



GROWTH GROUP BIBLE STUDIES
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ANGLICAN CHURCH

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Introduction to Deuteronomy

The setting for Moses' words in the book of Deuteronomy is the eve of Israel's entry into the land of Canaan, situated to the west of the Jordan River. This land was promised by God hundreds of years before (see Genesis 12:1-3).

Though the book seems to contain extensive sections of laws and stipulations, it is fundamentally about the outworking of the Abrahamic promise. In Genesis 12-50 we see how God keeps his promise to the provide children for Abraham, outlining the experiences of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph and their families. Genesis concludes with God's people still outside the Promised Land.

In Exodus the story is resumed 400 years later with the Israelites under the oppression and slavery of the Egyptians. God acts on his promises and miraculously rescues his people, under the leadership of Moses. The Israelites set out to the Promised Land, but do not enter it because they fear the inhabitants (Numbers 13-14). As punishment, God condemns the people to spend the next forty years roaming in the wilderness. Only when the initial adult generation has died out is the next generation permitted to enter the Promised Land. The Book of Deuteronomy then records the addresses of Moses to Israel on the plains of Moab as the next generation are about to enter the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy contains the words of Moses, and in this sense it is a sermon (five of them actually). He is old and about to die, but this is much more than a farewell speech. This is an exhortation to God's people to live faithfully and obediently in the land they are about to inherit. His message is anchored in the appeal to 'choose life' (30:19).

Our sermon series intersects with key chapters of the book, rather than adopting a chapter-by-chapter approach. We have sought to follow the development of the book in this selection of preaching texts. The structure of our series is as follows:

5/5/24	Learning from the Past (chs 1-3)	Deuteronomy 1:1-46
12/5/24	The God Who Speaks (ch 4)	Deuteronomy 4:1-40
19/5/24	The God of Second Chances (chs 5-11)	Deuteronomy 5:1-27
26/5/24	How to Worship God (chs 12-26)	Deuteronomy 12:1-14
2/6/24	Choose Life (chs 27-30)	Deuteronomy 30:1-20
9/6/24	What does the future hold? (chs 31-34)	Deuteronomy 31:24-29; 34:1-12

Recommended Reading

J.A. Thompson *Deuteronomy* (Tyndale Commentary)

G. Goldsworthy, *According to Plan* (biblical overview)

P. Barker, *The God who keeps promises* (Deuteronomy general overview)

STUDY ONE | LEARNING FROM THE PAST

DEUTERONOMY 1:1-46

Overview of Study One

Moses' first sermon commences at 1:6. It is a historical survey, and provides a summary of the Lord's sovereign activity during Israel's wandering in the desert. Verses 2 & 3 tell us that God's people have taken 40 years to travel a distance that could've been accomplished in 11 days!

In the remainder of the chapter Moses reminds Israel of the consequences of rebellion that brought about this 'wandering' for their ancestors. Yet this recollection of their history is more than a survey. It is a warning to 'learn from the past', and not to go the way again of their fathers (see 1 Corinthians 10:11-13).

The background to Deuteronomy is of course the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. The blessing of many descendants, in a land chosen specifically by God where he will lovingly rule his people is now beginning to unfold. God's people, in God's place, under God's rule.

The Abrahamic covenant comes with a curse as well as blessing, and Moses sets out this reality before the people. You cannot ignore God persistently and think that he will not notice. Failure to trust God had meant forty years of discipline in the desert, where a whole generation had passed on. Now was the time for this 'new' people of God to inherit the Abrahamic blessings. Would they learn from the past as they looked to their future? This question would only be answered as Israel remained faithful to God.

GETTING STARTED

1. What does the Old Testament mean for Christians today?
2. What understanding or 'impressions' do you have about the book of Deuteronomy? List these so that you can revisit them at the conclusion of the series.

INTO THE TEXT

Read Genesis 12:1-3

3. The background to Deuteronomy is the promises to Abraham. Outline what God has promised in these verses in Genesis.

Read Deuteronomy 1

4. What period in Israel's history does Moses refer to in the opening chapter?
5. The distance Israel travelled in the wilderness (from Horeb to the edge of Kadesh Barnea) took approximately 11 days. How long has it taken Israel to get there (v 3)?
6. In 1:41, the Israelites acknowledge their sin, then attempt in the following verses to do what they had originally been told to do. What is wrong with this course of action? Is God's refusal to heed their cries (v 45) harsh?
7. Moses had an awesome responsibility as a leader of God's people. Because of his own disobedience, he would not enter the promised land. Yet how does the writer to the Hebrews describe his ministry in Hebrews 3:1-6?
8. What goal or purpose does this passage in Hebrews give to the life and witness of Moses? How was this fulfilled?

