

Preamble to Deuteronomy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 14:12–14, Ezek. 28:12–17, Gen. 3:1–7, Gen. 12:1–3, Acts 7:20–36, Exod. 19:4–8.*

Memory Text: “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8, NKJV).

The book of Deuteronomy, of course, did not arise in a vacuum. As with everything in life, Deuteronomy exists in a context; and, as with everything in life, that context plays an important role in understanding what the book means and what its purpose is.

A lot of history came before it—a history that explained the circumstances, not only of the book itself but also of the world and environment that created its context. Just as it would be hard to understand the purpose and function of a windshield wiper outside the context of a car, it would be hard to understand Deuteronomy, especially in light of our theme (Deuteronomy and present truth), outside the context in which it arose.

Someone had read Russian Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*—about 1,500 pages—in just three days. When asked what the book was about, the reader replied: “It's about Russia.”

To cover in one week's lesson the thousands of years of history before we come to Deuteronomy is to do somewhat the same thing. But by focusing on the highlights, we can see the context needed to best understand this book, so rich with “present truth.”

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 2.

Love, to Be Loved

First John 4:8 says, “God is love.” However simple those three words (four in Greek), the idea behind them is so deep, so profound, that we can barely grasp their implications. They don’t say that God loves, or that God reveals love, or that God is a manifestation of love, but that God *is* love. *Is* love—as if love is the essence of God’s identity, Himself. As fallen human beings, with only a few pounds of tissue and chemicals in our heads with which to grasp reality, we just aren’t able to comprehend fully what “God is love” means.

But we can, certainly, understand enough to know that it’s very good news. If, instead of “God is love,” the verse said “God is hate” or “God is vindictive” or “God is indifferent,” this revelation about Him could have been something to worry about.

And the truth that “God is love” helps us better understand the idea that God’s government, how He rules all of creation, is reflective of that love. Love permeates the cosmos, perhaps even more than gravity does. God loves us, and we, too, are to love God back, in return (*see Deut. 6:5, Mark 12:30*).

Love, though, to be love, must be freely given. God cannot force love; the moment He does it’s no longer love. Hence, when God created intelligent and rational beings in heaven and on earth with the ability to love, the risk always existed that they might not love Him back. Some didn’t—and, hence there exist the origins of what we know as the great controversy.

Why do the following texts make sense only in the context of the freedom, and the risk, involved in love? *Isa. 14:12–14, Ezek. 28:12–17, Rev. 12:7.*

Especially insightful is Ezekiel 28:15, which shows that though this angel, Lucifer, was a perfect being created by a perfect God, iniquity was found in him. It was not because he had been created with that iniquity to begin with. Instead, created with the ability to love, Lucifer had true moral freedom, and despite all that he had been given (“Every precious stone was your covering”), this angel wanted more. One thing led to another until, well, there was “war in heaven.”

In some places you can buy robot dogs, which will obey your commands, never soil the carpet, or chew the furniture. Would you, however, have any kind of meaningful relationship with this “dog”? How does your answer help in understanding why God wanted beings who truly could love Him back?

The Fall and the Flood

Almost every school child has heard the story about an apple falling on Isaac Newton's head, and voilà! Newton discovered gravity. Whether or not an apple really fell on his head isn't the crucial point; instead, the point is that Newton's great insight (he didn't discover gravity, either; anyone who fell down already knew about gravity) was to understand that the same force that dropped the apple (gravity) also kept the moon in orbit around the earth, the earth in orbit around the sun, and so forth.

This was important because for millennia many people believed that the laws that governed the heavens were different from the laws that governed the earth. Newton showed that this belief was wrong.

And though Newton's contribution was in the area of natural law, the same principle holds true with moral law. The same freedom, the freedom inherent in love, that led to Lucifer's fall in heaven led to humanity's fall on earth, as well.

Read Genesis 2:16, 17 and Genesis 3:1–7. How do these verses about perfect people, in a perfect environment, created by a perfect God, also reveal the powerful truth of the freedom inherent in love?

After the Fall, things went from bad to worse, even to the point where the Lord said about humanity “that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (*Gen. 6:5, NKJV*). And if their thoughts were bad, their actions surely were, as well, until things got so evil that the Lord destroyed the entire world with the Flood—in a sense giving humanity a chance to start over, a kind of second creation. However, as the story of the Tower of Babel shows (*Gen. 11:1–9*), humanity still seemed intent on defying God. “When the tower had been partially completed, a portion of it was occupied as a dwelling place for the builders; other apartments, splendidly furnished and adorned, were devoted to their idols. The people rejoiced in their success, and praised the gods of silver and gold, and set themselves against the Ruler of heaven and earth.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 119. Thus, besides confusing their language, God scattered the fallen race across the face of the earth.

