

### DEUTERONOMY

#### Lesson 1 - Introduction

Today we begin a study of the final, the fifth, book of Torah, the book of Deuteronomy. We have come a long way, have we not? To this point in Torah we have seen the creation of the world and of mankind, the destruction of the world (and all but 8 humans) by a great flood and then the earth's very rapid repopulation. We have seen the creation of a people set apart for God, because the world (after the Flood) again quickly became wicked and turned away from Him. This automatically means that the world was divided and separated into two distinct groups: God's people and everybody else. God's people are called Hebrews, everybody else are called gentiles.

The Hebrews were NOT chosen for any kind of special merit on their part; nor were they chosen because they were a mighty people (because they were not). The exact reason they were chosen is not precisely stated in the Bible. In later times God says that He chose Israel because of His love of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (though this is a very broad and unspecific cause of His selection).

The Lord has issued two major covenants, BOTH to Israel: the first covenant was to Abraham that out of him would come the Hebrew people (later called Israel) and that they would receive a special allotment of land for their own; and the second covenant on Mt. Sinai (the Law) was issued through Moses to a nation of people called Israel. This second covenant set down exactly how Israel was to live the redeemed life that God intended; so it consisted of civil, religious and moral ordinances and rules. These laws were to be obeyed explicitly and fully without question. Yet these laws were also an ideal that reflected the purity and pattern of Heaven itself, and Israel was never able to follow these laws and their principles and patterns to any reasonable degree.

Israel, as Deuteronomy begins, is to this point a people without a country. They were formed and grew into a nation in the belly of the beast, Egypt. God has rescued them from the beast, redeemed them, and now given them His laws and commands so that they can know God's character and what pleases and displeases Him. By obeying these laws and observing the special holy occasions harmony with God could be achieved; disobedience and disregard for them brought down God's wrath upon their heads. Yehoveh has also established an elite set apart group of people from AMONG His **overall** set apart people: this group is the tribe of Levi who are to be His priests and servants and guardians of the Lord's holiness on earth.

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At this moment, Israel (all 3 million of them) is standing on the eastern edge of the Jordan River, in Moab, not far from Jericho and Moses is about to address them in a stirring speech. It is this address that forms the basis for Deuteronomy.

I congratulate you all for hanging in there as we have spent a bit over 3 years getting to this point in our study of Torah. The bad news is that we'll finish our 4<sup>th</sup> year together before we complete Deuteronomy and graduate from Torah into the next several books of the Hebrew Bible, the Tanach. The good news is that unlike what many of you might have heard, or perhaps assumed, Deuteronomy is NOT at all a repeat of the first 4 books of Torah, nor is it a summary. So what can we expect in Deuteronomy?

Well first, let's take a look at the name (Deuteronomy) itself. Deuto comes from the Greek ***deuteronomion touto*** that means "the second law". As I have stated on numerous occasions translating the original Hebrew into another language, Greek, and then from Greek to Latin; and then from Latin to English, is fraught with problems as you can imagine (and I've pointed up but a few during our time together). We not only dealing with differing languages but also differing cultures; so what a word indicated in one language and culture did not always have a direct counterpart in another language and culture. This has led to 100's of Bible versions in existence today, each of which has its advantages and disadvantages for the serious Bible student. The title of this 5th book of the Bible is a victim of these language and cultural variations.

Hebrews did NOT name the books of the Torah. Rather they just spoke of them by using the first several words that began each book. The first words of our new undertaking are "these are the words"; so the Hebrews at first simply referred to it as ***elleh ha-devarim*** (which is "these are the words" in Hebrew). The current popular name in Hebrew is sefer Devarim (the book of these are the words), and even that is usually shortened to simply Devarim.

The term Deuteronomy actually comes from an error in understanding the meaning of chapter 17 verse 18 that says, "this is a COPY of the teaching" of Moses. The Greek ***deuteronomian*** doesn't mean "copy" it means SECOND.....as in "another". So while the Hebrew intends "copy", the Greek intends "second". But the purpose of this book is NOT as a second set of laws (a second Torah), but it is simply a ***copy*** of what Moses taught earlier, slightly adjusted for the difference in circumstance between wandering in the wilderness as Bedouins, versus living a settled life in Canaan.

All that said, for the sake of communication in our native language of English, I shall use the word "Deuteronomy" because it's the one we're all familiar with.