TAKEAWAY

9. Think once more about your answer to question 6, and consider the call of obedience that comes through the gospel. Can future obedience make up for past disobedience?
10. Step by step Moses demolishes all reason for fear and not trusting God in the opening chapters of Deuteronomy. What fears, attitudes or thinking, prevent you from trusting God's promises and obeying him? Can that be changed?

STUDY TWO | THE GOD WHO SPEAKS

DEUTERONOMY 4:1-40

Overview of Study Two

Deuteronomy 1-3 has set up the book to reveal a God who is engaged with the world he has created and committed to, according to the promise of Genesis 12:1-3. His plan is to build a people for himself and providing blessing to the families of the earth. God gets involved with our lives and is concerned that we live in the light of his eternal promises.

Moses' first sermon in Deuteronomy takes us through to v 40 of chapter 4. It concludes with the appeal of v 39:

³⁹ Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other. ⁴⁰ Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time.

We can see from this exhortation that Moses is pointing to the gospel before Jesus Christ came (the purpose of the entire Old Testament). Note that the keeping his word is the key to godly living in our earthly days, because his promises have ensured our eternal future.

Chapter 4 reveals much about how the God of Israel is contrasted with other gods and religious practices. The chapter explains:

- a) Moses' call to follow God's commands (vv 1-14)
- b) The risk of idolatry for God's people (vv 15-31)
- c) The personal and powerful God who promises life (vv 32-40)

The use of the word LORD throughout the chapter speaks of the covenant keeping God whose personal name is Yahweh. He is the God who reveals himself to his people (Moses and the burning bush in Exodus 3) and fulfils his promises through the generations. In the diverse and multi-religious world that Moses and the people inhabited we read the definitive statement of v 35:

You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other.

Everything we encounter in the book of Deuteronomy (and arguably all of Scripture) flows out of this truth.

GETTING STARTED

1. Our political leaders in Australia constantly speak of a 'better standard of living' (especially in election cycles). In what ways do you think this is different from the promise of Deuteronomy 4:40 that "it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time."

INTO THE TEXT

Read Deuteronomy 4:1-14

2. From vv 1-2, what is that the people of Israel must comprehend about God and his word?
3. What are the outcomes for the surrounding nations from obedience to God's word (vv 5-8)?
4. From vv 9-14, how does Moses urge the people to obedience?

Read Deuteronomy 4:15-40

5. What is the risk for Israel identified in these verses?
6. How could v 20 be employed as the antidote to this risk?
7. Moses has to count a personal cost for his leadership in vv 21-22? What is it?
8. Vv 23-30 are prophetic in nature. Identify the consequences of Israel's idolatry.
9. How is the grace of the gospel revealed in vv 29-31?
10. What is the ultimate motivation for Israel's obedience in vv 35-40?

TAKEAWAY

11. How has the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ transformed our understanding of inheritance?
12. What would be the impact of a church that took idolatry seriously?

STUDY THREE | THE GOD OF SECOND CHANCES

DEUTERONOMY 5:1-27

Overview of Study Three

Moses begins his second sermon, the longest of the book, extending all the way to chapter 28. Like all of the gospel, his message is predicated on the principle that knowing God through his word is the key to enjoying God through his promises. The essence of Deuteronomy 5 (and its somewhat familiar territory for many Christians) is remembering that God takes the initiative in his relationship with us. While the temptation is to believe that we are engaged in some sort of cooperative arrangement when it comes to our faith (God does his bit and I do mine), the truth is otherwise. God's grace delivers us into his Kingdom. God's grace equips us to live for his Kingdom. God's grace will see us ultimately inherit his Kingdom.

As we examine the Ten Commandments, it will always be helpful for us to remember our relationship with the Lord is founded on his promises, not our performance. Moses begins the chapter by calling on the next generation of Israel to remember the covenant God made with them at Horeb. Even though this covenant was *received* by the previous generation, Moses declares if it is a covenant "with all of us who are alive here today." (v 3).

We are reminded that the Ten Commandments did not start Israel's relationship with God. They gave content and expression to a relationship already in existence. The promise to Abraham was the initiative and personal commitment to the covenantal blessings. That promise expanded to a nation in the ministry of Moses. But the initiative was all God's.

