

WHAT  
THE OLD  
TESTAMENT  
AUTHORS REALLY  
CARED ABOUT

A SURVEY of Jesus' Bible

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*What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Jesus' Bible*

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# DEUTERONOMY

## Who?

Deuteronomy largely consists of Moses' final sermons, which he spoke (Deut. 1:3, 5; 4:44; 5:1; 29:1) and transcribed (31:9, 22, 24; 32:45) for the Israelites who would live in the Promised Land (1:3, 35, 39). Later biblical figures affirmed the book's Mosaic authorship (Josh. 8:32; John 5:46–47), nature, and authority (e.g., Josh. 1:7–8; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 23:25; Mark 10:3–5; Acts 3:22–23; Rom. 10:19). Furthermore, Joshua—Moses' successor (Josh. 1:7–8; 8:32; cf. Deut. 3:38; 34:9)—and King David (1 Kings 2:3; cf. Deut. 17:18) had written copies of something called “the Book of the Law (*tōrā*)” or “the Law of Moses,” the former of which is the title Moses gave to his Deuteronomic material (Deut. 29:21; 30:10; 31:26).

All this stated, someone other than Moses, living in the Promised Land, finalized the book's form. This person introduced the whole (1:1–4), clarified geo-historical data (2:10–11, 20–23; 3:9, 11, 13b–14; 10:6–7), and seamed together Moses' messages (e.g., 1:5; 4:41–43, 44–5:1a; 29:1). He then commented on the prophet's death and succession (34:1–9), concluding, “there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses” (34:10–12; cf. 18:18).

## When?

Moses delivered and wrote his final messages around 1406 B.C. (though some posit ca. 1250 B.C.) at the end of Israel's forty years in the wilderness—just before his death and Israel's conquest of the Promised Land west of the Jordan River (1:1–4; 4:1–5; 31:1–3, 9, 14, 24). The final form would have appeared during Israel's tenure in

the land, probably in the early years following the conquest (before 1000 B.C.), though others suggest a time just prior to the exile (before 586 B.C.) or during the period of initial restoration (after 538 B.C.).

## Where?

Moses gave his final words east of the Jordan River near Beth Peor in what was formerly the territory of Moab (1:1, 5; 3:29; 4:46; 29:1; cf. Num. 21:26); from here, the Promised Land to the west was considered “beyond the Jordan” (Deut. 3:20, 25; 11:30; cf. Num. 32:19). In contrast, the final editor of Deuteronomy was within the Promised Land, viewing Moses and Israel's placement in Moab as “beyond the Jordan” (Deut. 1:1, 5; 3:8; 4:41, 46–47, 49).

## Why?

The collection of Moses' messages in Deuteronomy provided Israel with a constitution for governing their lives in relation to God and his world within the Promised Land. It also provides the new covenant community clarity on the nature of covenant love and various ways love can be manifest (30:6, 8). As “the Book of the *tōrā*,” it served as God's manual of “instruction,”

1. Reminding Israel of Yahweh's greatness by stressing his uniqueness and his past and future grace toward them, including ultimate restoration after exile;
2. Providing a lasting witness against Israel's sin (31:26–29; cf. 28:58–63; 29:19–21);
3. Clarifying for Israel how to enjoy lasting covenant relationship (6:4–9; 17:18–20; 30:9–10; 31:10–13; 32:44–47).

### Carefully Crafted Verses from Deuteronomy

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:4–5).

“Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess” (Deut. 32:46–47).

“There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in his majesty.... Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help, and the sword of your triumph!” (Deut. 33:26, 29).

### THE AUTHOR OF DEUTERONOMY ...

- Provided a *constitution* for guiding Israel’s relationship with God.
- Stressed the importance of taking *God and his Word* seriously.
- Emphasized the *centrality of love* in one’s relationship with God.
- Detailed the *perils* of sin, the *pleasures* of surrender, and the *promise* of grace.
- Defined the goal of love as *God-exalting influence* on the nations.
- Affirmed the *supremacy of Yahweh God* over all.

## The Author of Deuteronomy Provided a *Constitution* for Guiding Israel's Relationship with God

Perhaps no other book colors the tapestry of biblical thought like Deuteronomy. Standing climactically as the final installment in the Pentateuch and concluding the account of Moses' life, it clarified for the post-wilderness generation the significance of all that precedes, and it provided them with a constitution for guiding their covenant relationship with Yahweh in the Promised Land. It also supplied the Bible's later writers with a lens through which to interpret Israel's covenant history and clarified what humanity's response to Yahweh should be in this sometimes challenging world.

Like the New Testament's twin towers, John and Romans, Deuteronomy provides answers to all the major worldview questions: *Who or what governs reality? Who are we? Where are we? What is valuable in this world? What has gone wrong in this world? What is the solution?* As you read, try to answer these questions as Moses would have.

Why did Deuteronomy have such influence? A key reason is that the book served as a document of covenant *renewal* for all who would live in the Promised Land (thus the title *Deutero-nomos*, "second law"). As part of the fulfillment of his covenantal promises to the patriarchs (Deut. 1:8; 7:8; cf. Gen. 15:18; 17:7) and in alignment with what he started with the exodus generation at Sinai (Horeb) (Deut. 5:2–3; 29:1), Yahweh in Deuteronomy reaf-

firmed and developed his special covenant relationship with Israel just prior to their entry into Canaan (29:1, 12–15). For all who would dwell in the land, therefore, Deuteronomy's exposition of the earlier covenant materials would be a guide, governing life in relationship with Yahweh until the



"These are the words of the covenant that the LORD commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant that he made with them at Horeb" (Deut. 29:1). *Camels in the plains of Moab, opposite Jericho* (see Num. 36:13).

promises given to Abraham were fulfilled (see Gal. 3:23–29). To heed the instruction would result in sustained life and blessing; to ignore would result in curse and ultimately death (Deut. 11:26–28; 30:15–18).

