

# DEUTERONOMY - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

## THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

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### What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
  - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. What picture of God would you have if you had only the book of Deuteronomy? Where and when was this book given to Moses and written down? (see Deuteronomy 1:1)

“In all the Hebrew manuscripts the Pentateuch forms one roll or volume divided into larger and smaller sections called *parshioth* and *sedarim*. It is not easy to say when it was divided into five books. This was probably first done by the Greek translators of the book, whom the Vulgate follows. The fifth of these books was called by the Greeks Deuteronomion, i.e., the second law, hence our name Deuteronomy, or a second statement of the laws already promulgated. The Jews designated the book by the two first Hebrew words that occur, *‘Elle haddabharim*, i.e., “These are the words.” They divided it into eleven *parshioth*. In the English Bible it contains thirty-four chapters.

“**It consists chiefly of three discourses delivered by Moses a short time before his death.** They were spoken to all Israel in the plains of Moab, in the eleventh month of the last year of their wanderings.

“The **first discourse** (1-4:40) recapitulates the chief events of the last forty years in the wilderness, with earnest exhortations to obedience to the divine ordinances, and warnings against the danger of forsaking the God of their fathers.

“The **second discourse** (5-26:19) is in effect the body of the whole book. The first address is introductory to it. It contains practically a recapitulation of the law already given by God at Mount Sinai, together with many admonitions and injunctions as to the course of conduct they were to follow when they were settled in Canaan.

“The **concluding discourse** (ch. 27–30) relates almost wholly to the solemn sanctions of the law, the blessings to the obedient, and the curse that would fall on the rebellious. He solemnly adjures them to adhere faithfully to the covenant God had made with them, and so secure for themselves and their posterity the promised blessings.

“These addresses to the people are followed by what may be called **three appendices**, namely:

- (1) a song which God had commanded Moses to write (32:1–47);
- (2) the blessings he pronounced on the separate tribes (ch. 33); and
- (3) the story of his death (32:48–52) and burial (ch. 34), written by some other hand, probably that of Joshua.

“These farewell addresses of Moses to the tribes of Israel he had so long led in the wilderness glow in each line with the emotions of a great leader recounting to his contemporaries the marvelous story of their common experience. The enthusiasm they kindle, even to-day, though obscured by translation, reveals their matchless adaptation to the circumstances under which they

were first spoken. Confidence for the future is evoked by remembrance of the past. The same God who had done mighty works for the tribes since the Exodus would cover their head in the day of battle with the nations of Palestine, soon to be invaded. Their great lawgiver stands before us, vigorous in his hoary age, stern in his abhorrence of evil, earnest in his zeal for God, but mellowed in all relations to earth by his nearness to heaven. The commanding wisdom of his enactments, the dignity of his position as the founder of the nation and the first of prophets, enforce his utterances. But he touches our deepest emotions by the human tenderness that breathes in all his words. Standing on the verge of life, he speaks as a father giving his parting counsels to those he loves; willing to depart and be with God he has served so well, but fondly lengthening out his last farewell to the dear ones of earth. No book can compare with Deuteronomy in its mingled sublimity and tenderness.' Geikie, Hours, etc.

"The whole style and method of this book, its tone and its peculiarities of conception and expression, show that it must have come from one hand. That the author was none other than Moses is established by the following considerations:

(1.) The uniform tradition both of the Jewish and the Christian Church down to recent times.

(2.) The book professes to have been written by Moses (1:1; 29:1; 31:1, 9–11, etc.), and was obviously intended to be accepted as his work.

(3.) The incontrovertible testimony of our Lord and his apostles (Matt. 19:7, 8; Mark 10:3, 4; John 5:46, 47; Acts 3:22; 7:37; Rom. 10:19) establishes the same conclusion.

(4.) The frequent references to it in the later books of the canon (Joshua 8:31; 1 Kings 2:9; 2 Kings 14:6; 2 Chronicles 23:18; 25:4; 34:14; Ezra 3:2; 7:6; Nehemiah 8:1; Daniel 9:11, 13) prove its antiquity; and

(5) the archaisms found in it are in harmony with the age in which Moses lived.

(6.) Its style and allusions are also strikingly consistent with the circumstances and position of Moses and of the people at that time.

"This body of positive evidence cannot be set aside by the conjectures and reasonings of modern critics, who contended that the book was somewhat like a forgery, introduced among the Jews some seven or eight centuries after the Exodus." (*Easton's Bible Dictionary*)

This book reveals the final instructions of the great prophet Moses to the children of Israel. He did his very best to pass on to them his wonderful relationship and understanding of the God he loved. It was written in the final month of Moses' life as they were camped across the Jordan from Jericho. It was his final gift to them. So many of their future problems are spelled out in its discourses. If the children of Israel had only heeded its instruction the history of the Old Testament would have been completely different.