Deuteronomy 5 describes God's actions in *context* and *content*. The Israelites are never to forget the God who gave them his word at Sinai following the rescue from Egypt (vv 1-5; 22-27). His initiative and activity are always the *context* through which we understand the gospel (here, before Christ came), as we then consider the *content* of the gospel (vv 6-21; 28-33).

If we get context and content around the wrong way, we quickly move to a works-based faith. And soon recognise our incapacity to meet the norms and expectations of obedience. You cannot enjoy your relationship with God unless you are first assured of your relationship with him.

Importantly, the New Testament writers endorse the place of the Ten Commandments in the Christian life, yet can only do so in the light of Christ's transforming work of the cross (Romans 10:4).

It is striking that the Moses reminds his listeners about the good intentions of the previous generation gathered at Mt Sinai, ready to listen and obey (v 27), conscious of God's glory and majesty (v 24), aware of his eternal and powerful presence (v 26). We are led to ask what went wrong when they had such a clear and present understanding of the Lord?

And then we may ask the same of ourselves. If we have come to know Jesus in all his glory and majesty. If we are aware of his powerful and eternal presence. If we know of his saving and restoring grace, why is obeying his word such a challenge? For we have seen one greater than Moses (Hebrews 3:3).

GETTING STARTED

1. If you were sharing the gospel with a friend or neighbor do you think it would be helpful to refer to the Ten Commandments?

INTO THE TEXT

Read Deuteronomy 5:1-21

2. From vv 1-5, what is that the people of Israel must remember before they hear the Ten Commandments?
3. Given the present generation Moses was speaking to were not present when the commandments were first given, what are the implications of verse 3? What does this tell us about the Word of God?
4. How did the Ten Commandments contribute to the salvation of Israel (see Deuteronomy 7:6-9)?
5. Jesus summed up the commandments in his teaching in Matthew 22:37-40. How does this help us understand their place in the Christian life?

Read Deuteronomy 5:22-33

6. "History teaches us that we do not learn from history." What were Moses' listeners meant to understand from the previous generation?
7. What is the Lord's assessment of the people of Israel (v 29)? What is the Lord's hope for the people of Israel (v 33)?
8. What was Jesus' view of the place of the Ten Commandments (see Matthew 5:17-20), and what risks did he identify in following them (see Matthew 15:1-9)?
9. From Ephesians 2:8-10, what is the place of good works in the Christian life?

TAKEAWAY

10. Would urging our secular leaders to follow the Ten Commandments be a good gospel strategy?

STUDY FOUR | HOW TO WORSHIP GOD

DEUTERONOMY 12:1-14

Overview of Study Four

At one level the entire book of Deuteronomy could be seen as a manual on how to worship God. There is, however, a particular focus on how that worship is to be expressed in Deuteronomy 12. We learn that worship of the Lord is both *exclusive*, and *a guarantee of his presence*.

Exclusive Worship

The first thing we learn from the chapter is that worship of the Lord is exclusive. Underlying all biblical laws is the fundamental principle that God has spoken and revealed himself through his word. The only way we are to know how to worship God truly is through what he has told us in the Bible.

We are not to worship God in our own ways or 'according to our own desires' (v 8). Christian worship has popularly become an exercise in approaching a mystical, mysterious God with whom we seem to have many doubts and lack of assurance, but with whom we somehow commune in inexplicable ways. Deuteronomy does not allow this.

The laws in Deuteronomy are laid down within the context of the land, where the inhabitants worship other gods. Theirs, as ours is today, is a pluralistic world, and hence the call of chapter 12 to worship the Lord exclusively becomes essential to genuine godliness. The vigorous command of vv 2-3 is testament to this absolute priority.

What divides Israel from Canaan is the Lord, who is immensely different from the gods created by the imagination of the Canaanites. The imperative for this nation is not only the exclusive worship of the Lord, but in the manner and place that he has shown (v 5). This is the pattern that develops throughout scripture and finds its fulfilment in the Lord Jesus Christ, the centre of true worship (John 4:24-26; Philippians 2:11).

Worship as the Presence of God

Deuteronomy does not mention any place names, but in some special way, God was present in the place described in chapter 12. Hence we read that the Lord will 'put his Name there for his dwelling' in v 5. His name implies his presence.

