

With a title adapted from Deuteronomy 6:24, *For Our Good Always* is a collection of twenty-five new essays from evangelical scholars on the message of Deuteronomy and its influence on Christian Scripture. This collection of studies wrestles with Deuteronomy from historical, literary, theological, and canonical perspectives. In the process, it raises new questions, presents original discoveries, and makes innovative proposals. Part 1 is focused on Deuteronomy's message and includes ten essays that address the book's interpretation and specific texts and themes. Part 2 has nine essays that address Deuteronomy's influence on specific texts or whole books within the Prophets, Writings, and New Testament. Part 3 includes six trajectory-shaping essays that consider the lasting significance of Deuteronomy for Christian preaching and ethics.

We are pleased today to speak with Jason DeRouchie, one of the editors of the book. To our delight, Dr. DeRouchie tells us not only about his book – he takes the time to teach us much about the message of Deuteronomy and its significance for Christians.

Books At a Glance (Fred Zaspel):

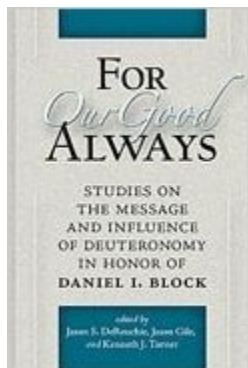
First, especially for our readers who may not be acquainted with him, please tell us something about Daniel Block — his career, his leading contributions, your relationship with him, etc. — and what considerations gave rise to this new Festschrift in his honor.

Jason DeRouchie:

The volume is offered in honor of my doctoral father, Daniel I. Block, on the occasion of his 70th birthday. He is presently the Gunther H. Knoedler Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, but in the past he has served at Providence College, Bethel Seminary, and Southern Seminary. I was first attracted to Block because of his rigorous scholarship matched by his heart for the Lord and his church.

In this generation, few Old Testament scholars have worked so ably, carefully, and intentionally to help the church and the academy grasp the message of the Old Testament in general and Deuteronomy in particular. Block's studies always exhibit an admirable balance of exegetical rigor, literary and theological awareness, and pastoral care. He is perhaps most well-known for his two volume commentary on *The Book of Ezekiel* in Eerdmans' NICOT series (1997, 1998), but he has also written major works on Judges and Ruth (B&H, 1999), ancient Near Eastern national theology (Wipf&Stock, 2013), Obadiah (Zondervan, 2014), and, most recently, a biblical theology of worship (Baker, 2014). Pride of place in recent days, however, must go to his work on Deuteronomy.

For well over a decade Block has, like the priest-scribe Ezra, devoted himself to the study, practice, and teaching of the deuteronomic torah (Ezra 7:10) in order to help and urge others to hear the life-giving gospel of Moses in Deuteronomy. Block has recently completed an 800-page pastoral commentary on *Deuteronomy* in Zondervan's NIVAC series (2012), which I believe is the best overall Deuteronomy commentary on the market. I say this even though I differ at some key points with Block's interpretation. Many of his essays on Deuteronomy have now been collected in two accessible volumes: *How I Love Your Torah, O LORD! Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy* (Cascade, 2011) and *The Gospel according to Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Cascade, 2012).



Books At a Glance:

What is the significance of your chosen title, *For Our Good Always*?

Jason DeRouchie:

The title *For Our Good Always* derives from Deuteronomy 6:24, which occurs in one of Deuteronomy's family discipleship passages and helps clarify the revealed purpose of Yahweh's commands: "And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, *for our good always*, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day" (ESV). Here Yahweh highlights that following his lead would result in life and blessing, good and not harm. Therefore, the people needed to "choose life, that you and your offspring may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Sadly, Israel was "stubborn" (Deuteronomy 9:6, 13; 10:16; 31:27), "unbelieving" (Deuteronomy 1:32; 9:23; 28:66), and "rebellious" (Deuteronomy 1:26, 43; 9:7, 23–24; 21:18, 20; 31:27), and in God's eternal purposes climaxing in Jesus, he chose not to change their hard hearts, at least not yet: "To this day Yahweh has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear" (Deuteronomy 29:4; cf. Romans 11:8, 10; 2 Corinthians 3:14)! Israel's sin would only increase in the land, ultimately resulting in their exile and death in the latter days (Deuteronomy 4:25–28; 31:27–29). Moses would have affirmed Paul's assertion that the old covenant bore a "ministry of condemnation"; this was so that the glory of Christ might be all the more magnified in the new covenant's "ministry of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 3:9).