2. Why does Moses give a completely different reason for keeping the Sabbath in Deuteronomy 5:12-15 than what he gave in Exodus 20:8-11? Which form of the commandment do you think was given by God and written on the tables of stone? (Deuteronomy 5:22) Does this mean that God is not too particular about the reasons why we are to worship Him?

This is not a change in the reason for observing the Sabbath but an addition. God had told them clearly even in Exodus that one of the reasons for obeying Him was that He had brought them out

of Egypt (Exodus 20:2). The same God who made us in the beginning—and thus should be worshiped for that reason—has also set us free from sin and all its consequences, symbolized here by deliverance from Egypt, and thus should be worshiped for rescuing us. God continues to add meaning to the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath all through Scripture. (See Exodus 31:12-17; Isaiah 66:23; Ezekiel 20:12,20; Mark 2:27,28)

3. What is the purpose of the whole theme of “obey Me and I will bless you, disobey Me and I will curse/destroy you” in the book of Deuteronomy? (Deuteronomy 8:18-20; 11:26-29; 27:11-28:68; 30:1-20)

This is the kind of language people who are at the very basic levels of moral thinking understand. God always has to deal with people where they are in their understanding, and not where He is or even where He wishes they were! Since “by beholding we become changed” God is here describing the terrible consequences of following the evil ways of the nations they were supposed to drive out of the land. Subsequent history proves that God was right in every detail!

4. What are the real reasons that God destroyed the inhabitants of Canaan and gave the land to the Israelites? (Deuteronomy 9:1-6; Compare 9:27-29 Compare Exodus 23:27-31; 34:10-17; Leviticus 18; Numbers 14:13-19; 33:50-56; Deuteronomy 12:29-31; 13:12-16) Doesn't God seem very paranoid about any of the Israelites worshiping any other “gods”? (Deuteronomy 17:2-7)
- a. Because the Canaanites are wicked. (Leviticus 18:24,25; Numbers 33:55,56; Deuteronomy 9:4,5)
  - b. Because God promised this land to your ancestors. (Exodus 32:13; Deuteronomy 9:5; 10:15; 11:9)
  - c. To uphold God's reputation. (Exodus 32:11,12; Numbers 14:13-19; Deuteronomy 9:28,29)
  - d. Because worshiping their “gods” would be a fatal mistake for you. (Exodus 23:33; 34:12-17; Leviticus 18:21,24,25; Deuteronomy 12:27-29; 17:2-7; 13:5-18; 29:17-28)
  - e. To prove that there is no other God like Jehovah. (Exodus 34:10-16; Deuteronomy 10:17)
  - f. Following their cultural practices would be a fatal mistake for you. (Leviticus 18:2-30; Numbers 33:55,56)
  - g. To fill the land with righteousness and holy living. (Deuteronomy 11:8-25; 13:3,4)

But God also loved all these other peoples: Deuteronomy 10:18,19; Exodus 22:18; 23:9; Leviticus 19:34. See question #21 below. See also “**Was God Fair to the Egyptians and Canaanites?**” (Handout Exodus #5)

5. In light of God's statements that He wanted Moses to step aside and allow Him to destroy the Israelites, (Exodus 32:7-10; Numbers 14:11,12; Deuteronomy 9:12-14) why does Moses say, “It was not His will to destroy you”? (Deuteronomy 10:10, *NIV*) What was really going on between God and Moses? Did Moses succeed in convincing God to change His mind?

If God in fact knows the future as suggested elsewhere in the Bible, then we must accept that God knew what Moses would say under these circumstances and even what He Himself would do in response. In this light, there seems to be only one reason for God to behave in such a way. It is

to demonstrate before the universe the truth about Moses' relationship to God. While God already knew what Moses would do and say, the rest of the universe needed to see this to understand why God felt about him the way that He did. God knew that He would soon bring Moses right into heaven to live among the angels and they needed a chance to see how loyal and righteous Moses really was.

6. Why did God take so long to say exactly what it was that He wanted of the people—reverence, love, obedience, faithfulness (trust) and worshipful praise? (Deuteronomy 10:12-22) Is there anything in these verses that we would object to today? Why did Moses wait until Deuteronomy for giving the “great commandment” (Deuteronomy 6:4-6)? Shouldn't he have started with this commandment?