Take a mental note of your thoughts throughout the day. What does this teach you about the state of your own heart?

The Call of Abram

Abram (later called Abraham) first appears in the genealogy of Genesis 11, which comes right after mention of the scattering from Babel.

Read Genesis 12:1–3, the call of God to Abram. Today, looking back after the cross, after the death of Jesus and the spreading of the gospel, how do we understand what God was promising to do through Abram?

Many centuries later, the apostle Paul, in seeking to deal with the heresy of the Galatians, pointed back to Abraham's call, showing it to be an early expression of what God's intentions had always been: the gospel to the world. "Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham" (*Gal. 3:7–9, NKJV*).

Abraham's call was first expressed in Genesis 12; much of the rest of Genesis is the story of his blood descendants, one dysfunctional seed after another, creating one messed-up family after another, and yet, through them the promise eventually was to be fulfilled, reaching a crucial milestone with the call of Moses.

Read Acts 7:20–36, the martyr Stephen's depiction of Moses and the Exodus. How does this fit in with God's initial promise to Abraham?

In a world steeped in ignorance, error, and a general lack of the knowledge of truth (things have not changed much in more than three thousand years, have they?), the Lord called out a people, His people, Abraham's seed, from Egypt. In them He sought not only to preserve knowledge of the truth, that is, knowledge of Him, Yahweh, and the plan of salvation, but also to spread that knowledge to the rest of the world.

Today, how do we as Seventh-day Adventists see ourselves in relation to the rest of the world? That is, what parallels exist between us and ancient Israel? More important, what responsibility does this parallel place on each of us individually?

The Covenant at Sinai

The Exodus and all that it entailed, from the blood on the doorpost in Egypt to the drama at the Red Sea—what an experience! No doubt it made an impression on those who lived through it. (And those who died, from the firstborn children in Egypt to the soldiers at the bottom of the sea, God will judge them fairly.) As the Lord said: “ ‘ “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself” ’ ” (*Exod. 19:4, NKJV*).

Why did the Lord do this stunning and dramatic rescue, actually taking one nation out of another nation, or, as Moses himself said to them: “ ‘ “Or did God ever try to go and take for Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?” ’ ” (*Deut. 4:34, NKJV*).

Read Exodus 19:4–8. Why did the Lord call the people out from Egypt?

It was as simple as that. God called them out, the seed, the descendants of the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And with these descendants the Lord established His covenant, and they would be, indeed, “ ‘ “a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine” ’ ” (*Exod. 19:5, NKJV*). This relationship was central to the covenant.

This idea of a “special treasure” (*segullah*), however, could be (and it was, in fact) easily misunderstood. Their specialness came not from anything inherently holy and righteous in and of themselves. Instead, it was because of God’s grace given to them and because of the wonderful truths that He had bestowed upon them—truths that they were to follow and, as a “kingdom of priests,” eventually spread to the world.

God then gave them some of the stipulations of the covenant, too (their end of the deal, so to speak), the Ten Commandments (*Exodus 20*), and then this covenant was ratified. Having sprinkled a newly constructed altar with the blood of the offerings, Moses “took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people” (*Exod. 24:7*). The people again declared that they would obey.

“When Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood . . . and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you’ ” (*Heb. 9:19, 20, NKJV*). What does the blood signify, and why is it so important, even to us today?

Apostasy and Punishment

“All that the LORD has spoken we will do” (*Exod. 19:8, NKJV; see also Exod. 24:3, Exod. 24:7*). Though, no doubt, the people had meant those words each time they said them, sacred history shows that, unfortunately, their actions time and again contradicted their words. Though they were the chosen people, though they had entered freely into the covenant with the Lord, they didn’t keep up their end of the deal, which really came down to one thing.

What was the crucial component for Israel in regard to the covenant?
Exod. 19:4, 5.

The call to obey God, to keep His law, was no more legalism than than it is now (*see Matt. 7:24–27; John 14:15; James 2:20; Rom 6:11, 12*), and yet, again and again the children of Israel failed to keep up their end of the deal.

Indeed, early on, even in the very sight of Mount Sinai itself, they fell into rank apostasy (*see Exod. 32:1–6*). Unfortunately, unfaithfulness seemed to be more the norm than the exception, and, thus, instead of quickly entering into the Promised Land, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years.