Interestingly, the geography of the location does not seem to be of greatest significance, but the reality that God is present in the place he chooses. We should not be surprised to hear this in the multi-religious and pantheistic culture that the Israelites encountered in their journey to the Promised Land (not that different from our own). We even read that if the place named by the Lord is too far from some of the Israelites, they are able to make sacrifices and bring offerings in their own towns (v 21). In a world where we so often tie worship to buildings, altars and icons, and where religious heritage is often linked to land and geography, it's helpful to know that the Lord's presence can never be contained in any earthly sense. King David learnt this lesson when he sought to build a temple for the Lord (2 Sam 7:5-6), and Paul affirmed this reality in his preaching at Athens (Acts 17:24).

Jesus and Worship

Jesus gave the definitive word on worship in the encounter with the woman at the well in John 4:23-24. As the promised Messiah he is both the place and presence for true worship. In this way he

fulfils the expectations created by Deuteronomy 12, and anticipates the day when he will be worshipped around the throne (Revelation 7:9-10). Until that day we are those, with all of God's people through the generations, heed the call of Hebrews 12:28-29:

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."

The Bible shows that our worship is not restricted geographically to a particular place, but restricted personally to a particular person. Deuteronomy 12 reveals the very real and gracious presence of God dwelling with his people, yet in Christ that presence is now different and deeper.

GETTING STARTED

1. When was the last time you heard the word *worship* used outside of church? How was it understood?
2. How would you describe worship?

INTO THE TEXT

Read Deuteronomy 12:1-14

3. What general picture is given of the nations presently inheriting the land promised to the Israelites? (vv 2-3)
4. What was the significance of a special place where God's people would make sacrifices? (vv 5-7)
5. How would the place of worship affect the daily life of God's people in The Promised Land?
6. What are the characteristics of worshipping God in Deuteronomy 12 that reveal his character?
7. The presence of God with his people is an important biblical theme. How do the New Testament writers pick up this truth? (see John 1:14; Romans 1:3; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 1:1-4; Revelation 21:3)
8. How does question #5 influence our understanding of what it means to worship God? (see also John 4:21-26)
9. What purpose does God have in continually revealing himself to his people throughout the Old Testament?

TAKEAWAY

10. "We must fellowship with God on his terms, not ours."
What do you think this statement means, and what are his terms for present day Christians?

STUDY FIVE | CHOOSE LIFE

DEUTERONOMY 30:11-20

Overview of Study Five

The words of this section are especially important in the book of Deuteronomy. In his third 'sermon' Moses brings Israel's future to the present by bringing before them the choice they must now face, as he approaches the conclusion of his ministry. His word to the people of God is to 'choose life' (v 19).

Life within grasp (vv 11-14)

The words of vv 11-14 echo the theme of Deuteronomy we began with: an exhortation to God's people to live faithfully and obediently in the land they are about to inherit. In chapter 6 God had explained to the Israelites:

⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

The same word by which the world was created is the word through which his purposes are revealed. The Psalmist declares it is "a lamp for my feet, and light for my path." (Psalm 119:105). After citing Moses' words in Deuteronomy 30, Paul concludes in Romans 10:9:

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Israel's choice cannot be made on the basis that God has not made clear what he promises, nor the consequences of their decisions. This premise is the foundation for every response to the gospel.

Life with God (vv 15-20)

The choice is not simply obey or disobey, as might be concluded from Deuteronomy. We know Israel will (and has) failed because of its reliance on its own will and strength. Its sinful nature guarantees this, for its heart is yet to be purified by God. The choice is between relying on self, and thus disobeying and failing, and relying on God's grace, which has been the constant call of Deuteronomy.

To choose life is to choose God, for he is the life giver (v 20). And the promise is that he will circumcise the heart of those who turn to him (Deuteronomy 30:6), a commitment which reaches its fulfilment with the coming of Christ (see also Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The obedience of the believer with a heart for God is faithful obedience, not legalistic burden. This obedience acknowledges there will be failure, but failure that can be forgiven through God's abundant goodness and mercy. Thus it is God who gives life: Israel does not earn it or deserve it. Life comes only from God and he is free to give it to whomever he wills. Ultimately this life finds its source and being in the one who brings it eternally (John 11:25).

GETTING STARTED

1. When we are faced with important decisions in life, are there questions we must always ask no matter what the issues are? List these 'essential' questions.