God gave His two great commandments: Love God first and fully (Deuteronomy 6:4-6) and your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18) at times when the people were more settled and reflective. These ideal goals are spelled out in several places: Deuteronomy 10:12-22; 11:13,22; 24:5-22; Leviticus 19). But God realized that most of the people were not ready for principled living yet. Moses certainly understood these principles but to most of the people it was still “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”. (Exodus 21:23-25; Leviticus 24:19,20; Deuteronomy 19:16-21; See Matthew 5:38-42) Notice that all of God's laws are given for our own good.

7. What was God really asking them to do when He said, “Remember these commands and cherish them. Tie them on your arms and wear them on your foreheads as a reminder?” (Deuteronomy 11:18) If He really commanded them to do this, why did He speak against it in Matthew 23:5?

God was asking them to make Him central in their lives. He was trying to get them to realize that this world is primarily a “prep” school for the hereafter. It was not His intention that they come to wear these items as some sort of badge of sainthood, but as a reminder for themselves and their children that God is to be number one in their lives. He spoke against it in the New Testament precisely because they had totally misconstrued His intentions.

God wanted them to put Him first in everything they thought (forehead) and did (hand).

8. How could Moses make the statement, “When that time comes, you must not do as you have been doing. Until now you have all been worshiping as you please?” (Deuteronomy 12:8 compare Judges 17:6; 21:25)

A society in which everyone does whatever he wants to do is total chaos unless that society is totally controlled by love and righteousness. The last three chapters of Judges illustrate this clearly. In this passage God is telling the people that they must come together and worship in one place following the guidelines He gives them or it will be disastrous for them.

9. Should we still be following the advice in Deuteronomy 13:1-3? God Himself seemed to use miracles to convince even Pharaoh to believe in Him, but now He says, “A prophet or an interpreter of dreams may promise a miracle or a wonder, in order to lead you to worship and serve gods that you have not worshiped before. Even if what he promises comes true, do not pay any attention to him.” (GNB) What criteria is God suggesting that we should use to judge miracle workers?

God is here spelling out the principle that we need to think clearly through what we are doing and why we are doing it. Religious claims are everywhere, even in our day, but God is warning us that the Devil also has the power even to perform “miracles” (Matthew 24:4, 24; 2 Corinthians 11:14; Revelation 13:14). Everything must be investigated thoroughly in order to protect us from being led astray.

10. Why does God forbid the eating of blood? (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 3:17; 7:25-27; **17:1-16**; 19:26; Deuteronomy 12:16,23-25; 15:23; compare Acts 15:28,29) Why is it that if you live in the original part of the promised land, you are not to kill and eat any of the sacrifices at home, but if the land is expanded and you live in an outlying area, it is okay to kill and eat the sacrifices at home? (Deuteronomy 12:14; Compare 12:20-21)

God repeatedly told them not to eat blood. (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 3:17; 7:23-27; **17:1-16**; 19:26; Deuteronomy 12:16,23-25; 15:23; compare Acts 15:28,29) Earlier He told them not to eat the fat either. (Leviticus 3:17; 7:23-25) There are several possible reasons why God gave these commands. Blood represents life. In ancient cultures many people believed that if you ate the blood you would somehow incorporate the strength of the creature whose blood you ate. God explains that blood does represent life and all life belongs to Him as the only Giver of life. Blood also carries the impurities from the body in it. It, and fat, are what gives the meat its flavor. God is saying here that men should only eat meat as a necessary means to sustain life and not for the pure pleasure of its taste. Blood carries various kinds of disease as well. The young Christian church felt that these prohibitions should also apply to Christians. (See Acts 15:28,29)

11. Why would God forbid them to shave the forehead (the front of the head) as a sign of mourning? (Deuteronomy 14:1) Why would God forbid them to boil a kid in its mother's milk? (Compare Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21; compare Leviticus 22:28 and Deuteronomy 22:6)

Tablets found at Ras Shamra, the ancient Ugarit, show that it was the custom of the ancient worshippers of Baal and others to cut themselves and shave themselves in certain ways to indicate mourning and attempting to get their “god’s” attention. (Compare 1 Kings 18:28; Jeremiah 16:6; 41:5 and 47:5; see also Leviticus 21:5; Ezekiel 7:18; and Micah 1:16) Boiling a kid (a young goat or sheep) in its mother's milk was a similar custom of the ancient Baal fertility religion. See **Exodus Teacher's Guide** question #18. God is doing everything possible to warn the people of the dangers of getting involved in these idolatrous rites.