On the basis of Jesus' perfect statute keeping (Romans 5:18; cf. Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5), Christians have been freed from the law's condemning power (Romans 8:1–3; cf. Colossians 2:14) and empowered by the Spirit of the resurrected Christ to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law by living the life of love (Romans 8:4; 13:8–10; cf. Deuteronomy 30:6, 8; Ezekiel 36:27; Romans 2:26–29). And "if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13). Similarly, "Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life" (Romans 6:22).

God's "law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (Romans 7:12). But apart from Christ, the law only discloses and multiplies sin (Romans 3:20; 5:20; 7:7; Galatians 3:19). In Christ, the law's demands are met, and all God's goodness is secured on behalf of those who believe. Then the Spirit empowers us to follow in ever-increasing ways *for our good always*. So we say with Paul, "*Thanks be to God*, that [we] who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which [we] were committed"

(Romans 6:17)—the law of Christ embodied in human lives (2 Corinthians 3:3; cf. Jeremiah 31:33).

Books At a Glance:

You have assembled an impressive list of contributors to this book. What considerations led to their selection? At least some are former students of Block, such as you, but were there any other “common” factors?

Jason DeRouchie:

The international group of specialists that contributed to this volume consists of Daniel Block’s colleagues, friends, and former students. All participants have a personal relationship with Dan, and the editors strongly encouraged them to write with the same type of balance between scholarly aptitude and pastoral care exemplified in Dan’s own writings. Most of the scholars identify themselves within conservative evangelicalism, affirming the doctrine of inerrancy. Still others readily accept the presuppositions of historical criticism, and their essays reflect such views. Contributors include Danny Akin, Christopher Ansberry, Jason DeRouchie, Peter Gentry, Jason Gile, Michael Graves, Michael Grisanti, Richard Hess, Harry Hoffner Jr., Jerry Hwang, Rebekah Josberger, Elmer Martens, Thomas McClendon Jr., J. Gordon McConville, Alan Millard, Douglas Moo, Grant Osborne, Richard Schultz, Gary Smith, Myrto Theocharous, Charlie Trimm, Kenneth Turner, Peter Vogt, Gordon Wenham, and Hugh Williamson.

Books At a Glance:

Can you describe for us briefly the significance of Deuteronomy in the Canon? What primary contributions does it make?

Jason DeRouchie:

No other book colors the tapestry of biblical thought quite like Deuteronomy. It synthesized the theology of the Pentateuch, provided Israel with a constitution for guiding their covenant relationship with Yahweh in the promised land, and served as a primary lens through which later biblical authors interpreted redemptive history. From it Jesus battled the devil in the wilderness, and from it Paul built his understanding of the relationship of the old and new covenants. I am convinced that it is because of Moses’ teaching in Deuteronomy that Paul rightly understood the old covenant to have “a ministry of condemnation” (2 Corinthians 3:9; cf. Deuteronomy 29:4[3]; 31:27–29).

With this, the so-called “Deuteronomistic History” (Joshua–Kings) gets its name from Deuteronomy’s apparent influence on these books. Similarly, the prophets grounded their teaching in Moses’ law (2 Kings 17:13; Malachi 4:4), and their warnings of judgment and their hopes of restoration were all controlled by the covenant curses and restoration blessings found in Moses’ words. The psalmists and sages too called for lives shaped around God’s law (Psalm 19:7–11; Proverbs 1:8; Ecclesiastes 12:13). Whether priest, prophet, prince, poet, parent, or the like, they were called to meditate on the Deuteronomic law (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:3; Nehemiah 8:13) and to teach it faithfully from generation to generation (Deuteronomy 6:7; 17:18–20; 18:18; 31:11; 33:10; Psalm 78:5), until the day when the “prophet like Moses” would rise (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; 34:10; cf. Luke 7:16 with 9:35; Acts 3:22–26), providing new covenant teaching that would both fulfill and supersede Moses’ voice (Matt 7:24–27; 17:5; 28:20; John 16:12–14; 17:8, 18, 20; 2 Thess 2:15; Heb 1:1–2).

