

Deuteronomy in the New Testament



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Matt. 4:1–11, Deut. 8:3, Acts 10:34, Gal. 3:1–14, Acts 7:37, Heb. 10:28–31.*

Memory Text: “ ‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” ’ ” (*Matthew 4:4, NKJV*).

The New Testament is saturated with the Old. That is, the inspired writers of the New Testament quoted the inspired writers of the Old as a source of authority. Jesus Himself said, “It is written” (*Matt. 4:4*), meaning, “It is written in the Old Testament;” and He said that “ ‘the Scriptures must be fulfilled’ ” (*Mark 14:49, NKJV*)—meaning the Scriptures of the Old Testament. And when Jesus met two disciples on the road to Emmaus, instead of doing a miracle to show them who He was, “beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (*Luke 24:27, NKJV*).

Whether direct Old Testament quotations, or allusions, or references to stories or prophecies, the New Testament writers constantly used the Old Testament to buttress, even justify, their claims.

And among the books often quoted or referred to was Deuteronomy (along with Psalms and Isaiah). Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Hebrews, the pastoral epistles, and Revelation all go back to Deuteronomy.

This week we’ll look at a few of those instances and see what truth, present truth, we can draw from them.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 18.

“It Is Written”

Read Matthew 4:1–11. How did Jesus respond to Satan’s temptations in the wilderness, and what is the important lesson here for us in His response?

Jesus didn’t argue with Satan or debate with him. He simply quoted Scripture because, as the Word of God, it is “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword” (*Heb. 4:12, NKJV*). And in each case, the Word He quoted was from Deuteronomy. How interesting that Jesus, in the wilderness, chose to quote texts that were given to Israel in the wilderness, as well.

In the first temptation, Jesus referred to Deuteronomy 8:3. Moses had been recounting to the people of Israel how the Lord had provided for them all those years in the wilderness, including giving them manna—all part of a refining process, as the Lord was seeking to teach them spiritual lessons. And among those lessons was the one that “man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD” (*NKJV*). *God fed you physical food, but He also gives you spiritual nourishment. You can’t take only the first without the second.* Jesus used the image of bread as a transition to Deuteronomy and to rebuke Satan and the doubt he tried to instill in Jesus.

In the second temptation, Jesus went back to Deuteronomy 6:16, where Moses pointed the people back to their rebellion in Massah (*see Exod. 17:1–7*), saying, “You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted Him in Massah” (*NKJV*). The word for “tempt” can mean “try” or “test.” The Lord already had shown them, again and again, His power and willingness to provide for them; yet, the moment trouble came, they cried out, “Is the LORD among us or not?” (*Exod. 17:7, NKJV*). And it was from that story that Jesus drew from the Word of God to rebuke Satan.

In the third temptation, Satan this time sought to get Christ to bow down and worship him. What an open and blatant revelation of just who he really was and what he really wanted! Rather than debate, Jesus rebuked Satan and again reverted to the Word of God, Deuteronomy, where the Lord was warning His people about what would happen if they were to fall away and worship other gods. “You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him” (*Deut. 6:13, NKJV*), meaning Him and Him alone.

How can we learn to draw more power in our own lives from our study of the Word of God in order to reflect more fully the character of Jesus and, like Him, resist Satan’s temptations?

Lifting Up Faces

In Deuteronomy 10, Moses (again) was recounting Israel's history and (again) used those accounts to admonish his people to faithfulness. Amid that admonishment he said something else.

Read Deuteronomy 10:17–19. What's the essential message to the people here, and why is this message relevant to God's church today?

The phrase "shows no partiality" is translated from a Hebrew figure of speech; it means literally that He does not "lift up faces." This is believed to have come from a legal setting in which the judge or king sees the face of the person on trial and, based on that person's status (important person or someone insignificant), the judge or king renders a verdict. The implication here in Deuteronomy is that the Lord doesn't treat people in such a manner, despite His great power and might. He's fair with everyone, regardless of their status. This truth, of course, was revealed in the life of Jesus and how He treated even the most despised in society.

Read Acts 10:34, Romans 2:11, Galatians 2:6, Ephesians 6:9, Colossians 3:25, and 1 Peter 1:17. How do these texts make use of Deuteronomy 10:17?

However varied the circumstances in each one of these references (in Ephesians Paul tells masters to be careful how they treat their slaves; in Romans Paul is talking about the fact that, when it comes to salvation and condemnation, there's no difference between Jews and Gentiles), they all go back to Deuteronomy and to the idea that God "does not lift up faces." And if the "God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome" won't do it, then certainly we shouldn't, as well.

