

-Save This Page as a PDF-

Deuteronomy **from a Jewish Perspective**

To Dr. Clifford Anderson, former Dean of Bethel Seminary, San Diego,
with much appreciation for your kindness and understanding.



Title

The fifth book of **Moshe** has traditionally been entitled **Deuteronomy**; interpreted literally, the title would mean *second law*. The use of this title originated because the Greek (LXX) translation of **Deuteronomy 17:18**. The translators apparently misunderstood the Hebrew (*a copy, or a repetition of this law*) and took it to mean *second law*, implying that a body of legislation different from that contained in the previous four books of **Moses** (which would have been, by implication, the *first law*). In a sense, the title (interpreted literally) is misleading, who needs the second law when you have the first law? But ignoring this book would deprive us of the great message of this book. It does however, repeat much of the legislation contained in the preceding four books, though the content and form of that repetition is unique to **Deuteronomy**. Thus, the Hebrew Bible, gives its more appropriate title, *elleh haddevarim*, meaning *these are the words*. This title, in accordance with the ancient custom, consists of the first words of the first line of the text of the book.¹

Throughout the book, **Moshe** reminds **the Israelites** to return to the Word of **ADONAI** where **they** will find **their** origin, **their** purpose, and the proper way to worship **their** Creator. **The LORD** knows we need this book even today. **Deuteronomy's** message is not merely confined to that specific generation who entered **the Land**. It speaks to every generation, Jews and Gentiles alike, who seek to find **Ha'Shem's** character, **His** unwavering patience, and **His** great love. And by seeking out these words, these *varim*, we also learn more about human nature because **the Israelites** represent a prototype of who

we all are. Therefore, may this book draw us closer to our **God**, and **His Son, Yeshua**.

Author

The Mosaic authorship of **Deuteronomy** is evidenced by several factors. First, **Deuteronomy 31:9** explicitly states: **Moses wrote down this Torah and gave it to the kohanim, the sons of Levi who carry the Ark of the Covenant of ADONAI, and to all the elders of Isra'el**. Second, the Jews of **Yeshua's** day believed that **Moshe** wrote **Deuteronomy (Matthew 22:24; Mark 10:3-4, 12:19)**. Third, **Messiah** referred to **Deuteronomy 24:1-4** when **He** said: **Why then did Moshe command to "give her a certificate of divorce and put her away?"** In addition, the unity and authenticity of **Deuteronomy** point to **Moshe** being the author because its structure conforms to that of the suzerain-vassal treaties of the fifteenth centuries BC. **Chapter 34**, however, was obviously written by someone other than **Moshe** since it records the account of **Moses' death**. **The sages teach that this chapter was written by Joshua.**²

Date

The book begins with **the Jews across the Jordan in the land of Mo'ab (1:5)**, right at the entrance point to **the Promised Land**. In **2:7** and **14** tell us that **their** journey from Egypt to **Mo'ab** took place some **forty years** before. So, dating the actual time of the **Exodus** would give us a reference point for the book of **Deuteronomy**. According to **First Kings 6:1** the **Exodus** occurred **480 years** before the construction of Solomon's Temple, which is believed to have been built, according to the dates of **Ezra, Nehemiah** and **Esther**, to have been in 967 BC. If we go back **480 years** from that date, it brings us to 1447 BC for the date of the **Exodus**, and **1407 BC for the date** of **Deuteronomy** and the entrance into **the Land**. The contents of the book lasted for forty days, from **Moshe's** first address in **5:1 (to see link click Bj - The First Address: The General Stipulations of the Covenant)**, to **his death in 34:1-12 (see Gj - The Death of Moses)**. Thirty days later, **the Israelites** would cross **the Jordan** into **the Promised Land (Joshua 4:19)**.³

Purpose

In **Deuteronomy**, **Moses** was addressing a new generation of **Israelites**. Because of their lack of faith to enter **the Promised Land** immediately after **the Exodus**, all the men of war, twenty-years of age and older, had died in the previous **forty years** of wilderness wanderings (**1:35-36, 2:14**). The only exceptions were **Joshua** and **Caleb** who gave a good report when **God** had told **the Jews** that **He** would go before **the people** and allow **them** to

conquer **the giants in the Land (Numbers 13)**. After **Moses** died, new leadership took over. This new generation of Jews needed to know and understand who they were in the eyes of **ADONAI**. What was their role as a newly formed priestly nation? **Moses'** words, however, were not only for them, but to explain to Jews and Gentiles of every generation the reason for their existence.