Read Numbers 14:28–35. What was the punishment meted out to the nation because of the people’s refusal to trust what the Lord had told them to do?

Then, as now, so often disobedience occurs as a result, not just of outright rebellion (though that does happen), but from a failure to trust in what God tells us. What made this sin even more heinous for Israel was the fact that, as God Himself said, all these men had “ ‘seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times’ ” (*Num. 14:22, NKJV*). Despite all that they had seen and experienced, they still refused to obey the Lord and to take the land, despite God’s promises that they would succeed (*Numbers 13, Numbers 14*).

Think about what was said above: that so often disobedience comes from a lack of trusting in God’s Word to us. Why is this true, and how can we, indeed, learn to trust in God more?

Further Thought: For a deeper and well-thought-out study on the great controversy theme, based on the idea of God as love, and written by a Seventh-day Adventist, see John Peckham's *Theodicy of Love: Cosmic Conflict and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018). The fact that this work has been published by a non-Adventist press shows how good biblical scholarship can reveal the reality of the great controversy as depicted in Scripture.

“In brief, I argue that God’s love (properly understood) is at the center of a cosmic dispute and that God’s commitment to love provides a morally sufficient reason for God’s allowance of evil, with significant ramifications for understanding divine providence as operating within what I call covenantal rules of engagement.”—John C. Peckham, *Theodicy of Love: Cosmic Conflict and the Problem of Evil*, p. 4.

“The decree that Israel was not to enter Canaan for forty years was a bitter disappointment to Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua; yet without a murmur they accepted the divine decision. But those who had been complaining of God’s dealings with them, and declaring that they would return to Egypt, wept and mourned greatly when the blessings which they had despised were taken from them. They had complained at nothing, and now God gave them cause to weep. Had they mourned for their sin when it was faithfully laid before them, this sentence would not have been pronounced; but they mourned for the judgment; their sorrow was not repentance, and could not secure a reversing of their sentence.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 392.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss the question of free will and love. Why must love, to be love, be freely given? Given all the suffering in the world, some would argue that love was not worth it. How would you answer that challenge?
- 2 With obedience so central to the whole Bible, what then is legalism? What factors can turn an attempt to be faithful to God and to His Word and commandments into the trap of legalism?
- 3 In class, discuss the question asked at the end of Tuesday’s study regarding the parallels between ancient Israel and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. What are those parallels, and why should we be concerned about them?

I Met Jesus at the Shop

By HONG SOON-MI

It didn't seem that life could get much worse. My husband was stricken with bone-marrow cancer. Then his parents died. I had to pay for my mother-in-law's funeral on my own and then take on responsibility for my family's livelihood. Sometimes I didn't even have 1,000 Korean won (US\$1) to pay for my son's school supplies. My salary wasn't enough to cover my husband's hospital bills. Every day, I worried that I wouldn't have enough rice to feed my family. I wept. I felt so alone.

Then I met Park Yeon-sook. She wasn't a relative or even a friend, but she tried to cheer me up. She saw that I was struggling financially, and she gave me additional work at her shop in Hanam, a suburb of South Korea's capital, Seoul. The extra money helped pay for living expenses and hospital bills.

I was so grateful for the work. But I noticed something unusual about Yeon-sook. She seemed happier than other people. I thought this was strange, but I was greatly moved by her joy.

As I got to know her, I saw that she went to church on Saturdays. She didn't worry about the income that she lost by closing her shop once a week. I was an atheist, but I wanted to go to church with her and find out why she had such joy and peace.

Yeon-sook never invited me to her Seventh-day Adventist church, but I resolved in my heart to go. So I started studying the Bible on my own. As I learned about God, the peace of heaven came into my life. I gave my heart to Jesus and joined West Hanam Seventh-day Adventist Church, where I now serve as a deaconess together with Yeon-sook.

There are many things that I don't know, but I believe in God from the bottom of my heart. Yeon-sook never spoke to me much about Jesus, but I saw Jesus in her life. The same Jesus whom I met through her life is living in my heart today.

This year, my husband and son also were baptized and joined the Adventist family. It doesn't seem that life can get much better. Thanks be to God for reaching my family through Yeon-sook and her shop.



This mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 1 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: "To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life involving not only pastors but every church member." Learn more at IWillGo2020.org. This quarter, your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will support two mission projects in South Korea. Read more about YEON-SOOK next week.

