



## PREPARATION FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM (LOOKING BACK AND GROWING FORWARD) STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY LESSON 2

### The Government of God

The book of Deuteronomy is the fifth and last book of the Pentateuch. It is usually referred to among the Jews by the expression "These Words," the first two words of the book in Hebrew. The English title of the book is from the Septuagint and means "The Second [or, Repeated] Legislation," in relation to the book of Exodus, which is sometimes referred to as "The First Legislation."

### I. THEMES OF DEUTERONOMY:

Deuteronomy is perhaps the most obviously theological book in the Hebrew Bible, if by theological we mean spelling out in a clear teaching style what the nature of God is and what faith entails. The theological teaching of Deuteronomy can be distilled into four phrases.

#### A. One God

Moses affirms a "practical" monotheism. He was not interested in abstract theological formulations. He stated that there was only one God who was interested in Israel. God demonstrated that by His care in the past. He demands their undivided loyalty in the present. He is the one and only God for them.

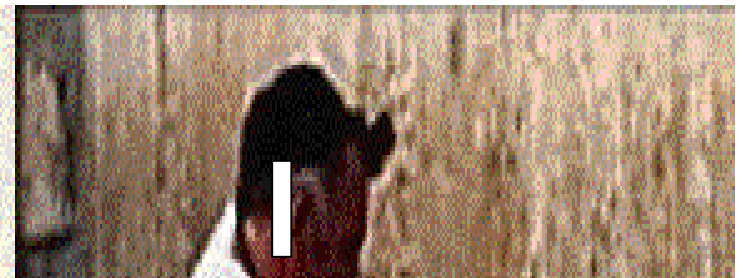
The people are bound to Yahweh by means of a legal contract, called the covenant. This covenant defines the shape of their loyalty and specifies how they would remain in God's good graces.

#### B. One People

Deuteronomy is addressed to the people of God as a whole. There are no tribal distinctions. This presumes a unity to the people of God. This is affirmed in the covenant formula, "Yahweh is the God of Israel, and Israel is the people of God."

The oneness of the people transcends generations. The book is addressed perpetually to the "now" generation. References to "today" and "this day" abound. The covenant is made "not with our fathers but with us alive today."

The unity of the people is not based on genetic commonality but on the belief that God called them to be His people. They alone are the people of God, set apart from the rest of the nations and held together because Yahweh, in love, chose them. Sometimes called the "election" of Israel, this notion affirms that God singled out these people at His own initiative. That is what makes them special-Yahweh's "treasured possession" in Deuteronomy's language (7:6; see also Exodus 19:5 where the same term is used).



### **C. One Faith**

Israel got in trouble because it lost religious focus. Local variations in religious practices and the tendency to drift in the direction of Baalism resulted in unorthodox worship. God demanded uniformity in worship. This could only be enforced if one central sanctuary was officially designated. "The place Yahweh will choose" became the only worship center. Although left unspecified in the text, God no doubt had Jerusalem in mind.

The application for us who are Christians is obvious. We worship one God Who has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are the "elect" people of God (though He has not thrown away Israel - See Romans 9–11). We worship in one faith the one Lord Who died in Jerusalem as the fulfillment of all the worship and sacrifices of Israel.

### **D. One Condition to Blessing: Obedience**

Included in the Palestinian Covenant (God's covenant with Israel concerning the Land) is a vital principle of Scripture: "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known" (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

All temporal blessings and curses of Scripture are based on obedience and disobedience to the revealed will of God. Such conditions, as well as the curses and blessings of God, are so plain that anyone can understand them and obey. Furthermore, it is clear in Scripture that conditions must be met if blessings are to be received. Continued blessings are conditioned by continued obedience--not just for Israel, but for anyone. It is plainly stated that if Israel failed to do the will of God and gave themselves to backsliding and rebellion, "as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other" (Dt. 28:63-64a). This has been literally fulfilled and is still in fulfillment at the present time. Paul uses this example to warn Christians that if God did not spare Israel from cutting them off when they sinned, He would not spare others (Rom. 11). Thus, the truth is that only with continued obedience will God continue temporally to bless anyone.

Eternal blessing (Salvation) of course is not conditioned on obedience, but on God's grace in Christ.

