

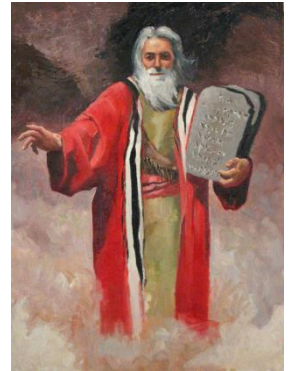
Deuteronomy

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Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy is the fifth book in the Bible and of the Pentateuch - the “five volumes” that make up the Hebrew *Torah*. Deuteronomy describes the final stages of the journey of the Israelites to Canaan, their “Promised Land”. In Deuteronomy God renews His covenant with the Israelites and restates the law given to Moses at Mt Sinai. This is why the book was called Deuteronomy. (*Deuteronomy* means “second law”).



Author

Moses is the traditional author of Deuteronomy and of the other books in the Pentateuch. (Deuteronomy is sometimes known as the “Fifth Book of Moses”). On several occasions the Lord commanded Moses to write down His words *on a scroll*. e.g. Exodus 17:14; 34:27,28. The five books of the Pentateuch, including Deuteronomy, are the product of that writing, although there may have been slight changes to spelling and grammar as the scrolls were hand-copied over the centuries. Some scholars reject Moses as the author and think the book was written by an unknown author in the seventh century BC, when Josiah was king in the southern kingdom of Judah.

Date

The events described in Deuteronomy began *in the fortieth year on the first day of the eleventh month*. (1:3). Scholars are divided as to when the Israelites left Egypt and travelled through the wilderness to Canaan. Some think it happened at the end of the 15th century BC, others early in the 13th century BC. The tabernacle was consecrated exactly 1 year after the Israelites left (Exodus 40:17), and the Israelites then spent another month at Sinai, during which time the laws in Leviticus were given to Moses. They then left Sinai and Numbers describes how they travelled north and camped on the east side of the Jordan River. This was some 40 years after leaving Mt Sinai, hence the “*In the fortieth year of the eleventh month*” when Deuteronomy begins.

Background

The final chapters of Genesis describe how the children of Israel had settled in Egypt due to a famine in their homeland of Canaan. They were rescued by the intervention of one of Jacob’s twelve sons, Joseph, who had risen to become the Pharaoh’s right hand man. The Israelites lived in Egypt for 430 years and became slaves of the Egyptians. They were cruelly used as a labour force to build the city of Rameses, at that time the capital of Lower Egypt. The Israelites multiplied rapidly over the 430 years and became a threat to the Egyptian rulers so persecution intensified and they were in great danger of being completely wiped out as a family nation. God raised up Moses as the person who would deliver His people from bondage to Egypt and who would lead them back to their homeland of Canaan: their “Promised Land”.

Exodus tells the story of how Moses was raised up and how he led the Israelites out of Egypt to Mt Sinai. It shows how God gave the Law to His people (including the 10 commandments); provided for His people as they travelled through the wilderness; dealt with their grumbling and rebellion, and revealed Himself to them in the Tabernacle. Leviticus describes how God revealed further laws to Moses in the Tent of Meeting, and how the Levitical priesthood was established. It adds greater detail to the laws for how the three great Feasts are to be celebrated, and to how the Sabbath is to be observed. Numbers describes the wanderings of the Israelites through the wilderness towards the Promised Land.



Deuteronomy describes how God renewed the covenant with His people and prepared them for entry into the Promised Land. The final chapters of Deuteronomy describe how Moses led the Israelites right up to the Jordan River on the border of Canaan, and how he died without actually entering the Promised Land. Deuteronomy is followed by the book of Joshua, which describes how the Israelites crossed the Jordan River and began their conquest of Canaan.