Deuteronomy presents itself as a collection of Moses’ three “farewell sermons” (1:5–4:43; 4:44–29:1; 29:2–30:20), a song of warning (32:1–43), and the prophet’s death-bed blessing (33:2–29), all wrapped into the grand narrative of God’s kingdom-building work begun in Genesis. Moses termed his own material “the Book of the *tôrâ*” (29:21; 30:10; 31:26)—God’s manual of “instruction” governing life in the Promised Land. In it Moses clarified the nature of lasting covenant relationship and pleaded as a pastor on behalf of a loving covenant “father” who was calling for the sustained love of his “sons” (6:5; 14:1; 32:5–6; cf. Exod. 4:22). Israel must listen to Moses’ teaching so they can “learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law” (Deut. 31:12). Later, the prophet stressed (32:47): “It is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.” He also emphasized that in the age of restoration following the curse (i.e., the new covenant), when God does a love-enabling work in the hearts of his people (30:6), the teachings of Deuteronomy would still be important (30:8): “And you shall again obey the voice of the LORD and keep all his commandments that I command you today” (cf. Jer. 12:16; 31:33; Isa. 2:2–3; 42:1–3; Mic. 4:1–3).

Jesus and the apostles frequently preached from Deuteronomy, citing it or alluding to it more than one-hundred times in the New Testament! Do we take Deuteronomy as seriously as they did?

**Figure 6.1. Deuteronomy at a Glance**

Literary Structure	Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Echo
Superscription (1:1–4)	Title/Preamble (1:1–4)
Moses’ 1 <sup>st</sup> Sermon: God’s Past Grace and Israel’s Covenant Future (1:5–4:43)	Historical Prologue (1:5–4:43)
Moses’ 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sermon: The Nature of Lasting Covenant Relationship (4:44–29:1)	Stipulations (4:44–26:19)
Moses’ 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sermon: A Paradigm for a New Covenant after Exile (29:2–30:20)	Document Clause (27:1–8; 31:9, 24–26)
Moses’ Arrangements for the Future, Including His Warning Song (31:1–32:47)	Public Recitation (27:9–26; 31:10–13)
Moses’ Final Blessing and Death (32:48–34:8)	Blessings and Curses (27:12–26; 28:1–68)
Postscript (34:9–12)	

### **The Author of Deuteronomy Stressed the Importance of Taking *God and His Word* Seriously**

Throughout his messages, Moses emphasized that Israel would enjoy life in the Promised Land only in a context of surrender to, dependence on, and trust in Yahweh and his revelation. The people must keep God and his Word central, for “man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:3; cf. Matt. 4:4).

Moses believed life could be enjoyed only when one closely follows God, for turning away would be to choose death over life (Deut. 30:15–20). The prophet stressed both that “[the LORD] is your life” (30:20) and his words are “your very life” (32:47), thus showing the amazing grace of God in disclosing his will to us. (Law does not have to be burden!) God is the initiator, graciously giving directions; having experienced grace, we respond



“You shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law” (Deut. 31:11–12). *Jewish men and boys with a Torah scroll at the Western Wall, Jerusalem.*

by following his lead and thus sustain our experience of life that can only be found in relationship to him. “I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life” (Ps. 119:93). In such a context, Moses charged Israel to hear and follow “the statutes and rules ... that you may live” (Deut. 4:1) and then emphasized that, in contrast to the tragic deaths of all who had followed Baal of Peor, “you who held fast to the LORD your God are all alive today” (4:4; cf. 6:24).

A willingness to follow implies surrender to the leader (reverence/fear) as well as dependence on and trust in the leader’s readiness to guide one to the promised destination (faith). Within the biblical framework, obeying God (following) is rightly understood only as an outgrowth of a proper disposition toward Yahweh’s awe-inspiring nature (fear) and promises (faith).

The Bible emphasizes that *fearing* the Lord is the generator for holy living (Exod. 20:20; Prov. 1:7; Jer. 32:39–40; Phil. 2:12). It also stresses that a lack of such fear results in judgment (Matt. 10:28; Rom. 3:18). In line with this canonical perspective, Deuteronomy teaches that true obedience grows out of a heart that reveres Yahweh’s supremacy. This is clear from the book’s stress that fearing God must precede and give rise to following his ways. As seen most clearly in Deuteronomy 6:1–3; 17:19–20, and 31:11–13, the full pattern is as follows (see also Deut. 4:10; 5:23–29; 6:1–2, 24; 10:12–13; cf. John 5:24–25; 6:44–45):<sup>1</sup>

The Reading or Teaching of God’s Word → Hearing God’s Word →  
Learning to Fear God → Obeying God = Life

Significantly, this progression emphasizes that the fear of God that produces dependent and productive living results only from God’s gracious disclosure of himself and his will in a way that captures the hearts of his people.

*Faith* in the God of promise is a natural outgrowth of fearing Yahweh, for a true encounter with the living God proves both his believability and the desirability of lasting relationship with him

The old covenant saw obedience as the fruit of a heart-encounter with God. But Deuteronomy also made clear that Israel was spiritually deaf (never receiving the gift of “hearing”) and would therefore never follow God (Deut. 29:4; 31:16, 20, 27, 29) until the day he would change their heart (4:30–31; 30:6, 8, 11–14). In echo of both Moses and Isaiah, Jesus said (John 6:44–45): “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.... Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.”

