

Present Truth in Deuteronomy

Preamble to Deuteronomy

Lesson #1 for October 2, 2021

Scriptures: Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-17; Genesis 3:1-7; 12:1-3; Acts 7:20-36; Exodus 19:4-8.

1. Deuteronomy was written about 1405 B.C. by Moses while the children of Israel were camped on the edge of the Jordan valley across from Jericho. Moses was giving the children of Israel final instructions before entering Palestine. The book consists of four discourses or sermons that Moses prepared for giving to the people.
2. The book of Deuteronomy is the fifth and last book of the Pentateuch. It contains Moses's farewell address to Israel before they entered the Promised Land. As such, this book is marked by a sense of urgency. **Moses was about to die and to leave his people. Therefore, the purpose of his last words was to remind them of the most important teachings of God. Thus, this book is an exposition of the Israelite faith—the textbook for the leaders of the people in order to keep them on the right track.**
3. Lesson Themes:
 - ***The God of history.*** As Moses addresses his people, he reminds them of the past events of history in which God saved them from slavery and took them out of Egypt through the hardships of the desert.
 - ***The God of love.*** Because God is love, He reaches out to His people and fights for them. In response, God's people will learn to love their God.
 - ***God's covenant.*** This reciprocal relationship between God and His people takes the form of a contract, a covenant between God and Israel.
 - ***God's people.*** Israel is the people of the covenant. By no means does this designation in any way suggest that they are superior to other peoples. This covenant, which was initiated with Abraham, implies Israel's holiness, and their commitment through love to fear God and obey His commandments.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 13.^{†§}
4. The history of our world from the beginning may seem to have moved slowly at first. Almost half of the history of our world happened before Moses was born, and it is mostly recorded in the book of Genesis. We know very little about that period of time. So, what are the most important things we need to learn from how it all started?
5. First of all, we need to remember that 1 John 4:8 tells us that “**God is love.**” These words may seem to be very simple; but, the ideas are profound. What is implied by the idea that the essence of God is love? Are we really capable of understanding that? At least, we must agree that it is very good news. **Could it be true that the love of God permeates the entire universe except for our little world?** Are we prepared to love God back? Or, will we use our freedom to hate Him? Or, ignore Him?

Deuteronomy 6:5: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Deuteronomy 6:5). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].[‡]

Mark 12:30: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all

your mind, and with all your strength.”—*Good News Bible*.*

6. To be genuine, love must be freely given. God cannot force love; the moment He tries to do that, it is no longer love. But, God is not only love Himself, but also He chooses to give us the ability to love Him. And He challenges us to love Him back.
7. The saddest story of our entire universe is that one of the covering cherubs, Lucifer by name, chose to rebel against God while living in God’s very presence. Lucifer did not want to love, and he did not want the universe to be ruled by love. The war in heaven took place before this world was created; and Lucifer, now Satan, having been cast down to this earth, was ready to attack Adam and Eve.

Isaiah 14:12-14: ¹² “King of Babylonia, bright morning star, you have fallen from heaven! In the past you conquered nations, but now you have been thrown to the ground. ¹³You were determined to climb up to heaven and to place your throne above the highest stars. You thought you would sit like a king on that mountain in the north where the gods assemble. ¹⁴You said you would climb to the tops of the clouds and be like the Almighty.”—*Good News Bible*.*

Ezekiel 28:12-17: ¹² “Mortal man,” he said, “grieve for the fate that is waiting for the king of Tyre. Tell him what I, the Sovereign LORD, am saying: you were once an example of perfection. How wise and handsome you were! ¹³You lived in Eden, the garden of God, and wore gems of every kind: rubies and diamonds; topaz, beryl, carnelian, and jasper; sapphires, emeralds, and garnets. You had ornaments of gold. They were made for you on the day you were created. ¹⁴I put a terrifying angel there to guard you. You lived on my holy mountain and walked among sparkling gems. ¹⁵**Your conduct was perfect from the day you were created until you began to do evil.** ¹⁶You were busy buying and selling, and this led you to violence and sin. So I forced you to leave my holy mountain, and the angel who guarded you drove you away from the sparkling gems. ¹⁷You were proud of being handsome, and your fame made you act like a fool. Because of this I hurled you to the ground and left you as a warning to other kings.”—*Good News Bible*.*†

