

Wisdom of the Bible ~ Deuteronomy ~ Discussion Questions & Scripture

Deuteronomy is the last of the five books of Moses. It is, in effect, Moses' valedictory address in the form of several speeches and two long poems, which basically describe the exodus from Egypt and change of leadership (to Joshua) wrapped around the code of laws from God (Deut 10:12-26:19). Several themes are repeated as many as five and six times, which means to us, *pay attention!*

Five of these themes are summarized in Deut 10:12-13 – “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, and to worship the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your being, to keep the Lord's commands and his statutes that I charge you today for your own good?” [Alter] Note the similarity between these words and those of Micah (6:8) written some 700 years later: “He has told you, man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you—only to act justly, to love kindness (some translations say “faithfulness” and some say “mercy”) and to walk humbly with your God.” [Holman]. And isn't this also what Jesus taught?

So these lessons from Deuteronomy are as applicable today as when they were presented to the Israelites some 3,400 years ago.

1. Before considering the main themes, let's look at what the Lord has to say about himself.

Deut 4:24 – For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. [NIV]

“Consuming fire” can mean the glory of the Lord (Exodus 25:16-16) or can mean the Lord will drive out people ahead of the Israelites taking the land (Deut 9:3). What does being a *jealous* God mean? Could it mean that the Lord demands that you serve him only? (Deut 5:9, 6:15) What else? How does it affect you?

Deut 4:35 – He showed you these things so you would know that the Lord is God and there is no other. Deut 4:39 – So remember this and keep it firmly in mind: The Lord is God both in heaven and on earth, and there is no other. [NLT]

Deut 6:4 – “Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. [NLT]

2. The Lord asks that you fear him and love him. *Fear* and *love* don't seem to be related. What does *fear* mean? How can we show that we love the Lord?

Deut 6:5 – And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. [NLT]

Deut 11:1 – “And you shall love the Lord your God and keep his watch and his statutes and his laws and his commands for all time.” [Alter]

Deut 6:13 – You must fear the Lord your God and serve him. When you take an oath, you must use only his name. [NLT]

Deut 31:12-13 – ¹² Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. ¹³ Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.” [NIV]

3. Next, the Lord asks that we serve him. But since he has created everything and owns everything and controls everything, how can we possibly serve him?

Deut 13:4 – Serve only the Lord your God and fear him alone. Obey his commands, listen to his voice, and cling to him. [NLT]

Deut 15:10-11 – [Speaking of a pauper among the people] ¹⁰ Give generously to the poor, not grudgingly [literally, “your heart shall not be evil”], for the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do. ¹¹ There will always be some in the land who are poor. That is why I am commanding you to share freely with the poor and with other Israelites in need. [NLT]

4. What are some positive reasons the Lord gives us to serve him?

Deut 6:3 – Listen closely, Israel, and be careful to obey. Then all will go well with you, and you will have many children in the land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you. [NLT]

Deut 6:24 – And the Lord our God commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear him so he can continue to bless us and preserve our lives, as he has done to this day. [NLT]

Deut 13:18 –“The Lord your God will be merciful only if you listen to his voice and keep all his commands that I am giving you today, doing what pleases him.” [NLT]

Deut 28:1-14 – Blessings for obeying the Lord. (14 verses)

Deut 11:26-28 – ²⁶ “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: ²⁷ the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I am commanding you today; ²⁸ and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known. [NASB]

5. So the Lord also tells us what will happen if we don't obey him.

Deut 28:15 – “But if you refuse to listen to the Lord your God and do not obey all the commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come and overwhelm you.” [NLT]

Deut 28:62 – Though you become as numerous as the stars in the sky, few of you will be left because you would not listen to the Lord your God. [NLT]

Deut 28:15-68 – Curses and punishments for disobeying the Lord. (53 verses)

6. The Lord recognizes that people are not always going to obey him, are going to be “stiff necked,” are going to backslide, and basically screw up. What does he say about this? Is there any sin that he will not forgive?

Deut 4:30-31 – ³⁰“In the distant future, when you are suffering all these things, you will finally return to the Lord your God and listen to what he tells you. ³¹For the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon you or destroy you or forget the solemn covenant he made with your ancestors. [NLT]

Note the emphasis on *listening* to God. In return, he will be merciful to you.

Deut 29:18-21 – ¹⁸ Make sure that no man, woman, family, or tribe standing here today turns from the Lord our God to worship the gods of other nations. This would be like a root that grows to be a bitter and poisonous plant. ¹⁹ Make sure that there is no one here today who hears these solemn demands and yet convinces himself that all will be well with him, even if he stubbornly goes his own way. That would destroy all of you, good and evil alike. ²⁰ The Lord will not forgive such a man. Instead, the Lord's burning anger will flame up against him, and all the disasters written in this book will fall on him until the Lord has destroyed him completely. ²¹ The Lord will make an example of him before all the tribes of Israel and will bring disaster on him in accordance with all the curses listed in the covenant that is written in this book of the Lord's teachings. [GNB/TEV]

7. What does the Lord have to say about humility?

Deut 8:17-18a – ¹⁷ When you become successful, don't say, “I'm rich, and I've earned it all myself.” ¹⁸ Instead, remember that the Lord your God gives you the strength to make a living. [CEV]

Wisdom of the Bible ~ Deuteronomy ~ For Groups of 3 or 4

1. In the pagan epics of the Biblical era, a daring hero often makes a bold effort to climb to the sky or cross the great sea to bring back the hidden treasures of the divine realm. The writer of Deuteronomy proclaims that this mythological era is at an end, for it is God's word inscribed in a book and in each person's heart that has become the intimate property of everyone.

Deut 30:11-14 – ¹¹ Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. ¹² It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹⁴ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. [NLT]

Do you feel that God's word is inscribed in your heart? Or do you get it from reading the Bible? Or from a sermon in church? Or from a Bible study?

2. Take a look at the ten commandments. They are in both Deuteronomy 5:6-18 and Exodus 20:2-17.

A. Which commandments do you find easiest to obey? Why?

B. Which ones do you find most difficult or nearly impossible to obey? Why?

C. In the Talmud, which is a record of rabbinic discussions pertaining to Jewish law, ethics, philosophy, customs and history for instruction and learning, several of God's commands from the books of Moses have been softened or even eliminated. The rabbis were so uncomfortable with the law about killing a rebellious son (Deut 21:18-21) that they virtually disallowed it. They effectively did away with the Year of Jubilee in which all property is to be returned to its original owners. And in the Ten Commandments, the first commandment is split into two: 1) I am the Lord your God who has taken you out of the land of Egypt and 2) You shall have no other gods but me, while the traditional second commandment has been eliminated all together. What do you think of this? Why do you think the Jewish rabbis did this?

D. In the third commandment, what does "misuse the name of the Lord your God" mean to you? The Amplified Bible says: "not take ... in vain ... or in falsehood or without purpose."

E. In the tenth commandment, what does "covet" mean? What does this commandment really mean today?