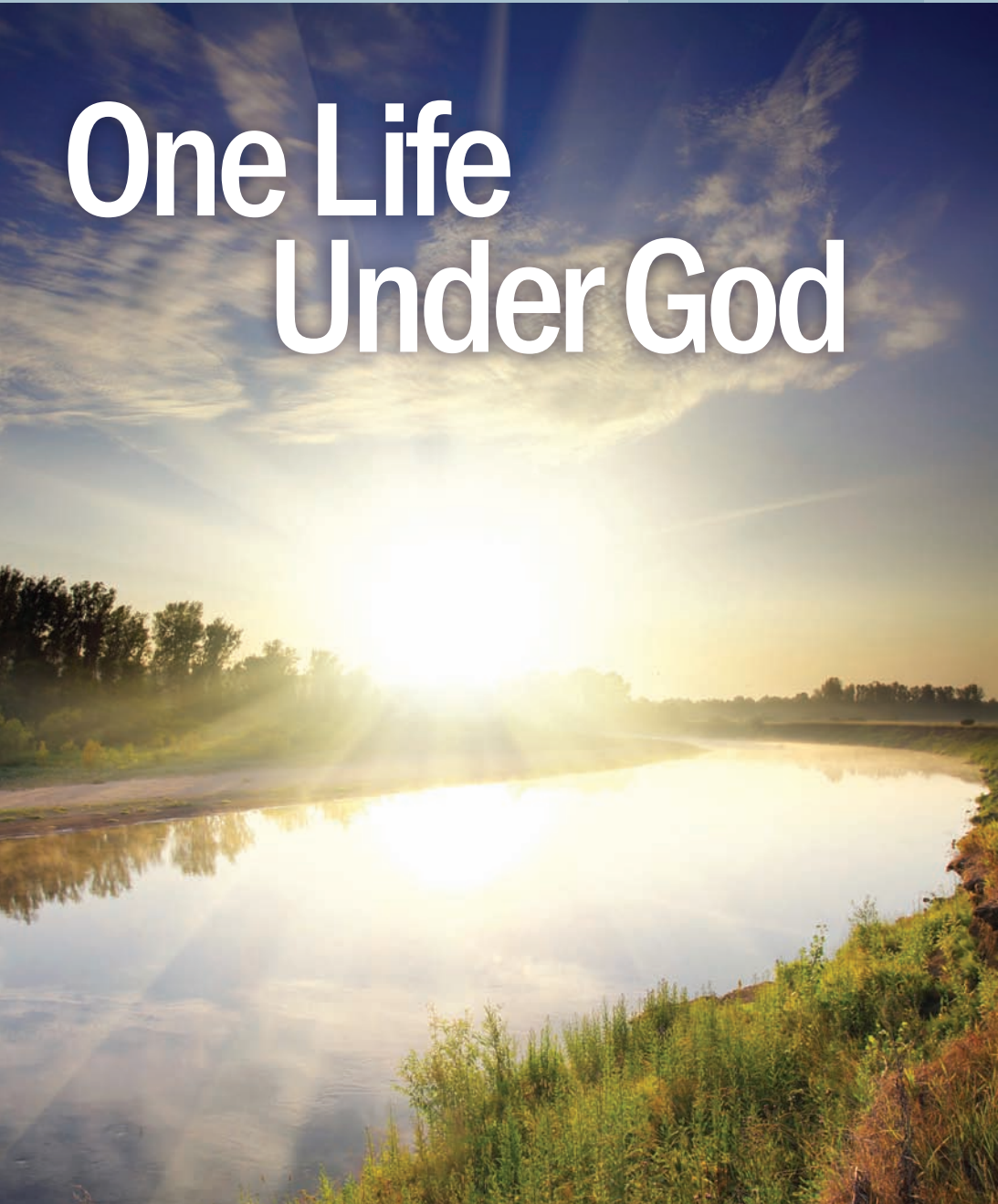




PATHWAY BIBLE GUIDES

DEUTERONOMY

One Life Under God





PATHWAY BIBLE GUIDES

**One Life
Under God
DEUTERONOMY**

BY PAUL BARKER



matthiasmedia

One Life Under God
Pathway Bible Guides: Deuteronomy
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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Many Christians have a bit of an aversion to the Old Testament. We know the classic Sunday School stories and some of the comforting Psalms, but otherwise we can be reluctant to delve into the first three-quarters of the Bible. Perhaps this is because we fear the unknown. Or perhaps our understanding of the fact that we belong to the new covenant leads us to mistakenly disregard the old one.