Purpose

Moses, Joshua and Caleb were the only original Israelites left after the wanderings in the wilderness. As they prepared to enter the Promised Land, the Law needed to be restated for the new generation who had been born over the previous 40 years. Deuteronomy is thus a little different in style to Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers which describe how Moses passed on the Law that God has just given him. Now he is strongly focused on exhorting the Israelites to fulfil their responsibilities before the Lord, especially in the light of the preceding generation's failures. As such, Deuteronomy is a positive and optimistic book, emphasising the benefits of all the promises God made to the Israelites in Egypt. God renews the covenant He made with Abraham and repeats His promise to bless the Israelites if they will obey Him, and curse them if they disobey Him. Aspects of the Law are chosen and repeated to encourage, warn and admonish the new generation so that they will succeed in conquering Canaan, in accordance with God's wishes.

While "Deuteronomy" means "second law", the Law given here is the same as the Law originally given to Moses by the Lord. Some parts, including the 10 commandments are repeated, but the emphasis is on the first commandment: *You shall have no other gods before Me*, rather than on the sacrifices, feasts and rituals of worship. Moses is primarily concerned with Israel's relationship with God and how they must maintain this relationship as they enter a land filled with foreign peoples and their gods.

Deuteronomy is quoted more than 80 times in the New Testament (making it one of the most frequently quoted books, along with Genesis, Psalms, and Isaiah). Jesus used Deuteronomy 6:5 and 10:19 when He summarised the Law as *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*, and *Love your neighbour as yourself*. Matthew 22:37-40.

The message of Deuteronomy is that we must love the Lord and put Him first in our lives, and then let this love overflow to others. This message is as relevant today as it was for the Israelites thousands of years ago, as they prepared to enter the Promised Land.

Content

Recent history of the Israelites. 1.1 - 4:43.

Moses begins Deuteronomy by reviewing the events that had taken place since the Israelites left Horeb, 40 years previously. Horeb (the "mountain of God") includes Mt Sinai where Moses was given the Law, and where God affirmed that they were *to take possession of the land that the Lord swore He would give to them*. These events included:

- Appointment of leaders so that Moses would not have to bear the burden of leadership alone.
- Sending out spies to see what the Promised Land was like. Some of the spies reported that it was a *good land that the Lord God is giving us*.
- The unwillingness of the people to go and take the Promised Land based on the negative report of some spies. The people did not trust the Lord and rebelled against Him, even though the Lord carried them, as a *father carried his son*, all the way they went until they reached the Jordan.
- The anger of the Lord due to this rebellion and His determination that only Joshua and Caleb of the original Israelites would actually enter Canaan.
- The wanderings of the Israelites in the desert and the continued blessing of the Lord as they travelled. *The Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast desert. The forty years the Lord your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything.*



- How the Lord enabled the Israelites to defeat each of the nations they encountered on the journey north.
- How the Reubenites, Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh were allocated land on the east side of the Jordan, provided they first supported the other Israelites in conquering Canaan.
- Why Moses would not be the one to actually lead them into the Promised Land. This honour would belong to Joshua, because Moses had angered the Lord and would perish in sight of the Promised Land. See Numbers 27:12-23.

Moses then reminded the Israelites of God's requirement for obedience to His commandments. They must learn from the mistakes of the generation that died in the wilderness and *carefully observe* all of God's laws. They must not *add to* or *subtract from* any of God's commands and must *teach them* to their children and *to their children after them*. Carefully observing God's laws will show their *wisdom and understanding* to other nations, and demonstrate that *God is near*. They are to always remember the covenant that God made with them and watch themselves *very carefully* lest they become corrupt through any form of idolatry. *For the Lord your God is a consuming fire; a jealous God.*

If the Israelites provoke the Lord by any form of idolatry they will *quickly perish from the land* and be *scattered among the peoples*, with only a few surviving. Then if they seek the Lord they will *find Him*, if they *look for Him with all their heart and with all their soul*. They will be able to *return to the Lord* because He is a *merciful God who will not abandon or destroy them, or forget the covenant He made with their forefathers, which He confirmed to them by oath*. They had been shown these things so that they might know *the Lord is God, and besides Him there is no other*. He has loved them and chosen them as His people. If they will *fully acknowledge* this and *keep all of His decrees*, it will *go well* with them and they will *live long in the land* the Lord has given to them *for all time*.