1. Daniel I. Block, “The Grace of Torah: The Mosaic Prescription for Life (Deut. 4:1–8; 6:20–25),” *BSac* 162 no.1 (2005), 15.

(Heb. 11:1, 6). Throughout the Bible, faith is future-oriented in that God’s people trust him to accomplish for them what they cannot do on their own (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:18–22; Heb. 11:1, 6). A heart of God-dependence rather than self-reliance is the root; obedience is the fruit (Deut. 29:18–19; cf. 1 John 3:7). Just as there is no true faith without obedience (1 Cor. 13:2; James 2:17, 26), so also there is no true obedience without faith (Rom. 14:23; Heb. 11:6).

Deuteronomy’s commitment to what Paul termed the “obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26; cf. 6:17–18) is clearly evident in the way Moses addressed Israel’s initial failure to enter the Promised Land. After affirming that Israel rebelled against God’s Word (Deut. 1:26), the prophet asserted that Israel’s ultimate failure was in not “believing” God (1:32–36; 9:23; cf. Num. 14:11; 20:12; 2 Kings 17:14). The generation that first sought to enter the land lacked faith overflowing in obedience, and this lack of persevering surrender ultimately resulted in their ruin. In the words of the writer to the Hebrews, Moses preached “*good news*” to the wilderness generation, but “the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened” (Heb. 4:2; cf. Rom. 9:32; Jude 5). The writer then added, “Those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience” (Heb. 4:6).

Believers today should still revere God’s Word! Two Gospel writers stress this fact by narrating Jesus’ use of Deuteronomy 8:3 in his own battle with the devil: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4; cf. Luke 4:4).

“Following the leader” is more than a kids’ game; it should be the pattern of our lives in relationship to God. In both the old and new covenants, real obedience to the Lord flows out of a heart that is awed by his greatness, takes seriously his Word, is surrendered to his ways, trusts in his promises, and looks to him for help.

### **The Author of Deuteronomy Emphasized the *Centrality of Love* in One’s Relationship with God**

What should such God-centered, faith-filled, Bible-saturated living look like? Some may immediately respond, “Keeping the Ten Commandments!” This is a reasonable assertion, in view of the foundational place of the Ten Words both in the Law (Exod. 20:2–17; Deut. 5:6–21) and in the rest of Scripture (e.g., Hos. 4:2; Jer.

7:8–11; Matt. 19:18; Rom. 13:9). Strikingly, however, in Deuteronomy and elsewhere, the Ten Words are seen as illustrations of a more fundamental call—namely, to love God and neighbor. As Jesus stressed, these two commands uphold “all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:37–40; cf. Mark 12:29–31). Similarly, Paul wrote that all other commandments are “summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Rom. 13:9; cf. Gal. 5:14; James 2:8).

### ***A Call to Covenant Love***

Deuteronomy suggests that “loving God” is the supreme command, the first step in a godward life (Deut. 6:4–5): “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Love for God is the spring from which love of neighbor flows (10:12, 19; cf. Lev. 19:18). Loving God and neighbor summarizes *what* God’s people were to do; the Ten Words (the “testimonies”) and all the additional “statutes and rules” clarify *how* God’s people were to do it (see Deut. 4:45; 12:1; 26:16). Love toward God and neighbor is the essence of covenant relationship.

### ***The Context and Scope of Covenant Love***

Intriguingly, in order to clarify for Israel in an understandable way the contours of relating to God, the Lord appears to have adopted and adapted international treaty language for his own purposes. In a world where suzerain “fathers” (i.e., big kings) committed to “love” their vassal “sons” (i.e., small kings) and where vassal “sons” were called to “love” their suzerain “fathers” and their fellow vassal “brothers,” Yahweh approached Israel as the covenant Lord who sought to make a people his treasure. In accordance with the “love” he had for the patriarchs (4:37; 10:15), he set his affections on Israel, electing them (7:6; 14:2), redeeming them (7:8), becoming their covenant “king” (33:3, 5), and protecting them through the wilderness (23:5). As such, he was Israel’s “father” (32:6) and they were his adopted “sons” (14:1) in order that they might become God’s “inheritance” (4:20; 9:26, 29; 32:9), “treasured possession,” and “holy people” (7:6; 26:18–19; cf. Exod. 19:5). In response to such grace, Israel was called to “love” Yahweh (Deut. 6:5), the effect of which included loving their “brother” (10:19; cf. 14:27–29; 15:11; Lev. 19:18)—a title representative of everyone (male and female) in the covenant community (Deut. 15:12), unless specified otherwise (13:6). Like the faith that

produces it, love for God and one's neighbor is a human *response* to God's covenant initiating and sustaining grace.

The immediate context of Deuteronomy 6 suggests that “love”



“You shall bind [these words] as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deut. 6:8). *Jewish men with phylacteries at the Western Wall, Jerusalem.*

for Yahweh was to be a life-encompassing, community-embracing, exclusive commitment to the Sovereign One. This definition is first suggested by the call of Deuteronomy 6:5 to love Yahweh with all one's *heart*, *soul* (being), and *might* (substance).<sup>2</sup> Most likely, rather than detailing three distinct parts of a person, these elements characterize three expanding, yet overlapping, human spheres of life, all of which are to proclaim God's supremacy. “Heart” relates to all that is internal—one's desires, emotions, attitudes, perceptions, *and* thoughts. “Soul” refers to one's entire being—all that is part of the “heart” plus everything outward: one's body, words, actions, reactions (e.g., Gen. 2:7; Lev. 26:11). Finally, “might” is not only physical strength but also all that one has available for honoring God, which would include one's spouse, children, house, land, animals, wardrobe, tools, and toys. All that we are and have should ring out, “My God is Yahweh!”

