament, and of the Old Testament?"

- i. I responded, "I don't know."
- ii. However, he was undeterred and followed up with an email to me:

"Chuck,

Any more thoughts on this question?

What Old Testament and New Testament passage(s) would you say "most" encapsulate the: directives/prescriptives/commands/delights/heart - of each Testament?

I ask because; I've concluded it's - **Matthew 5-7** for the New Testament and **Deuteronomy 1-8** for the Old Testament.

What might you say, today?

Thanks.

Joel"

- iii. This morning (about ten months after receiving his question) I finally responded. From my response:

"Joel-

You asked me this question after an online class almost a year ago, and again by email in May. I never answered you, in part because I was not sure of the answer, and in part because I tend to shy away from 'most important' type questions, since there is a tendency for people to want to focus on the 'most

important' parts of the Scripture and neglect the rest (whereas it is all important for us, many times in ways we cannot fully appreciate). I attended many meetings in the past involving... church leaders where they wanted to teach what they considered the 'most important' things, to the neglect of many things that were, in fact, extremely important.

This morning, after doing years of expository teaching through entire books of the Bible (including all of **Genesis-Numbers**) we are now at last tackling **Deuteronomy**. So in thinking of 'why study **Deuteronomy**', I came back to your question.

Recall that in **Deuteronomy 17**, the instruction was given that all future kings must write out the words of this second law (literally "Deuteronomy" in the LXX) and read it all the days of their lives. This one book.

So I suppose I agree with your assessment that **Deuteronomy 1-8** may be the single most important part of the Old Testament, for some obvious reasons; but I might expand your selection to include even more chapters of that book. Which should become clear over the course of this series.

Thanks for asking such a tough question, one that got me to think on this much more deeply.

Your brother,

-Chuck"

- c. On the other hand, many Christians think very little about **Deuteronomy**.
  - i. Some have never read it carefully, or perhaps only read it through once.
    - 1. Some, since it is part of the 'Law of Moses', consider it to be no longer relevant to us today, who are no longer under the Old Law.
- d. **Question:** "Why should we take the time to read and study this book? Why is it important for us, today?" (I will respond with my own "top ten reasons".
  - i. **Reason No. 10: *Everything* in the Old Testament was Written for Our Learning**

1. Paul told us that all of the things written in the past (the Old Testament) were *for the benefit of us, the Christians*. After quoting from **Psalm 69**, in his letter to a church in Rome predominantly made up of Gentiles, Paul wrote:
    - a. “For whatever things were written before were written *for our learning*, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” (**Romans 15:4**, NKJV)
  2. Many Christian teachers and preachers today want to focus almost exclusively on the New Testament.
    - a. For example, I had a conversation recently with a Catholic bishop who made a point that in his preaching he used just the New Testament.
      - i. I respectfully pushed back with some reasons to reconsider and to expand his teaching to incorporate the Old Testament to better equip the members of his church.
- ii. **Reason No. 9: Many Christians Consider this Book ‘The Heart of the Old Testament’**
1. Example: My friend Joel, a serious student of the Bible, as expressed in the note I received from him above.
  2. Over the years I have encountered many serious students of the Bible who also considered Deuteronomy to be the most critical part of the Old Testament. Joel is not alone in that.
- iii. **Reason No. 8: This Reveals the Multi-Faceted Character of God Like Few Other Books**
1. We see God acting throughout the history of the Jews as a *loving, protecting Father* carrying his child, and fighting our battles for us. (**Deuteronomy 1**)
  2. We see that God is a God to be feared, from the Mount Sinai encounter. (**Deuteronomy 4-5**)
    - a. Note that Jesus says we *still* need to fear God (**Matthew 10:28**).
  3. We see *why* God wants us to fear Him: to keep us from sin. (**Deuteronomy 5**).
  4. We see that God wants us to *love* Him. (**Deuteronomy 6**)

5. We see the *justice* of God in ultimately punishing those who abandon Him. (**Deuteronomy 6-7, 28-29**)
6. We see the *mercy* of God toward those who sin but later turn back to Him. (**Deuteronomy 30:1-10**)
7. We see that God *allows us to be free*. He is not controlling. He gives us free choice regarding whether we want to follow Him or not. (**Deuteronomy 30:15-20**)
  - a. Moses lays out two paths: one leading to life, and the other leading to death and destruction (similar to what Jesus would later say in **Matthew 7:13-14**). Moses then implores the people to choose life.
  - b. Those who claim we humans do not have free choice do not know what they are talking about!
8. Also, throughout the book, we can see the *faithfulness* of God in keeping all of His promises. He always does what He says; we can count on that.