Moses mentions the covenant between God and His people 27 times throughout Deuteronomy. This covenant was initially made between God and Abraham (Genesis Chapters 12-17) and then confirmed through Moses (Exodus Chapters 19-24). It stands as the foundational agreement for the nation of Israel as they occupied and lived in the Promised land, and looks forward to the New Covenant through which God would use Israel to bring His salvation to all the world in Jesus Christ. (Jeremiah 31:30-33).

Three cities of refuge were then set aside on the east of the Jordan. These were places that anyone who had unintentionally killed a person could flee to for safety.

Requirements of the Law. 4:44 – 26:19.

Moses now uses selections from the Law to highlight how the new generation of Israelites should live in covenant with their God. They must *learn them and be sure to follow them*. Chapters 4-21 are focused on ensuring the relationship between the Lord and the Israelites is maintained while Chapters 21 – 26 contain laws focused on the social life of the Israelites – how they are to deal with issues that arise within the community.

- **Obey the 10 commandments.** 5:1-33. The commandments are concerned with relationship to God and other people, and form the basis of all other laws in Israel. The first five deal with honouring the Lord, and the second five with showing respect for one's neighbour. The last commandment is broader than the others and deals with thoughts and intentions rather than with specific actions, so includes activities not included in the first nine. Moses reminded the people that when the Israelites first heard the 10 commandments there was a great demonstration of God's power. The people were told to *be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. Walk in the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.*

GOD

- 1: Do not worship any other gods
- 2: Do not make any idols
- 3: Do not misuse the name of God
- 4: Keep the Sabbath holy

MAN

- 5: Honour your father & mother
- 6: Do not murder
- 7: Do not commit adultery
- 8: Do not steal
- 9: Do not lie
- 10: Do not covet

- **Put the Lord first.** 6:1-25. Moses now emphasizes the principles behind the first commandment: *You shall have no other gods before Me*. All other commandments and laws flow from this so the Israelites must *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your*

strength. They must impress this on their children; not forget it when they enjoy the blessings of the Promised Land; and never test the Lord by following other gods. Symbols to remind them of their duty to have the Lord first should be on their hands and foreheads (phylacteries), and on the doorframes of their houses and gates (mezuzot). These symbols continue to this day.

A **tefillin** (or 'phylactery') is a small black leather box worn by Jewish men on the forehead and arms during prayer times. Tefillin contain parchment with verses from Exodus 13:1-10, Exodus 13:11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and Deuteronomy 11:13-21. Tefillin are worn as reminders to guard or protect the mind and actions from anything that might dishonour the Lord.



A **mezuzah** (Hebrew for "doorpost") contains verses from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21 on parchment in a decorative case. These verses make up the Jewish prayer "Shema Yisrael". A mezuzah is attached to the doorframe of most Jewish houses.



If the Israelites will *obey the Lord and serve Him only*, He will bless them richly and they will *prosper and be kept alive*.