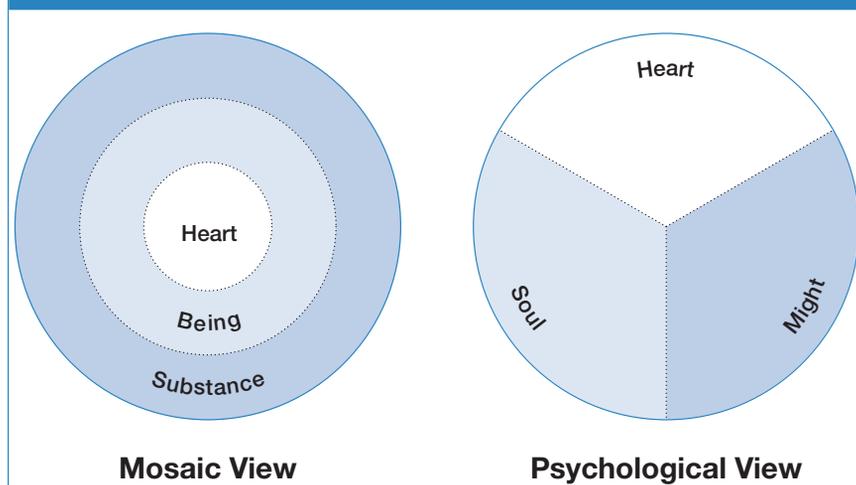
This interpretation of the call to holistic covenant surrender to Yahweh is further supported in the verses that follow. Not only are the hearers to have Moses' call to covenant love etched on their hearts (Deut. 6:6; cf. Jer. 31:33), but also they are to impress the words upon their children at all times and in all settings, spreading a passion for

The old covenant called for *internal* surrender and loyalty to God (Deut 4:39; 6:5–6; 8:5; 10:12–13, 16; 11:18; 26:16; 32:46), but for only a small remnant of Israel did the call reach the heart and produce a godward life (e.g., Pss. 37:31; 40:8; 119:10–11; Isa. 51:7). In contrast, *every member* of the new covenant is empowered by God to love him and others rightly—not perfectly yet, but truly (Deut. 30:6, 8; Jer. 31:33–34; Ezek. 36:26–27; cf. Rom. 8:4–9, 13; 13:8–10).

2. S. Dean McBride Jr., “The Yoke of the Kingdom: An Exposition of Deuteronomy 6:4–5,” *Int* 27 (1973): 304; Daniel I. Block, “How Many Is God: An Investigation into the Meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4–5,” *JETS* 47 no. 2 (2004): 202–4.

God's supremacy on to the next generation (Deut. 6:7; cf. 6:20–25; 11:19). Furthermore, an allegiance to God above all else is to govern both the nature of one's actions ("as a sign on your hand") and the object and manner of one's focus ("as frontlets between eyes") (6:8; cf. 21:7; Exod. 3:9, 16). Finally, all that takes place in the home ("on the doorposts of your house") and community ("in your [city] gates"), in private and in a crowd, is to proclaim that God is truly the king (Deut. 6:9). Covenant love for Yahweh is indeed a life-encompassing, community-embracing, exclusive commitment that calls for every closet of our lives to be filled with radical God-centeredness.

**Figure 6.2. The Locus of Covenant Love in Deuteronomy 6:5**



### ***The Nature of Covenant Love***

Immediately after calling God's people to covenant love, Moses characterized this God-centered existence in two ways, both of which are echoed and developed throughout the rest of the book. To love God is (1) to *remember* Yahweh amidst the pleasures of life (6:10–25) and (2) to *remove* all obstacles that could hinder a God-centered existence (7:1–26). These fruits of the supreme command are then developed in chapters 12–26, wherein Moses described "the statutes and rules" Israel must heed (12:1; 26:16) and called them to follow "righteousness and righteousness alone" (*contra* ESV) in every area of life (16:20). The Sovereign One is passionate about *right order* in his world, and only when he is taken seriously is true *righteousness*

manifest (cf. 6:25; 24:13; cf. Rom. 2:13; 1 John 3:7–10). Although some have unhappily titled chapters 12–26 the “Deuteronomic Law Code,” all of the instruction is pastoral. This is a sermon, giving hands and feet to the supreme command.



“The LORD gave me the two tablets of stone written with the finger of God” (Deut. 9:10). A remnant of Hammurabi’s Law Code (1790 B.C.) from Nippur during the Old Babylonian Kingdom (from the Istanbul Archaeological Museum).

As noted earlier, love for God and neighbor summarized *what to do*, and the detailed “statutes and rules” (12:1; 26:16) in chapters 12–26 clarified for Israel *how to do it* during their tenure in the land. For them, love would include three spheres: righteousness in community worship (12:1–16:17), righteousness in community oversight (16:18–18:22), and righteousness in daily community life (19:1–26:15). As one skims over this material, what becomes clear is that Yahweh’s guidance addressed all aspects of human existence, whether criminal offences, civil cases, family relationships, societal norms, or community worship (see Fig. 3.4). Most instructions were themselves concrete expressions of love for others, whereas some were symbolic, filled with pageantry that pointed to heart realities that Israel itself was to recognize. How gracious of God to spell out for his people the right way to live (see 4:5–8)! The psalmist recognized the significance of this gift (Ps. 19:9–10): “The rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.”