Revelation 12:7: Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, who fought back with his angels.—*Good News Bible*.*

8. When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He gave them one simple prohibition.

Genesis 2:16-17: ¹⁶He said to him, “You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, ¹⁷except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad. You must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day.”—*Good News Bible*.*

9. But, as we all know, Adam and Eve disobeyed.

Genesis 3:1-7: ¹ Now the snake was the most cunning animal that the LORD God had made. The snake asked the woman, “Did God really tell you not to eat fruit from any tree in the garden?”

² “We may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden,” the woman answered, ³ “except the tree in the middle of it. God told us not to eat the fruit of that tree or even touch it; if we do, we will die.”

⁴ The snake replied, “That’s not true; you will not die. ⁵God said that, because he knows that when you eat it you will be like God and know what is good and what is bad.” [After they ate the fruit, they knew good and bad; but, they did not become like God!]

⁶ The woman saw how beautiful the tree was and how good its fruit would be to eat, and she thought how wonderful it would be to become wise. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, and he also ate it. ⁷As soon as they had eaten it, they were given understanding and realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and covered themselves.—*Good News Bible*.* [What did they use to sew?][‡]

10. After sin entered our world, things went from bad to worse. It was so bad that Genesis 6:5, *NKJV** tells us that “every intent of the thoughts of his [man’s] heart was only evil continually.”[‡]

11. One might think that drowning all but eight in a flood would be a sufficient warning and a sufficient lesson so that those who were descendants of Noah would think they needed to obey God in every detail of their lives. However, just the opposite was true!

Genesis 11:1-9: ¹ At first, the people of the whole world had only one language and used the same words. ²As they wandered about in the East, they came to a plain in Babylonia and settled there. ³They said to one another, “Come on! Let’s make bricks and bake them hard.” So they had bricks to build with and tar to hold them together. ⁴They said, “Now let’s build a city with a tower that reaches the sky, so that we can make a name for ourselves and not be scattered all over the earth.”

⁵ Then the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which those men had built, ⁶and he said, “Now then, these are all one people and they speak one language; this is just the beginning of what they are going to do. Soon they will be able to do anything they want! ⁷Let us go down and mix up their language so that they will not understand one another.” ⁸So the LORD scattered them all over the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹The city was called Babylon, because there the LORD mixed up the language of all the people, and from there he scattered them all over the earth.—*Good News Bible*.*

When the tower had been partially completed, a portion of it was occupied as a dwelling place for the builders; other apartments, splendidly furnished and adorned, were devoted to their idols. The people rejoiced in their success, and praised the gods of silver and gold, and set themselves against the Ruler of heaven and earth.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 119.2. [Building stopped because they could not communicate.][‡]

12. As a result, God found it necessary to confuse the languages so that people would be scattered across the face of the earth. Later, God had to start over again with His friend Abram.

Genesis 12:1-3: ¹The LORD said to Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father’s home, and go to a land that I am going to show you. ²I will give you many descendants, and they will become a great nation. I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you,
But I will curse those who curse you.

And through you I will bless all the nations.”—*Good News Bible*.*

13. Even in those very first words when talking to Abram/Abraham, it is clear that God intended for His blessings and His words to be spread to the entire world—to all the nations. Clearly, that did not happen. But, after Jesus came and lived and died on this earth, Paul, picking up the torch, wrote Galatians 3:7-9.