- **Drive out the nations of Canaan.** 7:1-26. The Israelites were to *totally destroy* the nations of Canaan; *make no treaty with them; not intermarry with them, and show them no mercy*. If they didn't do this the foreign nations would turn them away from the Lord and they would begin to serve other gods, God's anger would then burn against them and they would be *quickly destroyed*. The Israelites should never forget that they were *a people holy to the Lord*, and that God had chosen them to be His people; *His treasured possession*. He did this because He loved them. God had been faithful to the covenant made with them, and now they had to fulfil their side of the covenant by following all of the Lord's *commands, decrees and laws*. Doing this would bring the Lord's blessing and keep them *free from every disease*. If they ever think it is too difficult to drive the nations out completely they should remember how the Lord rescued them from Egypt, and that the Lord is *a great and awesome God*. If they didn't drive the nations out completely (which is what happened) it will be a *detestable thing* to the Lord, and would bring His judgement on them (which is what happened).
- **Don't forget the Lord.** 8:1-20. God's loving discipline in the desert was *to humble you and test you in order to know what was in your heart*. Now He was bringing the Israelites into a *good land*, and they must not forget the Lord when they enjoy all of the benefits of this land. It is God who will give them *the ability to produce wealth* and who will prosper them, just as promised in His covenant. If they forget the Lord they will be no different to other nations and will be *destroyed for not obeying the Lord*.
- **Trust the Lord.** 9:1-10:11. The Israelites were about to *dispossess nations greater and stronger* than they were so Moses re-assured them that God would go before them like a *devouring fire* and subdue the nations on their behalf. Afterwards they must not say that it was because of their own righteousness that the Lord did this. They were a *stiff-necked people* and had repeatedly *provoked the Lord to anger in the desert*. An example of this was at Sinai when they quickly turned from the Lord and made the golden calf. Then they had only been spared through Moses' intercession when he reminded God that the Israelites were His people – His *inheritance*. God had even required Moses to make a new set of tablets so they would have a continual reminder to trust the Lord and obey all of His commandments.
- **Fear, love and obey the Lord.** 10:12-11:32. Now the Lord asked the Israelites *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, with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees*. He is the only God, - the One who owns *the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it*. He has proved His love to the Israelites and now they must return that love to Him by *keeping His requirements His laws and His*

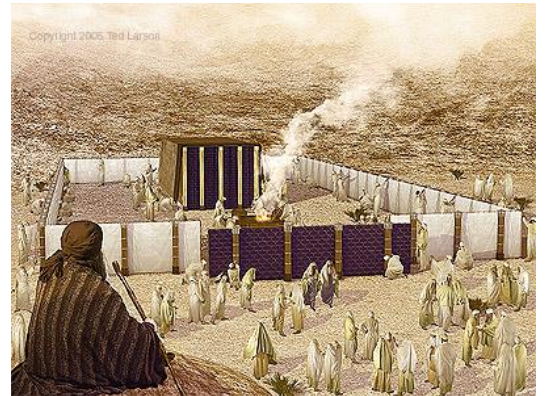
commands always. They must no longer be stiff-necked, but rather circumcise their hearts to the Lord (Jeremiah 4:4; 9:25; Romans 2:29), and *love those who are aliens.* (The concept of loving God and loving others introduced here was later developed by Jesus as being the summation of the Law. See Matthew 22:37-40). If they did this God would send rain on their new land and they would be *fully satisfied.* The Lord cares for His land and His *eyes are on it continually.* It will truly be *a land flowing with milk and honey* for them – if they will *faithfully obey* the commands Moses was giving them, and pass them on to their children. Then no-one would be able to stand against them for God had decreed *every place where you set your feet will be yours.*

Moses completes this section by summarising the covenant that God had made with the Israelites as a blessing and a curse:

- the **blessing** will come if they obey all of the commands of the Lord.
- the **curse** will come if they disobey the commands of the Lord and follow other gods.

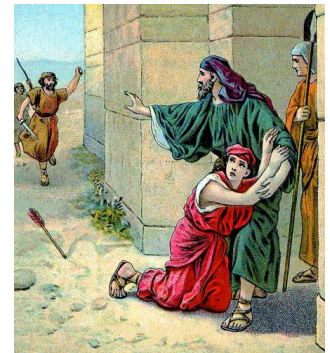
It couldn't be clearer!