Particularly in how Paul in Romans frames it, we can see a revelation of the gospel: we are all on the same plane, regardless of who we are in terms of status. We are all fallen beings in need of God's saving grace. And the good news is that, regardless of our status, we all are offered salvation in Jesus Christ.

How often, even subtly, do you "lift up faces," and why does the Cross show us how sinful that attitude really is?

Cursed on a Tree

Read Galatians 3:1–14. What is Paul saying there that is relevant to us today, and how does he use Deuteronomy 27:26 and Deuteronomy 21:22, 23 to make his point?

Unfortunately, it's common in Christianity to use this letter as some kind of justification for not keeping the law, the Ten Commandments. Of course, that argument is really used as a reason not to keep the fourth commandment, as if keeping that one commandment, as opposed to the other nine, is somehow an expression of the legalism that Paul was dealing with here.

Yet, Paul was not speaking against the law, and certainly nothing in this passage could justify breaking the Sabbath commandment. The key can be found in Galatians 3:10, where he writes that “all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse” (*NIV*), and then he quotes Deuteronomy 27:26. The issue isn't obedience to the law, but “relying on the law”—a tough position, if not an impossible one, for fallen beings such as ourselves.

Paul's point is that we are not saved by the works of the law, but by Christ's death on our behalf, which is credited to us by faith. His emphasis here is on what Christ has done for us at the cross. And to help make this point, he refers back to Deuteronomy again, this time Deuteronomy 21:23. Like Jesus, Paul says, “It is written,” showing the authority of the Old Testament, and now he quotes from a text dealing with someone who, having committed a capital crime, and having been executed for it, was then hung on a tree, perhaps as a deterrent to others.

Paul, though, uses that as a symbol for Christ's substitutionary death in our behalf: Christ became a “curse for us” in that He faced the curse of the law; that is, death, which all humans would face because all have violated the law. The good news of the gospel, however, is that the curse that should have been ours became His, at the cross, “that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (*Gal. 3:14, NKJV*).

Or, as Ellen G. White said it: “None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law and bring him again into harmony with Heaven. Christ would take upon Himself the guilt and shame of sin—sin so offensive to a holy God that it must separate the Father and His Son.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 63.

Think about what you would face if you were to receive the just punishment for whatever wrongs you have committed. However, because Christ bore the punishment for your wrongs in Himself, so that you don't have to, what should your response to His sacrifice be?

A Prophet Like Unto Thee

Again and again, the Lord had warned Israel not to follow after the practices of the nations around them. On the contrary, they were to be witnesses to those nations (*Deut. 4:6–8*). In Deuteronomy 18:9–14, Moses again warns them about their specific practices, which were an “abomination to the LORD” (*Deut. 18:12, NKJV*). In that context then, he tells them that they must be “blameless before the LORD your God” (*Deut. 18:13, NKJV*).

Read Deuteronomy 18:15–19. What is Moses telling them there? Then compare this with Acts 3:22 and Acts 7:37. How do Peter and Stephen apply Deuteronomy 18:18?

In reference to the covenant at Sinai, Moses talks about how the children of Israel, at the revelation of God’s law (*Exod. 20:18–21*), wanted Moses to act as a mediator, an intercessor between them and God. It is then that Moses promises them, twice (*Deut. 18:15, 18*), that the Lord will raise up a prophet like Moses, the idea being, given the context, that this prophet, like Moses, also will be, among other things, an intercessor between the people and the Lord.

Many centuries later, both Peter and Stephen quote the text in reference to Jesus. Peter is seeking to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of what had been spoken of by “all His holy prophets” (*Acts 3:21, NKJV*), and that the leaders need to obey Him and what He says. That is, Peter uses this text, which the Jews knew about, and applies it directly to Jesus, with the idea that they need to repent for what they had done to Him (*Acts 3:19*).

Next, in Acts 7:37, when Stephen, though in a different context than Peter’s, is proclaiming Jesus, he, too, refers back to that famous promise, and he, too, claims that it pointed to Jesus. He is saying that Moses, in his role in history and leading the Jews, had prefigured Jesus. That is, as Peter had done, Stephen is seeking to show the people that Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecy and that they need to listen to Him. Contrary to the charge against him, that Stephen had been speaking “blasphemous words against Moses and God” (*Acts 6:11, NKJV*), Stephen proclaims Jesus as the Messiah, a direct fulfillment of what God had promised through Moses.

How do these verses show us just how central Jesus is to the entire Bible, and why all our understanding of it must be Christ-centered?