Along with the other four books of **the Torah**, **Deuteronomy** still plays that role for any Jew or Gentile who is seeking to find his or her roots. Beginning with **Genesis**, **the Torah** enables a Jew to trace his or her roots all the way back to the Abrahamic Covenant. In **Exodus**, we discover the birth of the nation of **Isra'el** and how they would become a kingdom of priests and go to the other nations around them and tell them about **the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**. **Leviticus** emphasized the means why the **nation**, or anyone else, would have access to **the LORD**, through the blood of a sacrifice, which points to the ultimate sacrifice of **Yeshua Himself**. **Numbers** emphasizes salvation by grace, showing **Isra'el's** inability, and by application, our inability, to have a right standing before **YHVH** on our own merit, and consequently, showing how **God**, so graciously, provided a way of salvation by faith. And finally, **Deuteronomy**, summarizes and expands on the previous books, giving us the equivalent of the Sermon on the Mount in **the TaNaKh** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Da - The Sermon on the Mount**). This scroll is given to us by a passionate man, **Moshe**, who, having knowledge of the downfall of **the nation**, and **her** eventual dispersion, still prayed for **her**, and encouraged **his flock**, and all believers, to obey **the Word of ADONAI**. It reminds us of Paul and his passionate plea even though he knew of their eventual dispersion (**Romans 9-11**).

The Use of the Tree of Life Version

Because I am writing this commentary on the book of **Galatians** from a Jewish perspective, I will be using *the Tree of Life Version* unless otherwise indicated.

The use of ADONAI

Long before **Yeshua's** day, the word **ADONAI** had, out of respect, been substituted in speaking and in reading aloud for **God's** personal name, the four Hebrew letters *yud-heh-vav-heh*, variously written in English as **YHVH**. **The Talmud (Pesachim 50a) made it a requirement not to pronounce the Tetragrammaton**, meaning the four-letter name of **the LORD**, and this remains the rule in most modern Jewish settings. In deference to this tradition, which is unnecessary but harmless, I will be using **ADONAI** where **YHVH** is meant.¹ In ancient times when the scribes were translating the Hebrew Scriptures, they

revered the name of **YHVH** so much that they would use a quill to make one stroke of the name and then throw it away. Then they would make another stroke and throw that quill away until the name was completed. **His** name became so sacred to them that they started to substitute the phrase *the Name*, instead of writing or pronouncing **His** Name. Over centuries of doing this, the actual letters and pronunciation of **His** Name were lost. The closest we can come is **YHVH**, with no syllables. The pronunciation has been totally lost. Therefore, the name Yahweh is only a guess of what the original name sounded like. Both **ADONAI** and **Ha'Shem** are substitute names for **YHVH**. **ADONAI** is more of an affectionate name like *daddy*, while **Ha'Shem** is a more formal name like *sir*.

The use of TaNaKh

The Hebrew word **TaNaKh** is an acronym, based on the letters **T** (for "Torah"), **N** (for "Nevi'im," the Prophets), and **K** (for "Ketuvim," the Sacred Writings). It is the collection of the teachings of **God** to human beings in document form. The term "Old Covenant" implies that it is no longer valid, or at the very least outdated. Something old, to be either ignored or discarded. But **Yeshua Himself** said: **Don't think I have come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets, I have not come to abolish but to complete (Matthew 5:17 CJB)**. I will be using the Hebrew acronym **TaNaKh** instead of the phrase the Old Testament, throughout this devotional commentary.

The Use of the phrase, "the righteous of the TaNaKh," rather than using Old Testament saints

Messianic synagogues, and the Jewish messianic community in general, never use the phrase Old Testament saints. From a Jewish perspective, they prefer to use the phrase, "righteous of **the TaNaKh**." Therefore, I will be using "the righteous of **the TaNaKh**," rather than Old Testament saints throughout this devotional commentary.

Theological Values

As the book of **Romans** does for the B'rit Chadashah, **Deuteronomy** provides an important theological foundation for **the TaNaKh**. It graphically delineates the character of **ADONAI** and various fundamental aspects of **His** relationship with **His chosen people: For you are a holy people to ADONAI your God - from all the peoples on the face of the earth, ADONAI has chosen you to be His treasured people (Deuteronomy 14:2)**. The book provides the theological foundation on which later biblical writers base their teaching. Later **Israelite** historians evaluate the direction of **the chosen people** from the perspective

of **Deuteronomy**. The prophets call **the people of YHVH** to repentance and threaten terrible judgment in terms of the blessings and curses described in **Chapters 27 and 28**.