- **Worship the Lord only.** 12:1-13:18. To prevent them being led astray the Israelites must *destroy completely* all places where other nations worship their gods. They must *not worship the Lord their way.* Instead they are to find *the place the Lord chooses to put His name* and bring their sacrifices and offerings there. If they do this God will give them *rest from all the enemies* around them and they will *live in safety.* They must follow the ceremonial laws God had already given them and *rejoice before the Lord* in everything they put their hands to. They must obey these regulations and it will *always go well* because they will be *doing what is good and right in the eyes of the Lord.* They will be tempted to worship other gods, but this is just God testing them to find whether they *love Him with all their heart and soul.* They must *keep His commands and obey Him; serve Him and hold fast to Him,* no matter who or what tempts them. Anything that entices them away from the Lord must be quickly destroyed.



- **Stay ceremonially clean.** 14:1-21. The Israelites must maintain their ceremonial cleanness by not eating any unclean food. This is because they are *children of the Lord – a people holy to the Lord.*
- **Support the priests and the poor.** 14:22-29. They must set aside a tenth of all that their fields produce each year and eat it in the place the Lord chooses, then every three years store it so the Levites and the poor can be supported.
- **Cancel debts and free servants every 7 years.** 15:1-23. *There will always be poor people in the land,* so the Israelites must be *open-handed* to the poor and needy. This includes cancelling debts at the end of every seven years; being generous towards poor people, and freeing slaves after seven years of service. Generosity and care for the poor are always in God's heart and must be reflected in the actions of His people!
- **Observe the Passover, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles.** 16:1-17. Requirements for observance of the three main feasts are repeated.
- **Don't make idols.** 16:21-22:7. The Israelites must not make idols or worship before the idols of other nations. Anyone violating this must be put to death after proper investigation and on the *testimony of two or three witnesses.*
- **Exercise justice in the law courts.** 16:18-20; 17:8-13. Impartial *judges and officials* must be appointed who will ensure *justice and justice alone.* Cases too difficult for judges must be brought to the priests and their decisions must be followed. Anyone acting in contempt of this must be put to death. This is so evil will be purged from Israel.
- **Only appoint a King of the Lord's choosing.** 17:14-20. If the Israelites want a King they must only appoint the King the Lord chooses. This King must be a humble servant and must revere and obey the Law.

- **Give offerings to the priests.** 18:1-8.
Priests don't have any inheritance of land so their inheritance is to be the offerings made by the people.
- **Don't imitate the detestable ways of other nations.** 18:9-12.
The Israelites must not follow the detestable ways of other nations like sacrificing of children; sorcery, witchcraft and divination. Rather they are to *be blameless before the Lord*.
- **Listen to God's prophets.** 18:14-22.
The Lord will raise up prophets and the Israelites *must listen to them*. God will put His words into the prophet's mouths and prophets must be careful to only speak the words of the Lord. The Israelites can judge whether a prophet's words have come from the Lord by whether they take place or come true.
- **Maintain the cities of refuge.** 19:1-21.
Three cities of refuge were to be set aside in convenient locations. These were places that anyone who had unintentionally killed a person could flee to for safety. If the Lord enlarged the Israelites' territory three more cities of refuge were to be set up. The cities of refuge ensured that *innocent blood* would not be shed in the land. To convict someone of a crime required more than one witness, but if someone was convicted the evil they had done should be purged *life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot*. Numbers 35:6-34, Joshua 20:1-9.
- **Trust the Lord when going to war.** 20:1-20.
When going to war the Israelites must trust that the Lord is *going before you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory*. Trusting the Lord will mean they need never fear or panic in battle. Those who won't trust the Lord should go home. When the Israelites go up against a city in the Promised Land they must destroy it completely otherwise they will *worship their gods and sin against the Lord*. For cities further afield they should first make its people an offer of peace. If this is accepted the city's people should work for them. If it is not accepted the city may be plundered.



Christians and the Jewish Law.