Books At a Glance (Fred Zaspel):

You contributed two chapters to this festschrift, both on the Decalogue. In the first you argue for a “modified Lutheran-Catholic” numbering of the ten words. This of course is an old question, but we were impressed to read your rather uncommon approach to establish a rather surprising conclusion! We suspect that future discussion of this question will need to take your work into account. You cannot re-state your entire argument here, of course, but can you describe for us briefly what is unique about your approach. Or, perhaps more simply, what contribution(s) to this discussion did you hope to make?

Jason DeRouchie:

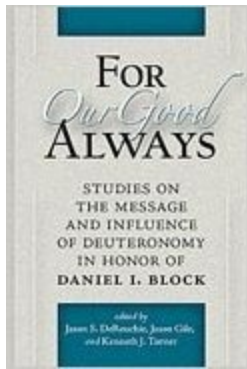
My first essay is titled, “[Counting the Ten: An Investigation into the Numbering of the Decalogue.](#)” I open the study with the following words (minus the footnotes):

The Bible is explicit that God revealed *ten* Words to his people at Mt. Sinai (Exod 34:28; Deut 4:13, 10:4), and it goes to reason that we should know how to count them, especially in light of the unique status these words bear in Scripture. But in the history of interpretation there have been three principal perspectives on how properly to enumerate these ten, and the distinct forms of the Decalogue in Exod 20:1–17 and Deut 5:5–21 only intensify the challenges.

Most recent studies of the Ten Words accept without discussion the traditional Reformed numbering. Throughout the centuries, however, interpreters have questioned their proper itemization, debating issues of form, style, semantic content, and cantillation, especially with reference to the boundaries of “Words” one, two, and ten.

Contemporary studies in discourse grammar (i.e., textlinguistics or discourse analysis) open new avenues for discerning literary structure and flow-of-thought in Hebrew texts. Utilizing a nuanced understanding of participant reference, connection, and other literary devices like inclusio and repetition, this study reevaluates the numbering of the Decalogue and argues that a modified form of the Catholic-Lutheran enumeration most closely aligns with the formal text-grammatical signals and finds strong support from the perspective of style, semantic content, and cantillation.

There are few texts in Scripture that have had as much influence on the church as the Ten Commandments, but the message of each individual word does alter somewhat based on where one divides the units. Building off my earlier study in discourse analysis (see [A Call to Covenant Love: Literary Structure and Text Grammar in Deuteronomy 5–11](#) [Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2007]), I sought to approach the Ten Words with fresh questions in order to discern what could be gained.



Books At a Glance:

Can you give us an example of the interpretive and/or “practical” implications of your suggested numbering of the ten commandments?

Jason DeRouchie:

I pick up this question in my second essay titled, “[Making the Ten Count: Reflections on the Lasting Message of the Decalogue](#).” The modified Catholic-Lutheran numbering, which I believe best accounts for the data of the Ten Words, enumerates the Decalogue as follows:

1. I am Yahweh. . . . Never other gods (Exodus 20:2–6 // Deuteronomy 5:6–10)
2. Never bear Yahweh’s name in falsehood (Exodus 20:7 // Deuteronomy 5:11)
3. Remember (/Observe) the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8–11 // Deuteronomy 5:12–15)
4. Honor your parents (Exodus 20:12 // Deuteronomy 5:16)
5. Never murder (Exodus 20:13 // Deuteronomy 5:17)
6. (And) Never commit adultery (Exodus 20:14 // Deuteronomy 5:18)
7. (And) Never steal (Exodus 20:15 // Deuteronomy 5:19)
8. (And) Never bear false witness (Exodus 20:16 // Deuteronomy 5:20)
9. (And) Never covet your neighbor’s house (/wife) (Exodus 20:17a // Deuteronomy 5:21a)
10. (And) Never covet (/desire) your neighbor’s wife, etc. (/house, field, etc.) (Exodus 20:17b // Deuteronomy 5:21b)