A Fearful Thing

The book of Hebrews, in all its depth and sublimity, is, in many ways, just one long exhortation to Jewish believers in Jesus. And what it exhorts them to do is: *Stay faithful to the Lord!*

This faithfulness, of course, should stem from our love of God, of who He is and of His character and goodness, most powerfully expressed at the cross of Christ. Sometimes, though, human beings need to be reminded of what the terrible consequences of falling away will be. That is, we need to remember that, in the end, if we don't accept what Jesus has done for us in having paid the penalty for our sins, we will have to pay that penalty ourselves, and that means "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (*Matt. 22:13*) followed by eternal destruction.

Read Hebrews 10:28–31. What is Paul saying, and how does it apply to us, as well?

How interesting that in order to exhort Jewish believers to stay faithful to God, Paul quotes Deuteronomy, an earlier exhortation to Jewish believers to stay faithful to God! Paul quotes Deuteronomy 17:6 in regard to the fact that someone deemed worthy of death would face that death only after at least two people testified against that person.

But Paul did this to make the point that if unfaithfulness could lead to death under the old covenant, how much "worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy [of] who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" (*Heb. 10:29, NKJV*). In other words, *You have more light and more truth than they did, and you know about the sacrifice of the Son of God for your sins; thus, if you fall away, your condemnation will be greater than theirs.*

Then Paul immediately goes back to Deuteronomy, now to Deuteronomy 32:35, simply to buttress his argument. Considering what they had been given in Christ and their knowledge of the great provision made for them, the Lord, who said, " 'vengeance is Mine' " (*NKJV*), will "judge His people" (*NKJV*) for their apostasy and unfaithfulness. After all, He had judged their forefathers, who didn't have what these New Testament Jews did, the fuller revelation of God's love revealed at the cross. Thus, basically, Paul was saying: *be warned.*

" 'The LORD will judge His people' " (*Deut. 32:36, NKJV*). What's our only hope in that judgment? (*See Rom. 8:1.*)

Further Thought: Just as the Old Testament quotes itself (that is, some of the prophets would quote or refer to, for example, texts from the five books of Moses), the New Testament is filled with direct quotes, references, and allusions to the Old. Psalms, Isaiah, and Deuteronomy were among the most quoted. Often, too, the New Testament writers would quote from what is known as the Septuagint (LXX), sometimes called the “Greek Old Testament,” which was the earliest known Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. The first five books of the Bible, known as the Torah or the Pentateuch, were translated in the third century B.C., and the rest of the Old Testament about the second century B.C.

One can learn a great deal, too, about how to interpret the Bible by how the inspired writers of the New Testament used the Old. And one of the first lessons we could learn is that, unlike so much Bible scholarship today, the New Testament writers never raised any question about the authenticity or authority of the Old Testament books. Nothing in their writings revealed, for instance, doubt about the historicity of Old Testament stories, from the existence of Adam and Eve, the Fall, and the Flood to the call of Abraham, and so forth. The “scholarship” that questions these things is just human skepticism, and it should have no place in the hearts and minds of Seventh-day Adventists.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Considering all the light that we have been given as Seventh-day Adventists, what should it teach us about the great responsibility upon us to be faithful to the truths that we have been given?
- 2 Read again Deuteronomy 18:9–14. What modern manifestations of these “abominations to the LORD” exist today, and how can we make sure that we avoid them?
- 3 Why, of all people, should Christians, who understand the universal application of Christ’s death on the cross, never “lift up faces” (see Monday’s study)? How can we recognize in ourselves the tendency to do just that (and don’t we fool ourselves if we deny that there is at least some tendency in us to do just that)? How can the cross, and keeping the cross before us, cure us of this wrong attitude?

Unforgettable Birthday

By OH DONGJUN

Nine-year-old Ji-yul is a popular boy at his school in rural South Korea. The teacher also likes him because he helps clean up the classroom.

But Ji-yul had a problem. His friends did not want to come to his house to play after school. Ji-yul often went to their homes and saw their new toys, aquariums, and pets. But no one seemed to want to come to his house. He didn't understand why they wouldn't come to his house.

One day, when Ji-yul invited a friend to play after school, the boy said, "Mother said I can play with you at school, but I cannot go to your house."

"Why did your mother say that?" Ji-yul asked.

"It's because your house is a church," the friend replied.

Ji-yul is the son of a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, and his home occupies a wing of a Seventh-day Adventist church building. Most of the town's other residents attend three large churches that belong to other Christian denominations in the town center. The parents of Ji-yul's friends didn't want their children going to the house inside the Adventist church.

Ji-yul told his parents about the conversation at school. His parents wondered how Ji-yul could have friends over to play. Seeing that Ji-yul would soon have his birthday, they decided that instead of going out, they would celebrate at home for the first time. Ji-yul prayed earnestly. "Please let my friends come to the birthday party and have a good time," he prayed. "Give their parents a good heart toward the church."