“The prohibition against boiling a young goat has received no entirely satisfactory explanation. Perhaps it attacked a pagan fertility rite, had a humane basis, or was connected with the Feast of Harvest. Since the statute prohibits cooking a kid in the milk of its own mother, its symbolism could have been focused on those who looked contemptuously on the relationship ordained of God between mother and child or on those who placed so low a value on life as to cook a young kid in what should have given it life. Later Judaism extended this to prohibit eating meat with any dairy product in the same meal, going beyond the directive in the text.” (*Women's Study Bible*)

“A prohibition against imitating the superstitious rites of the idolaters in Egypt, who, at the end of their harvest, seethed a kid in its mother's milk and sprinkled the broth as a magical charm on

their gardens and fields, to render them more productive the following season.” (*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (1871); Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown - article on Exodus 23:19)

“Unlike the Canaanites who boiled young goats alive in the milk of their mothers as a sacrifice to fertility gods, Israel was to practice a more humane method of animal sacrifice. Israel was to be different from its neighbors—that is, *holy*.” (*Nelson’s Study Bible*)

12. Why does God say to them, you are free to “spend (the tithe) on whatever you want—beef, lamb, wine, beer. . . eat and enjoy yourself” (Deuteronomy 14:22-27, GNB)? Should we return to this custom today? (Please note that these are the strongest forms of alcoholic beverage mentioned in the Bible)

There are many things that are not good for us that God does not at first specifically forbid. In this passage, God is saying that to worship Him should be foremost in our thinking, and even doing so in a less than ideal way is better than not doing it at all. Similar statements are made about **divorce** (Deuteronomy 22:19,29; 24:1-4; Matthew 19:4-8; Exodus 21:7-11; Deuteronomy 21:10-17), **polygamy** (Leviticus 18:18; Deuteronomy 17:17), **slavery** (Exodus 21:16,20; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 4:1) God goes on to clearly spell out the hazards of **alcohol** (Leviticus 10:9; Proverbs 31:4-7; 20:1; 23:29-33; Habakkuk 2:15) Later God spells out the ideal (1 Corinthians 10:31; 3:16,17; 6:19,20; 9:27) and explains what the final result will be (1 Corinthians 6:10).

13. Deuteronomy seems to have a “kinder, gentler” approach to almost everything. Why would the previous books be written in harsher language? Why the change? Did God change, did Moses change, or had the people changed?

God is here seeking to bring the people up a little higher in their understanding of Him and His requirements. When they first came out of slavery it was difficult for Moses to speak to them in these more gracious terms. Later as they came to experience God’s love and daily care, they would hopefully be prepared to “grow up” a bit.

14. Who wrote Deuteronomy 34—the account of Moses’ death? If it was not written by Moses, does that mean it is not inspired?

There are many parts of the Scripture for which we do not know the author—Judges, 1&2 Kings, many Psalms, etc. This does not mean these portions are uninspired. The only thing that determines that something is inspired is that God wants us to know it and it is true. There are even parts of the Scripture that we regard as “inspired” that are not true! (See Genesis 3:4,5; 1 Kings 13:18) But these are accurate representations of what actually happened. It was probably Joshua who wrote Deuteronomy 34. Who knew Moses better? And Joshua probably wrote Joshua as well, so we know that he was capable of writing “inspired” Scripture.

15. What do you think of Moses’ final words to the people in Deuteronomy 27:1-33:29? Does it sound like a parent speaking to his children?

This is Moses’ final passionate speech to the people that he had cared for like a tender mother for 40 years. If you had been Moses what would you have said? It was also God’s last chance to

speaking through this great man. Both of these “parents” wanted to do everything they could to instruct the people so no one could say they were not warned!

16. How long is the “forever” in Deuteronomy 15:17? (Compare Exodus 21:6) Does this shed any light on other uses of the word “forever” in the Bible? (Compare Revelation 14:9-11)

The following note, abbreviated from *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* by Arndt and Gingrich, may be helpful. “To the ancient near-eastern mind the vast stretches of time that we try to envision as ‘forever’ were unfathomable. To them the term forever just meant ‘as long as it is supposed to last.’ The Greek lexicon describes this as ‘of time to come which, if it has no end, is also known as eternity.’” While these verses suggest that forever does not have to go on for a long time, the righteous can be assured that eternal life will have no end because “there will be no more death.” (Revelation 21:4; compare 20:14) See ***Exodus Teacher’s Guide*** question #14 and *The Final End of Sin and Sinners*, section on “How long is Forever, Eternal, Everlasting?”

17. What do you think of the uncannily precise predictions of what would happen to the children of Israel if they turned away from God to serve other “gods”? (for example: Deuteronomy 7:3-6; 11:16-17; **28:15-68**) Didn’t virtually all these predictions come to pass almost exactly as He had predicted?