Because *all* scriptural commands are about loving our neighbor (Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:14), Paul could use Deuteronomy’s wisdom to challenge believers in their life of love, even though Christians are not under the old covenant (Deut. 25:4 in 1 Cor. 9:7–10; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; Eph. 6:1–3; 1 Peter 1:15–16). Moses and the later prophets anticipated this exact type of internalized application of Deuteronomy’s laws in the new covenant age (Deut. 30:6, 8; Jer. 12:16; 31:33; Ezek. 36:27)!

### **The Author of Deuteronomy Detailed the *Perils of Sin, the Pleasures of Surrender, and the Promise of Grace***

Throughout the book, the main challenge to a God-centered, fulfilled existence is the deceitfulness of sin manifest in two overlapping contexts: prosperity and paganism. As Israel entered the Promised Land, they needed to recognize how quickly riches or success can lead to self-reliance and to forgetting God as the ultimate provider (Deut. 6:10–12; 8:10–18; 9:4; 29:19; 32:15). They also needed to be aware how easily the wrong crowd or an immoral setting can pull people away from God (7:3, 4, 16, 25; 11:16; 17:17). All members of the community, therefore, needed to be intentional to sustain their surrender and God-ward focus. God takes sin seriously, and his people should too!

**Motivation: Perils, Pleasures, and Future Grace**

In Deuteronomy, Moses motivated Israel to battle sin and to love God by reaffirming the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26. Yahweh pledged to continue to *protect* his people and to *provide* for them, given they continue to live as his people—remaining loyal to him from the heart (28:1–14; 30:3–10). However, he also warned against trading joy for pain and rest for discipline through faithless, self-exalting rebellion (11:16–17; 28:15–68; 29:19–21).

Promises motivate people by creating either desire or dread. In the words of Peter, “He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desires” (2 Peter 1:4; cf. Rom. 4:18–21). In both the old and new covenants, believers come to look more like God and to battle the deceitful allurements of the evil one by focusing on that which is more desirable—God’s promises! We will make different choices in the present if we truly believe that the outcome of one decision over another will produce more satisfying results. By believing God’s Word, hope is created, and what we hope for tomorrow changes who we are today.

The covenant promises of blessing, curse, and restoration blessing in Deuteronomy 27–32 (and Lev. 26) address both spiritual and physical wellbeing, but the focus is on the latter (e.g., national security and influence, personal health and fertility, productivity, etc.). If Israel, with humble, God-honoring hearts, would not “go after other gods” (Deut. 28:14) but would carefully “do *all* his commandments” (28:1), God would remain with them (Lev. 26:11–12), and they would always enjoy bountiful food, successful pregnancies, victory in battle, and more (esp. 28:1–14; cf. Lev. 26:3–13).

Strikingly, Deuteronomy is clear both in its explicit statements and in its inclusion of longer lists of curses than blessings that, while Israel would enjoy sporadic communal blessings (e.g., Israel’s victory over Jericho and Ai in Josh. 5:13–8:29), the general pattern for them would be sin and the experience of curses (esp. Deut. 31:16–17, 26–29 with 27:15–26; 28:15–68; cf. 4:25–28). Their rebellion, like Adam’s before them, would bring about the

For Christians, *physical* health, wealth, and safety are a future hope (Isa. 65:17–25; 1 Cor. 9:25; Rev. 21:4) and not something that should be expected today. For although the obedience of Jesus has won us every *spiritual* blessing (Eph. 1:3; 2 Cor. 6:16), the old age still continues, and with it suffering, which identifies the believer with Christ (e.g., Luke 9:23; Rom. 8:17) and is necessary for sanctification (Rom. 5:3–5; 1 Tim. 3:12; James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 1:6–8).

just judgment of God, climaxing ultimately in the curse-bearing work of Messiah Jesus (Gal. 3:13–14).



“You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire. You shall chop down the carved images of their gods and destroy their name out of that place” (Deut. 12:3). *Remnants of Canaanite worship in Gezer, these standing stones or “pillars” were never destroyed because the Israelites “did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer” (Josh. 16:10) (photo by Daniel Frese).*

Nevertheless, as anticipated by Moses (Deut. 30:3–10; 32:34–43; 33:26–29; cf. 4:29–31) and clarified by the later prophets, the Eden-like, utopian picture of joy portrayed in the blessings and restoration blessings will come to full expression in the new heavens and new earth (Isa. 51:3; 65:17; Ezek. 36:35; Rev. 21:1–4; 22:1–5). In that day, God’s wrath and curse will be no more (Deut. 30:7; 32:43; Rev. 22:3), and believers, who now enjoy every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3; 2 Cor. 6:16), will then receive their full inheritance (Eph. 1:14; 1 Peter 1:4).

### ***Foundation: Perils, Pleasures, and Past Grace***

The reward in sight, Moses was also intentional to clarify the foundational reasons why Israel must continue to take seriously

God, his Word, and his promises. Specifically, Deuteronomy spends much time reminding Israel of their past experience of divine power, judgment, and grace (Deut. 32:18) in order to nurture confidence in God's promise of future grace and judgment (11:26–28; 30:15–18). Moses asserted that Yahweh's past grace to Israel through both revelation and forgiveness was the basis for their future-oriented faith and the obedience that was to flow from it.