But the Old Testament will inspire, challenge and deepen your Christian faith every bit as much as the New Testament, and Deuteronomy is a great place to start. This book records the final, stirring sermon of Moses, as the Israelites overlook the Promised Land and the leadership baton is passed to Joshua.

Deuteronomy keeps bringing us back to the one living God. In contrast to the pagan gods and idols, there is no other. He alone is the God who has spoken (to Israel at Mount Sinai), and he alone is the God who has rescued a people from slavery (rescuing Israel from Egypt). Holy, merciful, and unfailingly faithful to his promises to Abraham, this God persists in loving this wayward people. And this one God calls his people Israel to love him with everything, in response to his actions of redemption and provision. Every area of life is to be devoted to this God: one life under the one God.

Yes, many of the laws in this book appear peculiar to us—yet many continue to make good sense and to reflect the just and caring standards of God himself. And though it is not always obvious, this great Old Testament book keeps directing and driving us to the one who is greater than Moses: Jesus himself. On resurrection day, the two men walking to Emmaus hear their companion (who turns out to be Jesus) speak of how the Scriptures were fulfilled in himself: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). Jesus is the one who rescues his people not from slavery to a nation, but from slavery to sin; who speaks with even greater authority than Moses; who finally removes the curse of the law.

So welcome to Deuteronomy, the climactic final book in the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses). I pray that you will live your one life under the one living God, as Deuteronomy so persuasively urges its readers to do.

Paul Barker

July 2011

1. TRUSTING THE FAITHFUL AND POWERFUL GOD

Deuteronomy 1:1-3:11



Getting started

In your experience or observation, how easy is it to obey God when you doubt him? What things can help in such a situation?



Light from the Word

The story so far... Deuteronomy is the continuation of a story that stretches way back to Genesis.

Read Genesis 12:1-3, 7 and 15:5.

1. What does God promise Abram (later Abraham)¹ in 12:2 and 7, and 15:5?

Read Exodus 1:7-11. These verses describe a period of time hundreds of years later, when the Israelites are slaves in Egypt.

2. How do these verses relate to the promises to Abraham?

Read Exodus 2:23-25.

3. In their slavery in Egypt, the Israelites cry out to God. Why does God answer their prayer?

Read Deuteronomy 1:1-5.

4. Deuteronomy's opening paragraph sets the scene for this book.
 - a. Who is introduced as the speaker?
 - b. Who is the audience?
 - c. Where does this happen?
 - d. When does this happen?
 - e. What is Deuteronomy (v. 5)?

Read Deuteronomy 1:6-11.

5. What encouragement does Moses seek to give the Israelites by referring to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v. 8)?

6. To what does the wording in verse 10 refer? Why do you think Moses makes this reference?

Read Deuteronomy 1:19-46.

7. What was Israel's response to the report of the twelve spies? Why didn't Israel agree to enter the land (vv. 27-28)?

8. In what two ways is Israel's sin described (vv. 26, 32)? How do they relate to each other?

9. What qualities do we see in God's punishment for Israel's sin (vv. 34-40)?

Read Deuteronomy 2:8-12 and 19-23.

10. What do you think is the main lesson of the possession of land in the past by Moab and Ammon (remembering 1:28)?

Read Deuteronomy 2:24-3:11.

11. How would the reminder of these events encourage Israel to conquer the land?

Read Romans 4:16-25 (which quotes Genesis 15:5-6).

12. The apostle Paul uses Abraham's faith as an example of what it means to trust God's promises. In what ways does Abraham exemplify the lesson of these early chapters of Deuteronomy?



To finish

In order to trust God's promises, it is important to know that God is both faithful and powerful to keep his promises. Are there any ways in which you are especially prone to doubt God's faithfulness and power? How does God's word, both in Deuteronomy 1-3 and beyond into the New Testament, stir up faithful obedience from you?