The Law was given so that the Israelites could have a relationship with God. If they followed the Law and completely obeyed all of God's commandments they would be righteous and could have a relationship with their righteous God. This proved to be impossible so the Law included a way by which any sins they committed could be forgiven. Sacrifices were to be made and the blood of an animal shed to make atonement for sin. The animal died so that its owner didn't have to. (The wages of sin is always death. Romans 6:23). The sacrifices had to be repeated regularly because the people sinned regularly, so an annual sacrifice was made by the High priest on behalf of all of the people. This whole system didn't work! The people couldn't keep the commandments, and the sacrifices were not able to bring about lasting forgiveness for sin. What was needed was a "once for all, for all time sacrifice". God provided this when Jesus, His Son, came as *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*. (John 1:29). When Jesus' blood was shed at the Cross, atonement was made once for all so that anyone could be righteous in God's sight (in Christ) and thus have a relationship with Him. *God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*. 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Through His life, death and resurrection Jesus has fulfilled all the requirements of the Law and Christians (who are 'in Christ') are no longer under that Law but are now under grace. Romans 8:3,4. In fulfilling the Law Jesus gave us a 'new commandment' that encompasses the whole Jewish Law (and perhaps makes even greater demands on us?) – the requirement to love others. *A new commandment I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another*. John 13:34.

Because Jesus has fulfilled the Jewish Law it no longer has any relevance for Christians (including the 10 commandments). We are to be led by the Holy Spirit, do what God wants us to do and live in love. See Romans Chapters 1-11, Mark 12:29-31; John 13:34,35; John 14:15-27; Matthew 5:17-20, 22:37-39; Ephesians 2:14-18, Colossians 2:6-23; Hebrews 10:1-18; James 2:8-13; 1 John 3 etc. Acts 15 describes how the Church Council examined this issue and decreed that Christian believers had no obligation to follow the Jewish Law. Jesus death on the Cross also put an end to the Old Testament sacrificial system which was part of the Law. The sacrifices were imperfect and have now been replaced by Jesus' one perfect sacrifice. See 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Colossians 1:15-23; 1 Peter 1:13-25; Hebrews 1:10-18; 7:23-10:18. These verses show that the new covenant makes the old obsolete.

The next set of laws are to regulate the social life of the community of Israel. They ensure the people maintain social justice in their relationships with each other so everybody gets along in safety and security.

- **Unsolved murders.** 21:1-9.
If someone is murdered and *it is not known who killed him*, a heifer shall be killed to make atonement for the man's death.
- **Intermarriage with foreign women.** 21:10-14.
Men may marry captive women but only after they have had time to mourn for their families. Captive wives must not be treated as slaves.
- **Rights of firstborn children.** 21:15-17.
If a man has sons by two wives the firstborn son has the property rights, even if the father loves the second son more.
- **Rebellious children.** 21:18-21.
If rebellious sons will not heed proper discipline they should be brought before the elders and stoned to death. This is to *purge the evil from Israel*. Isn't it great that these days we are under grace, not under this harsh Jewish law?
- **Various offences.** 21:22-22:12.
This section contains random laws including the significant statement that *anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse*. (This points to the wonderful truth that when Jesus was on the cross He took the curse of sin on Himself - the curse that we deserved. Galatians 3:13). It also contains laws about helping others and strange (to us) laws regarding things that can and cannot be mixed together.
- **Marriage violations.** 22:13-30.
Marriage vows are always sacred in God's eyes because when they are violated there is much distress for the people involved and for the community. Then laws are designed to *purge the evil from Israel*. How different from the casual regard marriage vows are so often taken these days!
- **Exclusion from the community.** 23:1-9.
A list is now given of those who are forbidden from *entering the assembly of the Lord*. The list includes those who have been emasculated; those born of forbidden marriages; Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites
- **Miscellaneous laws.** 23:9-25-19.
The laws in this section are designed to ensure purity among the Israelites and justice and honesty in their dealings with each other. The camp must be kept clean; vows must be kept; marriage must be honoured; people must be treated with respect; and the poor must be cared for. In the courts justice must be done. Within families there must be a continuation of the family line and fairness for all.
- **Firstfruits and tithes.**
Some of the firstfruits of all that is produced must be gathered and given as an offering for the priests. This is in recognition of *all the good things the Lord has given*. A tenth (tithe) of the produce is to be *given to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow*, in the third year; the *year of the tithe*. This is called the *sacred portion* and is given in obedience to the lord because of His great blessing. The tithes were always of produce (not money) so storehouse were needed associated with the temple, where the produce could be stored before distribution to the poor. Malachi 3:9-12.