Galatians 3:7-9: ⁷You should realize then, that the real descendants of Abraham are the people who have faith. ⁸The scripture predicted that God would put the Gentiles right with himself through faith. And so the scripture announced the Good News to Abraham: **“Through you God will bless the whole human race.”** ⁹Abraham believed and was blessed; so all who believe are blessed as he was.—*Good News Bible*.*[†]

14. After working with Abraham’s descendants for about 1800 years, God sent His Son to try to convince those Bible-believing, health-reforming, Sabbathkeeping adventists—they were very much looking forward to the coming of the Messiah/Christ—to truly love Him and obey Him. Unfortunately, He was not successful in that attempt. But, as a result of His coming, living, dying, and rising to life again, the Christian church was started.
15. Many things have happened since Christianity began. Think about the hundreds of years of persecution and, then, the corruption that came into the church by the mingling of pagan rituals and feast days with the true teachings of God’s Son. It was necessary for God to call for a partial reformation in the 16th century. Martin Luther and others led out in that great reform which we call *the Reformation*.
16. So, today, don’t we, as Seventh-day Adventists, believe that God has chosen us to take up the torch to carry the gospel to the world?
17. But, God went beyond just what He did with Abraham and, later, in the days of Moses. He called the children of Israel out of Egypt and had an encounter with them—an epiphany—at Mount Sinai. Was God fair to the Egyptians and the Canaanites? Did all of those first-born in Egypt who died really deserve to die? And what about the soldiers who drowned at the bottom of the Red Sea? Throughout Scripture, there are many other questions like this that are a challenge to answer. Why did God do this? Why did He do that? Why did God place the children of Israel in Palestine at the crossroads of three continents? What did He want them to do?

Exodus 19:4-8: ⁴ “You saw what I, the LORD, did to the Egyptians and how I carried you as an eagle carries her young on her wings, and brought you here to me. ⁵Now, **if you will obey me and keep my covenant**, you will be my own people. The whole earth is mine, but **you will be my chosen people, ⁶a people dedicated to me alone, and you will serve me as priests.**” ⁷So Moses went down and called the leaders of the people together and told them everything that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸Then all the **people answered together, “We will do everything that the LORD has said,”** and Moses reported this to the LORD.—*Good News Bible*.*[†]
[Compare Exodus 24:3,7.][‡]

18. However, as we study the history of the Israelites, we see that they were constantly

focused on the privileges that were to be theirs if they were obedient while ignoring the responsibilities and the necessity of the obedience. Why was that such a problem for them? Is it a problem for us?

19. It is hard for us to imagine how the children of Israel under the guidance of Aaron could come together, produce a golden bull calf which they named *Yahweh*, and engage in a fertility-cult worship ceremony while the pillar of cloud representing God's presence was a few hundred feet above them on the mount! What were they thinking?

Exodus 32:1-6: ¹When the people saw that Moses had not come down from the mountain but was staying there a long time, they gathered round Aaron and said to him, "We do not know what has happened to this man Moses, who led us out of Egypt; so make us a god to lead us."

² Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold earrings which your wives, your sons, and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." ³So all the people took off their gold earrings and brought them to Aaron. ⁴He took the earrings, melted them, poured the gold into a mould, and made a gold bull calf.

The people said, "Israel, this is our god [*Elohim*], who led us out of Egypt!"

⁵ Then Aaron built an altar in front of the gold bull calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to honour the LORD [*Yahweh*]." ⁶Early the next morning they brought some animals to burn as sacrifices and others to eat as fellowship offerings. **The people sat down to a feast, which turned into an orgy of drinking and sex.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [Was that true worship?][‡]

20. God's chosen people failed to remain obedient.
21. Despite that incredible experience at the foot of Mount Sinai and the relationship that God tried to establish with them over the next year while they were building the sanctuary, some very sad events happened when the time came for them to move to the land of Canaan. Once again, God's chosen people failed to remain obedient.
22. When the spies returned from Palestine, they brought with them some amazing things like a bunch of grapes that was so heavy that it had to be carried on a stick between two men! But, 10 of those spies brought a very biased and negative report. Despite the efforts of Caleb and Joshua to convince the people to trust God and move forward, the children of Israel rebelled. Then, they tried to choose another leader and go up into Palestine without God's guidance; they suffered a disastrous defeat.
23. Try to imagine how Caleb, Joshua, Moses, and Aaron felt when they saw all of this evil taking place. Then, God declared that awful verdict: They must return into the wilderness and wander for 40 years.