Give thanks and pray

- Thank God that despite our faithlessness, God remains faithful.
- Pray that your "obedience of faith" will grow during this study of Deuteronomy.

1. See Genesis 17:5.

FOR THE LEADER

What are Pathway Bible Guides?

The Pathway Bible Guides aim to provide simple, straightforward Bible study material for:

- Christians who are new to studying the Bible (perhaps because they've been recently converted or because they have joined a Bible study group for the first time)
- Christians who find other studies¹ too much of a stretch.

Accordingly, we've designed the studies to be short, straightforward and easy to use, with a simple vocabulary. At the same time, we've tried to do justice to the passages being studied, and to model good Bible-reading principles. We've tried to be simple without being simplistic; no-nonsense without being no-content.

The questions and answers assume a small group context, but it should be easy to adapt them to suit different situations, such as individual study and one-to-one.

Your role as leader

Because many in your group may not be used to reading and discussing a Bible passage in a group context, a greater level of responsibility will fall to you as the leader of the discussions. There are the usual responsibilities of preparation, prayer and managing group dynamics. In addition, there will be an extra dimension of forming and encouraging good Bible reading habits in people who may not have much of an idea of what those habits look like.

Questions have been kept deliberately brief and simple. For this reason, you may have to fill in some of the gaps that may have been addressed in, say, an Interactive Bible Study. Such 'filling in' may take the form of asking follow-up questions, or using your best judgement to work out when you might need to supply background information. That sort of information, and some suggestions about other questions you could ask, may be found in the following leader's

notes. In addition, a *New Bible Dictionary* is always a useful aid to preparation, and simple commentaries such as those in the *Tyndale* or *Bible Speaks Today* series are often helpful. On Deuteronomy, the following commentaries are all sound and not too difficult: the *Tyndale* commentary by John Thompson, the *Bible Speaks Today* commentary by Raymond Brown, and in particular, the *New International Biblical Commentary* by Christopher Wright.² My own book, *The God Who Keeps Promises*, offers a straightforward overview of the book of Deuteronomy.³ Consult these resources after you have done your own preparation.

On the question of background information, these studies are written from the assumption that God's word stands alone. God works through his Holy Spirit and the leaders he has gifted—such as you—to make his meaning clear. Assuming this to be true, the best interpreter and provider of background information for Scripture will not be academic historical research, but Scripture itself. Extra historical information may be useful for the purpose of illustration, but it is unnecessary for understanding and applying what God says to us.

The format of the studies

The discussion questions on each passage follow a simple pattern. There is a question at the beginning of each discussion that is intended to get people talking around the issues raised by the passage, and to give you some idea of how people are thinking. If the group turns out to be confident, motivated and comfortable with each other and the task at hand, you may even decide to skip this question. Alternatively, if the group members are shy or quiet, you may decide to think of related types of questions that you could add in to the study, so as to maintain momentum in a non-threatening way.

After the first question, the remaining questions work through the passage sequentially, alternating between observation, interpretation and application in a way that will become obvious when you do your own preparation. The final question of each discussion, just before the opportunity for prayer, could be used in some groups to encourage (say) one person each week to give a short talk (it could be 1 minute or 5 minutes, depending on the topic and the people). The thinking here is that there's no better way to encourage understanding of a passage than to get people to the point where they can explain it to others. Use your judgement in making the best use of this final exercise each week, depending on the people in your group.

In an average group, it should be possible to work through the study in

approximately 45 minutes. But it's important that you work out what your group is capable of, given the time available, and make adjustments accordingly. Work out in advance which questions or sub-points can be omitted if time is short. And have a few supplementary questions or discussion starters up your sleeve if your group is dealing with the material quickly and hungering for more. Each group is different. It's your job as leader to use the printed material as 'Bible Guides', and not as a set of questions that you must rigidly stick to regardless of your circumstances.

Preparation: 60/40/20

Ideally, group members should spend half an hour reading over the passage and pencilling in some answers *before* they come to the group. Not every group member will do this, of course, but encourage them with the idea that the more they prepare for the study, the more they will get out of the discussion.