Ji-yul made birthday invitations with the name and location of the church. Together with small gifts, he gave the cards to all his classmates.

Finally, Ji-yul's birthday arrived. When the party started at 11:00 A.M., ten friends showed up to celebrate the day with him. Ji-yul was so happy. For the first time, he could play with friends at home.

From that day on, if there is a concert or another event at the church, Ji-yul makes invitations and distributes them to his classmates. He has learned that the more often his friends come to church, the more fun he has at home. Now he has three friends who come regularly to his house to play. He prays that someday his friends will worship with him at the church.



This mission story illustrates Spiritual Growth Objective No. 6 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: "To increase accession, retention, reclamation, and participation of children, youth, and young adults." Learn more at IWillGo2020.org. This quarter, your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will support two mission projects in South Korea.

Key Text: *Matthew 4:4*

Study Focus: *Matt. 4:1–11; compare Deut. 8:3; Gal. 3:1–14; compare Deut. 27:22–26; Acts 3:22; compare Deut. 18:15–19; Heb. 10:28–31; compare Deut. 17:2–6; Deut. 19:15; Deut. 32:35, 36.*

Part I: Overview

The book of Deuteronomy is one of four books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Isaiah) that are most often quoted in the New Testament. According to biblical scholars, Deuteronomy is the book that Jesus quoted the most, especially in crucial moments of His Messianic mission. The reason for Deuteronomy's popularity has to do with the sermon genre of the book of Deuteronomy, its pedagogical tone, and its theological teaching. Moses does not just quote the laws; he comments on them and brings out their theological content and profound intention for the sake of applying them to the lives of the Israelites. Deuteronomy contains many teachings that will constitute the theological fundamentals of Christian faith. We find in Deuteronomy the theological tension between the rigor of the law and the good news of the grace of God. It is from the book of Deuteronomy that Paul draws the idea that the law reveals sin (*Rom. 7:7*), that righteousness is only by faith (*Rom. 1:17; 10:6, 8, 17; compare Deut. 30:12–14*), and the hope that someday God's people will join as one with the Gentiles (*Rom. 15:10; compare Deut. 32:43*). This is why the book of Deuteronomy has been compared to the book of Romans in the New Testament. This week's study is devoted to the place and significance of the book of Deuteronomy in the New Testament.

Lesson Themes:

- *“It is written” (Matt. 4:4).* Jesus uses the Word of God.
- *Live by the Word.* Deep lesson on where humans find their source of life and existence
- *Law and grace.* How the New Testament uses Deuteronomy to explain law and grace
- *“ ‘A Prophet like me’ ” (Deut. 18:15, NKJV).* Jesus points back to Deuteronomy, which pointed forward to Him.

Part II: Commentary

The study of the book of Deuteronomy, from the perspective of the New Testament, provides a comprehensive and balanced theology. From it, we will learn about the vital need of the Word of God by which we shall live. We will appreciate the value of the principle “It is written” and the vital need for the Word of God. We will understand better the interaction between law and grace, and thus adjust our relationship with the God of justice and love. We will believe in the Messianic prophecies.

“It Is Written” (*Matt. 4:4*).

The fact that Jesus uses “It is written” (*Matt. 4:4*) to introduce His quotation from the book of Deuteronomy clearly indicates that for Him this book belongs to the corpus of inspired Scriptures. This is a technical expression that already had been used in the time of the Old Testament (*Josh. 1:8, 1 Kings 2:3, Neh. 10:34, etc.*) and later in the New Testament (*Mark 9:13, Acts 1:20, 1 Cor. 1:19, etc.*) to refer to the authority of the Scriptures. The passive form of the verb indicates the grammatical intention to imply the divine subject behind these writings. It is interesting that not only Jesus but also Satan refers to the inspired Scriptures, and both use the conventional “It is written” to introduce their quotations. But only Jesus, not Satan, points to God. The devil focuses only on the miracle, and God is not important in his theology. Jesus, on the other hand, focuses on God, whom alone we should worship (*Matt. 4:10*). For it is possible to know the Scriptures well and quote them all the time, and yet ignore or even reject the God who inspired them.

Live by the Word.

