

**HEARING GOD'S COMMANDS**  
**Teaching-Learning Resources**  
**BAPTIST LEADER**

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Background Scripture 2 Kings 22–23; Deut 10:12–11:1

Key Passage: 2 Kings 23:1–2; Deut 10:12–11:1

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This is the first of thirteen lessons in a new series entitled “The Book of Deuteronomy.” During the next thirteen weeks we will study various texts from nineteen of the thirty-four chapters in Deuteronomy. The series will be divided into three sections, following the natural divisions of the book itself into three major “speeches” by Moses. This first unit for the month of June is entitled “Foundations for Faith” and deals with material from the first discourse of Moses contained in Deuteronomy 1:6–4:43. The subsequent units for July and August are entitled “Laws to Live By” and “Covenant Renewal.” The second unit will focus on the second discourse of Moses in Deuteronomy 4:44–26:19; and the final unit will deal with his third discourse in Deuteronomy 27:1–30:20.

The fifteen chapters of Deuteronomy which are not included in this series (namely, chapters 2, 8, 9, 11, 15, 18–23, and 25–28) also warrant very serious study. A number of war stories, which have minimal value for the Christian faith, are included in these chapters. But much of the material is relevant for our faith. For example, Deuteronomy 15 deals with the release of people from debts and creditors every seven years so that poverty or institutions which cause poverty would not survive in Israel. This Mosaic law cannot be ignored simply because we are capitalists as well as Christians. Few Americans who realize the implications of such an

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economic system would advocate applying this chapter literally in our credit card and mortgage oriented society. But this text, like many from the omitted chapters, needs to be studied with equal care to make certain that we are doing everything possible to fulfill the spirit of the law, if not the letter of the law.

The easiest way to demonstrate the arrangement and scope of material in Deuteronomy is to present a detailed outline of the book. The following extended outline is offered for this purpose and will serve as a study reference and easy index for all thirteen lessons in this series. Immediately one should be able to appreciate the simple arrangement of the book and, at the same time, note the differences in the length and content of the three “speeches.” (The first discourse is only 155 verses long, and the third discourse is 143. But the second discourse, which reads more like a legal code than a sermon or speech, is a lengthy 537 verses.)

### **An Outline of Deuteronomy**

- I. *The First Discourse of Moses*, 1:1–4:43
  - A. Editorial introduction, 1:1–5
  - B. Historical review of events from Sinai to Transjordan, 1:6–3:29
  - C. Moses’ appeal for obedience to the laws of Yahweh, 4:1–40
  - D. Editorial note on refuge cities, 4:41–43
- II. *The Second Discourse of Moses*, 4:44–26:19
  - A. Editorial introduction, 4:44–49
  - B. Recital of the Ten Commandments and the people’s response and charge, 5:1–33
  - C. The Great Commandment and its exposition, 6:1–11:32
  - D. Fifty pieces of major legislation, 12:1–26:15
    - 1. Rules for worship, 12:1–14:29
      - a. Restriction on where to sacrifice, 12:1–14

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- b.* Dietary regulations, 12:15–28
  - c.* Prohibition against idolatry, 12:29–32
  - d.* Penalty for idolatry and a prohibition inmourning, 13:1–14:2
  - e.* More dietary rules, 14:3–21
  - f.* Tithing, 14:22–29
2. Seventh-year release from creditors, 15:1–18
  3. Consecration of the first-born, 15:19–23
  4. Three required annual feasts, 16:1–17
  5. Appointment of judges, 16:18–20
  6. Cultic prohibitions/penalties, 16:21–17:7
  7. Provision for an “appeals court,” 17:8–13
  8. Provision for appointing a king, 17:14–20
  9. Provisions for landless Levites, 18:1–8
  10. Prohibition against occult arts, 18:9–14
  11. The test for true/false prophets, 18:15–22
  12. Criminal laws, 19:1–21
    - a. Provision for manslaughter, 19:1–10
    - b. Death penalty for murder, 19:11–13
    - c. Protection of property boundaries, 19:14
    - d. Provision for honest witnesses, 19:15–21
  13. Laws pertaining to war, 20:1–20
    - a. Spiritual preparations for battle, 20:1–4
    - b. Military exemptions, 20:5–9
    - c. Peace offer and forced labor, 20:10–11
    - d. Peace offer rejected—death, 20:12–15
    - e. Extermination of the enemy, 20:16–20
  14. How to handle a murder case, 21:1–9
  15. How to treat captured women, 21:10–14
  16. Rules for fathers with two wives, 21:15–17
  17. Death penalty for a rebellious son, 21:18–21
  18. Regulations about hangings, 21:22–23