YHVH: ADONAI is the only **God** for **Isra'el (4:35, 32:39)** and is **the LORD** of the covenant (**6:4**). **He** reveals **Himself** to **His** covenantal nation by means of **His** acts, theophany (the manifestation of **the LORD** that is tangible to the human senses, especially a visible appearance of **Messiah** as **the Angel of ADONAI** in the TaNaKh), and in direct revelation (**His** words). **He** has been, is, and will always be **Isra'el's Redeemer (1:30-31, 6:21-23, 26:6-9)**; **their** tender **Warrior (2:21-22 and 30-31, 7:1-2 and 20-24)**, and **their** righteous **Judge (7:13-16, 11:14-15, 30:3-9)**. **He** is **gracious (5:10, 7:9 and 12)**, **loving (1:31, 7:7-8 and 13)**, **righteous or just (4:8, 10:17-18)**, **merciful (4:31, 13:17)**, **powerful (4:34 and 37, 6:21-22)**, **holy (5:11)**, **glorious (5:24-26)**, **faithful or loyal (7:9 and 12)**, and **upright (32:4)**. But **He** is also an **angry God (1:37, 3:26, 9:18-20)**, one **zealous for His** own honor (**4:24, 13:2-10, 29:20**).

Covenant: The covenant serves as the bond between **YHVH** and **His people, the apple of His eye (Deuteronomy 32:10; Psalm 17:8; Proverbs 7:2; Zechariah 2:8)**. The source of the covenant rests in **ADONAI** alone and represents **His** steadfast faithfulness (see the commentary on **Ruth Af - The Concept of Chesed**) for **His** servant-nation. **He** has committed **Himself** to **her** in this unique relationship **the wife of ADONAI (Deuteronomy 5:1-3, 6:10-15, 7:6-11; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Isaiah 54:1-8; Hosea 2:14-23)**. The covenant is grounded in the past, gives meaning to the present, and promises hope for the future. Therefore, it is important to understand that the covenant at **Sinai** was not merely a historical event, but inaugurated a continuing relationship between **YHVH** and **Isra'el**.

Isra'el's Task: **Isra'el's God-given** task is to model **His** character before **all the other nations** of the earth (**Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Exodus 19:4-6**). Although they live among **the nations** (Hebrew: *goyim*), they are to be **a people** (Hebrew: *'am*) set apart for the purposes of **YHVH (27:9)**. As **His people**, they are the ones who **ADONAI** redeemed, to whom **He** gave the Promised Land as an inheritance, and through whom **He** intended to affect the entire world (**9:26 and 29, 21:8, 26:15, 32:9, 36 and 43**).

The Land: **The Land** is a fundamental theme throughout **Deuteronomy**. **YHVH** had promised **the Land** to **Isra'el's** ancestors (see the commentary on **Genesis Du - Abram Left Haran, He Took His Wife Sari and His Nephew Lot**), and pledged to bring **them** into that **Land** because of that divine commitment (**4:37-38, 9:4-6**). It is a **Land** of abundant blessings (**6:3, 8:7-10, 11:9, 26:9 and 15, 27:3, 31:20**). A key part of **God's** promise to **His people** is long tenure in that **Land (4:40, 5:16 and 33, 6:2, 11:9, 22:7,**

25:15, 32:47), where life will **go well** for **them** (**4:40, 6:3** and **18, 12:25** and **28, 22:7**). However, if **Isra'el** chooses rebellion, **YHVH** will evict **His people** from this Promised **Land** (**4:26, 28:32** and **63-66**). This is an everlasting promise and has nothing to do with current politics.⁴

Deuteronomy is relevant to your life today: This book teaches principles that could determine the success of your walk with **Yeshua Messiah**. It contains the final address that **Moshe** delivered to **the Isrealites** at a decisive time in **their** history; the eve of their emergence into the world as a political power. The merging of the final words of a great leader with the dawning of a new era for the nation of **Isra'el** creates a sense of anticipation as we read **Deuteronomy**.

Here a dying leader stands before **Isra'el**, a **nation** about to give birth to a long-awaited promise of **ADONAI**. **Moses'** words, if obeyed, would allow **the people of God** to reach **their** potential; however, if ignored, **Isra'el's** dreams would evaporate like a desert wind.

In encouraging the people to do what was right, Moshe addresses the following seven principles:

1. Don't Forget God: The nation of **Isra'el's** attitude toward **ADONAI** is a major consideration. In various ways, **Moshe** continually warns **the people** not to forget **YHVH**. Today, the fundamental question "What place will **the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** have in our country?" is generating much debate, but **YHVH** has set up a system of blessing and cursing in our world. It is a simple formula, but forgotten by most people. The more you read, understand and obey the Word of **ADONAI**, the more you will, in the end, blessed; however, the more you ignore **the LORD's** Word and embrace the values of this world (**First John 2:15-16**), you will, in the end, be cursed. Don't forget **Elohim**.