The oldest extant text of Deuteronomy goes back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century and is called the Masoretic

Text (which includes the entire Hebrew Bible). However the discovery and translation of the Dead Sea Scrolls (that date to before the time of Christ) contains many large fragments of Deuteronomy and examination has proven them to be nearly identical with the Masoretic Text (except for minor spelling or copyist errors or grammar differences). So what we have available to us today is accurate to at least 100-200 BC.

Many modern scholars have an affinity for trying to disprove the authenticity of the 5 books of Moses (and most of the Bible for that matter). The primary method they use for that is called Literary Criticism; another is called Textual Criticism. The idea, in general, is to examine the ancient texts to determine if what was written down makes sense for the era it claims to have been written; and they look for signs that perhaps more than one style of writing might have been incorporated (indicating to them that multiple writers were involved), and even if what was said is appropriate for what is archeologically known about that era. Therefore Deuteronomy is now said to have been written in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. not in the 14<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century (which is probably when Moses was leading Israel out of Egypt).

Let me assure you, however, that there is no need to buy into this latest so-called scientific finding that more closely approximates a fad. First, it is anything but scientific. There are no “tests” or “standards” by which to measure whether or not these folks are right. This is all about speculation that revolves around their often subjective worldview. This is not unlike the recent spate of Hollywood movies about Cave Men and how Dinosaurs must have lived and operated in the primitive earthly environment. The same scholars who refuse to acknowledge the accuracy of the ancient Hebrew documents we call the Bible because (for them) there are not sufficient written documents of other societies from that era to verify the voracity of the content are the same ones who find animal or human skeletons, some faded cave paintings, spear heads, and other scattered artifacts and will make full length feature films showing hairy men grunting at one another, fighting over equally hairy women, all the while munching away on a raw Mammoth rib. And of course there must always be the enormous (and now extinct) reptiles running in packs and interacting (even intelligently communicating) with other creatures in very specific ways. As far as I know none of these creatures, hairy human or gigantic lizard-skinned reptile, have left us any written documents from these “Caveman” days. But these scientists don’t seem to have any problem insisting that their vision of the ancient past with but the scantest of real evidence is the correct one.

While it is VERY likely that redactions to all the books of the Torah have occurred to some degree over the centuries, the reality is that every fragment of Torah ever found (from any era) all closely match one another. The evidence is that Deuteronomy was partially penned by Moses (or more likely his scribe), as well as some other contributors because part of Deuteronomy looks back on a time after Moses’ death. Could some redaction have taken place in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the time at which some scholars say Deuteronomy was actually first created? Certainly and it is very likely; however to say that the main body of this book was first written 500 years after the Exodus is nothing but the most blatant form of modern secular or liberal Judeo-Christian intellectualism that seeks to harmonize the Bible with whatever is

currently politically correct and popular among their academic colleagues.

In fact in earliest Christianity there was no concept of anything but a Torah written by Moses; even in the far older religion of Judaism there was no serious thought or dissent against the common knowledge that the Torah had been written by Moses. We find the likes of Philo and Josephus, for instance, insisting on a Moses-authored Torah. In the end it was not until the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe, during the period of the Enlightenment (when secular humanism was invented and religion was seen by these anti-Semitic Enlightenment philosophers to be an unintelligent activity of the uneducated masses) that the first scholarly objections to the Torah being authentic arose. It's hard for me to put the arrogance and irrationality of this line of thinking into a severe enough mold; academics from 3000 years after the fact want to ARGUE with the writings of the historians who were present, or at least 2000 years closer, to the actual events as they unfolded and tell them that what they saw, they didn't see. And, what they lived through they didn't perceive correctly. I reject that outright.

Deuteronomy is going to be a surprising book to most of you. It's going to surprise primarily in the concepts it so beautifully and articulately presents about God, the land of Canaan, the Law, and other important subjects. In fact, I would submit to you that Deuteronomy is the Moses version of Yeshua's Sermon on the Mount. Here's why:

Moses begins this book by recounting how it is that Israel got to where they are at this moment. And in the doing he expounds on at least 50% of all the Laws given at Mt. Sinai. In other words, he will go through almost all of the Law, point by point, and tell Israel what it is that they are to conclude is God's purpose for this Law.

We're going to find that Moses takes the Law from its purely physical mechanical level, to a higher spiritual level of Godly principles that governs all things, anywhere during any era. He'll explain WHY certain rituals were laid down the way they were, what their spiritual purpose is, the God-principles behind them and therefore why they are important and are to be obeyed as ordained.