iv. **Reason No. 7: It Helps Us Understand the New Testament Much Better**

1. The books from the Old Testament that are most frequently and prominently quoted in the New Testament (at least as it seems to me) are **Genesis, Deuteronomy, Isaiah** and the **Psalms**.
  - a. Even those who prefer to focus exclusively on the New Testament should see value in reading the Old Testament as well, if only to *better understand what they are reading in the New Testament!*
2. Jesus and Paul base their arguments on passages from **Deuteronomy**, in their teaching. Paul even uses seemingly obscure passages from this book, assuming that even the Gentile Christians he was writing to knew these things.
  - a. Paul cites “Don’t muzzle the ox” (from **Deuteronomy 25:4**) to back up his teaching that those serving in the ministry should receive financial support, in **1 Corinthians 9** and **1 Timothy 5**.
  - b. Jesus in discussing divorce/remarriage, refers to what Moses taught regarding a man giving his wife a

“certificate of divorce. (**Matthew 9 & 19, Mark 10;** referring to **Deuteronomy 24**)

- c. “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’),” (**Galatians 3:13**, NKJV; quoting from **Deuteronomy 21:23**. Note that Paul had just quoted another passage from **Deuteronomy 27** regarding this “curse”.)

v. **Reason No. 6: This is Moses’ ‘Farewell Address’**

1. Moses was one of the greatest prophets and spiritual leaders and one of the wisest men of all time. Before departing this world, he poured out his concerns for those about to inherit the Promised Land and the generations that would follow.
2. Moses is held up in the New Testament, especially for his spiritual perseverance (**Hebrews 11:27**). He remained faithful to God to the age of 120. There is much we can learn from him.
3. Those who heeded his advice were blessed abundantly, while those who did not paid the price for their foolishness.

vi. **Reason No. 5: This Book Provides a Roadmap for Everything that Follows in the Old Testament**

1. This book provides the script for everything that follows.
2. *If you understand the instructions and warnings in the Book of **Deuteronomy**:*
  - a. You can understand what happens in Joshua in the conquest of Canaan, and in the cycles in Judges that follow.
  - b. You can see the reason why Solomon fell, and the result of that fall on future generations.
  - c. You can understand what happens under the good and bad kings of Judah.
  - d. You can appreciate the reasons why the Jews ended up going into captivity in Babylon, and returning seventy years later.

vii. **Reason No. 4: This Was the One Book that Was ‘Must Reading’ for All Future Kings**

1. Read **Deuteronomy 17:14-20**.
  2. The title of the book, '*Deuteronomy*', comes from the LXX, where it appears here in **Deuteronomy 17:18**, the "second law". It is the second telling of the Law of Moses.
  3. Every future king was to write this book down and then read it "all the days of his life". It would help him to remember to obey God's commands, to fear God, and not to become arrogant (thinking he was better than his brothers).
- viii. **Reason No. 3: This Book Has the Ten Commandments in It, as Well as the Greatest Commandment**
1. Ten Commandments are given in **Exodus 20** and recounted in **Deuteronomy 5**.
  2. The *first and greatest commandment* of them all is found in **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**. This is one of the two commandments upon which "all the Law and the Prophets hang", according to Jesus.
    - a. "Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind'. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (**Matthew 22:37-40**, NKJV)
- ix. **Reason No. 2: This is the Book Jesus Himself Used to Repel Satan's Attacks**
1. In **Matthew 4**, when Jesus spends 40 days in the Wilderness being tempted after His baptism, He encounters Satan and three classic temptations. In all three cases, He responds by saying, "It is written" and then quotes from **Deuteronomy 6** and **Deuteronomy 8**.
    - a. Jesus does not rely on half-measures, shortcuts, or conventional weapons here. He responds to this assault from Satan with the spiritual equivalent of highly focused 'tactical nuclear weapons'.
    - b. "And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat." (**Luke 22:31**, NKJV)

- i. The “you” here is in the plural, applying to more than just Peter!
  - c. Recall that Paul says in **Ephesians 6** that we are all facing assault from the unseen forces of evil. Therefore, we need the full spiritual armor of God to be able to withstand the attacks of Satan. The sword of the Spirit (our offensive weapon) is the word of God!
    - i. Let us look to and follow the example of Jesus in knowing and quoting from **Deuteronomy** in the face of severe temptation from Satan!
- x. **Reason No. 1: This Book Will Reveal Jesus to Us**
  - 1. “The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found *Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote*—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” (**John 1:43–45**, NKJV)
  - 2. Jesus told the Jews who challenged Him: “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for *he wrote about Me*. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (**John 5:46–47**, NKJV)
    - a. **Question for Moses:** *Where* did you write about Jesus? In which of the Five Books of the Law? Consider...
      - i. **Genesis**
        - 1. the Curse on Satan in **Genesis 3**,
        - 2. the foreshadowing of Noah,
        - 3. Abraham sacrificing his beloved son Isaac, who carries the wood to the place of his sacrifice,
        - 4. the life of Joseph,
        - 5. the **Genesis 49** blessing to Judah.
      - ii. **Exodus**
        - 1. the Passover Lamb foreshadowing,

