

The Gospel According to Moses: Three Reasons Why We Should Study Deuteronomy

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If you could only take one book of the Bible with you on a deserted island, what would it be? Psalms? The Gospel of John? Hebrews? What about Deuteronomy?

Amazingly, when we put that question to the life Jesus, we discover it was the book of Deuteronomy and the Psalms, which Jesus took with him when the Spirit led him into the wilderness. In Matthew 4:1–11 we find the account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, and notice what words Jesus quotes.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written,

" 'Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' " [Deut. 8:3]

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

" 'He will command his angels concerning you,'

and

" 'On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.' " [Psalm 91:11–12]

⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' " ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

" 'You shall worship the Lord your God
and him only shall you serve.' " [Deut. 6:16]

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

In this temptation narrative, we learn something about Jesus and the way Jesus read the Old Testament, as well as the importance of the book of Deuteronomy.

Why Deuteronomy

1. Jesus found his identity as God's Son in Deuteronomy.

It was not by accident that Jesus found himself in the wilderness being tempted by Satan. As verse 1 indicates, it was the Spirit that led him there. Just as God's Spirit brought life to Adam and put him in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:7–8, 14) and just as the Spirit led Israel into the wilderness (Isaiah 63:10–14), so the Spirit led Jesus into a place where he would experience the same temptations as Adam and Israel.

In fact, Satan's words, "If you are the *Son of God*, command these stones to become loaves of bread" harken back to God's [two other "sons."](#) In Eden, Satan tempted Adam to distrust God and eat the fruit from the forbidden tree (Genesis 3). Luke 3:38, which is situated just before Luke's account of Jesus's temptation (4:1–11), identifies Adam as "God's son." Accordingly, the temptation in the Wilderness offers Jesus the same chance to deny God, just like the first man did.

But being the true Son of God, Jesus does not turn the stone into bread. Rather, as a true Adam, he trusts God perfectly and quotes Deuteronomy 8:3: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." In this way, Jesus proves his identity as God's Son and a greater Adam.

At the same time, Jesus's experience in the wilderness also identifies him with Israel, who is also called God's son (see Exodus 4:22; Hosea 11:1). Just as Israel spent forty years in the wilderness, one year for every day the spies spent in Canaan (see Num. 13:25; 14:33, 34), Jesus also spent forty days in the wilderness. The location and the time are intentional, and they demonstrate how Jesus as God's Son is walking the same path as Israel.

The great difference, however, is that where Israel failed in their belief (cf. Psalm 95), Jesus succeeded. In the face of temptation, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 to demonstrate his faith. In context, this passage recalls God's faithfulness to Israel when they were in the wilderness (Deut. 8:2). Moses commanded the people of God to trust God in Deuteronomy 8 by remembering his great works of redemption. And truly, this is what Jesus did.

Facing himself the question of God's faithfulness in the barren wilderness, Jesus remembered what God did for Israel when they faced a similar trial. And importantly, he shows that he has done more than memorize a few verses from the Old Testament; he has fully embraced the identity of being God's son. He has sat at the feet of Moses, such that by knowing the context of Deuteronomy 8, we see how Jesus is now living out the story of Israel, yet without failing in his faith.

Instead, through trust in the covenant promises of God, Jesus proves that he is God's Son. In fact, in each of Satan's three temptations, Jesus returns to the Old Testament. Once to Psalm 91 and twice to Deuteronomy. Accordingly, we see how important this book is for Jesus. And for us who follow him, Deuteronomy is vital for seeing how Jesus comes to fulfill God's law.

2. Deuteronomy is vital for our Christian discipleship.

If Jesus found his identity in Deuteronomy, and we find our identity in Christ, then Deuteronomy is necessary for our Christian discipleship too. Indeed, we know from passages like Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; and 2 Timothy 3:16 that the Old Testament is for New

Covenant believers, but sometimes we struggle to know how to apply the Old Testament to our lives.

In the case of Deuteronomy, the book is the final words of Moses to the people who are entering the Promised Land. After forty years in the wilderness, God has winnowed his people and made them ready for entering his presence. In this way, Moses recalls all that God has done for Israel and he gives an explanation of how to live in covenant with God.

Indeed, the book is not, as it is unfortunately labeled “a second giving of the law” (*deutero* = second; *nomos* = law), where “law” is a list of rules and regulations to earn God’s favor. Rather, Deuteronomy is a book that recalls who God is, what he has promised, and how he desires his people to live before him.

In this way, it is a book of instruction for those who have been saved by his grace. And, in fact, it is the book which first describes the new covenant. Deuteronomy 30 looks to a future day when God will circumcise the heart of his people and place his word within them. In this way, the book is not merely an historical recollection of God’s word to Israel on the plains of Moab; it is a book with a future that speaks to our hearts today. Therefore, this book is vital for our Christian discipleship.

3. Therefore, we should study the book of Deuteronomy.

As Jesus twice quotes from Deuteronomy, the rest of the New Testament is equally attentive to this book. More than eighty times, the apostles cite Deuteronomy. And thus for anyone who is seeking to follow Christ and know the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus, Deuteronomy is a vital book.

Because Jesus comes to establish a new covenant, we who follow him must grow in our understanding of the old covenant. And while that study includes the whole of the Old Testament, Deuteronomy is a key book for understanding what it means to live in covenant with God.

Over the next few months, our church will be studying this book in Sunday School. We will begin by seeing its covenant structure and learning about the author Moses. From there, we will walk through the chapters of this book, learning how the center of this book is an exposition of the Ten Commandments. At the same time, we will learn how to guard against the prosperity gospel, a teaching that often misused Deuteronomy 27–28. All in all, by looking at this book, we will learn more carefully who God is and how we his new covenant people may live before him.

After all, that is why the Spirit led Moses to write these words. And what the Spirit inspired him to write are at work to teach, reprove, correct, and train the people of God for every good work. [Join us on Sundays for this class](#), or listen in [online](#) as we study the book of Deuteronomy and learn how to live in covenant before the God of Israel.

Soli Deo Gloria, ds