For the Israelites to persevere with God in the present, they needed to look back, remembering their unworthiness to receive God's affection (7:7; 9:6–8, 22–24) and the seriousness with which he had taken their past sins (1:35). They also needed to remember Yahweh's vowed commitment to the patriarchs and to their offspring (1:8; 9:5; cf. Gen. 12:1–3; 15:18; 17:7; 22:16–18), the freedom Yahweh alone gave them from slavery (Deut. 5:15; 6:22–23), the gracious provision that Yahweh alone supplied them through the wilderness (2:7; 8:3–4; 29:5–6), and the fact that they alone among all the nations of the world were set apart to be Yahweh's people (7:6; 14:2; 26:18; cf. Exod 19:5–6). Israel's redeemer, therefore, deserved their allegiance, and out of obligation, gratitude, and anticipation, they needed to live for him alone.

### ***Israel's Problem: Hard-Heartedness***

Yet Israel was “rebellious” (Deut 1:26, 43; 9:7, 23–24; 21:18, 20; 31:27), “unbelieving” (1:32; 9:23; 28:66), and “stubborn” (9:6, 13; 10:16; 31:27), and in God's eternal purposes climaxing in Jesus, he did not change their hard hearts: “To this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear” (29:4; cf. Rom. 11:8, 10)! As such, the people's doom was sure, and Moses himself declared that Israel would enter the Promised Land and break the covenant by rebelling against Yahweh (Deut. 30:1; 31:16, 20, 27, 29). In turn, Yahweh, who is always just and upright in his actions (32:4), would bring upon Israel the curses, climaxing in their exile from the Promised Land (4:25–28; 29:18–28; 31:16–21; cf. Dan. 9:11). Like Adam and Eve before them, they would be separated from God's life-giving presence, all because of the hardness of their hearts (see Rom. 8:7–9; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 4:18).

Paul recognized that most of old covenant Israel did not follow God but “were hardened, as it is written, ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day’” (Rom. 11:7; cf. Deut. 29:4). But ethnic Israel's rejection opened the door for salvation to reach the Gentiles (Rom. 15:10; cf. Deut. 32:43). And this, in accordance with Deuteronomy 32:21, is designed to make the elect of Israel jealous and ultimately turn to God (Rom. 10:19; 11:11–12, 25–26).

Deuteronomy’s redemptive-historical perspective clarifies how Paul could assert that “the law is not of faith” (Gal. 3:12) and “is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient” (1 Tim. 1:9). Elsewhere he rightly observes that the law was a temporary reality added after the Abrahamic covenant “to increase the trespass” (Rom. 5:20) and “because of transgressions, until the offspring ([i.e., Messiah Jesus] should come to whom the promise had been made” (Gal. 3:19; cf. vv. 16, 29). God’s instruction given through Moses “is holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12), “the embodiment of knowledge and truth” (2:20). However, where God’s law is given to an unbelieving and disobedient people, death can be the only result. And this was God’s purpose, in order to clarify for all in the world their need for Messiah Jesus. “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4).<sup>3</sup>



“When you have crossed over the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people.... And these shall stand on Mount Ebal for the curse” (Deut. 27:12–13). *Mount Gerizim, Shechem, and Mount Ebal from the east.*

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3. In Romans 3:19, Paul asserted, “Now we know that whatever the [Mosaic] law says it speaks to those who are under the law [i.e., the Jews], so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.” If the Jews, even with their special privileges (9:4–5), gained only a knowledge of sin from the law, what hope did the Gentiles who never received such privileges have (3:20)? The Jewish failure to keep the law proved to the whole world that “by works of the law no human being will be justified in [God’s] sight” (3:20). As such, the only hope for Jew and Gentile alike is “the righteousness of God ... manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (3:21–22; cf. 9:30–32; 10:4).

### ***God's Solution: Salvation Through Judgment***

As he had done with the entire world in Adam, God would curse Israel. However, God's curse is never the final word (Deut. 4:31): "For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them" (see also Gen. 15:17–18; 22:16–18; Exod. 34:6–7). Indeed, the covenant curses were always portrayed as disciplinary and did not signal the end of the relationship on a corporate scale (Deut. 30:1–3; cf. Lev. 26:44; Judg. 2:1–2; Jer. 33:20–26). As stated explicitly in Leviticus 26:18, 21, 23, 27, 40–45, the curses were ultimately blessings in disguise for all who would learn from them—the gracious disciplining hand of a loving covenant "king" (Deut. 33:5) or "father" (1:31; 32:6) designed to shake Israel out of their ignorance and to draw them back to the Lord (8:5; cf. Heb. 12:5–11). Hope would still exist for any who would repent and return to God (Deut. 4:29–30; 30:2; 32:36).

Specifically, while Yahweh had not yet enabled covenant love (29:4), he promised that one day he would. Indeed, a time was coming when God's wrath would be appeased, the curse would end, repentance would be realized, forgiveness would be granted, and an unending period of restoration blessing would be initiated (4:29–30; 30:3–10; 32:43). Amazingly, this blessing would include a divine heart-transformation that would enable God's people to love just as they should, thus ensuring the perpetuation of the covenant relationship: "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live" (30:6; cf. Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 11:19–20; 36:26–27).

Paul considered the work of God's Spirit in Christians (Rom. 2:28–29; 8:4; 2 Cor. 3:3; Gal. 5:6, 22) to be a fulfillment of Moses' "heart circumcision" (Deut. 30:6), Jeremiah's new covenant "heart inscription" (Jer. 31:33), and Ezekiel's "heart transplant" and "Spirit indwelling" (Ezek. 11:19–20; 36:26–27).