Key Texts: *1 John 4:8, Deuteronomy 4:37, Deuteronomy 6:5*

Study Focus: *Isa. 14:12–14, Ezek. 28:12–17, Gen. 3:1–7, Gen. 12:1–3, Acts 7:20–36, Exod. 19:4–8, Deut. 1:34.*

Part I: Overview

Introduction: The book of Deuteronomy is the fifth and last book of the Pentateuch, and it contains Moses’ farewell address to Israel before entering the Promised Land. As such, this book is marked by a sense of urgency. Moses is about to die and to leave his people, and the purpose of his last words is, therefore, to remind them of the most important teachings of God. This book is, thus, an exposition of the Israelite faith—the textbook for the leaders of the people in order to keep them on the right track.

Lesson Themes:

- *The God of history.* As Moses addresses his people, he reminds them of the past events of history in which God saved them from slavery and took them out of Egypt through the hardships of the desert.
- *The God of love.* Because God is love, He reaches out to His people and fights for them. In response, God’s people will learn to love their God.
- *God’s covenant.* This reciprocal relationship between God and His people takes the form of a contract, a covenant between God and Israel.
- *God’s people.* Israel is the people of the covenant. By no means does this designation in any way suggest that they are superior to other peoples. This covenant, which was initiated with Abraham, implies Israel’s holiness, and their commitment through love to fear God and obey His commandments.

Part II: Commentary

“All Israel”

This book is designated to “all Israel” (*Deut. 1:1*), an expression that refers to the totality of the people just before their entry to the Promised Land (*Deut. 34:12; Deut. 27:9; Deut. 31:1, 7*). The apostle Paul uses this expression in an eschatological sense to refer to the totality of the saved people (including Jews and Gentiles): “and so all Israel will be saved” (*Rom. 11:26, NKJV*). Although the phrase “all

Israel” in Daniel’s prayer may refer to the exiled people in Babylon, implying the hope of restoration, it is clear that it has a universalistic scope, encompassing “ ‘those near and those far off in all the countries’ ” (*Dan. 9:7, NKJV*).

Discussion and Thought Questions: Why does the book of Deuteronomy speak to the people of Israel as a corporate people? Why are the messages of this book better understood when the whole people are assembled? How does the adage “no man is an island” apply to the church today?

Deuteronomy

The word “Deuteronomy,” the title of the book, is derived from the Greek translation (the Septuagint) of a phrase found in Deuteronomy 17:18, “a copy of this law,” which means literally “a second [i.e., a repetition] of this law.” The Hebrew word for “law” is *torah*, which refers to more than our word “law” in a juridical sense; it means “teaching” in the general sense of the term and includes all God’s instructions. The phrase in Deuteronomy, “this second law,” does indeed describe the content of the book (*Deut. 28:61, Deut. 29:21, etc.*), not only because it is the repetition of the law that was originally given on Mount Sinai, but also because it is a review of God’s teachings. Significantly, the Hebrew title of the book, *Debarim*, “words” or “these are the words” (*Deut. 1:1, NKJV*), refers to the prophetic words of Moses, “according to all that the LORD had given him as commandments to them” (*Deut. 1:3, NKJV*). This echoes the last words of the book of Numbers, which read “these are the commandments” (*Num. 36:13; compare Deut. 1:6*).

Thought Question: Why did Moses need to repeat the Law?

Four Speeches

Moses addresses his people in four great speeches, each of which are introduced by the same phrase “these are the words” or its equivalent (*Deut. 1:1, Deut. 4:44, Deut. 29:1, Deut. 31:1*). The first speech is a historical prologue (*Deuteronomy 1–4*) wherein Moses retraces the past journey of Israel from Sinai to Canaan (*Deuteronomy 1–3*). The second speech is a review of the Law (*Deut. 4:44–Deut. 28:68*). The third speech is an appeal to keep the covenant (*Deuteronomy 29–30*). And the fourth speech is a final call to read and remember the Law, followed by the Song of Moses and his blessing and farewell before he dies (*Deuteronomy 31–34*).