2. Care for the Disadvantaged: **Deuteronomy** deals effectively with the importance of caring for the disadvantaged of the **Israelite** community. The test of any legal system's respect of the rights of individuals is best reflected in its treatment of society's weakest members. Today, the social needs of the community must be effectively addressed by the believing community. Whether through times of plenty or times of want, our responsibility remains the same. How will we respond?

3. No Generation Stands Alone: The messages of **Moshe** are timeless. They are just as relevant today, as they were then. This great leader stands between past and present generations. The **Israelites** of the preceding years had suffered the consequences of wrong decisions. What would happen to the next generation? **Moses** impressed on the current generation their responsibility to their children. **Deuteronomy** interprets the past for the

sake of the future. **Isra'el's** present position in **their** journey was a result of their past decisions. **Their** decisions now regarding entry into the Promised Land and what **they** teach **their** children will affect the next generation. Today, we also face issues that will have a direct bearing on our children's future.

4. Obedience is Essential to Success in the Life of Believers: Each of **Moshe's** messages revolves around the same command: **Obey**. Everything - possession of the Land, victory over enemies, prosperity, and enjoyment of life - depended upon **Isra'el's** obedience to **ADONAI**. **Moses** continually asked his people for a positive response to **God's** leading. **He** encouraged them to **hear** (50 times), **do, keep, and observe** (177 times) **out of a heart of love** (21 times). This is relevant today, since our success as believers depends on our obedience to **YHVH**. **If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of His Son Yeshua purifies us from all sin (First John 1:7).**

5. Personal Responsibility for Obedience to God Must be Accepted: **Moses** motivates **his people** to **obey the LORD** by appealing to **their** common sense and desire to maintain **their** own well-being. **His** appeal was threefold. First, as a nation **they** never had it so good (**4:7-8**); therefore, secondly, **they** were responsible for the well-being of the nation; and, third, an unfaithful response would bring godly discipline. **Deuteronomy** is the first book to introduce this subject. In **Leviticus**, **Moses** was saying, "Don't do wrong, because **Ha'Shem** says not to." However, in **Deuteronomy**, **he** is saying, "Don't do wrong, because **Ha'Shem** will discipline you if you do." A transition is made from the collective to individual discipline (**24:16**). Today, we are faced with responsibility for our sins both collectively and individually. It is popular to deny this and to insist that we are helpless victims of our circumstances. But Deuteronomy tells us that personal change cannot be effective unless personal responsibility is accepted.

6. ADONAI Acts Among His People: By word and event, **the LORD** continually communicates to **His people**. **Isra'el's** history becomes the focus of **His** persistent activity. **Moshe** combines past events which reveal **God's** hand working with new exhortation to reveal what **He** wanted in the present. Our understanding of **YHVH** in the TaNaKh is one in which **He** is always personal, always known by what **He** does. There is nothing vague about **Him**. Scripture clearly defines **His** character and **His** desire. **He** even has a name, **YHVH, Ha'Shem** (the name), or **ADONAI**. Therefore, **the LORD** does not have many names, **He** has only one name - **YHVH** (Yud Hay Vav Hay). All the other names in the Bible describe **His** characteristics and **His** attributes. And **He** is very clear about **His** active relationship with **His people**; it calls for a most determined effort on our part to **obey** and trust in **Him**

alone. We must embrace this same timeless truth today.

7. The Covenant Between God and His People Must be Renewed: The renewal of the covenant between **ADONAI** and **His people** is an integral part of **Deuteronomy** (see [Fm - Renewal of the Covenant](#)), for it sets out the terms of the relationship between **YHVH** and **Isra'el**. This covenant was the constitution of the theocracy. **The LORD** was **King** and had claimed **His people** for **Himself** out of Egypt; **the people**, who owed everything to **God**, were required to submit to **Him** in a covenant that was based on love. The approaching death of **Moses** provided the initial basis for the renewal of the covenant. Today, when a crisis of transition comes upon us, we also need to be reminded of **God's** faithfulness and of our responsibility to obey **Him**.⁵

Genesis is the book of beginnings; Exodus shows the giving of the Torah and exit from Egypt; Leviticus is an addendum to Exodus, giving the sacrifices and allowing the Israelites to draw near to God; Numbers records the death of the old rebellious generation, and the hope of a new generation; Deuteronomy Moses restating the warnings and blessings of the Torah to the children of the Exodus generation, and the transfer of leadership from Moshe to Joshua, preparing them to enter the Promised Land.