Paul clarified that the restoration day anticipated in Deuteronomy found its ultimate fulfillment in the redemptive work of Christ. Jesus' death and resurrection not only reversed humanity's curse through Adam (Rom. 5:19; 1 Cor. 15:21–22) but also stood as the climax of Israel's covenantal judgment and restoration anticipated in Deuteronomy (Gal. 3:13–14 with Deut. 21:23; chs. 29–30). Jesus is the ultimate offspring of Abraham through whom the world is blessed (Gal. 3:14, 16, 29; cf. Gen. 12:2–3; 22:17b–18). As the servant representing God's people (Isa. 49:3, 5–6), Jesus stands as Israel's substitute, bears the curse (52:13–53:12), and becomes the channel

through whom believing Jews and Gentiles alike are brought back to God, experiencing the blessing of life forevermore (Acts 3:25–26; Gal. 3:8, 13–14, 16, 29; Eph. 2:11–18).

Any relationship between Yahweh and a sinful humanity demands reconciliation through an atoning sacrifice, for which the sacrifices of Leviticus provided only a shadow (Heb. 8:5; 10:1). Because of this fact, Messiah Jesus' redeeming and purifying work on the cross supplies the only ultimate ground for anyone's right-standing with God—past, present, and future (8:6; 10:10, 14, 18; Rom. 3:24–26; 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:21). Christ's atoning work is also the foundational grace upon which all Christian living is based, and it alone secures the promise of all future grace (Rom. 15:8; 2 Cor. 1:20; Gal. 3:29). As Paul proclaims, because God gave us his Son, we can be sure he will also meet all our needs (Rom. 8:31–32), and because we have experienced such mercy, we should live lives surrendered to him (12:1). In fulfillment of Deuteronomic anticipation (Deut. 30:6; cf. Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:26–27), such love-filled living is a result of a divinely generated new birth (John 3:5–8; 6:63) or heart surgery (Rom. 2:15, 29)—a fruit of Christ's Spirit in us (8:4, 9–11; Gal. 5:6, 22), which ultimately will result in Christ-honoring witness (Acts 1:8), lasting life (Rom. 6:22; 8:13; Gal. 5:25; cf. John 6:63), and the exaltation of God's name in the world (Ezek. 36:22–23, 27; Heb. 13:20–21; 1 Peter 4:11).

### ***Lasting Covenant Relationship: Grace from Start to Finish***

Before God's people ever exert future-oriented faith that creates hope resulting in love of others, God graciously initiates the relationship and graciously makes amazing promises that stimulate a different kind of living. Deuteronomy testifies that God's choice of Israel and his initial working on their behalf had everything to do with the promises he had made to the patriarchs and with his unmerited love for his people and had nothing to do with any greatness *of* Israel (Deut. 7:7–8) or any greatness *in* Israel (9:5–6)—they were stubborn (9:6, 13; 31:27)! Furthermore, the surrendered, dependent following (i.e., the obedience of faith) that God demanded would ultimately only be experienced because of this same divine grace, for God was not only the gracious promise maker but the one who would make the promises desirable to a divinely reshaped heart. In the end, therefore, the perpetuation of covenant relationship would ultimately be grounded in, motivated by, and dependent on the experience and hope of divine grace and only secondarily and responsively on the obedience of faith. Faith, hope,

and love are merely human responses to God’s covenant-initiating and sustaining grace—praise the Lord!



“The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he” (Deut. 32:4). *Dead Sea cliffs aerial opposite Moab, north of Engedi.*

### **The Author of Deuteronomy Defined the Goal of Love as *God-Exalting Influence on the Nations***

Deuteronomy portrays the goal of Israel’s love as God-exalting witness in the world. Yahweh, the only God (4:35, 39; 6:4), holy (26:15; 32:51), sovereign over all things (10:14), the creator of mankind (4:32) and Israel (32:6), and the overseer of nations (32:8), must always act for his own exaltation, for to make anything else more important than himself would render him not God. Because Yahweh is God, he must be jealous for his people’s

affections (4:24; 5:9; 29:20; 32:16, 21) and must act to maintain right order (righteousness) in the world (4:8; 16:20; 32:4), wherein he is recognized as supreme. In separating Israel for himself, he created them with mission. Their fearing and obeying God would bear the missional purpose of seeing the worship of Yahweh reestablished on a global scale.

In Genesis, God’s sovereign rest—kingdom peace—was aggravated through humanity’s rebellion and its resulting curse (Gen. 3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25). The gracious creator of all, however, set in motion the solution to the problem, initially through the first statement of gospel in Genesis 3:15 and then by focusing through Abraham and his offspring this promise of the defeat of evil and reversal of the curse (12:2–3; 22:17b–18). In Exodus, God restressed Israel’s mission of imaging his supremacy and of standing as a mediator between God and the rest of humanity (Exod. 19:5–6).

Deuteronomy expressed this same goal of God-exaltation by blending a call to covenant love with the unique treasure of God’s presence and the necessity of worldwide influence for the glory of God.

The most explicit text is Deuteronomy 4:5–8, where, after calling Israel to heed Yahweh’s commands (Deut. 4:5–6a), Moses clarified the reason why obedience (i.e., love in action) was imperative—namely, a godly witness in the world (4:6b–8)! If Israel would live wisely, their lifestyle would attract the attention of the nations (4:6b), who would stand amazed at God’s nearness to Israel (4:7) and at the uprightness of his revelation (4:8). Israel’s heeding of God’s com-

mands would result in the display of God’s greatness in the sight of the world (cf. Matt. 5:16).