Therefore we'll have Moses saying that this is the Law that was enacted back at Mt. Sinai, 40 years earlier, and this is the way that the first generation of the Exodus has practiced it up to now; however I'm going to tell you what it all means and as we prepare to enter the Promised Land this is how we should understand it and how we should execute God's instructions when we settle there.

And of course in the New Testament counterpart of Moses' speech we have Yeshua, in the book of Matthew, doing basically the same thing. Moses took the Law from the primarily physical/behavioral to a more spiritual plane in Deuteronomy; and in the Sermon on the Mount

Jesus takes the spiritual element Moses gave to the Law in Deuteronomy (much of which had been lost) and moves it to a yet HIGHER and PURER spiritual level. Jesus says (and I paraphrase) 'here is historically how your ancestors thought of this command of God, and how the traditions of men have affected it, but I am here to tell you what it means from here forth and how it is in Heaven.'

We have the first Mediator of God, Moses, expounding on the ideal of the Law in Deuteronomy; and we have the second and best Mediator of God, Yeshua, expounding on the ideal of the Law in the book of Matthew. The reason and conditions for the first expounding of the Law in the Bible, by Moses, was his coming death and the subsequent entry of God's people into the Promised Land of Canaan, God's earthly kingdom. The reason and conditions for the SECOND expounding of the Law in the Bible by Yeshua was His coming death and the subsequent entry of God's people into God's Kingdom, a spiritual kingdom.

I hope this makes sense to you, for a number of reasons. First, if you can understand the parallel I just drew for you then you have a good basic context for understanding Deuteronomy. Second, this is but further dramatic proof of God's established patterns that begin in Genesis and are never ending. They repeat, over and over again; but as we move through the Bible we see these patterns begin as mere dust and clay (physical) and progressively move into a higher and yet higher spiritual plane until at the end of the Bible all the Laws and patterns established by Yehoveh are at the absolute, ultimate spiritual perfection and essence that Yehoveh has planned and ordained for His creation because essentially there will come a time when the lines between Heaven and earth start to blur and eventually fully merge into one. Third, it helps to establish that the "Newness" of the so-called New Covenant (or New Testament) is NOT about a new set of principles, or additional principles, or some principles (laws) abolished and replaced by different ones; rather the **newness** is that the OT Messiah has finally come, and He is Yeshua of Nazareth, and all that was promised has come with Him or (in some cases) the process has been advanced towards the ultimate World to Come. In other words the constant drumbeat we have always heard in Church about love, grace, peace, mercy, and redemption as being a NEW revelation that is the core of the NEW Testament system is simply not true; it was first introduced in the Torah, and much of it right here in Deuteronomy.

Now let me comment about another aspect of this Sermon on the Mount parallel with Moses' address in Moab to the people of Israel (actually it was a series of 3 addresses in Deuteronomy): this was more a sermon than a re-rendering of the code of Laws given as an oracle from God on Mt. Sinai. That is why the SERMON on the Mount is **called** a SERMON and not an "oracle". It was Jesus preaching and teaching ON the Law, not Jesus creating a SECOND or NEW law. It was the same on the mountain in Moab with Moses as the orator: he was preaching ABOUT the law, not making new laws or changing old ones. So what we will study in Deuteronomy will help to set the context not just for the books that immediately follow it (like Joshua and Judges), but for the New Testament as well.

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Perhaps one of the most difficult things for a Christian who has come to understand the era of restoration that we have entered, and the reality that Israel is in process of having the torch of the gospel handed back to them by the gentiles who took the lead of evangelizing for around 1900 years, is how to approach that section of the Bible that has been relegated to the trash bin for so long: the Old Testament.

We who speak fondly of the Hebrew Roots of our faith have struggled right along with the rest of our brothers and sisters in Christ who form the larger and more mainstream portion of the church about just how to deal with the very ancient code of laws we find in the Torah. How does a modern Christian keep Torah? Are we to avoid wearing clothes of mixed cloth? Are we to re-establish a society where males decide everything? Are we only to eat food grown under the Biblical Kosher ordinances? Should we re-establish cities of refuge for those who kill accidentally? Are we to celebrate the Biblical Festivals and observe the Jewish Sabbath? Men, are we to adopt Rabbinical Jewish traditions like wearing Kippahs and sporting full beards and reading from Jewish prayer books? Should we insist that we sit apart from our wives during congregational services?