## **II. OUTLINE**

### **A. CHAPTER 1**

**1. vs. 1 – 5: The Preamble of the Covenant**

### **B. CHAPTER 1**

**1. vs. 6 – 18: From Mount Sinai to Kadesh**

**2. vs. 19 – 46: At Kadesh**

### **C. CHAPTER 2**

**1. vs. 1 – 8: Do not Meddle with Edom**

**2. vs. 9 – 15: Do Not Harass Moab**

**3. vs. 16 – 23: Do Not Harass Ammon**

**4. vs. 24 – 37: The Conquest of Sihon**

**D. CHAPTER 3**

1. vs. 1 – 11: The Conquest of Og
2. vs. 12 – 20: Land is Granted to Two-and-a-Half Tribes
3. vs. 21 – 29: Transition of Leadership

**E. CHAPTER 4**

1. vs. 1 – 43: Summary of the Covenant
2. vs. 44 – 49: Introduction to the Law of God

**F. CHAPTER 5**

1. vs. 1 – 5: Setting of the Covenant
2. vs. 6 – 21: Commandments of the Covenant
3. vs. 22 – 27: Response of Israel
4. vs. 28 – 33: Response of God

**G. CHAPTER 6**

- vs. 1 – 25: The Command to Teach the Law

**H. CHAPTER 7**

- vs. 1 – 26: The Command to Conquer Canaan

**I. CHAPTER 8**

- vs. 1 – 20: The Command to Remember the Lord

**J. CHAPTER 9**

- vs. 1 – 29: Moses Rehearses Israel's Rebellion

**K. CHAPTER 10**

1. vs. 1 – 11: Moses Rehearses God's Mercy
2. vs. 12 – 22: Love God

**L. CHAPTER 11**

1. vs. 1 – 21: Study and Obey the Commands
2. vs. 22 – 32: Victory Depends upon Obedience

**M. CHAPTER 12**

1. vs. 1 – 28: Law of the Central Sanctuary
2. vs. 29 – 32: Law of Idolatry

**N. CHAPTER 13**

- vs. 1 – 18: Law of Idolatry Con't.

**O. CHAPTER 14**

1. vs. 1 – 21: Law of Food
2. vs. 22 – 29: Law of the Tithes

**P. CHAPTER 15**

1. vs. 1 – 11: Law of the Debts
2. vs. 12 – 18: Law of the Slaves
3. vs. 19 – 23: Law of Firstborn

**Q. CHAPTER 16**

1. vs. 1 – 17: Law of the Feasts
2. vs. 18 – 22: Law of the Administration of the Judges

**R. CHAPTER 17**

1. vs. 1 – 13: Law of the Administration of the Judges Con't.
2. vs. 14 – 20: Law of the Administration of the King

**S. CHAPTER 18**

1. vs. 1 – 22: Law of the Administration of the Priest and Prophet
2. vs.15: The Mashieach (Messiah, Jesus) promised as Prophet

**T. CHAPTER 19**

1. vs. 1 – 14: Cities of Refuge
2. vs. 15 – 21: Law of Witnesses

**U. CHAPTER 20**

- vs. 1 – 20: Law of Warfare

**V. CHAPTER 21**

1. vs. 1 – 9: Law of Unknown Murder
2. vs. 10 – 17: Law of Marriage
3. vs. 18 – 23: Law of the Rebellious Son

**W. CHAPTER 22**

1. vs. 1 – 4: Law of the Brother's Property
2. vs. 5 – 12: Law of Separation
3. vs. 13 – 30: Law of Marriage

**X. CHAPTER 23**

1. vs. 1 – 23: Law of Acceptance into the Congregation
2. vs. 24 – 25: Law for Harmony in the Nation

**Y. CHAPTER 24**

- vs. 1 – 22: Law for Harmony in the Nation Con't.

**Z. CHAPTER 25**

- vs. 1 – 19: Law of Harmony in the Nation Con't.

**AA. CHAPTER 26**

1. vs. 1 – 15: Law of the Tithe
2. vs. 16 – 19: Vow of Israel and of God

**AB. CHAPTER 27**

1. vs. 1 – 8: Erection of the Altar
2. vs. 9 – 10: Admonition to Obey the Law
3. vs. 11 – 26: Proclamation of the Curses

**AC. CHAPTER 28**

1. vs. 1 – 14: Promised Blessings for Obedience
2. vs. 15 – 68: Promised Curses for Disobedience

**AD. CHAPTER 29**

1. vs. 1 – 9: The Covenant Is Based on the Power of God
2. vs. 10 – 15: Parties of the Covenant