This may be the best evidence in the whole of Scripture that God can foresee the future. With warnings as specific as these, how could the Israelites proceed in the way they did to wander away from God in almost every conceivable way?

18. What was the purpose of all the detailed instructions about going to war, if they were not supposed to fight? (Deuteronomy 20) Why do you suppose they were to treat the peoples of Canaan differently than the peoples of other areas that they might conquer in later years? Did they give the people of Jericho or Ai a chance to surrender as they were instructed? (Deuteronomy 20:10-12)

See ***Exodus Teacher’s Guide*** question #8 and Section III entitled “DESTRUCTION DESCRIBED AS AN ACT OF GOD’S PEOPLE UNDER HIS DIRECT GUIDANCE” in *The Final End of Sin and Sinners*. God never commanded them to “go up and fight” (Deuteronomy 1:41). The disastrous results of each of their attempts to proceed without God’s guidance should have made it clear to them that they were totally dependent on Him.

19. Why did Moses give them the divorce laws? (Deuteronomy 24:1-4 Compare Matthew 5:31,32; 19:3-10; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18 but note Malachi 2:16)

See question #12 above. Divorce was never God’s plan. (See Genesis 2:24; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31) Adam was given one wife. The experience of millions down through the millennia is clear evidence that neither polygamy nor divorce is God’s ideal. But God also knows that even He must speak to people where they are in their understanding. This is the way He deals with those who are too stubborn to recognize the wisdom of His ideal commands.

20. Why would God ask them to exclude from the assembly for 10 or more generations any child born illegitimately? (Deuteronomy 23:2) Why were sexually deformed males also excluded? (Deuteronomy 23:1) Why were women excluded? Do we have any information about how some of these illegitimate children may have been conceived? (Deuteronomy 23:17,18)

This is another chapter dealing with issues that they were going to face as they entered the land of Canaan. This is not a command against Israelites born out of wedlock. This was a prohibition against children who might be born as a result of heathen fertility practices. (Deuteronomy 23:17,18) Such foreigners who might be very prone to lead the children of Israel to other “gods” were forbidden to participate in their sanctuary worship service and not from salvation as such. (Nehemiah 13:1,7; Lamentations 1:10; Isaiah 56:3,5) There were a number of ancient religions that castrated males who wanted to be especially dedicated to the “gods”. (See Leviticus 21:20; Daniel 1:3) But on a later occasion a Eunuch was highly honored by God. (See Acts 8:27,40) Eunuchs were even employed by the kings of Israel and Judah (2 Kings 9:32; Jeremiah 29:2) There was a lot of religious prostitution in ancient times. (1 Kings 14:23,24; 15:12; 2 Kings 23:7; Jeremiah 3:2)

21. How could they spare the family of Rahab after all that God had said about Canaanites, prostitutes, etc.? After the specific instructions regarding Moabites and Ammonites given in Deuteronomy 23:3-6, how could they elect David as their most famous king when his great grandmother was a Moabitess and his great, great grandmother was a Canaanite prostitute? (Matthew 1:5,6; Ruth 4:13-22) Why didn't they at least keep quiet about it? Does it sometimes seem like God is saying, “Do as I say, and not as I do?” Why would Jesus then choose this exact family as the ancestors of King David and later of Jesus Himself? Is He taking delight in breaking His own rules?

God is here demonstrating that He values and deals with people on the basis of their individual characters and not just as groups. The stories of Tamar (Genesis 38), Rahab (Joshua 2) and Ruth (the book of Ruth) are clear evidence that God loves and cares for anyone who responds to His love. Remember that every single person who has ever lived on this earth will be resurrected and judged at the end in light of the life which he lived. (John 5:28,29)

22. What was the purpose of the Levirate marriage law? (Deuteronomy 25:5-10) If it were in force today, do you think you would comply?

This law was a common one among ancient peoples. It is still practiced in some places today. The purpose of this law was to maintain the family land and the line of succession which was very important to Israelites. It primarily served as a kind of social security system to protect women who had lost their husbands. In their way of thinking, when a man lost his wife, he had lost a precious possession. By contrast, when a woman lost her husband, she has lost her owner! In some parts of Africa today many of these traditions are practiced. Some languages don't even have a word to describe an unmarried adult female! She is supposed to be attached to some man!

23. Does Deuteronomy 29:17-28 make you think of a kind and loving God who is forgiveness personified?

This is a very forceful direct warning of the dangers that they are headed for! These are not punishments from God but direct consequences of their behaviors.

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k hart@llu.edu