Numbers 14:28-35: ²⁸ "Now give them this answer: 'I swear that as surely as I live, I will do to you just what you have asked. I, the LORD, have spoken. ²⁹You will die and your corpses will be scattered across this wilderness. Because you have complained against me, none of you over twenty years of age will enter that land. ³⁰I promised to let you live there, but not one of you will, except Caleb and Joshua. ³¹You said that your children would be captured, but I will bring them into the land that you rejected, and it will be their home.'

³²You will die here in this wilderness. ³³Your children will wander in the wilderness for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last one of you dies. ³⁴You will suffer the consequences of your sin for forty years, **one year for each of the forty days you spent exploring the land.** You will know what it means to have me against you! ³⁵I swear that I will do this to you wicked people who have gathered together against me. Here in the wilderness every one of you will die. I, the LORD, have spoken.’ ”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

The decree that Israel was not to enter Canaan for forty years was a bitter disappointment to Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua; yet without a murmur they accepted the divine decision. But those who had been complaining of God’s dealings with them, and declaring that they would return to Egypt, wept and mourned greatly when the blessings which they had despised were taken from them. They had complained at nothing, and now God gave them cause to weep. **Had they mourned for their sin when it was faithfully laid before them, this sentence would not have been pronounced; but they mourned for the judgment; their sorrow was not repentance, and could not secure a reversing of their sentence.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 392.1.[†]

24. Is it clear to you why free will is necessary in order for God to grant the ability to love?
25. Would we really be willing to give up our freedom and our ability to love? Some people have actually said that they would be willing to give up their freedom if they could receive a guaranteed place in heaven. Would you do that?
26. Obedience is such a central concept in the Bible. What are all the implications of obedience? Where is the boundary between obedience and legalism? The Greek word for *obedience* is *hupakoe* which means a “humble willingness to listen.”
27. If we begin to think that we could somehow earn our way to heaven by doing good things, that is legalism.
28. We understand the fact that the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. They had conquered nations, and they had already captured a portion of land east of the Jordan River. Then, they traveled south and camped on the plains of Moab, across from the city of Jericho. While there, preparing to cross the flooded Jordan River, Moses was writing his last words to give them final instructions. Then, he climbed Mount Nebo and died.
29. Many of our Christian friends who consider themselves to be scholars believe that the book of Deuteronomy was written hundreds of years after Moses was dead. **They do not believe that even God can predict the future.** Therefore, because so many things were accurately predicted in Deuteronomy, they refuse to believe that Deuteronomy could have been written in the time of Moses. The details of Israel’s future experiences that appear in the book of Deuteronomy are so clear and precise that those critics believe that the book of Deuteronomy could not have been written in the days of Moses. They believe that it was written in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, about 1000 years after Moses, even after the Babylonian captivity and after the events predicted in the book of Deuteronomy had taken place. But, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Moses was the author.
30. So, who should be involved in studying and understanding the book of Deuteronomy? Was

it a book written only for the Jewish people? Are any Gentiles addressed in the book? In the book of Deuteronomy, we find God addressing the Israelites as a group on a number of occasions.

31. Christians in our day have come to believe that salvation is an individual matter and that we are not saved in groups. We cannot be saved by the good deeds or the righteousness of our parents or grandparents or any other group.
32. One of the first and most important questions to be raised in the book of Deuteronomy is: Why did God and Moses find it necessary to repeat His laws given from Mount Sinai? See Deuteronomy 5. Unfortunately, the children of Israel had been very unfaithful to God during those 40 years in the wilderness. Now the adult population, all those over 20 years of age at the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, were dead except Caleb and Joshua. God realized that it was a wise idea to repeat those instructions to the new generation.
33. There are four speeches in the book of Deuteronomy. The first one starts with Deuteronomy 1:1; the next with Deuteronomy 4:44; the third with Deuteronomy 29:1; and the final—a kind of appendix—with Deuteronomy 31:1. Each of these sections begins with a similar Hebrew expression translated as “These are the words.”
34. One of the reasons why we believe that Moses was the author of Deuteronomy is that a careful study of ancient Egyptian and especially Hittite covenants or treaties shows that they follow a definite pattern.