**3. vs. 16 – 29: Scattering of Israel**

**AE. CHAPTER 30**

**1. vs. 1 – 10: Restoration of Israel**

**2. vs. 11 – 20: Ratification of the Palestinian Covenant**

**AF. CHAPTER 31**

**1. vs. 1 – 13: Moses Charges Joshua and Israel**

**2. vs. 14 – 21: God Charges Israel**

**3. vs. 22 – 30: The Book of the Law Is Deposited**

**AG. CHAPTER 32**

**1. vs. 1 – 47: The Song of Moses**

**2. vs. 48 – 52: Moses Is Ordered to Mount Nebo**

**AH. CHAPTER 33**

**--vs. 1 – 29: Moses Blesses the Tribes**

**AI. CHAPTER 34**

**1. vs. 1 – 4: Moses Views the Promised Land**

**2. vs. 5 – 8: Moses Dies and Is Mourned**

**3. vs. 9: Moses Is Replaced by Joshua**

**4. vs. 10 – 12: Moses Is Extolled in Israel**

**III. THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD**

The core of the book of Deuteronomy is a law code contained in chapters 12-26. This law code is introduced by two speeches of Moses. The first introductory speech (1:1-4:40) is a review of Israel's history from the time God spoke to them at Mount Sinai (called Horeb in Deuteronomy) up to that point.

Moses highlighted two features of their history. First, the wilderness generation had been unfaithful time and again. They had constantly complained, mumbled, and grumbled. Second, the Lord had demonstrated His faithfulness by giving them all they had needed and by giving them victory over all their enemies. Moses was conveying a warning to these Israelites. "Do not be unfaithful, as was that first generation, or you will not reach your goal."

God expressed His governing of Israel by a "covenant" with them. Deuteronomy is written in the style of a contemporary national covenant between a king and his subjects. A covenant (Hebrew *berit* or *Brita*) is a pact or formal agreement between two parties in which there are mutual obligations and expectations. "Covenant" is used as a metaphor of God's relationship with His people. The major covenants in the Old Testament are God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15), and the Sinai/Moses covenant (Exodus 19-24) between God and Israel; the writers used a succession of covenants to track the development of salvation history. In Judaism, the covenant is a major theological concept referring to the eternal bond between God and the people of Israel grounded in God's

gracious and steadfast concern (Hebrew *chesed*) that calls for the nation's obedience to the divine commandments (*mitzvot*) and instruction (*torah*.) For Christianity (e.g. Paul, and the writer of Hebrews), God has made a "new covenant" (rendered as "new testament" in older English) with us who are believers on Jesus in the last times, superseding the "old covenant" (thus, "old testament") with Moses at Sinai (see Jeremiah 31:31-34).

### **Areas of God's Faithfulness in Deuteronomy 2:1-15**

**1. God is faithful in speaking to His people** (vv. 1-2). Notice that it was when the people "turned and journeyed into the wilderness" that the Lord spoke. God is still communicating with His people even though they have rebelled against Him. His interest in their welfare remains strong.

**2. God is faithful in guiding His people** (v. 3). Throughout this section of Scripture, God is continually guiding the people. Even the wandering has a sense of purpose. A Christian's life is in the hands of God as a bow and arrow are in the hands of an archer. God is aiming at something the saint cannot see; He stretches and we strain, and at times we say, "I cannot stand any more." But God goes on stretching until His purpose is accomplished; then He lets the arrow fly. God has a purpose in every zig-zag of Israel's journey.

**3. God is faithful to other nations** (vv. 5, 6, 9). Here we see God's power over peoples and nations other than Israel. Deuteronomy allows us at various times to see God's faithfulness to other nations besides Israel. This sovereignty should have encouraged the Israelites to enter their land of promise. If God would honor Edom's (v. 5) and also Moab's (v. 9) right to possess their land, how much more would He honor Israel's right to possess Canaan.

Another reason for the command to leave Edom and Moab alone is that God does not want Israel to settle down and covet land that is not theirs. He will not let them settle for less than His promise to them!

**4. God is faithful in blessing His people** (v. 7a). Forty years of faithful blessing bestowed on an unfaithful people! This is one of the examples that underscore the words of Richard C. Halverson, "There is nothing you can do to make God love you more. There is nothing you can do to make God love you less. His love is unconditional, impartial, everlasting, infinite, and perfect!"

**5. God is faithful in knowing about His people** (v. 7b). He also knows about other nations. I remember Dr. Donald Snow's saying, "We may not know where God is, but He always knows where you are." Yes, Israel, God sees you trudging through this great wilderness!

**6. God is faithful in disciplining His people.** These "men of war" **did not die** a natural death from old age; it was the direct action of the Lord that hastened their end (vv. 14-15). Jude 5 refers to this incident. "But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe."

This is just one of the New Testament examples illustrating that it is possible for men to receive the greatest of privileges and yet fall into a terrible calamity. In teaching the parable of the faithful servant and the evil servant, Jesus said, "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48).

The children of Israel had been given deliverance from the oppression of Egypt. God had committed to them the promised land. Yet, because they "rejected authority" (Jude 8), they were consumed in the wilderness.