In terms of your own preparation as leader, we recommend you put aside approximately *two hours*, either all at once or in two one-hour blocks, and that you divide up the time as follows:

- 60 minutes reading the passage and answering the questions yourself as best you can (without looking at the leader's notes or Bible commentaries)
- 40 minutes consulting the leader's notes (plus other resources, like commentaries). Add to your own answers, and jot down supplementary questions or other information that you want to have available as you lead the discussion. Make sure you write everything you need on the study pages—the last thing you want to do is to keep turning to the 'answers' in the back during the group discussion
- 20 minutes praying about the study and for your group members.

This 60/40/20 pattern will help you to focus on the Bible and what it's saying, rather than simply regurgitating to the group what is in the leader's notes. Remember, these notes are just that—notes to offer some help and guidance. They are not the Bible! As a pattern of preparation, 60/40/20 also helps you to keep praying for yourself and your group, that God would give spiritual growth as his word is sown in your hearts (see Luke 8:4-15; 1 Cor 3:5-7).

If, for some reason, you have less or more time to spend in preparation, simply apply the 60/40/20 proportions accordingly.

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1. Such as the Interactive Bible Study (IBS) series also available from Matthias Media.
 2. JA Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, TOTC, IVP, Leicester, 2008; RA Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy: Not By Bread Alone*, BST, IVP, Leicester, 1993; CJH Wright, *Deuteronomy*, NIBC, Hendrickson, Massachusetts, 1996.
 3. P Barker, *The God Who Keeps His Promises*, SUFES, Malaysia, 2011.

LEADER'S NOTES

1. TRUSTING THE FAITHFUL AND POWERFUL GOD

Deuteronomy 1:1-3:11

► Remember: 60/40/20



Getting started

The 'Getting started' question establishes a point of contact between our situation and the situation for many of the Israelites on the edge of the Promised Land. Like the Israelites, we are in a relationship with God where he has made promises to us and commanded things from us. Hopefully the discussion will bring out the link between faith and obedience, where confidence in God is necessary to live a life of obedience.

Studying the passage

Deuteronomy is the continuation of a story that stretches way back to Genesis.

The land that is the focus of so much of this book is that which was promised to Abram (later called Abraham) in Genesis 12:7. Six hundred years may have passed since that promise, but God has not forgotten it. God also promised Abram a multitude of descendants (Gen 12:2 and 15:5), a promise that sees some fulfilment by the time we get to Exodus 1-2 (questions 1-3).

Israel left Egypt nearly 40 years before Deuteronomy begins, after a sequence of miracles and plagues against Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea, and all under the human leadership of Moses (Exodus 1-15). They received laws from God at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-Numbers 10). The relationship between God and the descendants of Israel was to be a formal covenant. God pledged himself to Israel and the promises he made; Israel was to pledge itself to God by obedience to his laws. There is one main covenant throughout the Old

Testament, begun with the promises to Abraham in Genesis 12, formalized in a covenant ceremony in Genesis 15, and later including the covenant stipulations of the laws given at Mount Sinai. In Exodus 24, Israel pledged itself to that covenant relationship and its binding obligations.

Israel failed to enter the Promised Land on their first attempt (Numbers 13-14, retold in Deut 1:19-46). As a result that generation died in the wilderness and, as Deuteronomy begins, a new generation has arrived at the border of the Promised Land. These are the people Moses addresses. Deuteronomy is like a covenant renewal for this next generation.

The opening paragraph sets the scene for the book. A Bible map might be useful to show where Israel is, on the plains of Moab. The list of place names in 1:1 is less important. Note the time discrepancies in 1:2-3. It takes just eleven days to get to the border of the Promised Land from Egypt, but Israel has taken 40 years (they are “in the fortieth year” in the wilderness). The reason for such a long time, of course, is their sin, which is the subject of the second half of chapter 1.

Deuteronomy is a sermon, preached by Moses. Note the emphasis in this opening paragraph on Moses speaking (1:1, 3, 5). In particular, 1:5 says that he “undertook to explain this law”. “Law” (Hebrew: *torah*) includes the retelling of history as well as legal commands. To explain is not to give the law, since that was done at Sinai to the previous generation. Rather it is to preach it, to urge and exhort this generation faithfully to keep it (question 4).