Covenant

A more careful analysis of the structure of the book of Deuteronomy in the light of ancient Near Eastern literature has revealed a sophisticated

organization that follows the pattern of ancient covenant treaties between the suzerain and his vassal (Egyptian and especially Hittite, from the second millennium B.C.), which displayed the following features:

- Preamble (*Deut. 1:1–5*)
- Historical prologue (*Deut. 1:6–4:49*)
- Stipulations: general (*Deuteronomy 5–11*); specific (*Deuteronomy 12–26*)
- Blessings and curses (*Deuteronomy 27, Deuteronomy 28*)
- Covenant loyalty and witnesses (*Deuteronomy 29, Deuteronomy 30*)

God in History

This covenant structure, which confirms the antiquity of the book and its Mosaic authorship, suggests the intention to emphasize God's covenant with His people. The historical events, a reminder of God's works of salvation in behalf of His people, precede and lay the foundation of the covenant from Abraham and Egypt to the present time. These events suggest a biblical theology of history that is essentially different from our modern Western conceptions of history. For the Bible, history is not the mechanical flow of cause-and-effect events; rather, it is the result of God's continuous presence and actions. God initiates the covenant by His action in history. He is the First who moves and acts. And these acts in history are the basis of the covenant. God makes the covenant with His people (*Deut. 5:3*) because He is the Lord who brought them out of the land of Egypt (*Deut. 5:6*). The Hebrew word *debarim*, "words," the Hebrew title of the book of Deuteronomy, also means "events" and refers to the sacred history of God's works of salvation. The book of Chronicles, which recounts that history in the Old Testament, is called in Hebrew *dibre hayamim*, meaning "the words of the days." The words of God also are to be read through these events of history.

Discussion and Thought Question: What lessons about God could we learn from the fact that the same Hebrew word *dabar* means "word" and "history"?

The Principle of Love

The fundamental principle of God's covenant with His people is love. The verb "love" occurs often in the book, not only to refer to the love of God for His people (*Deut. 4:37, Deut. 7:8, Deut. 10:15, Deut. 23:5, etc.*) but also to the love of Israel in response to God (*Deut. 6:5, Deut. 7:9, Deut. 10:12*). In the book of Deuteronomy, the divine love is not described just

as a sentimental emotion. God’s love is intense and infinite and is manifested through events that express the intensity, the authenticity, and the infinite nature of His love. Because of this love, which created the heavens and the earth (*Deut. 10:14, Deut. 4:35, etc.*), God also entered the arena of human events and saved His people (*Deut. 1:27–31, Deut. 4:20*). In response to the divine love, Israel, the people of the covenant, are urged by God: “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength’ ” (*Deut. 6:5, NKJV*). Love implies, then, that they should remember God (*Deut. 7:18, Deut. 9:7, Deut. 24:9, etc.*), hear Him, strive to understand and obey His words (*Deut. 4:1, Deut. 6:4, Deut. 20:3, etc.*), fear Him (*Deut. 4:10, Deut. 5:29, Deuteronomy 17, Deuteronomy 19, Deut. 31:12, etc.*), and serve Him (*Deut. 6:13; Deut. 28:47, 48, etc.*).

Discussion and Thought Questions: Why is love more than a passing emotion? Why are the commandments of God “an expression of the principle of love”?—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 607.

Call to Study

The book of Deuteronomy is a powerful call to study and teach the words of God (*Deut. 6:7*), a book that has been esteemed in both Jewish and Christian communities as one of the greatest books of their Holy Scriptures. This is the book that contains the *Shema Israel*, “Hear, O Israel” (*Deut. 6:4*), which shaped Jewish religious identity. This also is one of the most present Old Testament books in the New Testament, wherein it is quoted 80 times. As such, it is one of the most important books of the Bible. It is a book of contemporary relevance for God’s people at the end of time as they are about to enter the Promised Land that the Lord has prepared for them (*John 14:2*). “The book of Deuteronomy should be carefully studied by those living on the earth today.”—Ellen G. White, in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 31, 1903.

Discussion and Thought Questions: Why should Bible study be an important component of spiritual life for Seventh-day Adventists? Find in the Bible examples of people who emphasized the value of studying as a religious duty.

Part III: Life Application

It is not enough to hear and study the words of God. We have to live according to what we have heard and understood. When I was a child, I

(Jacques Doukhan) heard from my rabbi an oral legend about a man who found a miraculous trumpet in the market. The salesman boasted of its magic qualities: “This trumpet,” he said, “has a wonderful power. If you blow into it, the fire of the house will be immediately mastered.” As soon as the man arrived home, he wanted to test the power of the trumpet. He set his house on fire and then started to blow the trumpet. And the more he blew into the trumpet, the more the fire grew and burned his house. The man got angry at the person who sold him the trumpet and ran back to the market to complain about it. The salesman explained then that the function of the trumpet was not to extinguish the fire but to alert the people of the city, who would then come and extinguish it.

One of the most important differences between God and humans is that when God speaks, things happen. Find cases in the Bible that illustrate this principle. In comparison, find in history, in political life, and in your own existence cases that illustrate the discrepancies between words and actions.

Notes