Within this framework, a number of groupings are evident. Word 1 alone includes portrays Yahweh in first person (“I/my”), whereas all others use third (“Yahweh/him”). Words 1–4 are distinct from Words 6–10 in that every one includes the phrase “Yahweh your God,” has either a ground (“because”) or purpose clause (“so that”), and is somewhat developed in length. In light of the chain of “and” conjunctions linking Words 6–10 in Deuteronomy, the result is a pattern of long and short command groupings, which places the Sabbath—Israel’s covenant sign—at the center:

- *Long*: No other gods
- *Short*: Never bear God’s name in vain
- *Long*: Keep the Sabbath

- *Short*: Honor one's parents
- *Long*: Never murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, covet your neighbor's wife, desire your neighbor's house, etc.

As for an example of my numbering's significance, the Orthodox-Reformed tradition has generally held that "There shall never be to you other gods" (Exodus 20:3 // Deuteronomy 5:7) and "You shall never make a carved image" (Exodus 20:4[–6] // Deuteronomy 5:8[–10]) are distinct Words, the first addressing worship's object and the second its mode. In contrast, the Catholic-Lutheran numbering reads these two commands together, treating as the first Word all the first-person address that runs from the initial indicative "*I am Yahweh your God*" through the phrase "those who love *me* and keep *my* commandments." The initial statement and three prohibitions together clarify one of Israel's most fundamental worldview questions—how should we perceive and, by implication, approach the God who has saved us?

The initial indicative highlights Yahweh as Israel's deliverer from physical slavery and thus characterizes in one sense all the commandments that follow as words of freedom. What follows is then the first main imperative: "There shall never be to you other gods besides me" (Exodus 20:3 // Deuteronomy 5:7). In all likelihood, this charge relates *not* to Yahweh having highest priority or rank among many (though this is a justified implication of the meaning) but to his status as the only sovereign, the one who acts alone, not as the head of a pantheon of rival deities but as the sole and ultimate power in the universe. This view is suggested by the fact that whenever the preposition "besides" is used with a personal object, the meaning is elsewhere always spatial, thus implying that the stress in this text is that Yahweh has no peers in his presence. He does not share power, authority, or jurisdiction with anyone.

This initial charge then leads naturally into the explanatory statements regarding (1) the crafting of a sculptured image and (2) the worship and service of other gods (Exodus 20:4–6 // Deuteronomy 5:8–10). What is striking here is that the truth of Yahweh's preeminence over all is not left as a theological abstraction; rather the implications for Israel's every day life are made explicit by the two injunctions, which intentionally build upon the initial command.

First, Yahweh's transcendence both in being and function requires that human-made idols hold no place in Israel's existence. Graven images were believed to mediate the presence of the gods, and by them humans served the needs of the gods. Yahweh has no needs but indeed supplies everything as he governs heaven and earth (Deuteronomy 4:39; 32:39; cf. Acts 17:25). Furthermore, Yahweh encounters his creation through his Spirit-presence and not through idols (Deuteronomy 4:15–18).

Second, Yahweh's supremacy over all necessitates that Israel never worship or serve anything other than him (Exodus 20:5 // Deuteronomy 5:9). The practical import here is vast. Powers and pleasures abound in this world that vie for attention and allegiance. Indeed, they can even be viewed as being controlled by demons (Deuteronomy 32:17; 1 Corinthians 10:19–20)! Yet in this world where God alone hold absolute supremacy, honor and thanksgiving must ultimately be given to him alone (Romans 1:21).

The call to worship Yahweh alone is directly related to the manner by which he should be worshipped. The two cannot be separated, and the Ten Words suggest they go together, all

because Yahweh is rightfully, necessarily, and lovingly jealous for his people's affection (Exodus 20:5–6 // Deuteronomy 5:9–10).

Books At a Glance:

What is the connection you suggest between the Decalogue and the *imago Dei*?