2. Moses stretching out his arms all day with the wood in **Exodus 17**, making the form of the cross.

### iii. **Leviticus**

1. Anointed High Priest,
2. the blood sacrifices at the tabernacle.

### iv. **Numbers**

1. the bronze serpent that must be lifted up in order to save people from the deadly bite of the serpent (**Numbers 21 / John 3:14-15**,
2. Moses appointing a successor so that the people would not be like “sheep having no shepherd”, whose name is changed to Joshua/Jesus (**Numbers 13:16**).

### v. What about **Deuteronomy**?

1. This book may contain the single greatest, most detailed prophecy about Jesus in all of the Old Testament, one that Jesus, Peter, and Stephen allude to.
3. The prophecy of **Deuteronomy 18** is especially important in providing compelling evidence to convince atheists, agnostics, Muslims and Jews we are reaching out to.
  - a. Muslims accept Moses as a prophet. The Koran is full of quotes from and references to many things in the writings of Moses.
  - b. Who was “the Prophet”, the one Moses said would come? Was it Jesus, or Mohammed?

## II. **Recounting the Journey Through the Wilderness**

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 1:1-8**.
  - i. Now near the end of the 40 years in the Wilderness.
  - ii. They had recently defeated Sihon and Og. (**Numbers 21:21+**)
  - iii. Moses recalls when they left Mount Sinai, about 38 years earlier. (**Numbers 10:11+**)



b. Read **Deuteronomy 1:9-18**.

- i. Apparently these leaders or 'judges' were appointed when they were *leaving* Mount Sinai. (If that is the case, this was not the same event as the one described in **Exodus 18** where Moses followed the advice of Jethro, his father-in-law, which happened *before* the Jews arrived at Mount Sinai).
  1. Perhaps this event is tied with the appointing of elders after the people departed Mount Sinai, as described in **Numbers 11:10**.
- ii. The primary concern here is for honesty and justice. Those involved in judging disputes are *not to show favoritism in any way*.
  1. The great vs. the small.
  2. The Jew vs. the resident alien.
  3. The rich vs. the poor.
- iii. These human judges are called to see God as the ultimate judge, and to avoid the temptation to become people-pleasers.
  1. As we are instructed in **James 2**, God does not want them to show favoritism. In judging disputes, their concern must be on *what is true and just*, and on *who is telling the truth*.
- iv. The hard cases will get escalated to Moses.

c. Read **Deuteronomy 1:19-33**.

- i. Moses recalls the time in Kadesh Barnea, when the 12 spies were sent out. (**Numbers 13-14**)
- ii. The people were complaining, one of many instances of their complaining on their journey. Recall that Paul said one of the lessons we are to learn from the Wilderness journey of the Jews is that we must not complain, as they did, if we want to make it to our 'Promised Land'. (**1 Corinthians 10:1-13**)
- iii. We find some important details in this retelling of the story in **Deuteronomy 1** that were not in the **Numbers 13-14** account.
  1. The original idea to send out spies into Canaan came from the people, rather than from Moses. After they told it to Moses, he agreed it sounded like a good idea and implemented it.

2. Moses reassured the people with comforting words after the spies returned with a terrifying report.
3. Re-read **Numbers 1:29-31**.
  - a. This provides a picture of how the Lord had loved, protected and carried them thus far. They were not alone!
  - b. The Lord had “carried” them out of Egypt and through the Wilderness “as a man carries his son”.
  - c. Here we find a beautiful illustration of how the Lord is carrying us in our time through this ‘Wilderness’ between our baptism and the Promised Land.
  - d. [Chuck then shared a personal story of many years before, when teaching this passage, he lifting up his then-young son William in order to provide a visual illustration of how God is caring for His people.]
- d. Read **Deuteronomy 1:34-46**.
  - i. This explains why the Israelites spent 40 years in the Wilderness. They spent one year for every day that the 12 spies were exploring Canaan.
  - ii. Foolish attempts to try to undo what God has established will not go well.
  - iii. Joshua and Caleb were the only ones from that first generation of adults who would make it into the Promised Land. They provide great examples for us, who also must remain faithful through the various trials and temptations in our own ‘Wilderness journey’.