This possibility of falling into calamity haunted Paul (1 Cor. 10:5-12) and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (3:18-4:2). Dr. Johnstone Jeffrey tells of a great man who absolutely refused to have his life story written before his death. His reason? "I have seen too many men fall out on the last leg."

*The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it" (Heb. 4:1, 2).*

*An entire generation lost everything at the door of the promised land because of their disobedience. What a waste. "You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" (Gal. 5:7).*

John Maxwell, Mastering The Old Testament Deuteronomy

God does govern. We are a little in danger of treating God as though He were some infinite, marvelous abstraction; or as though He were seated afar off in some distant heaven, unacquainted with the actual experience of these little human lives of ours; or as though He had formed and fashioned us in some mysterious creation, and one day, at the end of a period of loneliness, He would meet us again and call us to account. All such conceptions of God are unwarranted by the Biblical revelation, and are untrue to the profoundest things of our Bible.

The Bible reveals the actual, immediate government by God of the lives of His own people. Let us further remind ourselves that this government of God is autocratic. He never consults us as to what He will do with us. The government of God is absolute; He permits no compromise. The government of God is inclusive; He exempts no territory. All that produces no fear in the hearts of men and women who know the government of God. God is love, and God is wisdom. It is the government of the One Who fashioned me in answer to the impulses of His own love. It is the government of One Who knows my thought afar off and understands the sobbing desire that underlies all the failure, and Who will be infinitely patient with me until He has perfected that which concerns me. But it is government: direct, immediate, absolute, and autocratic.

### **A. The Government of God is Disquieting**

When the Divine upheaval came, they were moved from Goshen and Egypt and encamped at the Sea. Enemies and the sea hemmed them in. They were then led out of danger, and across the highway of the dried sea, into the wilderness. They encamped beneath Sinai, a ransomed people, freed from bondage, escaped from slavery, resting at last amid the quietness and peace of the magnificent solitude of the mountain. For a year and a month, free from all opposition, they realized the peace and blessedness of the Divine government, and then came the voice, "Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain," and immediately all engagements had to be canceled, every tent had to be struck.. The next picture we have is that of marching hosts moving forward, leaving the place of peace, tramping the dreary, desolate wilderness with faces set toward the goal of the Divine purpose. They were a disturbed people from beginning to end.

God disturbs lives – hopes and aspirations that gleamed and inspired, are suddenly put out, and all the movement of the years towards the goal seem to end in defeat. These are the common experiences of the saints. They are the problems of the men who observe the saints. Again and again they have been made the reason of ridicule.

Along the avenue of these experiences Satan has ridden with all his host to assault the faith of the believer: "If God loved you would He allow you thus to be disturbed? If God really loved you, would He not have left you that sacred, holy companionship? If God were really governing your life would He move you while your work seems to be successful?" God is always doing it. Divinely governed souls are always sojourners in tents, pilgrims. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their Lord," was the word of the Master Himself, indicating to the men who would follow Him that their true attitude should ever be that of expecting disturbance and change and alteration.

### **B. The Government of God is Purposeful**

He moved Israel on because His purpose was to give them the land. Here again the picture is a parable and the teaching is clear. God's dealings with a man today are always in the interest of his perfecting tomorrow. God's disquieting of human life is always in order that the life may climb to a higher height and come to fuller realization.

### **C. The Government of God is Perfect**

To the man who is truly God-governed the morning breaks and there is in his heart the consciousness that nothing can merely happen, in the secular sense of the word. There can be no accident. Yes, I may suffer. I may suffer some physical evil, some mental trouble, some assault on the soul. I may pass through the great and terrible wilderness; but the covenant is ordered in all things, and sure. God cannot be surprised. Exigency, contingency, are very useful words for you and for me; but God has no need of them. No emergency surprises Him. No contingency baffles Him. He sees the end from the beginning, and all the affairs of the universe are under His control. The man God-governed is a man who lives at the very heart of method and order. He knows that God is the blessed controller of all things.

**What is our relationship to this government?** Our true relation to the government of God is that of obedience: immediate and wholehearted. What are the conditions of such obedience? Confidence in the method because it is the method of God, even when I cannot see its value; keeping forever in view the ultimate purpose in me and through me, and being forever ready to be disturbed. I love the paradoxes of faith. Here is one: the only man who is never disquieted, is the man who is always ready to be disturbed. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning," ready to be disturbed; then when the call comes you will not be disturbed. It is when I allow my life to be anchored to friend, home, or church, that if God wants me to do without this friend, break up this home, leave this church, I am upset. When my life is anchored in God, then no disturbance can disturb. That is the philosophy of life of the men who really live in the Divine government.