When at the end of His 40 days of fasting in the wilderness Jesus was tempted by Satan to turn stones into bread (an allusion to the miracle of the manna), He quoted a line from the book of Deuteronomy, in which Moses spoke to the Israelites at the end of their 40 years in the wilderness: “ ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’ ” (*Matt. 4:4, NKJV; compare Deut. 8:3*). This verse refers, of course, to the Word of God, as it was understood by the Greek translation (known as the Septuagint) that is quoted in the Greek New Testament. But the Hebrew text implies more than the words coming out of God’s mouth. The Hebrew text says literally, “Man shall live on all that will come out from the mouth of God” (*Deut. 8:3; compare Robert Alter’s translation; compare JPS*). The Hebrew verse also alludes to God’s creation of human beings (*Gen. 2:7*). What Moses was emphasizing was that it is from God’s mouth,

not from bread, that humans receive life. It was important that the Israelites understand this lesson. Spoiled by the manna that fell regularly and surely on their ground, the Israelites got used to that natural provision and may have, indeed, forgotten that it came from God. Jesus reminds Satan that even the power of the miracle was not the point, but the person of God Himself was.

Law and Grace

As in the book of Deuteronomy, the apostle Paul upholds both law and grace, although he also warns against misunderstanding these two principles. When Paul discusses the curse of Deuteronomy against those who observe the law (*Gal. 3:10; compare Deut. 27:26*), he insists that it is not the law, per se, that will save believers. To the Galatians, Paul argues that they should not trust the law for salvation, for the rigor of the law will indeed make them worthy of death. Their human effort to obey the law is bound to fail. Yet, Paul pursues, “ ‘the man who does them shall live by them’ ” (*Gal. 3:12, NKJV*), referring to the laws of Moses (*Deut. 4:1; compare Lev. 18:5*). The reason for this paradox resides not only in the value of the law but also in the faith in the grace of God: “The just shall live by faith” (*Gal. 3:11*), a principle that is taken from Genesis 15:6. Then Paul explains and gives the key to that “contradiction”: “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law” (*Gal. 3:13, NKJV*) that comes from disobeying it. Paul does not promote the rejection of the law; on the contrary, he reinforces the need for the law. Although we shall live by the law, it is precisely this life of faithfulness that will take us to faith in Jesus Christ, who has died for the failure of the sinner. But we are bound to suffer the curse by relying only on our works of the law, excluding the dimension of mercy (*Heb. 10:28; compare Deut. 17:2–6; Deut. 19:15; Heb. 10:30; compare Deut. 32:35, 36*). Thus, it will be even worse if we ignore the mercy of God, and thus dismiss, or “insult,” the Spirit of grace that has been manifested in the Cross (*Heb. 10:29*).

“ ‘A Prophet Like Me’ ” (*Deut 18:15, NKJV*)

When, under inspiration, Moses predicts the coming of a Prophet like him (*Deut. 18:15–19*), he is not just referring to the future coming of prophets in general. There have been prophets before Moses (*Gen. 20:7, Gen. 37:5–9, Num. 11:25*). Moses has in mind the future Messiah, just as later prophets predicted Him. Note that the same particular expression, “I will raise up a prophet,” was used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe the coming of the Messiah, thus alluding to Moses’ previous prophecy (*2 Sam 7:12*). So, when Jesus came and performed the extraordinary miracle of the multiplication of the loaves of bread, the Jews immediately remembered the miracle of the manna and thought

that the prophet like Moses had come (*John 6:14*). No wonder Peter and Stephen, who knew about this Messianic prophecy, used it as an argument to convince the Jews of that time who were waiting for a Prophet like Moses (*Acts 3:22, 23*).

Part III: Life Application

How Do You Apply the Scriptures?

Consider the following cases of knowing the Scriptures well, but without taking seriously its inspired nature:

- *Hermeneutic Application.* Some may question the historical, ethical, and theological truth of the text and/or interpret the Scriptures from the point of view of their cultural presuppositions (evolutionist theories, social and political pressure, etc.). What is the danger to one's faith from this mode of thinking? What is the remedy?
- *Existential Application.* For some, the Scriptures do not impact their personal and professional life, as if the God of the Scriptures (Old and New Testament) were just a God of another time who has nothing to do with their daily life and the marketplace. How can the existential thinker strive to make the Scriptures and God more personal?

How Do You Observe the Biblical Laws?

- *The Sabbath.* What can you do to prepare for the coming of the Sabbath from the start of the week so that you may live this day as a time of joy, as a gift from God to you, and not as a chore?
- *The Tithe.* Do you complain when you have to set aside part of your salary for God? Why do you think that is? What can you do to reframe your attitude toward tithing?

How Do You Understand the Messianic Prophecies?

Discuss with your class the following answers

- as real predictions that have been understood, as such, by the prophet who uttered them,
- as reflections that apply only to the contemporary situation, and
- as prophecies with double applications (contemporary and future) and reinterpreted by New Testament writers.

Notes