Women, should you see yourselves as unclean during your period, remove yourself from your husband during that time and immerse in a Mikvah upon the end of the cycle? You see the thing is that Moses in Deuteronomy draws attention to the fact that the issue he is addressing in Moab is not whether these laws and principles still exist, but rather how to apply them and reapply them in evolving societal conditions and in various locations. Yeshua did essentially the same but He was concerned in His sermon with something that Moses didn't have to contend; Moses didn't have to tell people that the Law would continue because He was addressing the people of the Law and any thought that the Law would be terminated was unthinkable.

But 1300 years later on a hill overlooking the Galilee Yeshua was speaking to a crowd of Jews and gentiles and He needed to make it crystal clear that nothing He said should be construed as abolishing even the slightest sliver of the Law, nor was He changing the pronouncements of the Prophets. Indeed, not until Heaven and earth passed away (He said) could such a thing even be contemplated. And of course we find that discourse in Matthew 5. Therefore, my brethren, pay very close attention to Deuteronomy because we'll see how a society has evolved after 4 decades and thus the practical need for change in the details of observing the Law to account for their new condition. We're in the same boat, today.

Deuteronomy, like all other books of the Bible, was not written in a vacuum. It is not a standalone book. Deuteronomy, like the New Testament, will be misunderstood and misapplied if one does not read and understand what came before it as a foundation. Deuteronomy assumes (as Moses assumes) that many of the things that will be discussed have been known and assimilated into the Hebrews' everyday life for quite some time. So Moses won't explain his terms because they were common knowledge; he won't FULLY

repeat a law of Exodus or Leviticus or Numbers when he wants to preach on it; instead he'll often just refer to a certain law or command in abbreviated form because it's understood. Moses will draw on incidents like the Golden Calf, and the Balaam and Balak affair, and will even speak of "what happened to Miriam". "What happened to Miriam" was so infamous and ingrained in the people that he wasn't going to explain the obvious (that she was punished with a skin disease for her rebellion and exiled from camp until her disease ended).

Deuteronomy had an enormous effect on the development of Jewish Tradition that would come far into the future. But even before that, the prophets who brought God's oracles to Israel on His behalf would use the verbiage and imagery that Moses used in this matchless book. Almost 200 of the original 613 Torah commands come in Deuteronomy. The method that Moses expounded on the Law is closer to how the Rabbis (at least at first) commented on the Law, and so Rabbinical Halakah (Rabbinical legal rulings) have a form and protocol much more similar to Deuteronomy than to the 4 earlier books of Torah.

Deuteronomy forms an important part of ancient and modern day Jewish liturgy; for instance the **Shema** (the Hear O Israel) of Deut.6: 4 –9 holds a premium spot in Jewish synagogue service. Other phrases from Deuteronomy are interspersed in standard Jewish prayers such as the **Amidah** and the **Aleinu**.

In order to best prepare you to study this tremendous book, I would like to lay some groundwork of the main premises that are discussed so that you can be looking for them.

J.H. Tigay, a noted Hebrew scholar, has done a masterful job of assessing the primary themes that form Deuteronomy, and since it would be hard for me to improve upon it, I'll lay it out as he sees it.

At the top of the list is that the highest and most fundamental principle that under girds Deuteronomy is **Monotheism**. While to we modern Christians and Jews that doesn't seem like such an earth shattering revelation, the principle of there being but one god was almost incomprehensible to the mind of the Hebrew and gentile of that era.

All throughout our years of studying together I've tried to point out the inescapable reality that when the OT says things like "gods", plural, and "God of gods and Lord of lords", this was simply reflecting what every human culture believed: that there were many gods and each nation had its own gods who presided over some particular territory. Further, that while Israel believed in ONE God, it was not that there was a sum total of ONE God in existence....it's that in their peculiar case, their God only permitted them to HAVE one god. That He tolerated no competition. As a result, to the Hebrews' mind and to all those who surrounded the Hebrews, Israel was god-poor. Having only ONE god was downright embarrassing!

And, I have also tried to point out that through the first 4/5ths of the Torah, we really don't find Yehoveh (or Moses or anyone else for that matter) pushing hard on the idea that it's not that Israel is allowed only one god, it's that there is only one god in existence and He is the god of everyone and everything. Well, it is addressed here in Deuteronomy and Moses makes it clear that there is but one god, period. And, it is a concept that is not particularly well-received by the Israelites, nor is it taken seriously as we see the people of Israel move from apostasy to apostasy, worshipping god after god, and suffering dearly for it.

The next major theme we'll find in Deuteronomy is **Loyalty** to Yehoveh. Loyalty goes hand in hand with the Monotheistic stream of thought. The logic is that if there is only one God, and this God has decided to bless Israel above all other people, then the obvious response is absolute loyalty to Him. In fact, Israel is not only **not** to revert to worshipping other gods or things like stars, and the moon, and comets.... they are to destroy the Temples, altars, and high places of these non-gods all throughout the land of Canaan.