A more careful analysis of the structure of the book of Deuteronomy in the light of ancient Near Eastern literature has revealed a sophisticated organization that follows the pattern of ancient covenant treaties between the suzerain and his vassal (Egyptian and especially Hittite, from the second millennium B.C.), which displayed the following features:

- **Preamble (*Deut. 1:1-5*)**
- **Historical prologue (*Deut. 1:6-4:49*)**
- **Stipulations: general (*Deuteronomy 5-11*); specific (*Deuteronomy 12-26*)**
- **Blessings and curses (*Deuteronomy 27, Deuteronomy 28*)**
- **Covenant loyalty and witnesses (*Deuteronomy 29, Deuteronomy 30*)—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 14-15.^{†§}**

35. God worked very closely with the children of Israel. The history as recorded in Deuteronomy and in the other books of Moses does not follow a very strict cause and effect or chronological order. Instead, we find that God initiates something—perhaps a covenant—by His actions which is followed by behaviors from the people as a result of that covenant. God acts and the people react. The Bible is implying that all real history is “His story.”
36. It is important for us to recognize a couple of very significant aspects of the book of Deuteronomy:

(1) Although this lesson dips over into Isaiah and Ezekiel to point out that the great controversy was fully underway in the days of Moses, Deuteronomy itself does not mention the Devil. The great controversy did not seem to be a part of the thinking of Moses when

he was writing Deuteronomy.

(2) God's governmental covenant is expressed through His love to the people. (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:8; 10:15; 23:5; etc.) The book also focuses a lot on what God expected back from them in the form of love. (Deuteronomy 6:5; 7:9; 10:12)

37. The love God was talking about in Deuteronomy is a principled form of love in which God puts Himself on the line in order to assist His people. It is not a superficial, emotional, sentimental kind of love. Notice these words:

God's love is intense and infinite and is manifested through events that express the intensity, the authenticity, and the infinite nature of His love. Because of this love, which created the heavens and the earth (*Deut. 10:14, Deut. 4:35, etc.*), God also entered the arena of human events and saved His people (*Deut. 1:27-31, Deut. 4:20*). In response to the divine love, Israel, the people of the covenant, are urged by God: " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength' " (*Deut. 6:5, NKJV*). Love implies, then, that they should remember God (*Deut. 7:18, Deut. 9:7, Deut. 24:9, etc.*), hear Him, strive to understand and obey His words (*Deut. 4:1, Deut. 6:4, Deut. 20:3, etc.*), fear Him (*Deut. 4:10, Deut. 5:29, Deuteronomy 17, Deuteronomy 19, Deut. 31:12, etc.*), and serve Him (*Deut. 6:13; Deut. 28:47, 48, etc.*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 16.[§]

38. The book of Deuteronomy includes the final words from Moses to his people just before they entered the land of Canaan. We as Christians believe that these words were given to Moses by God Himself. As we, as Seventh-day Adventists and other Christians, prepare to enter the "heavenly Canaan," shouldn't these same directions and this advice guide us? Hearing and even studying the Word of God is not enough. It must be a part of our lives and actions.

When I was a child, I (Jacques Doukhan) heard from my rabbi an oral legend about a man who found a miraculous trumpet in the market. The salesman boasted of its magic qualities: "This trumpet," he said, "has a wonderful power. If you blow into it, the fire of the house will be immediately mastered." As soon as the man arrived home, he wanted to test the power of the trumpet. He set his house on fire and then started to blow the trumpet. And the more he blew into the trumpet, the more the fire grew and burned his house. The man got angry at the person who sold him the trumpet and ran back to the market to complain about it. The salesman explained then that the function of the trumpet was not to extinguish the fire but to alert the people of the city, who would then come and extinguish it.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 16-17.

39. Are we taking advantage of the instruction God has given? Are we not only reading and studying the Bible, but also implementing it in our own lives?

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