The rest of Deuteronomy affirms Israel’s mission mindset. The people’s God-centered living would result in international renown (Deut. 26:19; 28:1), with the world standing in awe of Yahweh’s people in light of his favor toward them (28:9–10). The global jealousy directed at Israel, however, would in time be turned on its head. For “in the latter days” (31:29; *contra* ESV), after Israel had disobeyed God’s Word, receiving both destruction and shame at the hands of the nations (28:25, 37) and profaning God’s name through bad witness (29:24; cf. Ezek. 36:20), Yahweh would act on behalf of his “servants” (i.e., those that had [re-]surrendered to God’s supremacy, Deut. 32:36). In light of the jealousy that Israel’s disloyalty caused God, Yahweh would cause them to be jealous toward the nations (32:21;

Drawing on imagery found in Deuteronomy, Peter emphasized that the church’s identity and mission are the realization of what Old Testament Israel was to be and do: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

cf. Rom. 10:19–11:26), would avenge his enemies (Deut. 32:35, 41, 43; cf. Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30), would atone for the polluting effects of sin (Deut. 32:43), and would have compassion on his servants (32:36). From the perspective of at least some Old Testament manuscripts and Paul, this last move would result in worldwide joy, a feature that suggests the inclusion of the nations (Gentiles) in the people of God (32:43, KJV, NASB, NIV, HCSB; cf. Rom. 15:10).

### **The Author of Deuteronomy Affirmed the *Supremacy of Yahweh God over All***

The governing truth at the core of Israel’s worldview was Yahweh’s supremacy over all things: he alone is God (Deut. 4:35; 6:4; 33:26). Missions exists because a global recognition of this fact needs to be rekindled.

Yahweh alone is God—a rock (32:4, 15, 18, 30–31), a great (5:24, 7:21, 10:17; 11:2; 32:3) and consuming presence (4:24; 9:3; 33:2) that stands unique in his perfections. With respect to his character (32:3–4), Yahweh is perfectly merciful (4:31; 13:17; 30:3), loving (5:10; 7:8, 13; 10:15, 18;



“The LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other” (Deut. 4:39). *Sunrise over Moab from across the Dead Sea in Engedi.*

23:5), loyal (5:10; 7:9, 12), faithful (7:9; 32:4), holy (26:15; 32:51), eternal (33:27), impartial (10:17–18), and just (32:4). He is fully distinct from his creation (7:21; 10:17) yet fully present and active in it (4:7; 6:15; 7:21; cf. 1:45; 31:17). With respect to his power (3:24; 32:39), he is the creator of humanity (4:32), the overseer of nations (32:8), the universal judge (9:4; 18:12; 32:41, 43), and the sole controller of all things in heaven and on earth (4:39; 10:14; cf. Heb. 1:3). “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand” (Deut. 32:39).

Yahweh alone is Israel’s “father” (32:6)—their redeemer (4:20; 4:34; etc.), covenant maker (29:1), warrior (1:30; 3:22), protector (33:26–29), guide (1:33; 8:2; 32:12), instructor (1:3; 4:2; 6:1–2), prayer answerer (4:7; 9:19; 10:10), provider (2:7; 8:16–18), disciplinarian (8:3, 5; 11:2), tester (13:3), judge (1:17; 5:9; 7:10), restorer (4:40–31; 30:1–10; 32:34), and savior (4:31; 33:29). Because he is God, he is jealous for his people’s love (4:24; 5:9; 32:16, 21) and deserves their life-encompassing, community-embracing, exclusive commitment (6:4–5). Because he is God and is by nature both good and just (32:4), he must hate and punish sin (7:4; 8:19–20; 9:8, 19, 20, 22; 29:20; 31:17). He must detest all influences that subvert his rule and all satisfactions that do not ultimately result in humility, gratitude, and praise (7:25–26; 12:31; 32:16). God’s people must tenaciously battle against all forms of idolatry (5:7; 6:14), for the preeminent one from whom, through whom, and to whom all things exist demands respect (Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:16).

Moses would have agreed with Paul that God is the source, sustainer, and goal of all things (Rom. 11:36)!

Yet this respect is a natural response for those who have truly experienced the covenant initiating and sustaining grace of this amazing God. Consider his grace, believe his promises, walk in love, and find your heart satisfied in him. Moses declared such “good news” for those who would respond in faith, hope, and love! “There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in his majesty.... Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help, and the sword of your triumph! Your enemies shall come fawning to you, and you shall tread upon their backs” (Deut. 33:26, 29).



“Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo.... Moses the servant of the LORD died there” (Deut. 34:1, 5). *Mount Nebo summit from the northeast.*

### Summary

Deuteronomy is all about pursuing a lasting covenant relationship with God. Moses treated the book as a *charter* (or constitution) for guiding life in relation to Yahweh. And within its pages he detailed the relationship’s *context* (taking God and his Word seriously), *essence* (the centrality of love), *foundation* and *means of perpetuation* (grace), *purpose* (God-exalting influence), and *Lord* (Yahweh God).

**KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS FOR REVIEW**

Constitution

The Book of the *tôrâ*

Fear

Faith

Obedience of faith

Covenant love

Supreme command

Heart, soul, might

Righteousness

Contexts of sin

God's promises: blessings and curses

Heart circumcision

Grace

Israel's mission

Governing truth in Israel's worldview

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