Then we find that Moses discusses the entire Concept of God. A man who had been a Christian for at least 50 years told me several months ago that until he studied Torah with us he didn't realize that until then that he really didn't know whom God was. And, I agree with him totally. It is in the Torah, and primarily Deuteronomy, that we get a very majestic and succinct picture of God's attributes such that we can understand who He is more in depth than we can from **only** studying New Testament documents.

For instance, God's nearness is further refined; God lives in Heaven but it's His presence that dwells with Israel. It was not God who was in the fire on the summit of Mt. Sinai; rather it was the Lord's Kavod, His Glory. The Lord hasn't moved from Heaven into the tent sanctuary (The Wilderness Tabernacle) but His Shekinah is there hovering above the Ark of the Covenant. In other words, as I spoke of earlier, Moses takes the typical physical nature of the world of false gods who are present, completely or partially, on earth (often in the forms of animals or a Pharaoh or a river) and makes it obsolete; rather, Moses invokes the spirituality and formlessness of Yehoveh as His true essence.

Yet, Yehoveh is a God with something akin to emotions; He is the God who loves, and gets angry, and even gets jealous. He is not some distant being that sets the world in motion, gives mankind rules for living, and then takes a long vacation with a Do Not Disturb sign hanging on his door. This is a God that craves intimacy with people who love Him.

Next, the theme of the **Covenant** relationship between God and Israel is affirmed. The first two covenants are reviewed and discussed. And, in chapter 26 Moses emphasizes that even though the covenant relationship has as its foundation both legal and religious elements, that the relationship between God and Israel goes well beyond emotional and spiritual.....or



spiritualized.....ties; rather, Israelite has specific definable obligations to meet. Meeting these obligations reflects both a proper attitude and demonstrates Israel's intent to be obedient to the WAY the Lord has ordained many of these obligations to be performed, and this is part and parcel of this covenant relationship.

There is much the modern church can learn from this. This covenant theme goes to some length to make it clear that physical action must accompany the spiritual faith of Israel. That to try and separate the two is folly. In other words, WORKS are an indispensable part of a Believer's walk with God. Today, works is practically a 4-letter word within the Body of Believers. Everything has been spiritualized to the point that what we DO is completely secondary to what we FEEL; that once we have accepted Yeshua as our Savior, we have NO further obligations to the Father.....everything becomes optional.

The NT book of James addresses this head on. <sup>NAS</sup> **James 2:26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.** But, this was not a new idea; works coupled with faith was standard within Judaism BECAUSE the concept is found in the Torah and expounded upon here in Deuteronomy.

It is going to take some of you by surprise that another major theme of Deuteronomy is **love**. The love that is discussed is primarily about God's love towards Israel and to a lesser degree to all mankind. This bond of love is also to be reflected in God's people, not only towards God but also towards one another even foreigners.

Who **Israel** is, in Yehoveh's eyes, is also central to Deuteronomy. Israel is a nation who's God and KING is Yehoveh. Israel is as a son to God for He created them, redeemed them, guided them through the wilderness, fights for them and protects them and has chosen Israel among all nations on earth for a special one-of-a-kind relationship with Him.

Other themes that will be discussed at some length in Deuteronomy are the **The Land** that is now Israel; **the Law** and the need to stay safely within the boundaries of behavior and thought that the Lord has ordained for Israel. One of the most interesting themes we will uncover is the process of **Centralizing** the place of Sacrificial Worship. That is, once Israel is in possession of the Promised Land there will be ONE common place where all are to bring their sacrifices, where the ONLY authorized place of atonement resides.

And as is so central to both Judaism and Christianity today, the theme of **Humanitarianism** is focused upon in Deuteronomy. Orphans, widows, the poor, the sick, slaves, foreigners living among Israel, even animals and captured soldiers are given attention as Israel is exhorted to be humane in all their dealings with God's creatures.

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So despite this terribly faulty rhetoric that has been a mainstay of Church doctrine for centuries that in the Old Testament we get the angry God, the vengeful God, the legalistic and blood thirsty God.....but in the New we see the peaceful God, the merciful and self-sacrificing God, the God of grace and shalom.....this notion is completely destroyed not only when one studies the first 4 books of Torah, but particularly when one studies Deuteronomy.

And, that study will begin in earnest next week.