After Moses had passed on all of these laws he re-emphasised why the Israelites must follow all of the Lord's commands. They were God's people; *His treasured possession*. Keeping His commands would mean He would continue to set them *high in praise, fame and honour, high above all the nations He has made* and they would be *a people holy to the Lord God*, just as He promised.



Development of the Jewish Law.

The Jewish Law (*Halakha*) developed over time as the Law that God gave to Moses was interpreted and applied to everyday life.

The *Halakha* is the collective body of Jewish religious laws: It is made up of:

- **The Written Law** is found in the first five books of the Bible (the **Torah**). It is based on the original 631 *mitzvot* (commandments), including the “10 commandments”.
- **The Oral Law** is made up of laws, statutes and legal interpretations that were believed to have been given orally by God to Moses, and then passed on in an unbroken chain from generation to generation through the Rabbis. (It is sometimes called Rabbinical Law). The Oral Law was written down after the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70 CE and is regarded as just as authoritative and inspired as the Written Law. It is a code of conduct that covers all areas of life including rituals, worship, relationships, religious observances, diet, marital relations, agricultural practices, and civil disputes.
- The Oral Law is contained in **the Mishnah**, compiled between 200–220 AD, and **the Gemara**, an open series of commentaries and debates on the Mishnah and how it relates to everyday life.
- Together the Mishnah and the Gemara make up **the Talmud**, the main text of Judaism.

Renewal of the Covenant. 27:1–30:20.

Moses called the leaders of the Israelites together and told them to write the law down on large stones as soon as they entered the Promised Land. He reminded them that they were now *the people of the Lord* and that they must *obey the Lord God and follow His commands and decrees*.

Upon entering the Promised Land six of the tribes were to go to Mt Gerizim and pronounce blessings. If the Israelites *fully obey the Lord* they would be *blessed when they come in and blessed when they go out*. The blessings would include fruitful crops and animals; defeat of enemies; prosperity; and bounty. The Israelites would *always be at the top; never at the bottom*.

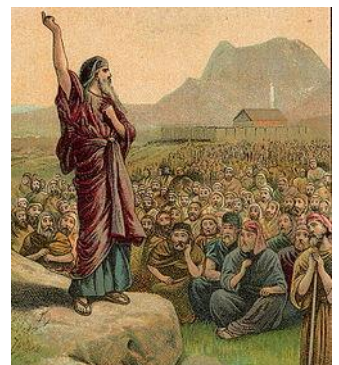
The other six tribes were to go to Mt Ebal and pronounce curses. *Cursed are those who do not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out*. The curses would include loss of crops and animals; confusion; diseases; droughts and plagues; defeat by enemies; marriage and family breakdown, and domination by other nations. If the Israelites didn't obey the Lord they would be *unsuccessful in everything* they did. Though they were *numerous as the stars in the sky* they would become *few in number* because they did not obey the Lord. The Lord would scatter them among the nations *from one end of the earth to another* where they would *find no repose, no resting place*. This, of course, is what happened, and the Jewish nation became spread throughout the world, suffering constant persecution, even to this day.

Moses had now made clear the terms of the covenant by stating the results of obedience and disobedience to the Lord. He then repeated God's offer of blessing for obedience or cursing for disobedience and reminded the Israelites how they had previously promised to obey the Lord, but had quickly turned away and followed idols. Now they had a very important choice to make:

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to Him, and to keep His commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him. For the Lord is your life, and He will give you many years in the land He swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. 30:15-20.