Jason DeRouchie:

In my essay I note that the Ten Words were the only Scripture placed in the ark of the covenant within the holy of holies, directly where a sculptured god would have rested in the temples of Israel's neighbors (Exodus 40:20–21). For Yahweh, his image would not and could not be mediated through idols of wood or stone. Instead, he purposed that his image would be evident in his people's living out the Decalogue. Thus the divine character would be embodied in human lives.

Significantly, the tablets remained enshrined within the ark, unable to be read. This provided a parable of the role of the law within the old covenant. Instead of being etched on the hearts of the people, sin was engraved on the tablets of their hearts (Jeremiah 17:1), and thus no one could read the character of God in their lives.

The new covenant promised something greater. The day would come when the ark of the covenant would no longer be remembered because God would make his own people his throne—Jew and Gentile alike gathered together under his supremacy (Jeremiah 3:16–18; cf. Isaiah 4:5–6). Here the people would replace the ark of the covenant, enjoying the presence of God and the law written on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:27). That is, they would be God's temple (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19), and the character of God would now be read in their lives by all (2 Corinthians 3:2–3).

All this is made possible because of Christ, who stands as the fulfillment and end of the law partially by meeting the law's legal demands (Matthew 5:17; Romans 10:4; cf. Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:13–15). Christ is the last Adam, the ultimate image bearer, the true Israel, and God's royal-priest Son, whose perfect obedience of faith in his life and death completely fulfilled the law and thus secured eternal blessing and enablement for the elect (Rom 5:18–19; Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 5:8). Before the Ten Commandments are ever about us, they are about Christ, for they portray for us a picture of the character of God that is magnified in his person and work.

Books At a Glance:

For our readers who may want to read more from Dr. Block, where would you suggest is a good place for them to begin? And for whom does he usually write?

Jason DeRouchie:

Block normally writes for learned pastors and scholars, and as I already noted, his studies always exhibit an admirable balance of exegetical rigor, literary and theological awareness, and pastoral care. To get a good sense for Block's exegetical rigor and heart for the church, I would pick up his soon-to-be-published [*For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship*](#) (Baker, 2014). I would also snag his excellent commentaries on [*Deuteronomy*](#), [*Judges and Ruth*](#), and volumes [1](#) and [2](#) of [*The Book of Ezekiel*](#).

Books At a Glance: We would have also enjoyed speaking with the other contributors to this volume about their various subjects — exile (McConville and Gile), Israel as God’s Son (Osborne), Paul’s use of Deuteronomy in Galatians 3 and Romans 10 (Moo), the several chapters on the influence of Deuteronomy elsewhere in the canon, etc. *For Your Good Always* is a substantive contribution to studies in Deuteronomy. But thank you for your time. In a previous interview with us you mentioned your forthcoming work on Deuteronomy, which you said would still be a few years until completion. For any of our readers who would like to begin a study of Deuteronomy, what books – in addition to Deuteronomy itself! – would you suggest that would be most helpful?

Jason DeRouchie: My chapter on “Deuteronomy” in my *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Jesus’ Bible* (Kregel, 2013) is a great place to begin for a synthesis of the book’s message (at least as I see it). Next I would check out the commentaries on Deuteronomy by [Block](#), [C. J. H. Wright](#), and [J. G. McConville](#). A helpful recent introduction to the interpretive issues facing the book is D. G. Firth and Philip S. Johnston, eds., *Interpreting Deuteronomy: Issues and Approaches* (InterVarsity, 2012). Also, three helpful books on Deuteronomy’s theology are J. G. Millar, *Now Choose Life: Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy* (NSBT 6; InterVarsity, 2000); Paul A. Barker, *The Triumph of Grace in Deuteronomy: Faithless Israel, Faithful Yahweh in Deuteronomy* (PBM; Wipf&Stock, 2007); and Kenneth J. Turner, *The Death of Deaths in the Death of Israel: Deuteronomy’s Theology of Exile* (Wipf & Stock, 2010). Finally, readers can keep their eye out for the fall 2014 edition of the *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, which will be fully devoted to Deuteronomy.