Moses is seeking to convince and persuade Israel to trust God and thus to obey the command to enter the land. Hence, frequently in Deuteronomy the land is referred to as land that God “swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them” (or similar expressions; 1:8). The land is described in terms of the promises to Abraham. Part of the way that Moses seeks to bolster faith in God’s promises is to show the faithfulness of God in the past (question 5). So 1:10 acknowledges that already one of the promises to Abraham is fulfilled. In Genesis 15:5, when Abraham doubted God’s promises, God reassured him by pointing to the stars and saying his descendants would be that numerous. And so it has happened, Moses says. So the reference to Genesis 15 is intended to link the two promises (descendants and land) together and imply that if one is now fulfilled, Israel can be sure that the other will be too. Seeing one promise fulfilled is intended to encourage faith that God will fulfil the land promise too (question 6).

In 1:19-46, the spies reported that the land was good. Yet the people’s

response suggested otherwise. Moses particularly highlights Israel's faithless fear (1:28; question 7).

Israel's sin was both rebellion and unbelief, as sin always is (question 8). What God requires of people is "the obedience of faith", to use Paul's expression in Romans 1:5. Their unbelief was related to their lack of trust in the promises of God.

Yet despite Israel's sin, God's promise still stands. Faithlessness by God's people fails to thwart the faithfulness of God (a truth taught in Romans 3:3-4). So the first generation will die out in the wilderness but the promise still stands for their children. There is both judgement and mercy, severity and grace in this incident (question 9). Notice that when God withdrew his promise of being with Israel to fight (1:42), they were guaranteed defeat. When God promised his presence, they were guaranteed victory (1:30).

In 2:1-23, Moses recounts the history of other nations in the area (as also found in Numbers 20-21). The purpose is not simply to give a history lesson, but to show that God is able to keep his promise. In giving land to Moab and Ammon God has dispossessed nations that were giants, that were strong and fortified—the exact fears that Israel expressed in 1:28. What God has done for other nations he is powerful also to do for Israel (question 10).

Having passed through the lands of Edom, Moab and Ammon, Israel successfully fought two other nations, Heshbon and Bashan, on the east side of the Jordan on their way to the border of the Promised Land (Numbers 21, retold in Deut 2:24-3:11). These victories give added evidence for God's ability to keep his promise of giving Israel the land. Note that both Sihon and Og's kingdoms were fortified (2:36, 3:4-5) and Og was a giant (3:11)—further evidence that Israel's fears in 1:28 were baseless (question 11).

Abraham is an example of what Moses is calling Israel to be. While Abraham had no command to obey in Romans 4:16-25's account, like Israel, he faced the issue of a seemingly impossible promise. Nonetheless, he was "fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised" (Rom 4:21). He models for us the kind of faith that produces the obedience that God requires of his people (question 12).



To finish

The final question aims to link the purpose of Deuteronomy 1-3 with one of the purposes of Scripture as a whole: to stir up faithful obedience on the part of the

readers. Though this question does not make explicit a link to Jesus, it would be good to point out that Jesus provides even more evidence of God's faithfulness and power to keep his promises. For example, Luke 1:55 links Jesus' coming with God keeping his promises to Abraham.

Moses recites God's actions in history in order to demonstrate the faithfulness and power of God, thus inviting the reader/hearer to faithful obedience. That is a major role of Scripture, which is powerful to make us wise for salvation in Christ—even the Old Testament (2 Tim 3:16). So the final question aims to help people see that function of Scripture for themselves.

In later studies we will address the issues of the land and what place 'land' has for Christians. We will also address the question of the ethics of war, which passages such as 2:24-3:11 raise.



Give thanks and pray

Each study will end with suggestions for thanksgiving and for prayer. They are intended only as a starting point—however it is good to model thanksgiving and prayer that derives from what is learnt in the Bible study.



Deuteronomy is possibly the longest sermon ever given, preached by Moses as Israel is about to enter the Promised Land. As Moses exhorts Israel to live faithfully, we discover rich and practical insights about what the God we serve is like, what it means to live his way, the nature of worship, and God's view on leadership. Most importantly, Paul Barker points us to the difference that Jesus has made, enabling Christians to respond to God more faithfully than Israel did.

8 studies. Leader's notes included.

Pathway Bible Guides

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