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19. Provision for stray/fallen beasts, 22:1–4
20. Regulations about clothing, 22:5
21. Regulations about birds, 22:6–7
22. Requirement of a roof parapet, 22:8
23. Rules about farming, 22:9–10
24. Dress code, 22:11–12
25. Regulations about sex, 22:13–23:2
  - a. Use of the “tokens of virginity,” 22:13–21
  - b. Death penalty for adultery, 22:22
  - c. Rules regarding virgin women, 22:23–29
  - d. Prohibitions against incest, eunuchs, and illegitimate children, 22:30–23:2
26. Prohibitions against Ammon and Moab, 23:3–6
27. Provisions for Edom and Egypt, 23:7–8
28. Regulations on sanitation, 23:9–14
29. Freedom for the escaped slave, 23:15–16
30. Prohibition of cultic prostitution, 23:17–18
31. Prohibition against usury, 23:19–20
32. Voluntary vows must be paid, 23:21–23
33. Limits on eating a neighbor's food, 23:24–25
34. Rules for divorce/remarriage, 24:1–4
35. Exemptions from military service, 24:5
36. Illegal loan securities, 24:6, 10–11
37. Death penalty for kidnapping, 24:7
38. Procedure for a leprosy epidemic, 24:8–9
39. Restoration of a poor person's coat, 24:12–13
40. Daily work/daily payment to the poor, 24:14–15
41. No substitutions in capital punishment, 24:16
42. Treatment of the widow, orphan, and alien, 24:

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43. Limit of “forty stripes,” 25:1–3
  44. The ox must remain unmuzzled, 25:4
  45. Fathering a child foia brother, 25:5–10
  46. Corporal punishment for foul fights, 25:11–12
  47. Required honest weights/measures, 25:13–16
  48. Required revenge on Amalek, 25:17–19
  49. Firstfruits and the credo, 26:1–11
  50. Distribution of the tithes, 26:12–15
  - E. Israel’s declaration of faith, 26:12–17
  - F. Yahweh’s declaration of promise, 26:18–19
- III. *The Third Discourse of Moses*, 27:1–30:20
- A. Editorial introduction, 27:1–10
    1. Address by Moses and the elders, 27:1–8
    2. Address by Moses and the priests, 27:9–10
  - B. Address by Moses only, 27:11–28:68
    1. Directions to the twelve tribes, 27:11–13
    2. Liturgy of curses (at Ebal/Gerizim), 27:14–26
    3. List of blessings for obedience, 28:1–14
    4. List of curses for disobedience, 28:15–68
  - C. Transitional note by the editor, 29:1
  - D. Moses’ exhortation to obedience, 29:2–30:20
    1. Review of historical events, 29:2–15
    2. Warning of what could happen, 29:16–29
    3. Promise of conditional restoration, 30:1–10
    4. Fairness of God’s laws affirmed, 30:11–18
    5. Summons of heaven/earth as witnesses, 30:19–20
- IV. *Editorial Appendix*, 31:1–34:12
- A. Moses’ final instructions, 31:1–13
  - B. Yahweh’s final word to Moses, 31:14–22

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1. Instructions to call Joshua, 31:14–15
2. Instructions to write a song, 31:16–22
- C. The commission of Joshua, 31:23
- D. The Law Book as a witness, 31:24–29
- E. The “Song of Moses,” 31:30–32:44
- F. God’s final instructions to Moses, 32:45–52
- G. The “Blessing of Moses,” 33:1–29
- H. The death and burial of Moses, 34:1–12

### **The Historical and Biblical Background**

In dealing with the historical background of Deuteronomy, three different historical periods must be kept in mind. First, the entire book of Deuteronomy is presented, by the editorial note in 1:1–5, as a collection of Moses’ farewell addresses just before his death while the Israelites were waiting to cross the Jordan River into the land of Canaan. These events occurred late in the thirteenth century B.C.

Secondly, it is clear to those familiar with the legal traditions of the ancient Near East that many elements of the Mosaic Law were already a part of or had a prototype equivalent in the established legal traditions of Mesopotamia. For example, the *lex talionis*, “the law of retaliation,” which called for “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Deuteronomy 19:21; Exodus 21:23–25; Leviticus 24:19), was established in a modified form by the time of Hammurabi (1728–1686 B.C.) and was an integral part of the famed Code of Hammurabi (lines 196–200). Consequently, the historical review of the laws in Deuteronomy requires one to look at ancient Near Eastern legal traditions which predate Moses by five hundred years.

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Thirdly, the Book of Deuteronomy is closely associated with the events in Judah during the reign of King Josiah (640–609 B.C.). There is good reason to believe that, Deuteronomy, as we now have it, was a product of the seventh century B.C. If so, it was finally edited five hundred years after the death of Moses. Consequently, as we study this book, the historical framework will embrace a thousand years, not just the few final years before Moses died.

For this lesson the historical moment of significance is 621 B.C., the year in which King Josiah was presented with a “Law Book” that had been discovered in the temple at Jerusalem. The biblical record does not explicitly identify the Law Book as Deuteronomy. It was identified in 2 Kings 22–23 as either “the book of the law” or the “book of the covenant.” The Chronicler writing in the post-exilic period was a little more specific and identified it as “the book of the law in the house of Yahweh” (2 Chronicles 34:15) and “the book of the law of [Yahweh] given through Moses” (v. 14). The identification of this work of Moses with Deuteronomy was a logical deduction based upon the similarities between the laws articulated in Deuteronomy and those reforms enacted by Josiah because of the laws he had read in the newly found book.