As they entered the Promised Land the Israelites certainly knew that they must comply with all the terms of the covenant that God had made with them long ago. They agreed to comply with the covenant and follow the Lord, but history shows that these were just empty words.



Transition of the leadership from Moses to Joshua. 31:1 - 34:12.

Moses was 120 years old and recognised that he could *no longer lead* the Israelites. The Lord had said he would not go into the Promised Land because of an act of disobedience (Numbers 20:6-12). Moses reminded the people that the Lord had promised to go before them into Canaan and would *destroy the nations* before them. They were to be *strong and courageous* because the Lord would never leave or forsake them.

The leadership was to be handed over to Joshua so Moses encouraged him to also be strong and courageous. Joshua was *not to be afraid or discouraged*, characteristics required by all effective leaders.

Moses then carried out a number of final acts:

- Moses wrote down the Law and gave it to the priests as its custodians. The Law was placed in the Ark of the Covenant where it would remain as a witness to the people. Moses reminded the priests of their responsibilities to read the Law to the people; to keep the Law, and to pass it on to future generations.
- Along with Joshua Moses met with the Lord before the Tent of Meeting. There the Lord told them that the people would soon rebel against the Lord, and *forsake Me and break the covenant I made with them*.
- Moses commissioned Joshua for the leadership and God and encouraged Joshua to *be strong and courageous, for you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them, and I will be with you*.
- Moses wrote a song (called the Song of Moses (32:1-43) and recited it to the whole assembly. In his song Moses proclaimed the greatness of the Lord: *He is the Rock; His works are perfect and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He*. He recalled the faithfulness of the Lord as He led His people through the desert, even when they were unfaithful. Moses then spoke prophetically reminding the people that the Lord would judge His people for their rebellion but would remain compassionate towards them. *I myself am He. There is no god besides me*. God would avenge the blood shed by His people *and make atonement for His land and people*.
- Moses reminded Joshua that the words he had spoken were *not just idle words – they are your life*.
- Moses blessed each of the tribes in turn. (The custom of a blessing your children and grandchildren before you died was common at the time – and is a custom well worth reviving).

God told Moses he was to die on Mount Nebo, near to the Jordan River and overlooking the Promised Land. *You will see the land only from a distance. You will not enter the land I am giving to the people of Israel*.

Moses climbed Mount Nebo and looked over to the Promised Land before he died. *No-one knows where his grave is*. Moses was 120 years old when he died *yet his eyes were not weak, nor his strength gone*. The Israelites grieved for him for 30 days then Joshua was *filled with the spirit of wisdom* as he began his task of leading the Israelites across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land.

The story of the crossing of the Jordan and the conquest of Canaan is told in the next book after Deuteronomy, the book of Joshua.

The writer of Deuteronomy finishes the book with a wonderful testimony about Moses: *Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt - to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel*.



Discussion questions

1. Why was the book of Deuteronomy written as part of the 5 books of the Torah? How does Deuteronomy link with the other books? Is the Law described in Deuteronomy the same as the Law in the other books?
2. What characteristics made Moses such a great leader?
3. In Deuteronomy Moses restates the covenant God made with the Israelites and clearly defines God's requirements for maintaining this covenant. What was the covenant? Why was it necessary to restate the covenant? What were God requirements on the Israelites relating to the covenant? What blessings or curses would result from their keeping or not keeping the covenant? Did the Israelites keep the covenant? What happened to them as a result? Is the covenant still relevant for Israelites today? Is it relevant for Christians today?
4. Deuteronomy restates quite a few aspects of the Law. How should Christians respond to these aspects of the Law when we are "not under law, but under grace"?
5. What can you learn from the book of Deuteronomy about how God involves Himself in the life of His people?
6. What have you learned from your study of Deuteronomy? How will you apply this in your life in the future?