INTO THE TEXT

Read Deuteronomy 29:10-13

2. What is the purpose of the covenant that is 'renewed' as the people are about to enter the Promised Land?

Read Deuteronomy 30:1-10

3. The closing verses of chapter 29, and the opening verses of chapter 30 are prophetic. They describe the future exile of Israel and her subsequent restoration. What will it mean for the people of God to have a circumcised heart? (v 6 cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Read Deuteronomy 30:11-14

4. What choice does Israel face?
5. What does Moses say about the choice, and how is this made clear? (vv 11-14)
6. What are the possible outcomes of each choice?
7. How is the seriousness of Israel's 'moment of decision' emphasised in v 19?
8. The biblical story line records how Israel could not overcome the temptations before her, and repeatedly failed as a nation to make the correct choice. How did God fulfil his covenant promise and remedy the situation? (see Acts 3:24-25 & Hebrews 4:14-16)

TAKEAWAY

9. The choice for Israel seemed so obvious. Why is it that people don't want to follow God's way when he has made it so clear?
10. How can you develop faithful patience as you await the full and final inheritance of God's promises?

STUDY SIX | WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

DEUTERONOMY 31:24-29; 34:1-12

Overview of Study Six

The Testimony of Moses

On his birthday, at 120 years of age Moses declares that the time for him to hand over his ministry to his successor has come (Deuteronomy 31:1-3). If it is important to 'finish well' when it comes to concluding our ministries, then Moses gives us a sober understanding of what that looked like as he came to hand the reigns over to Joshua. While chapter 31 looks like Moses' opportunity to share his last words, it is the Lord who is directing affairs. His prophetic words of vv 16-18 speak of a time of rebellion and refusal to obey God's will, which in turn brings God's judgment upon them. Moses' urging of the reading of the law in v 26 is a witness against Israel's rebellious character, even after he has departed (v 27).

While we may have been looking for a joyous and triumphant conclusion to Deuteronomy, the reality is otherwise. Moses finishes with a warning for Israel because of their stubbornness and rebellion, yet confirms the strategy and potential for enjoying the covenant's blessings remains. They must understand that God's commands are "no empty word for you." (Deuteronomy 32:45-47).

In the midst of God's judgment there is always the presence of grace (the pattern of the cross). The song the Lord provides for the people through Moses in Deuteronomy 32 is a witness to future generations that grace is always available to God's people. That his purposes cannot fail. He must bring sin and rebellion to account, yet at the same time will express his compassion to his servants (Deuteronomy 32:36). The song is an echo of the gospel before Christ came.

At the point where Israel may have been left in hopeless despair, Moses instead pronounces a series of blessings on the tribes in Deuteronomy 33, as his last testament. They are a mixture of prayer, praise and warning. In many ways they anticipate the New Testament hope of the gospel that comes to us in Christ. Even when our sin and rebellion mar our relationship with God and the enjoyment of his blessings, there is always a greater hope held out for our future.

The Death of Moses

After the blessings pronounced in the previous chapter the Lord pronounces his own upon Moses in chapter 34. He will see that land that Israel will inherit, but because of his own failed leadership he will not take possession of it (Deuteronomy 34:26-27). The narrator's curious note of v 7 suggests that even though Moses knew of his time coming to a close, the Lord had granted him the sustaining grace to serve him through all his days. The spirit of wisdom had remained with him, which he now conferred on Joshua for his ministry (v 9). The closing summary of Moses' prophetic ministry is a testimony not to his personal ability, but to the Lord's mighty power at work in his life, from the time of Pharaoh, to the now anticipated inheritance of the Promised Land. The book concludes reminding us that God's salvation plans are about rescue and restoration for his people, achieved through his appointed servants.

"Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house," bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

Hebrews 3:5-6

GETTING STARTED

1. Last words can carry significance and weight, yet few of us have the opportunity to share them. Most find words of them are said by others in eulogies at our funeral.

If you had to summarise your 'last words' into a few sentences what would they be?

INTO THE TEXT

Read Deuteronomy 31:24-29

2. What action does Moses take in vv 24-26 and why?
3. What do these verses predict about how Israel will respond to God following Moses' death?
4. What do the verses predict about how God will respond to Israel?
5. How would you sum up the nation of Israel as we move towards the conclusion of Moses' ministry?
6. Is it unfair that Moses is denied entry into the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 32:48-52)?

Read Deuteronomy 34:1-12

7. In what way had Moses been faithful in his ministry, according to Hebrews 3:5 & 11:24-28?

TAKEAWAY

8. What attributes of God have been prominent in Deuteronomy, and how might they help us in our faith and obedience as we await the return of Christ?
9. Summarise what you have learnt about the book of Deuteronomy in a sentence. Compare this with question 2 of Study One.