A look at a few of the similarities should be convincing. (1) A call for the destruction of idols is found in Deuteronomy 12:2; 16:21; 17:3; 18:10 and 23:18. In 2 Kings 23:4–12, 15, 24 it is noted that Josiah vigorously destroyed the idols in both Judah and Samaria. (2) Deuteronomy 12:1–14 restricts sacrificial worship to the place (understood to mean “the one place only”) where Yahweh would choose to place his name. According to 2 Kings 23:8, 13–15, 19, Josiah abolished the

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high places and centralized in Jerusalem all worship of Yahweh. Archaeological excavations at Tell Arad in southern Judah demonstrate that Josiah destroyed not only the centers of Canaanite worship but also even long established official centers of sacrificial Yahweh worship. (3) According to Deuteronomy 16:5, the Passover sacrifice was to be restricted to the place where Yahweh would choose to put his name, and Josiah called for the celebration of the Passover in Jerusalem for the first time ever (2 Kings 23:21–24).

The identification of Deuteronomy with the book found in 621 B.C. is not a new idea. In the fourth century A.D. Christian scholars like Jerome and Chrysostom maintained that the two books were identical.

### **Interpreting the Biblical Lesson**

**Deuteronomy 10:12—“... What does [Yahweh] your God require of you?”**

The verb “require,” used here in the RSV and the MV, is more authoritarian than the Hebrew text demands. The Hebrew word *sha-al*, used here and 169 other times in the Old Testament, means “to ask, request, desire.” God’s requirements are stated in the context of divine desire, and recognition that God made a request from Israel demonstrates the freedom which Israel had and the affection which Yahweh had for the Israelites. God’s commandments are not imposed by a heavenly dictator but are offered entreatingly by a loving, heavenly parent for the well-being of the children.

**Deuteronomy 10:12— “ . . . but to fear [Yahweh] your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve [Yahweh] your God with all your heart and with all your soul”**



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There are four verbs in this stipulation of God's desire: "fear," "walk," "love," and "serve." The last three explain what is meant by the first verb, "fear." To "fear" God does not mean to be afraid of God. It means to stand in awe and wonder, to enter into a relationship of love which spontaneously evokes the desire to walk with and to serve God. In our language the idiom of love closely approximates this Hebrew concept of "fear" and awe." Such a relationship is beautifully attested to on earth when two people fall in love and are in "seventh heaven," in awe and wonder as to how terrific the other person is. The other person is so terrific (which carries no connotations of "terror" or "terrify") that they want to walk through life in the service and enjoyment of each other. The desire that Israel "fear" Yahweh was the desire that Israel find God terrific, not terrifying.

**Deuteronomy 10:14—"To [Yahweh] your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it"**

This verse speaks of just how terrific the God of Israel is. Yahweh (a name which can be paraphrased "The Creator") is not a local or limited ethnic or national deity. In the words of Deuteronomy 10:17, he is "God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the terrible (terrific[!]) God." As the Creator, all that is is God's. It is an awesome thought and a mind-blowing statement that the Supreme Lord of creation and cosmos *asked* Israel to do God's will. Although God could have related as a dictator or suzerain, God chose to relate as the Lord of love, as stated in Deuteronomy 10:15— "[Yahweh] set his heart in love upon your fathers and chose their descendants after them. . . ."

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**Deuteronomy 10:18—“He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and he loves the alien, giving him food and clothing”**

One might expect the Supreme Lord of creation to be concerned with the powerful people on earth, but the terrific and awe-inspiring truth is that God is concerned with the powerless. In biblical times as in modern times, the orphan, the widow, and the alien are stereotypes of the powerless and the oppressed. For such people God seeks and works for justice. One cannot overlook how closely “justice” and “love” are related in this verse. “Love” without justice, without food and clothing, is something less than God’s own standard. One need not debate if love without justice, food, and clothes is possible; or vice versa, if justice is possible without love, food, and clothing. Possible or not, anything less than all four is below God’s standard. Since these four items make up the LORD’S standard, they were also to become Israel’s standard. Subsumed under the commandment “Love the alien!” (see 10:19) is God’s request for Israel to love and to deal justly with the powerless and the oppressed.

### **Applying the Lesson to Life**

Since Jesus did not come to destroy the Law but to *fulfill* it, the Law as recorded in Deuteronomy warrants a careful and critical study. It will cause us, as it did Josiah, to clarify the foundations of our faith and reform our religious practices and theological perspectives; for some of our religious practices and traditions have become so affected by cultural accretions and political accommodation we can no longer distinguish between the word and will of God and the “theologies” of our own time and making. This study of Deuteronomy will permit

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us to move from the foundations of our faith to covenant renewal so that we will be able to affirm with conviction the words of I John 2:3–5, “By this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says ‘I know him’ but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected . . . .”