

## INTRODUCTION TO DEUTERONOMY

- What makes Deuteronomy so important for us to read □
- Is it for everyone to read, young and old, male and female □
- If it is God's word for us, are we bound by its covenant laws □
- What can we learn from it, how does it connect with the New Testament Gospel, and more importantly how is it fulfilled in Jesus Christ □

Our hope is that as we embark on this journey through the book of Deuteronomy, that each of us will grow in our personal faith and find answers to some of the questions that can be an obstacle to faith for Christians and non-Christians alike.

For a start, let's imagine:

At the age of five, you remember many of your male Egyptian friends just died overnight. Along with many other Israelite families, within 24 hours of eating a lamb or goat in haste, you were forced to leave the home in Goshen that you had always known, never to return.

You saw the old man who leads your people lift up a wooden rod, you witnessed the sea water dividing over Yam Suph (the sea of reeds), and you walked through on the rocky dry seabed. After you crossed to the other side you were terrified when you heard the sound of the chariots of Egyptian soldiers which changed to screams followed by silence when the sea closed the gap.

After one month of walking in a hot dry desert with not enough food, you cried and asked your parents why you didn't stay in Goshen and eat and drink there. The water was either contaminated and sometimes there was no water at all. In spite of all these problems, you also saw miraculous wonders attributed to the God of the old man with the wooden staff.

Even with 1500 plus Egyptian gods, and the magical spells of the Egyptian priests, no one had ever heard of water coming out of rocks when you hit it, or bread flakes raining from the sky.

A few weeks later, you stood with about two or three million at the foot of a huge mountain which your parents called Horeb. There you saw lightning and smoke from the mountain, and you heard thunder as Moses received God's laws. You yourself were taught the Shema (**Deut 6:4-5**) from an early age; a huge change from Egypt where you were used to learning about many nature and local state gods.

At the age of seven, you saw your parents agree to join the masses to try to return to Egypt. They rebelled against God, Moses, Caleb and Joshua.

You saw cousins, aunts and uncles perish by plague or be swallowed up by the earth, because they grumbled and rebelled.

After 38 years you saw many of your friends in their 40s die because they

worshiped the local gods and idols and indulged in sexual sin as part of the worship.

It is THIS generation of children, preteens and teens who grew in the desert that Moses addresses in Deuteronomy.

Now let's be honest if you had this experience growing up,

- What would your feelings and attitudes be like
- Would your dreams for God's Promised Land be changed by the tribulations of desert life
- What about your thoughts of God  Would you easily see God's harsh judgement or His grace

### **Themes of Deuteronomy**

At first glance we might think God is harsh and vindictive. But the book consistently reveals many distinguishing attributes of God -his **redemption, love, grace, power, justice and judgement**.

In fact, Deuteronomy is theocentric; it shows **God as a mighty champion** for Israel and to be compared to no other (3:22-24; 4:34-35).

God chose to redeem Israel from their bondage and give them an inheritance they did not deserve out of love for them and their forefathers (4:37-38; 6:10-12; 7:7-8); it is God who initiates a relationship of love with His people and provides His gift of grace throughout their journey.

### **What did God ask for in return?**

The themes are twofold:

**First** are the themes relating to the attributes of God, some of which have been described above, and **second** are the themes relating to God's people.

God wanted a relationship with His people through a covenant, the goal of which was for the Israelites to acknowledge the "one" true God and to love Him through obedience to His commands. Their obedience was not for God's benefit but for theirs (4:39; 5:29; 6:1-5).

His people were chosen to be holy as God is holy (Lev 11:44-45; Deut 7:6); they were not to blend into the prevailing cultures of that time.

Deuteronomy as part of the "Torah" was a Law to govern a nation with God being the supreme ruler. Israel united the nation and assembly (church) as one, unlike biblical Christianity, where the church and state are separate. One thing needs to be clear that although Deuteronomy is the word of God for us, it is **Not** our covenant or law, but we can still learn from the ethical and moral principles from the past that the Spirit shows us (1 Cor 10:6-11; Rom 15:4).

### **What does "Deuteronomy" mean?**

The English title Deuteronomy is derived from the Greek translation

“deuteronomion” which literally means “**second law**”. Unfortunately, when the Hebrew book was translated into Greek (for the Septuagint, 250 BC), the reference in Dt 17:18 to “copy of the Law” (to be made by any Israelite king to study and observe) was mistranslated as “second law”. However, it was **Not** a second law or second edition, but a copy of the original covenant law that was referred to. The adult recipients of the Sinai covenant all perished in the wilderness within 40 years, except **Caleb and Joshua**. With a lapse of 40 years Deuteronomy represents a renewal of God's covenant with the children who were at Sinai and those born along the journey, who have now grown up and are about to enter Canaan. In other words, this was the second giving or repeat of the law for the next generation. The covenant core, that is the Ten Commandments, is reinforced, but many important events in Israel's history have taken place leading up to Deuteronomy, and Deuteronomy includes a significant amount of historical narrative, as well as present and future perspectives, which will be discussed later on. Since Moses was not going to enter Canaan and the earlier generations had died, this generation needed to be prepared for the transition ahead.

What do you think of when you see the names Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers □

In English these titles signify a central theme of the book: the origin (Genesis) of God's creation; the departure (Exodus) of the Israelites from Egypt; the priestly (Leviticus) duties for holiness; and the censuses (Numbers) in preparation for the promised land. If you were reading the Hebrew Torah the titles would say respectively: Bereshith {in the beginning (God exists before time, space and matter); We'elleh shemot - these are the names (descendants of Israel); Wayyiqra - and He summoned (the Lord summoned Moses); and Bemidbar - in the wilderness (life journey to the promised land). In Deuteronomy “these words” pertain to those of Moses to the people (Dt 1:1) by the guidance of God's Spirit (more shall be explained later).

### **What were the needs?**

Although this new generation had, through God's power, defeated two pagan kings and taken their territories east of the Jordan river, they still needed encouragement. Maybe the fears and failures of their faithless predecessors haunted them; maybe they feared possible hardship in a new land. Maybe they were overwhelmed by God's expectations and apprehensive about falling short.

This generation had seen their parents and grandparents perish because they were unfaithful to the Lord. They needed reassurance that God's gracious love for them was still steadfast with an everlasting covenant in return for their loyalty. They needed to see God as their hero, their redeemer, provider and protector.

There was a danger that the people could easily forget about God after they had settled in Canaan for a long time. With increasing agricultural work, expanding families and increasing wealth and prosperity, life could get busy enough to blot God out, and as a substitute they would settle for local gods who could be influenced to meet their personal/family needs only.

God wanted a people set apart for Himself. God's holiness required that His people be holy. To ensure spiritual purity the covenant demanded that the existing Canaanite nations, whose land the Israelites were to inherit, be removed. This in fact was to be a divine prophetic judgement call on the nations that cherished centuries of abominable religious and cultural practices (**Gen 15:16**). Another vital reason was to prevent the Israelites' faith in the one true God from being polluted by influence from local religions and gods.

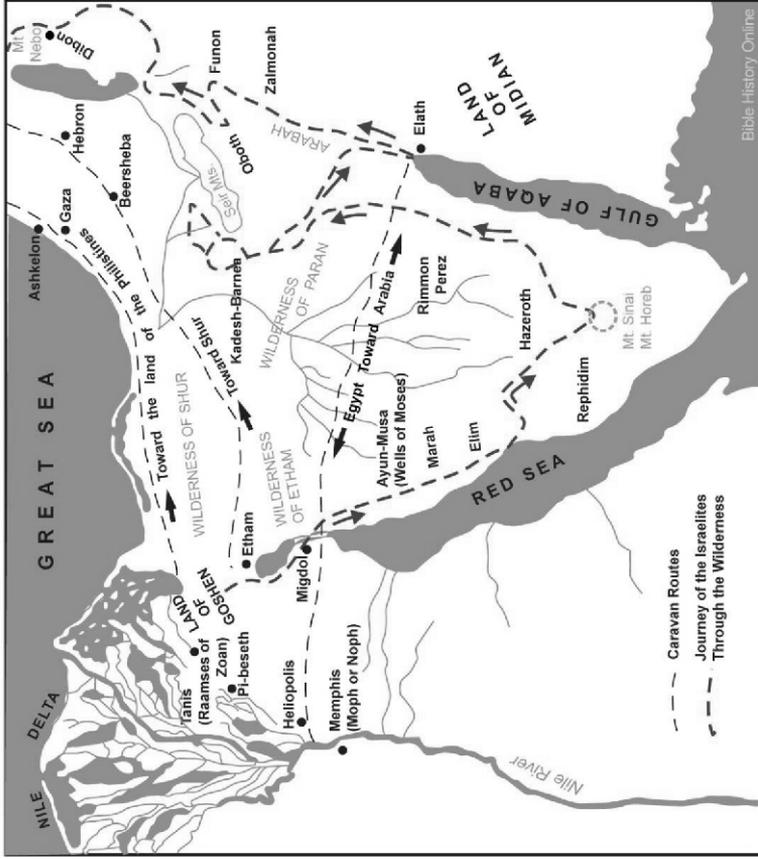
### **How to use this series**

If the introduction was a lot to read and digest in one seating, feel free to turn back to it as we explore each chapter. Do not rush the material just to be “up to date” with the reading schedule, but look up the references given and reflect on these; wrestle through the difficult passages and perhaps check more than one Bible translation. Try and look for central themes in each chapter rather than focus on quirky miscellaneous single commands, not to say that we will not try to address some of these.

For each section of scripture, we provide some notes and/or questions to help you get started, followed by some more detailed points for delving deeper into the text when you have time. We have prepared studies for each week day, leaving weekends free for other study or catching up. The dates are a suggestion; feel free to read at your own pace.

It is always best to read the Bible passage first — it is God's word, this booklet is not! — and write down any thoughts and questions you may have. Then look at the questions and notes for the passage. Any questions you have that are not answered here can be raised at the end of the lessons or with one of the brothers (Ramesh, John, Mark, Raji or David) or you are welcome to send any comments, criticisms and questions by email to <[cocumbai@rediffmail.com](mailto:cocumbai@rediffmail.com)>.

# ROUTE OF THE EXODUS OF THE ISRAELITES FROM EGYPT



### **Deut. 1:1-5 ‘Moses Begins his First Sermon to Israel’ Tuesday - 1st Jan**

Take some time to look at the maps above and below (32). Knowing some geography will help you follow the place names, and in particular it will help you understand where the Israelite audience is.

These five verses set the stage for the following speech that recounts the last 40 years of Israel’s life in the wilderness. After spending eleven months at Sinai/Horeb, having completed the tabernacle, the first generation set off for the wilderness of Paran and settled in Kadesh Barnea (Ex 19:1; Num 10:11-12; 13:26). Eleven days travelling from Sinai to Kadesh was about 110 to 120 miles on foot. The eleventh month “shebat” would have been in the middle of a cold rainy season (January/February).

Moses is retelling the story of Israel to the present generation in the Plain of Moab not far from Mount Pisgah. Why do you think the Lord wanted Moses to narrate the events and the Law to the second generation, even after the recent defeat of two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River □

### **Deut. 1:6-46 ‘Israel’s History after the Exodus’ Wednesday - 2nd Jan**

Moses begins his historical review of Israel from 40 years earlier when the Lord made a covenant with His people at Sinai/Horeb; this was two months after leaving Egypt (Ex 19-23). In fact they spent almost one year there constructing a mobile tabernacle and learning new ritual, dietary, purity and quarantine laws (Leviticus), so that the community could be holy for God. God called for a census to number the military personnel for the battle ahead (Num 1). In the second month of the second year (Num 10:11-12) God called them to leave Sinai and set their sights on the Promised Land. Upon the advice of Moses’ father in law, in order to reduce the burden on Moses, official leaders or judges were appointed to decide lesser judicial cases and disputes (Ex 18). The nation had become too large for Moses to govern alone. Their first main stop was Kadesh Barnea. As mentioned previously this journey covered eleven days which was over 120 miles on foot; men, women, children and livestock. They travelled from one desert region (Sinai) to another (Paran).

Kadesh Barnea (modern Ain El Qudeirat – see map 32) was located in the southern border of Amorite territory, not far from the Amalekite settlers. It is from here that Moses charges Israel to enter the land of Canaan by heading north. Perhaps the whole nation is still apprehensive about taking the land, and as such they request Moses to send a small delegation to represent them to glean information about the territory. This plan is authorised by God (Num 13).

What did scouting the land involve □ According to Num 13 they spied the land for 40 days from the southernmost border (wilderness of Zin) to the

northernmost border (Rehob) . This would have been the hot/dry season since it was the beginning of the grape harvest (mid to late July).

Their journey is shown on the following map (31):



Though over 200 miles (by foot) was scouted, Moses focuses on the spies' experiences around the Valley of Eschol (meaning "clusters") where grapes were harvested. This was near a famous ancient fortified city Hebron, where Abraham used to camp as a nomad (Gen 13:18). Imagine scouting all the cities between Mumbai and Pune without bus, car, motorbike, plane or train for 40 days.

What were the "negative" facts that affected the faith of the people □

A bad report spread a lack of faith throughout Israel, with the result that they viewed God as their enemy, intent on destroying them by having them embark on this mission. If God told you to uproot your whole family from your city and settle in a city that is 98% Muslim with Sharia Law enforced, with a mission to convert all to Christianity, what would be your natural response □ The Israelites feared for the safety of their families as they entered what they perceived to be a dangerous land. The land of Egypt, from which God had redeemed them from a life of bondage and harsh living, now looked like paradise compared to Canaan (Num 14:1-4).

Jesus has rescued us from Egypt spiritually; freed us from the bondage of sin. Nevertheless when we face trials and obstacles in the wilderness of Christian life, are we tempted to look back □ Does Egypt look attractive to you now in your season of life □

With the exception of Caleb and Joshua (the two spies who remained faithful), God was upset enough to wipe out the whole faithless nation and rebuild it through Moses (Num 14:12). Moses interceded for the nation to seek a pardon from God for their rebellion. Though their sin was forgiven in the sense that God did not carry out what He said He would do, it was not left unpunished: every man over 20 years would perish in the wilderness over a period of 40 years and fail to see the Promised Land. The babies, children and teenagers who suffered and bore the consequences of their parents' sin for 40 years were the ones who would see the good land.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews picks up the theme of the wilderness wanderers; their hearts were evil and unbelieving, leading to their rebellion (Heb 3:12-18). Why do you think their hearts became rebellious □ What can we learn from this today □

Was it God's original plan to wait 40 years before allowing His people to enter the land of Canaan □

After God rejected His people, the Israelites changed their mind and attempted to conquer Canaan after all, ending in fruitless defeat. Why do you think they failed □

"Remaining in Kadesh many days" was a euphemism for the remaining 38 years spent south of the border of the Amorites.

## Deut. 2:1-3:11 'The Desert Years' Thursday - 3rd Jan

Mount Seir marked an ancient border between Egypt and Canaan. By this time it had become the home of the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob, having been divinely allotted to him (Gen 36:8; Josh 24:4). The location is a mountainous landscape (not one single summit) and was so named after the native ancestor Seir the Horite who inhabited the territory centuries earlier (Gen 36:20).

Picking up from Dt 1:40, after Israel's rebellious refusal to enter Canaan from Kadesh Barnea 38 years earlier, God had condemned that generation and told them to travel south in the opposite direction to Canaan towards the Red Sea (Yam Suph = "sea of reeds").



The people would have travelled toward Ezion Geber, a famous sea port north of the Gulf of Aqabah, before passing northbound on the east side of Edom. In the parallel account of Num 20:17, Edom refused to allow Israel direct passage through their territory using the King's Highway which was a major trade route from the Gulf of Aqabah to Damascus in Syria. It is probably a bit like the people of Luton prohibiting the use of the M1 for motorists travelling to Leicester from London.

Unlike Num 20, Dt 2 suggests that Israel could buy food and water from them. Possibly this was done as they skirted around the land of Edom. In any case, why do you think Esau was hostile to Israel? How long had this feud existed between both nations? Unresolved grudges passed on through the centuries can be devastating. In Matt 2, the Edomite ruler Herod the Great wiped out many of the Israelite babies of Bethlehem to try to kill the messiah king.

Dispossession or exile of original inhabitants was usually God's judgement call on the sin of the nation. At this time Israel was God's chosen servant nation for this task (Dt 7:1-2; 9:5-6). The additional reason for Israel was that God had to keep His promise to the patriarchs and His love for Israel. However, God also used pagan nations as His servants to dispossess nations (including Israel) as a judgement call on the nations (Jer 25:8; 27:6-8; Amos 1-2; 2 Kings 17; etc.). The dispossession was not based on the righteousness of the dispossessor.

Those dispossessed were giant fighting warriors like those of Canaan; why would this be significant for faith? Why do you think God gave Moab, Ammon, Edom and Caphtor (Philistines) their lands? Does God show favouritism for Israel (also see Amos 9:7)?

From the time of leaving Kadesh to crossing the Zered brook (the border between Edom and Moab) why did God allow 38 years to pass when the journey should only take a few weeks?

In the fortieth year of Israel's wilderness life, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River had been recently defeated. That means that all the territory from the Arnon River to beyond the Yarmuk River was newly inherited territory (see map 32), a stretch of up to 150 miles.

With King Og being the last of the race of giants to be killed, what do you think the mood and confidence of the people was like? Why do you think God allowed these two victories?

Israel needed to overcome fear through faith in God. What are your fears that hinder your faith in God?

### **Deut. 3:12-29 ‘Inheritance in the Transjordan’ Friday - 4th Jan**

Please look again at map 32, focussing on the territory east of the Jordan (known as the Transjordan). The Transjordan was allotted to three tribes of Israel (strictly speaking two and a half tribes). Can you see the territories covered by Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh? Here Moses is reminding these Transjordanian tribes to cross over and help the rest of their brothers possess the land in Canaan. What was the attitude of these two and a half tribes originally (see Num 32)?

When God amply blesses your life, do you easily forget the needs of others around you?

Why does Moses remind his people that God continues to fight for them (3:22)?

Despite Moses' desperate prayers, God in anger still refused to allow him to enter Canaan, but only to view it from Mount Pisgah. Why?

Mount Pisgah was a mountain range within the Abarim Mountains, and Mount Nebo happened to be one of its peaks (Dt 32:49; 34:1). If Moses were standing on the Nebo summit he would have been over 2600 feet over sea level (equivalent to more than three times the height of the skyscraper building).

This same year, while waiting in the plains of Moab, Moses is charged by God to transfer leadership to Joshua. In the parallel passage of Num 27:18-19, Joshua was publicly commissioned with authority to take the mantle of leadership after Moses even though Joshua had already been endowed with God's Spirit of leadership.

### **Deut. - 4 ‘The Call to Obedience’ Saturday - 5th Jan**

Moses reminds Israel of the importance of obeying God's commands for their own good. You would think that after all the amazing wonders of God in bringing Israel out of Egypt, the people would automatically obey out of gratitude. God was continuously pouring out His grace to a stubborn, rebellious people even before the covenant was given. A written law was necessary to remind them of God's ways. They were neither to add to nor subtract from what God legislated. Moses recalls a recent event while waiting in the plain of Moab (Num 25:1-2) when Israel accepted the invitation from Moabite women to worship and sacrifice to the god Baal of Peor – blatant idolatry which broke the covenant. The pagan cult worship involved sexual immorality with the Moabite and Midianite women which Israel engaged in. This pagan worship like many others was used as a fertility ritual, supposedly to cajole the gods to guarantee healthy births of humans and livestock. The cost of this sin took 24,000 lives through plague, compared with 3000 of the

earlier generation who died due to golden calf worship 40 years before. Hard lessons from history were not being heeded.

Are there resources that you immediately run to in place of God to try to meet any of your needs□

God was calling Israel to always remember the great experiences that God had shown, for them to pass down from generation to generation. God took their minds back to the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai (Horeb). The present audience would have been infants, young children, preteens and teens at the time. In the middle of a hot desert you see a 1500+ foot mountain ablaze with dense smoke. You also hear the thunder of a voice coming down from the mountain top, although you do not see the form of God. This was an absolutely unique experience, like nothing they – or we – would ever have known.

At Sinai the people of Israel saw no form of God, though they heard a voice and a dramatic display of His presence. This would have been contrary to expectations since other nations' gods were identified by distinctive images and statues. God forbade any carvings to represent Him since God is Spirit; nor would He tolerate any carvings of other gods for syncretistic worship (4:15-24).

God tells of His uniqueness: no nation has ever had the privilege of hearing God speak as Israel has at Sinai. Also, unlike the man-made gods of Egypt, God Himself out of love delivered Israel out of the powerful nation of Egypt (4:35-37). It is because of God's gracious love that Israel is being redeemed and delivered into the Promised Land (7:7-8). Israel did not earn God's love nor did they love God first. God was the first to initiate and reach out to His people. In return God desired that His people reciprocate their love for God by faithful obedience to the covenant.

The character of God does not change (Mal 3:6). How can we see similar themes of God's gracious love and our love through obedience under Christ's covenant□(See 1 John 4:10,19; 5:2-3.)

### **Deut. 5 'The Ten Commandments' Monday - 7th Jan**

This appears to be the start of Moses' second speech and of a major new section of Deuteronomy (Dt 5-11), beginning with an account in chapter 5 of the giving of the Law at Horeb (Mount Sinai). This section as a whole contains general laws, followed by the detailed laws in chapters 12-26. Some scholars argue that the detailed laws of chapters 12-26 correspond broadly with the order of the 10 Commandments. In addition, this section emphasizes how much God loves the Israelites.

Verses 2-3: "The earlier covenant at Horeb": Horeb is Mount Sinai. Even

though the listeners were only children at the time of the first giving of the law, Moses emphasizes that this is also their covenant, not just for the earlier generation, thus a covenant for future Israelite generations too.

Verses 4-5: Moses reminds them how God spoke from the fire and cloud the first time the law was given and that Moses had to be a mediator, as the people were so scared of God (the fire and cloud would show God's power and authority). Perhaps this reminder is there to show that they have a personal relationship with God (though it is still at a distance compared to what we have) and have not just received a bunch of laws.

What does the Hebrews 8:6 teach about the mediator of the covenant that we live under

Would you describe your relationship with God as personal or a bunch of laws

Verse 6: God describes himself as the one who rescued them from slavery; remember that the first time these laws were given was at a time immediately after the rescue from slavery, so the people had never lived with any religious code. They would be aware of whatever the Egyptians had. The commandments had to instruct the people how to worship God and live together, avoiding the influences of Egyptian worship and the false gods of other nations they had passed through on the way to, and then later in, the Promised Land.

In what ways does the rescue of Israel from slavery in Egypt parallel the rescue by Jesus of us in the New Covenant

Verses 22-33: Moses reminds them that 40 years earlier the people had been really terrified of God, and respected God, so had asked Moses to be their mediator; this pleased God who wished that the people would always respect Him in that way. This new generation does not see God directly, however, they only receive the law through Moses. Moses reminds them that they need to trust his authority as it is given by God.

### **Extra Notes on the 10 Commandments (Deut 5:7-21)**

1. No other Gods before me: Literally this means no other gods "in my presence" – i.e. no chance of any others there at all. This is like a marriage, you don't have a bit on the side, you don't flirt, the door is closed, there is only one; God must be first, He must take pride of place. The existing religious culture was to worship multiple gods, to have gods depending on agriculture and other needs, so this needed to be very clear.

2. No idols, else punishment: the people needed educating, as they were so used to multiple gods, with all the idols. Remember how quickly the people made the Golden Calf whilst Moses was away the first time the law was given

(Ex 32). They were not even to make idols representing the Lord – why do you think this was? Note that punishment lasts 3 – 4 generations but God’s love to ‘a thousand’ generations. (See also Dt 4 for more on idolatry.)

Application: What are you tempted to put before worshipping God? (See Lk 14:24-33.) What do you think about, dream about, save up for, get excited about, trust in or seek happiness and fulfilment from? Do you find that you get attached emotionally to things like houses, cars, clothes, gadgets, games, or holidays? Can you think of situations where you have compromised on your commitment to God because of something that you have allowed to capture your emotions?

3. Do not misuse God’s name (literally “lifting up the name of Yahweh to emptiness”): God revealed himself by his name to Moses and then to Pharaoh and then proceeded to do miracles, so the use of God’s name was very significant, as his name had never been revealed before. The danger for them would be to do things or make vows in the name of God, or attempt to gain advantage by use of God’s name.

Application: For us, this is not a magical or mystical use of God’s name, but more the association between what we do and God/Christianity. How often have you heard people criticizing Christianity because of wrong things done in the name of God (e.g. the Spanish inquisition or other abuses of people “in the name of God”)? Do we claim to be a Christian, yet behave like a non-Christian, e.g. not sharing faith, not coming to meetings, gossiping, tolerating impure jokes/talk around us, being rude to people (e.g. call centres), driving too fast, etc., so that our non-Christian friends see and then associate that with Christianity?

4. Keep the Sabbath holy: They were to remember that they had been slaves in Egypt, so the Sabbath (equivalent to our Saturday) commandment was linked with release from slavery and rescue by God; the idea was of a day without work, a day partly of rest, but also filled with time to focus on God, remembering what He had done for them; there are more details about what this means later but we can see here the reality of freedom (no longer slaves always forced to work) and also using that freedom to worship God.

Importance: It was important to God, but perhaps not obvious to the people; without it, would they stop and think about God? Would they just wait for the annual festivals? Perhaps this was a way to develop the relationship personally that is quite different to other competing religions of the time, as there were to be no local idols for personal worship.

Application: Note that this commandment is the only one of the ten that was never confirmed in the NT, and actually Jesus made a point of healing and doing good on it; but what of the underlying goal to take time to worship God despite the pressures of busy lives? Do you worship God daily, or do work, family life and other activities push God away?

5. Honour father and mother: Here we see a shift from God to social laws and the first is the parents, the foundation of the family social unit. Why do you think this is? In the Israelite society with extended families living and working together, this command would have included adults respecting adult parents. The family was the key unit of society, e.g. land was divided by families, teaching took place in families, the army was chosen from families. The spiritual and economic success of the nation would depend on the success of the family (and its extension through kinship, group and tribe). Respect for father and mother was symbolic for respect for the whole social organisation established by the covenant. See also the punishment of disrespect in Dt 21:18-21 below.

Application: Imagine a society where parents are not honoured or respected. What does it look like, what happens? It looks like ours: there's no basic understanding of authority and respect; people can't be bothered; they cannot control themselves; rules and standards don't matter unless you get caught; families are difficult, with a bad atmosphere, ungrateful kids, etc. Do we expect our children to honour parents and authority? (See 1 Tim 3:4-5.)

6. No murder: Life here is given a fundamental value – later commandments will deal with situations where the reason for loss of life is in doubt (willful murder, accidents, etc.) or where there is a justification for the taking of life (judicial or military). See Lev 19:17 for the attitude that precedes the action, which Jesus also deals with (Matt 5:2). Does God have the right to take human life? Does man?

7. No adultery: This establishes the clear boundaries of marriage. Throughout time man has flitted in and out of these boundaries, struggling with this fundamental relationship; the bible has examples of the damage when adultery happens (e.g. David and Bathsheba); here we see a simple rule that reflects something so much deeper, the love and commitment of 2 people. Furthermore, marriage was the foundation of society, from which the larger social groups (families and tribes) were to grow. Deut 22:22 makes adultery a capital offense. Later, God used adultery to illustrate the Israelites breaching their covenant with him (e.g. Hosea 3:1) further underlining its significance.

Application: For marrieds: are you keeping your boundaries secure, making sure no other person takes your spouse's place in your heart and mind? Adultery starts in the mind, not the body.

8. No theft: This implies the existence of personal property and ownership, with a responsibility to take care of your own welfare without resorting to theft. Again, the Israelites came from a society where the Egyptian rulers could confiscate their property if they felt like it. The new society was to be fair without the abuses of power in other societies. Unlike other societies of the time, theft was never punished by death or mutilation.

9. No false testimony against someone else: A moral law that also extends to the wider Israelite society beyond the family. See Deut 19:16-21 for the punishment someone who gives false testimony was to receive. The reliance on truthful, trustworthy witnesses is key – this also underpins our legal system today. Imagine a society where honesty was not expected or practiced – how secure would you feel? Think about God’s wisdom in establishing this standard from the outset.

10. Don’t covet others’ wife, house, wealth, etc.: This is different because it is a commandment about an attitude, whereas most of the others are actions – how do you think it is linked to the first and second commandments? This is as much a part of us now as it was then. Society accepts it on some levels (advertising encourages you to covet what you do not have so that you will go and buy it), but not on others.

Application: are you at peace with what you have, or do you desire what others have? Are you tempted to have bad attitudes to others, perhaps those in church, when they have possessions, holidays, even relationships that you do not have?

## **Deut. 6 ‘Life in the Land’ Tuesday - 8th Jan**

This chapter is principally about the Israelites’ future life in the promised land, and the centrality of covenant faithfulness to it. There is also a real focus in this chapter on teaching (vv20-25) and especially teaching our children (v7), so as not to forget what God has done.

- How can you best build ongoing conversations about God and his greatness in to your daily life? How can you apply the general principles of this chapter about loving God to your own life?
- Do you have the word of God on your heart? If not, decide to memorize verses to help you be close to God in all situations. How else can you involve the bible in your conversations and thoughts?
- Parents: What are some situations where you can use the bible with your children?
- Parents: What have you discussed with your kids? What have you not discussed? Decide what you can discuss with your kids from the bible and when you will do it. Ask them if they have any questions about God, church, family life or life in general. If you struggle for ideas then talk to a parent at church to get suggestions for what you ought to be reading and discussing for the age and maturity of your children.

### **Further Notes**

Verses 1-6: After the specific commandments of chapter 5 comes a section

that forms more of an appeal, even a sermon. After explaining that following God will lead to benefits in blessings comes the famous passage that Jesus quoted when asked what was the greatest commandment (Mk 12:28-30). It is quite easy to apply the principles in this chapter to our relationship with God even though we live under a different covenant.

The command is to love God with all your being – it is not describing humans as being composed of 3 parts: heart, soul and strength. This is an idea that appears in several places in Deuteronomy and carries the idea of a single-minded and complete devotion leading to wholehearted and inward obedience. For us this means to decide to appreciate, think about, and search for the will of God each day, remembering that walking in the light means confessing sin and appreciating grace.

A part of loving God with all our heart is loving the bible and striving to know what it says, where it says it, and why it says it; then we can use the bible in daily life.

Verses 7-9 and 20-24: Parents and the whole community are to impress the teachings on the hearts of the children by talking about them frequently, in the morning, out and about, and in the evening. They were even to use writing to help them remember. They were also to make sure to describe how God initiated by leading them to somewhere new, out of slavery, and how following God's laws would help their life practically.

Verses 10-12: How quickly do we forget God when things go well □ How easy is it to seek God when things are tough, and then coast when things are easy □

Verses 13-15: The danger is to follow the gods “of the people around you”. Now we learn something about the true God: He is jealous – what does that mean □ Intuitively we know that applied to God it means He does not accept divided devotion - that in fact would be a contradiction.

## **Deut. 7 ‘Love and Judgement’ Wednesday - 9th Jan**

This chapter swings between two extremes: the extreme love that God has for the Israelites and the extreme way in which the existing inhabitants of the Promised Land will be dealt with.

- List all the different expressions of God's love mentioned in this chapter. How do you think the Israelites would have felt to hear these expressions □ What NT passages would you show to someone who was unsure whether or not God loved them □
- Why does God command them to destroy the inhabitants and all their objects of worship □
- Application for us: do you believe in the love that God has for you as you live under the New Covenant □

- What can you learn from this passage about the attitude you ought to have to leaving sin and temptation □

### **Further Notes**

Verses 1-6, 16, 24-26: It can seem unnecessarily harsh that the inhabitants should be destroyed when the Israelites take the Promised Land. However, it is sobering to realise that God was trying to protect both the Israelites and His own honour in giving these commands. The Israelites were too weak to worship God with the temptations of false religion close by, so radical measures needed to be taken. See also comments on Deut 20:10-20 where this subject is expanded. See Ezra 9:1-10 and look at how Ezra responded when he learned of intermarriage between the Jews and surrounding nations. Can you think of any NT passages that teach something similar for Christians □

Verses 7-15: Here God explains how His love for the Israelites is based on His own love and promise, not on the numerousness of the Israelites. It's easy when you receive a gift or things go well to feel that in some way you have earned or deserve your good fortune. But then we forget God's involvement and give ourselves the glory.

Verses 17-22: God answers the doubt that these commands will throw up - the doubt is that the Israelites are too few, weak, inexperienced etc. to be able to beat the inhabitants. God promises to be the one that defeats them; He reminds them that He brought them out of Egypt, which was also "impossible" or at least very unlikely.

Application: How easily do you doubt when you understand God's promises, commands or will for your life □ Pray to see God and his might in such situations.

### **Deut. 8 'Remembering the Law' Thursday 10th Jan**

The chapter is aimed at persuading Israel to remember and not forget God, and to keep his laws.

- Verses 1-5 remind the Israelites of the hard period of wanderings. How do periods of challenge enable us to see our hearts □ What can we learn from that □ See 2 Cor 1:8-9.

- What blessings have you received from God □ Take some time in prayer to be grateful, looking at your life, giving God the honour for all the blessings (spiritual, physical, etc.).

- Verse 18 "it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth": Have you ever looked down at others less able than yourself and felt smug at your abilities □ How does this passage challenge that attitude □

• Verses 19-20: What can be the idol for you that replaces God as number one in your heart□

### **Further Notes**

Verses 1-5: They are reminded how God disciplines in love, through the period of wandering in the desert: this was to be a key learning for them, that a period of pain had a purpose. They should not forget what that period was supposed to teach them. They were to learn that: God, in his leadership, would lead them through tough periods to see whether they would keep his commands or not; but more than this, that suffering allows them to see their hearts; also that they could not rely on self or even nature for life, but purely on God (manna).

Verses 6-10: God will give them a great land to possess, it will be easy to work, they will get the benefit of others' work; again the reminder to make sure to praise God when there and when experiencing the benefits. There is a dilemma here: God promises rich blessings, and yet there is a moral danger in having wealth and plenty, i.e. that self-sufficiency will lead to forgetting God through lack of evident dependence on him.

Verses 11-18: Forgetting God leads to failing to follow his commands; so "forget" here carries the meaning of not thinking of God and then not living out his expectations. Verse 14 links this attitude with pride – i.e. we are so proud of our achievements that we don't see how God enabled us to make these achievements.

Verses 19-20: If you forget God you replace Him with something else – other gods that you end up worshipping. So although forgetting might seem innocent, there's always something else that can take the place of God in our lives. God warns the Israelites here that the covenantal curse can be applied to the chosen nation too.

### **Deut. 9 'Israel Has Broken the Covenant' Friday 11th Jan**

This passage is partly based on the narrative of the golden calf at the Exodus, amounting to a breach of the covenant just made on Mt Sinai. It clearly was not a one-off (v22-24). Israel is not greater than other nations (chs 7-8) and, here, it is shown as definitely not being more righteous. It is only due to God's choice of them through love, that He gave Israel the land, and their continuing occupation was to be by faith and not by their own strength.

When Moses discourses on the history of Israel's rebellion he focuses on five places that define Israel's rebellion: Sinai, Taberah, Massah, Kibroth Hattaavah and Kadesh Barnea (9:13-25). Here the Israelites had been idolatrous: when they complained, when they were greedy, when they tested God and when they wanted to leave God and return to Egypt (Num 11:1-4; Num 31-34; Ex 32; Num 13-14; Ex 17:1-7).

- What challenge facing the Israelites did God promise to solve for them □
- What did Moses predict the Israelites would be tempted to feel after God resolved this challenge for them □
- Why did Moses use so much time reminding them of their previous sin and rebellion □
- What role did Moses perform for the Israelites before God in the earlier rebellions □
- How can we be like the Israelites and how is Jesus like Moses □

### **Further Notes**

Verses 1-3: The nations that the Israelites are replacing are naturally stronger than them, suggesting that it would be difficult to simply conquer and enslave them. Instead, they are to destroy them (with God's help).

Verses 4-17: How easy it would have been for the Israelites to think that God had chosen them because they were worth choosing, because they were more righteous than others. God makes it clear that people are wicked, and that He chose the Israelites in grace, i.e. having to discount their unrighteousness. So people are all alike – unrighteous – the difference is to whom God decides to show mercy. So the question is not “How can a righteous person be punished (killed) □” but “How can an unrighteous person be saved □”.

Verses 18-29: Moses interceded on behalf of the Israelites in a similar way to Jesus interceding before God for us.

### **Deut. 10 ‘Covenant Renewal’ Saturday - 12th Jan**

After chapter 9 recounting Israel's breach of the covenant, Moses describes the new stone tablets and the Ark, a covenant renewal giving the possibility of continuance, due to God's grace over Israel's inability. See also Jer 31:31-34 re the prophetic idea of the new covenant.

- Why did Moses describe here the Ark of the Covenant, the stone tables within it and the Levites who carry it □
- How does Moses summarise the heart of the commandments in verses 12 and 13 □ How is that the same/different under the New Covenant □
- What examples of the way God loves the Israelites are described in verses 15 to 22 □
- How does Moses link the way in which the Israelites were to love other people to the way in which God loved them □
- Do you feel motivated by God's love for you, when you consider living out the challenges of the Christian life □

## Further Notes

Verses 14-16: The Lord chose them, despite being so mighty that He could make stars, planets, and the universe. He chose to set his affection on them, so they shouldn't be proud or conceited – neither should we under the New Covenant.

Verses 17-19: As God loves the fatherless and the alien, we should do the same. God sets an example that we are to follow. The qualities seen here are like a picture of a king exercising just and merciful rule – God is that king. See chapter 17 on a human king for Israel.

Verses 20-22: “He is your praise, He is your God”; how do I feel about God today □ Is God exciting for me, or boring, a routine □

## Deut. 11 ‘Love and Obedience’ Monday 14th Jan

This chapter sets out how they are to love God in the context of covenant faithfulness; love and command are interdependent and not at odds. The call to love God and the promise of blessings are followed by the alternative possible outcomes – blessings and curses – dealt with in more detail in chapters 28-29 below.

- Why does Moses remind them of the miraculous acts that they had seen God do since the time of the exodus from Egypt □ How was this to motivate or help them □
- How does Moses try to motivate the Israelites in verses 8 - 15 □
- How does he motivate them in verses 16 - 17 □
- What are some ways the New Testament tries to motivate us as Christians □
- Parents: have you been teaching your children about God since you read Deut 6:7-9 a few days ago □ Read Dt.11:18-21 and if you have not been teaching your children decide what and to teach them and when you will do it.
- In what way does the idea of blessings and curses as a result of the choices we make hold true in the New Covenant (verses 26-28) □

## Further Notes

Chapter 11 includes several reminders as to what God had done for the Israelites in the previous 40 or so years. It was important that they continued to remember what God had done for them and passed this on to the next generation. There are also repeated promises of blessings as a reward for following God's commands and curses for not. The announcement of the

covenant ceremony that is to take place on Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, overlooking the ancient city of Shechem, is clearly important, mentioned here and detailed again in chapter 27 and then described in its fulfilment in Joshua 8:30-35.

### **Deut. 12:1-28 ‘The One Place of Worship’ Tuesday 15th Jan**

This is the start of the more specific regulations, within the context of Moses’ second speech. Worship is in response to what God has given the land and the required response is to bring produce of the land and offer it to God.

- Do you know the names of the gods that were worshipped by these nations  Do you know what the worship of these gods entailed  If not do a little research in this area.
- Why did God command that the places of worship of these nations be completely destroyed
- Why do you think the Lord CHOSE a place for corporate worship
- Why did the Lord not let everyone choose his or her personal style of worship and permit them to worship by themselves
- What was the Israelite form of worship meant to look like
- As a Christian what is the equivalent of this destruction of other places of worship
- What areas of your life do you tend to try and blend in with the lifestyles of those around you and which need to be destroyed
- How do you view corporate worship  How do you deal with your personal preferences – song likes/dislikes etc.
- What are the advantages of having one central place of worship  What are the disadvantages
- Consider the celebration aspect of their worship of God in your view of worship. Further Notes God was extremely unhappy and against the idolatrous worship of the Canaanite nations, whose worship involved burning their children in the fire (v29-31). God’s instruction to kill these idolaters has already been given in 7:1-6. The context in chapter 12 seems to be establishing a place for corporate worship BUT NOT using the same places of worship as those used to worship the Canaanite gods. The main source of knowledge of the Canaanite religions outside of the Bible is the excavations of clay tablets at Ugarit (modern day Ras Shamra, Syria). The Canaanites worshipped several gods. Predominant gods worshipped include: Molech (Lev 18:21), known for the practice of child sacrifice; Asherah (Lev 12:3), one or many female goddesses involving worship of trees/wood,

possibly connected to the garden of Eden and tree of life, also associated with Baal, patron of sex and war; Baal, the giver of rain and all fertility; and many more.

After the Israelites settled in Canaan, several towns became centres of worship: Mount Ebal – for the reading of the Law; Shechem – a sanctuary; Shiloh – the place where the tabernacle was erected under Joshua, and central place of worship throughout the period of the judges. Jerusalem had not yet become a place of worship. The worship service that God instructed involved bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, tithes and special gifts, freewill offerings and the firstborn of herds and flocks. God specifically identifies the need to include the servants and Levites (who had no land) because all belong to God's people. The atmosphere God seems to expect at the place of worship is one of rejoicing, in this case as a result of the fulfilment of the promised blessings in the land (v7, v18).

### **Deut.12:29-13:18 'Worshipping Other Gods' Wednesday 16th Jan**

This section deals with the temptation or enticement to follow other gods; it describes how this might happen, and how it should be dealt with.

- Why is God so strong about the call to not worship these other gods
- What do you think was attractive to the Israelites about worshipping these other gods
- What were the dangers associated with worshipping these other gods
- Why do you think God chooses to “test” the Israelites (v3)
- The punishment for enticing others to unfaithfulness is death in each instance – v5, 9-10, 15. Why do you think the punishment is so strong
- Who is responsible for carrying out the death sentence – and why do you think this is
- Considering the question above, do you think God was showing love to the Israelites
- What might attract you to worshipping other gods
- What might make us think that God is not effective in our lives
- How can we avoid the danger of being similarly misled by any preacher today
- Why is it easy for people who are close to us (family etc.) to have greater influence in leading us away from God
- How is the principle of placing allegiance to God above all other claims, reinforced for us in the NT  (Consider Mk 3:31-35; Mt 10:37-39; 1 Cor 5:11-13.)

- What lesson can we learn from Dt 13:12-14, when we “hear” things that bother us

### **Further Notes**

A divine test of the Israelites’ love for God was a prophet advocating idol worship and yet performing a sign or wonder. (See Dt 18:21-22 for another test of whether a person who claims to be a prophet is truly speaking from God.) The death penalty was to be enforced for a prophet advocating idol worship. We might struggle sometimes to understand why God tests us. Why would God put extra pressure in our lives that might result in us leaving Him  This is something to think and pray about. There is no doubt that our motives and beliefs are more visible to us and to others when we are tested. Three examples are given of people advocating the worship of foreign Gods: teachers, members of a family and residents in a city. A teacher is an authority figure, whose influence is knowledge-based; family represents our emotional ties, with feelings-based influence; and residents (neighbours) influence us via the pressure of wanting to fit in. The punishment for enticing others to unfaithfulness seems very strong. It is important to note that Israel was both a political and religious entity, and breach of the covenant amounted to treason as well as apostasy. A common theme of the Canaanite Gods was that they were gods that these nations tried to manipulate to do for them what they desire.

Dt 13:12-14 provides a very practical way of handling information we receive via hearsay. (Hearsay is information gathered by one person from another person concerning some event, condition, or thing of which the first person had no direct experience.) God is protecting all parties. Don’t just accept what you hear, but go and inquire, probe and investigate THOROUGHLY. Many of us fall too quickly into accepting things we hear, passing judgement and potentially harming other people. By learning to overcome your fears associated with talking with others and asking them the difficult, probing questions, you could help save their lives as well as your own.

### **Deut.14 ‘Clean and Unclean Food, and Tithes’ Thu. 17th Jan**

Following on from the theme of Israel being a people set apart for God alone, this chapter deals with some aspects of what is and is not acceptable for God’s holy people, covering laws on food purity, tithes and firstlings, all of which relate to Israel’s holiness (v2).

- Why do you think God was against self mutilation
- Why do you think God gave these dietary laws
- What is the spiritual significance of these dietary laws
- How was the tithe to be used
- What was the purpose of the tithe, and what was the benefit to the people

- How do you deal with deep pain in your life □
  - Do you think it is a spiritual matter for us today regarding what foods we eat □
  - How do you respond to obeying God's commands, in particular those that do not seem reasonable to you or that you do not understand □
  - What is your understanding of God's expectation of us as Christians regarding giving of the tithe □ Do you believe that a tithe is required today □
- Discuss your thoughts with another disciple.
- How is the requirement to give to God carried forward into the NT □

### **Further Notes**

God prohibited self mutilation in relation to false religious practices. What about tattoos, ear piercing, nose and belly buttons, etc. (Lev 19:28) □ Are these different from the self-mutilation and contemplations of suicide which reflect an inability to deal with deep pain in life □ How should we deal with deep pain (Heb 4:15-16) □

Regarding the dietary laws (kashrut, kosher), they seem somewhat arbitrary. Some argue that they are for preventative medicine purposes or simply for good hygiene. Some say they are symbolic in nature. Some say that they have no particular explanation. When Jesus declared all foods "clean" do you think He was saying and expecting the Jews at the time to seamlessly start eating non-kosher foods □

The practice of boiling a kid in its mother's milk was known to be superstitiously carried out by Canaanites hoping that through magical acts they could increase fertility and productivity.

### **Deut. 15 'Release' Friday 18th Jan**

This chapter focuses on the idea of release, first of debts and then of debt slaves. This follows laws re the tithe (ch 14) and forms another aspect of maintaining some economic fairness, or balance, in the land.

- Why do you think God called the Israelites to cancel debts as described □
- What was the benefit to Israel of this attitude to cancelling debt □
- What is God's reasoning in expecting there to be no poor amongst them □
- What is wrong with the attitude God condemns in v9 □
- What is the generosity called for at v11 and v14 based on □
- In v17, why this mark on the servant □
- Why was the service of the Hebrew servant viewed as twice that of a hired hand □
- What causes you to fall into debt □ How does being in debt affect your faith/joy □
- How would you describe a person who was poor then □ How would you describe a person who is poor today □

- How do you handle your money in relation to those “poor” in your life □
- How do you feel about giving to others □ What does it reveal about your heart and trust in God □
- How does our giving reflect on our knowledge of God □

### **Further Notes**

Cancelling debt is an expression of love. God recognises our potential to fall into debt. At the same time He understands the burdens that this might bring on us. God also recognises that many of us are in a position to give. Our motivation should be in recognition of how much God has blessed us. The instructions given to the Israelites seemed to be aimed at helping them to be more like God – sacrificing to help the needy. The humanitarian spirit of the Mosaic legislation stands in contrast to the lack of dignity accorded to the common man in contemporary cultures of the Mosaic age. We see from the prophets that oppression of the poor by the rich was ultimately a problem in Israel. In this chapter of Deuteronomy we see however a principle whereby people should restrain themselves from accumulating wealth at all cost, and using their resources for fairness and to support others’ independence (e.g. v14). The idea of release from debts and from slavery is picked up in the prophets and in the NT – see in particular Jesus’ words in Luke 4:18-19, referring to the year of Jubilee or the Lord’s favour.

### **Deut. 16:1-17 ‘The Three Feasts’ Sat 19th Jan**

These verses contain laws governing the three main feasts of Israel.

- Why do you think the Israelites were called to remember the time of their departure from Egypt □
- Why do you think the bread was called the “bread of affliction” □
- How did God call the Israelites to celebrate the Feast of Weeks □
- Why were the Israelites called to rejoice □
- If someone came to the feasts empty-handed, what do you think this indicated □
- Why is it important for us to constantly remember where we have come from (i.e. before we became Christians) to where we are now as Christians □
- Why are we called to rejoice □
- What is the equivalent today of us not appearing before the Lord empty-handed □
- How is the connection between Passover and God’s deliverance of his people maintained – and fulfilled – in the NT □

### **Further Notes**

Part of the reason for having annual feasts was to remind the people of what God has done and what God continues to do. The Passover, the Feast of

Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles are mentioned here. Regarding the Passover (Ex 12), a lamb was selected from the flock on the 10th day of the month and sacrificed on the 14th day. Why 4 days to be in the presence of the lamb that would be slaughtered? Maybe this made the killing of the lamb impress on the people the costly nature of the sacrifice, an innocent lamb. Think about Jesus as the Passover lamb as you consider your appreciation of being healed spiritually. Apart from eating of the lamb, matzo (bread made without yeast) – the bread of affliction (or redemption) is to be eaten. The Israelites ate matzo while they were slaves in Egypt. It would remind them of the bitter afflictions they faced. It is helpful for us to be reminded of our bitter afflictions as we can then keep a fresh appreciation of being rescued. The Feast of Weeks (also known as Harvest, the Day of Firstfruits, or Pentecost), was a festival of joy and thanksgiving celebrating the completion of the harvest season. Essentially a harvest celebration, the term “Weeks” was used to describe the time period from the grain harvest to the barley harvest and finally to the wheat harvest. It is called the Feast of Weeks because God specifically told the sons of Jacob to count seven weeks from Firstfruits (Lev 23:15; Deut 16:9), and then on the following day this feast was to be observed. Seven weeks are forty-nine days, plus the one additional day brings the total number of days to fifty, hence the name “Pentecost” (Acts 2:1) which means “fifty”. The Feast of Weeks is a symbolic festival which pointed to the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birthday of the Church. It took place precisely fifty days after Firstfruits, which was when the Son of God arose from the grave. Jesus spent forty days with His disciples in post-resurrection ministry (Acts 1:3); then ten days after his ascension, the Spirit was poured out on the disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 2).

Regarding the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites were called to make booths, a symbol of protection, reminding them of their temporary housing during the exodus.

### **Deut.16:18–17:13 ‘Judges, Officials and Worship’      Mon 21st Jan**

The next few chapters (Dt 16:18–21:9) contain God’s laws for establishing and maintaining justice in Israel, extending the principles already laid out in the Ten Commandments. God’s people on earth were to be a visible demonstration of God’s wisdom and righteousness, drawing other people to Him (Dt 4:5-8). God promised that they could live securely in their new land if they held to his laws (Dt 16:20).

- We live in different circumstances to the Israelites: Deuteronomy is not the law book of the UK! What is the relationship between God’s law and the law of the land? What should it be?
  - How does our different situation affect the way we look at Deuteronomy?
- Are the principles in Deuteronomy still valid for us?
- How about the way we view our government and local authorities? (See Rom 13:1-7.)

- Do you think the death penalty for idolatry (Dt 17:5; see also Dt 13) is too harsh □ How does it compare with Eph 5:5-6 □
- Likewise rejecting the word of the priest or judge would result in death (Dt 17:12). How does this apply to us today □ Whom should we be careful not to reject □ (See Heb 10:26-29.)
- Dt 17:1 states that only a perfect sacrifice is acceptable to God. Have you ever seen a perfect sheep □ Probably not. What then is this requirement pointing towards □ (See Heb 10:1-14 for an explanation.)

### **Further Notes**

The laws about authority extend the 5th commandment, that we are to honour our parents. The officials in Israel were typically heads of tribes or families, people who were already respected in the community.

The form of Israel's government was first suggested by Jethro, who advised Moses to delegate the bulk of the work to faithful men and only deal with the difficult issues himself (Ex 18:13-24). God confirmed that this was his will (Num 11:14-17) and Moses implemented it (Dt 1:15-17). Israel was to have two levels of government: local judges (Dt 16:18-20) who took care of most civil and criminal cases, and a central tribunal (Dt 17:8-13) which dealt with cases too difficult for the local courts. The local judges were chosen from among the people (Dt 1:15; 31:28) by the people (Dt 16:18). The central tribunal, originally led by Moses, was run by priests (Dt 17:9,12) and/or judges (who were Levites, Dt 21:5).

One of the main tasks of the leaders was to ensure that the people remained faithful to God. So between the passages about the two levels of government, there is a section on forbidden worship (Dt 16:21-17:7; compare with the laws on correct worship, Dt 12:1-16:17). The laws forbid idolatry (reinforcing the first of the Ten Commandments, Dt 5:7-9), and specifically Canaanite forms of worship: wooden (Asherah) poles and stone pillars (Dt 16:21-22), and the sun, moon and stars (Dt 17:3). Idolaters were subject to the death penalty (Dt 17:5), but to prevent abuse of this power, it could not be enacted without a thorough investigation (v4) and multiple witnesses (v6).

The other main task of leadership was to ensure that justice prevailed in Israel (Dt 16:20). This was both to protect God's people and to serve as a witness to Israelites and foreigners alike about God's character. Practical steps for promoting justice were the banning of payments to leaders, and the safeguards on court cases mentioned above (see also Isa 1:23; Mic 3:11). Jesus' instruction on dealing with sin (Mt 18:15-17) is built on Dt 17, so the same principles hold today (see also 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19), but note that the aim in the New Testament is restoration rather than justice (Gal 6:1; Jam 2:13).

Since around the fourth century AD, many have misunderstood this section of the Bible and attempted to recreate the OT legal structure in the form of a so-called Christian government which enforces the Bible as the law of the land. This has had tragic consequences: at times the visible church has taken on the character of the world, changing from being persecuted to becoming a persecutor, with forced instead of voluntary membership, and lost any requirement of personal conversion, commitment or separation from the world (Mt 6:24; Jn 15:18-19).

### **Deut. 18 ‘The Laws of Priests and Prophets’ Tue. 22nd Jan**

Today’s passage contains laws about priests (Dt 18:1-8) and prophets (Dt 18:9-22; see also Dt 13:2-5).

- Why do you think were the priests and Levites supported by offerings from the people of Israel □
- Who should this apply to today □ (See for example Acts 6:2; 1 Cor 9:4-14.)
- How obvious do you think it would have been when a prophet suggested following other gods □ What about when they spoke lies in God’s name □ How were the Israelites supposed to test this (vv21-22) □ How would this work for prophecies that take 70 years (Jer 25:11-12; 29:10; Dan 9:2) or 490 years (Dan 9:24-27) before they are fulfilled □
- When different people claiming to speak for God contradict each other, how do you know who is speaking the truth (if anyone) □ This is clearly a big issue today, just as it was in ancient Israel. Can you think of any New Testament guidelines □

### **Further Notes**

The Levites (descendants of Jacob’s son Levi) were appointed by God to be his ministers in Israel. Their role included assisting the priests with sacrifices, leading the worship, and resolving disputes (1 Chr 23:28; 2 Chr 19:8; 29:25,34; Dt 21:5). Although some served at the central tabernacle, most of them dwelt among the other tribes of Israel (Josh 18:7), living from their offerings and tithes (Dt 18:1; 26:12), and acting as local judges and priests (and the “village butcher”).

The priests were descendants of Moses’ brother Aaron, so they were also Levites. They served at the central sanctuary: sacrificing, teaching and advising about God’s will (Dt 17:9; 20:2; 21:5; 24:8). They also lived from the people’s offerings (Lev 2:3; 6:16; Dt 18:3-5), so that they could be devoted to serving God and the people.

Prophets were the primary leaders in ancient Israel, and their focus was spiritual rather than management or administration. Early prophets include Abraham (Gen 20:7), Moses (Dt 18:15,18; 34:10-12), Joshua (Jos 6:26; 1 Ki 16:34) and Samuel. The position of prophet was critical to the spiritual condition of the people, as prophets had the potential to lead people astray, for

example by turning to false gods (including occult and omens), or by speaking lies in God's name (e.g. Jer 28; 1 Ki 13). False prophets were not always aware of their error (e.g. Jer 14:14 describes them as "deluded").

Dt 18:12,14 gives the reason that the Canaanites lost possession of their land — God's judgement. In this case Israel would carry out the judgement, but note that this had nothing to do with Israel's righteousness (Dt 9:4-6). God hates occult, which involves people turning to other powers instead of to God himself.

The promise of a prophet like Moses (vv15-19) is clearly a reference to the Messiah, Jesus. He would be "one of your brothers" (v15), that is a Jew (not Mohammed!). Verse 16 refers to Dt 5:24-27, where the Israelites asked for a mediator between them and God.

In verse 22, "fear" or "be afraid" involves respect with the practical result of following what the prophet says.

### **Deut. 19 and 21:1-9 'Judicial Laws' Wed 23rd Jan**

Today we look at how manslaughter, murder and witnesses were dealt with in the law of Moses. God's justice shines through in these passages: protecting the innocent, and punishing the guilty. (We'll skip chapter 20 for now and come back to it tomorrow.)

- What was the point of setting up cities of refuge? What would be the modern-day equivalent? What are the differences?
- In this passage, a clear distinction is made between accidental and deliberate killing. Deliberate rejection of God's law led to punishment without mercy (Dt 19:13,21). How does this relate to us today? Look at 1 Cor 6:9-11, and then at Heb 10:26-30, which refers to this passage in Deuteronomy.
- What was special about boundary stones (Dt 19:14)? Is this just about stealing?
- Why does God require more than one witness in a court case? Where else in the Bible do you find similar instructions?
- What is atonement (Dt 21:8)? How does this relate to us today?

#### **Further Notes**

Dt 19:1-13 covers provisions for manslaughter and murder (expanding on the 6th commandment:

"Thou shalt not kill"). When someone is killed, their relatives usually want to see the person responsible punished. It seems to have been common at the time that one relative ("the avenger of blood", v6) would take it upon himself to kill the guilty person. In the case of an accident, this might be unjust and could lead to a chain reaction of further vengeance killings. To avoid this, God provided a few cities that were a safe haven for accidental killers, where they were protected until their case was brought to court. But if the killing turned out to be intentional, they were extradited and punished.

Verses 10 and 13 say that the land or people would be contaminated by the shedding of “innocent blood” (compare with Gen 4:10, where Abel’s blood “cries out” for vengeance). This had to be dealt with in order to restore God’s blessing. The concept of “purging” or cleansing the land by bringing the guilty to justice (often by way of the death penalty) is a recurring theme in the Old Testament (e.g. Num 35:31; Dt 13:6-11; 17:7,12). God’s justice demands that sin is paid for — either by the guilty person, or by a substitute (Dt 21:1-4 required the sacrifice of an innocent animal, pointing to Jesus). The city of refuge is also a symbol of Jesus, the one we flee to when our accuser (Satan) attacks. Another function of “purging the evil” is that those who see it are deterred from imitating, and others never see the bad example. In this sense, it can be compared to church discipline in the New Testament, which removes willful sinners from the church so that others are not led astray by their example.

Between the passages about murder and witnesses, Dt 19:14 stands alone as a prohibition against moving land boundaries (breaking the 8th commandment: “Thou shalt not steal”). The land was a gift from God, and could not be taken or given as people pleased. See 1 Kings 21 for an example of this law in practice. Jewish tradition understood this law as protecting a person’s livelihood, extending it to cover issues such as copyright.

The remainder of chapter 19 deals with false witnesses (9th commandment, Dt 5:20), and the practical safeguard of requiring more than one witness to condemn a person (see also Dt 17:6). Apart from the possibility of a malicious witness, one person might have a false perception, for example, mistakenly believing they had seen a particular person at the scene of a crime. The heavy punishment for false witnesses (v20) was intended to deter would-be offenders. Punishments were limited to the extent of the injury or intended injury (v21), in order to stop vengeance from escalating. Note however that Jesus took this further by banning all retaliation (Mt 5:38-42; 1 Pe 2:23; Jam 2:13). He set an example for us to follow, of trusting God to bring offenders to justice and not seeking vengeance at all.

The beginning of chapter 21 returns to the theme of murder, dealing with unsolved cases (Dt 21:1-9). The slaughter of an innocent animal symbolised the removal of guilt; breaking the neck signified that the animal was impure (Ex 13:13). The priest prayed for forgiveness (v5) for the community, who were held responsible collectively for the bloodshed (vv8-9). The local community leaders declared ignorance of the culprit, symbolised by washing their hands. The system permitted no withholding of information or assisting criminals. Note how Pilate misused this rite (Mt 27:24) as he knowingly condemned an innocent man. In verse 8, note how the basis for atonement is God’s past redemption, and not the merit or innocence of the people.

## **Deut. 20 ‘Military Laws’ Thu 24th Jan**

Dt 20 contains laws concerning the conduct of warfare. This differs from the laws about killing in chapters 19 and 21: here God is fighting for his people (vv1,4; see also Dt 9:4-6), the battle is led by priests (v2) and officials (v5) and involves an army (v9), and the context is taking possession of the promised land.

- Why was Israel told not to fear? (See vv1-4 and Ps 20:7.)
- What promises could the Israelites base their confidence on? (See v1, v4 and Gen 12:5-7.)
- How does this chapter relate to us today? (See 2 Cor 10:3-5.)
- Compare “When you go to war against your enemies” (Dt 20:1) with “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Lk 6:27-28). Is this a contradiction? How would you explain it, for example, to a non-Christian?

### **Further Notes**

The preparation for war involved a ritual of first excusing anyone with a new house, vineyard or wife — potential distractions from military duty — and then anyone who was fearful (i.e. lacking faith). Only then were leaders selected, from the remnant who were not distracted or lacking faith. On face value, this would result in a smaller but more focussed army, but in Judges 7:1-8, the army was reduced to almost nothing, so that God would get the glory for the victory (Dt 20:4). God never makes us so strong that we don’t need him; his strength is seen most clearly in our weakness (2 Cor 12:10).

Verses 10-20 describe how the Israelites were to take the promised land. Apart from the Canaanites, nations were invited to join God’s people (as labourers, v11), but if they resisted, the men were to be killed in battle (v13). The seven Canaanite nations, however, were to be totally destroyed.

Three reasons are given: God’s judgement, the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham to give his descendants the land, and the danger of Israel adopting Canaanite practices (Dt 20:16-18; 7:1-4; 9:4-5; see also Gen 12:5-7; Josh 6-8). The final two verses forbid the destruction of fruitful trees, which were part of the inheritance that God promised to Israel (Dt 6:11).

The conquest of the promised land raises some ethical problems, particularly the harsh intolerance of other nations and the command of total destruction. The subsequent history of Israel reveals that they did not obey this command (2 Chr 8:7-8), and that God used this to test Israel (Jdg 3:4).

Reading this passage alone, we might think that there is nothing wrong with war, but other passages paint a different picture. David was not allowed to build God’s temple because he was a warrior (1 Chr 28:3), and the prophets pointed to a time when war would finally be over (Is 2:4; Mic 4:3), when the Messiah (Christ) would come, the “Prince of Peace” (Is 9:6). So when Jesus

came, he overturned people's thinking with his teaching on enemies (Mt 5:43-44; Lk 6:27-30,35; cf Dt 20:1).

In a sense this was revolutionary, but in fact similar teachings are found in the Old Testament (Pr 24:17; 25:21), and the ideal of peace is a theme of the prophets describing the Messianic age. The language of war is still used in the New Testament (e.g. Eph 6:11-17; Php 2:25; Phm 2) but this is referring to a spiritual, not a physical war (2 Cor 10:3-4).

### **Deut.21:10-23 'Family Relations: Protecting Life'**

**Fri 25th Jan**

The laws in the next few chapters (Dt 21:10-26:19) broadly correspond with the seventh to the tenth commandments, and deal largely with family and other relationships in the community. In the remainder of chapter 21, the theme of war continues with the law relating to the captured "trophy wife", forming a transition to the provisions on inheritance and the family.

- How easy is it for us to appreciate the situation of the captured wife? Note that we live many hundreds of years later and in a very different culture and society. If we consider the situation of a captured woman without these safeguards, does this help us better to see their value?
- The provision about the firstborn son is designed for impartiality in inheritance. Do you think this is always easy? Parents: do you treat your children equally, i.e. without showing favouritism?
- Children's rebellion is not treated the same in our society as in Deuteronomic law. However, do you think any less damage is caused by rebellious children today? In what way do you think society benefits and/or loses out, by the strict measures set out in Deuteronomy?

### **Further Notes**

In the case of a captured wife, the usual family contract would be impossible, but the marriage can hereby take place. But also, note, the law is designed to protect the dignity of the woman: she is to be allowed to mourn, for a full month, and is then given full status as a wife (probably polygamous). Also if the man wishes to divorce her, she is to be treated the same as a free Israelite, and not sold or traded as a slave.

The stipulation that the firstborn of whichever wife should receive the double portion of inheritance (twice the share of any other son, as was the common custom in the Ancient Near East) ensures fairness and not favouritism. See the story of Jacob and sons – he favoured Joseph, son of his second wife Rachel, leading to severe family conflict. Deuteronomy does not allow the exercise of a preference, in this case a double portion given to Joseph rather than Reuben, to become the norm. This protects the interests of the mother and the firstborn, and also helps to prevent manipulation and scheming.

Verses 18-21: respect for parents is a basic element in having the right attitude

to society and also to God – it is not just an internal family matter (see also Ex 21:15; Lev 20:9; Dt 27:16). In the Hammurabi Law Code, the reasons for action by the father against the son had to be proved in court. Here, also, it has to comprise persistent faults, since disciplining and not listening (v18) are repeated actions. It may be that the very harshness of this law means it is primarily a deterrent, and there is no evidence that such measures were actually taken.

Execution was usually by stoning. Impaling of the body was a form of shaming the criminal publicly, apparently designed to show that they were under God’s curse. Crucifixion in the Hellenistic period continued the theme of exposure, although also being the means of execution.

### **Deut. 22 ‘Adultery and the Protection of Life’ Sat 26th Jan**

The greater part of this chapter – by extension, including the three illicit “mixtures” (v9-11) – can be linked back to the seventh commandment, “do not commit adultery”.

- Look at v1-4 and also v8. Can you put in your own words the principles they give
- Society is very different now – but can you give an example of how you could apply each of these principles today
- Look at v21 and v22. Adultery (or sex before marriage) is not a “crime” in our society. Can you think of reasons why the law in Deuteronomy treats adultery so seriously
- Consider v13-29. Can you think of situations where these laws could not be exactly applied  What then
- Also in v13-29, do you find concern here exclusively for male rights  If you find also concern for women, then how would you describe the sorts of concern shown for women
- Again, we live many centuries after these laws were given, and in a very different culture and society. How do you think this affects our understanding of these laws
- What can we take away from these laws for today

### **Further Notes**

The laws in v1-4, 6-8 show a concern for livelihood and sustaining the means of life; the obligation to help a brother Israelite is a positive obligation to take action, not only to refrain from harm.

The ban on transvestism (v5) may be to discourage behaviour linked with some forms of homosexuality and/or linked to particular practices in Canaanite or Mesopotamian worship. What is very noticeable here is that sexual crimes are viewed as crimes against God and society, and are

punishable by death – which seems very strong to us today. The contemporary law code of Hammurabi, for example, does allow a husband to relieve his unfaithful wife from death, but Deuteronomy does not allow for this. Persons who are judged to have willingly taken part in illicit sexual activity – whether a young girl or an unfaithful wife – are subject to the death penalty; the language used of the young girl “prostituting herself” is very strong, and the shame attaches also to her family.

While other ancient Near East laws on adultery resemble property laws and distinguish slave and free women, only in Deuteronomy is there concern for the woman’s situation; the judges have an obligation to protect her honour (e.g. v18-19). The falsely accused new wife obtains greater than usual protection, since the husband who has tried to reject her cannot divorce her; in relation to the violated young woman, her honour and financial position are preserved by marriage (v28-29), though admittedly this doesn’t address how she might feel about it. Note however that such marriage is not compulsory (Ex 22:17).

### **Deut. 23 ‘ Membership and Economics of the Community’ Mon 28th Jan**

- What does Dt 23:1-8 tell you about who can (and cannot) be part of the assembly of the Lord? Think about how this relates to the NT picture of God’s kingdom, and what is different about the NT picture.
- How concerned is God for the purity of his people (v9-14)? How are we doing at maintaining our purity in difficult situations?
- Look at v19-20, and back at Dt 15:1-18. Then look at v24-25. What do these provisions tell you about the nature of the community that God wanted to establish? What can we learn from this text, about attachment to money and our thinking about how to use it?
- Look at v21-23. What does this teach you about making a promise to God?

#### **Further Notes**

V1-8 governs admission to the assembly of Yahweh. Those excluded are those ritually mutilated in the context of worship of other gods. “Illicit relationship” refers to the offspring of an incestuous or forbidden relationship, or offspring of ritual prostitution. Moab and Ammon were rejected because they refused to help Israel on its journey, thereby resisting God’s purposes. Edom, who is said to have closer kinship, and Egypt, which expressed hospitality to Israel in Joseph’s time, have a real prospect of entering the assembly. Note that as we go through the Old Testament, the idea of restriction by birth is qualified, e.g. Ruth the Moabitess has a crucial role in the bloodline of Jesus. There is prophecy of other nations joining the assembly in Isaiah. However, only in the NT is the concept of election reconceived as something in which blood distinctions or heritage are irrelevant.

V21-23: vows do not have to be made, but if made, must be kept (Num 30:2-18; see also Matt 5:33-37). God's spoken word is reliable: to fail to fulfil a vow is against the spirit of the covenant. The chapter ends with laws showing that economic life in the land is a means of expressing the co-operative, mutual character of society. This is quite a radical socio-economic theory: the use of wealth is part of being a brotherhood. V19-20: these laws against interest-taking are unique in the Ancient Near East. This applies generally but would especially help the poor. See also Dt 15:1-18, where Israelites are urged to lend to the needy, even at risk of not getting the money back. The requirement to help the interests of others was more important than commercial interests. V24-25: the basis of the freedom to eat one's neighbour's produce is, again, that the fruitfulness of Yahweh's land is his gift to all the people. All are obliged to each other, but there are restrictions on this, to prevent abuse of the law.

### **Deut. 24 'Israelite Society and the Covenant with Yahweh' Tue 29th Jan**

The chapter moves from protecting marriage, to family life, to protecting the poor or disadvantaged. It talks about what it means to be Yahweh's people.

- When you read these laws, especially v10-22, what sort of society do you think this would be? What words would you use to describe it?
- Look at v16. What does this tell you about the responsibility for sin? (Note there was a tendency in the Biblical world to punish whole families for the offences of one member.)
- What do you think should motivate the people to keep the laws? Look at v4, v18 and v22. See also v9. What motivates you to try to live according to God's standards?
- Why, in v1-4, when divorce and remarriage appear to have been accepted, do you think the woman is declared "defiled" for the purposes of remarriage to her first husband? What do you think might be the concern behind this law?
- What do these laws reveal about God's character?

### **Further Notes**

V10-18 has been called a "social torah" (compare with Ezek 18:5-20). V10-13 shows a humane respect for the neighbour, not to enter his house or keep his cloak overnight, so as to be in the right before God. V14-15, oppression of the poor and politically weak, is a major social sin in the OT and is mentioned also in Leviticus, the prophets and wisdom literature. Economic calculation has to be subject to compassion for one's neighbour and the foreigner. The particular concern for the poor here relates back to Dt 15:1-18; there should not be "poor" as a permanent class in Israel's society as set out in Deuteronomy.

V17-18 extends the protection of the law to the stranger or foreign resident,

clearly requiring him to be included. The orphan and widow are similarly mentioned. V19-22: the socially disadvantaged are given a stake in the three typical crops of grain, oil and wine. This is a similar idea to 23:24-25, i.e. that all members of the covenant community have the right to share in the blessings of the land that is the gift of Yahweh, regardless of whether they personally own land.

V1-4: this is the only law on divorce in the OT; it assumes a practice of divorce exists, but works to regulate and limit it through proper procedure, requiring legal certification (following which the wife can remarry). This procedure protected the woman in a culture where divorce (by the husband) for trivial reasons was commonplace. It is not a law saying divorce is allowed – for God’s standard and view, see Gen 2:24; Mal 2:16.

Here, it is clear from v4 that the first husband may not re-marry his original wife, where she is divorced or widowed from a second marriage. The reason may be that remarriage to the first husband would mean the second marriage was considered to be adultery after the fact. Note, however, that God himself symbolically takes back his unfaithful and defiled wife, Israel (Jer 3:1; Hos 3:1).

### **Deut. 25 ‘Commitment to Justice’ Wed 30th Jan**

- Read v1-3. Why do you think the punishment is limited to 40 lashes? What is the reason given? Do you think there is a principle in this law that we can use today?
- Look at v13-16. Who do you think might lose out the most from dishonesty? What is the promise or reward for honesty?
- What do you think is the principle behind v4? How might this relate to Dt 23:25-6; 24:19-22?
- Look at v5-10. What do you think was the purpose of marriage between the widow and her dead husband’s brother (i.e. levirate marriage)? Why was a brother’s refusal to enter into such marriage viewed with such strong disapproval by the community?

### **Further Notes**

v1-3: note the intention is explicitly to protect the brother’s dignity; it also should prevent his death. It should be a further safeguard that the punishment is carried out before the judge. Note also that all are treated equally: there is no separate or worse treatment for slaves than for everyone else.

Regarding brother-in-law or levirate marriage, see also Gen 38. Num 27:8-11 provides an alternative law for situations where such marriage had been refused or had not produced a son – and, indeed, reveals one motivation for

refusing, i.e. the surviving brother would increase his own wealth if there was no heir to his late brother. The importance is in trying to ensure there are descendants for the dead man and the widow. Another purpose of levirate marriage may be to prevent the widow remarrying outside the family, so that property would remain within the family. It is a practical law, also caring for the vulnerable widow, and is principled due to its costly respect for the deceased. Public spitting in the face is, obviously, very shaming for the brother-in-law.

V4: the ox can take what it needs, like the poor and disadvantaged. See also 1 Cor 9:9, which extends this principle to those in Christian ministry. Re false weights (v13-16), see also Lev 19:35-37. The prophets Amos (8:5) and Micah (6:10-12) speak about this. Again, false weights are something that contribute to oppression of the poor and vulnerable.

V17-19: Amalek was Israel's first enemy on the way out of Egypt (Ex 17:8-15). Dt 25:5-12 seeks to ensure the memory of the Israelites survives forever. See also 2 Sam 7:1 – Amalek becomes the last enemy – ceasing to be a nation, as set out in 1 Chr 4:43. These verses, at the close of the specific laws, are a reminder that the society they are trying to build can be threatened from without as well as from within.

## **Deut. 26 'Origins, Beliefs and Commitment' Thu 31st Jan**

In this chapter, two particular ceremonies are set out: the first celebration of the first fruits offering, and the first celebration of the triennial tithe. These ceremonies were a vital part of the Israelites remembering what God had done for them. V5-10 sets out the Israelites' origins as a nation. God had brought them a long way.

- Think about your entry into God's kingdom, if you are a disciple (or about your journey so far, if you are not). How would you summarise your spiritual origins, and your path to God □
- If you had set out this sort of statement at your baptism, what would it have said □
- Today, how do we remind ourselves of what God has done for us □
- How does the NT apply this principle, of giving back to God in gratitude and as a reminder, to disciples today □

### **Further Notes**

Chapters 12 and 26 form a frame around the specific laws in Deuteronomy. Both of those chapters make important statements about worship at the chosen place once the Israelites have entered the land. By bringing the offerings and making the confessions and statements, the worshipper is

obeying God's commands and also accepting the terms on which those commands are given. This fulfils Dt 12:5-7,11-13 – the requirements to bring, eat and rejoice.

V5-10 outlines Israel's origins as a nation. There is a contrast drawn between their homelessness and the gift of the land, between having nothing and having plenty, and emphasis is placed on Yahweh's response to the Israelites' desperate cry for help. They were to be delivered into a secure place – a land of their own – which is a testimony to God's faithfulness. At the end of these verses, especially at v11, there is a reminder to include the stranger, that is, to allow others to belong to the community.

Chapter 26 is described by one commentator as “a chapter of declarations” – Israel confesses Yahweh as her God (v3, 5-10), the worshipper declares he has obeyed the commands (v13-15) and Moses declares that both Yahweh and Israel are willing partners to the covenant (v17-18). This is a statement of covenant commitment, i.e. a formal declaration.

The bringing of the first fruits occurs in references elsewhere to the Feast of Weeks (Ex 23:19; 34:26; Lev 23:10; Num 28:26). This is at the start of a new, agriculture-based lifestyle; up to this point, the Israelites have been living a nomadic existence, relying on their animals and provision from God.

The chapter closes with v18-19, a magnificent high point to conclude the specific laws: God calls the Israelites as his special people to obey “with all your heart and soul”, and promises to set them high above all the nations in praise and honour, a people holy to the Lord.

### **Deut. 27 ‘Recording of the Covenant Blessings and Curses’ Fri 1st Feb**

This chapter, in between two other chapters recounting speeches of Moses, contains narrative about Moses, together with the elders and priests, giving specific instructions about the future covenant ratification, to take place at Shechem. Note that Moses will not be there when these instructions are eventually carried out.

- In v1-8, why do you think the command is given to record the law at the designated location
- From your knowledge of the Bible what practical alternatives do you think of the people had to read/recall the recorded law
- What actions are prescribed with the writing down of laws on stone and how would they complement each other
- A series of 12 curses are uttered for various sins. Considering what society today perceives as serious and less serious, are you surprised by any of the items included in this list  Why would God put these together

- What are God's priorities that lie behind these curses □

### **Further Notes**

As we move into this and the following chapters, we need to look at the events that unfold in the context of the following: First, Moses is approaching his death, after which the mantle of leadership will be passed to Joshua, as established by God. Second, the ratification (bringing into force) of Near Eastern suzerain treaties included the stating of blessings and curses as well as a fellowship meal and celebrations; we will see this pattern followed in Deuteronomy.

The fact that Mount Ebal was chosen to hold this ceremony and record the law on the dressed stones may have been largely because of the history associated with the region. Abram erected his first altar in Canaan in Shechem between Mt Gerizim and Mt Ebal after receiving the promise he would inherit the land (Gen 12:6-7). Also, Mt Ebal was practically the centre of the Promised Land, considering that a number of tribes had already been attributed land and the conquest was going to continue into the remaining land across the Jordan River. Dt 11:26-32 also anticipates this ceremony.

It was common in the Ancient Near East for important agreements to be recorded on stones (stelae). Note that twice emphasis is made that God is giving this land of great quality (flowing with milk and honey). The emphasis is that God provided. That is, the land was not earned, even though they were called to take the land through battle.

The prescription of how the law was to be recorded seems to indicate it was a memorial. Also altars for offerings perhaps indicated a place of worship. The precautions to build out of unhewn stones (as at Mt Sinai, Ex 20:24-25) were taken possibly to avoid suggestions of idol worship, as an object for worship could easily become an object of worship (see Lev 26:1).

From v9, Levitical priests, possibly implying that the ark of the Lord was present nearby, are involved with Moses in formally calling the people into a treaty (covenant) with God as set out in 26:17-19. The people, split by tribes, are further called to participate in a future ceremony at Shechem entailing blessings and curses as part of a covenant renewal. Blessings are announced on Mt Gerizim and curses on Mt Ebal, perhaps because geographically the mountains together formed part of a valley where the people there stationed could hear the proclamations from opposing mountains in what could have been a natural and roomy amphitheatre.

The enumeration of the curses starts off with the sin of idolatry that addresses entities that directly compete with God. Further on, it deals with a number of sexual sins that are serious because they disrupt the family structure – the

backbone of society. The series finally ends with proclamations about the sin of disobedience, emphasising the call for the people to demonstrate their love for God through practical and active obedience. The first and last of the twelve curses sum up the teaching of the book of Deuteronomy: worship God alone and not idols, and keep the commands of God (see also Dt 4).

### **Deut. 28:1-29:1 ‘The Two Ways’ Sat 2nd Feb**

- How broadly do these promises cover the daily life of the Israelite? Can you think of times in biblical history that God fulfilled the blessings and curses in this chapter?
- From the text, what did the receipt of either the curses or the blessings depend on?
- What do you notice about the length of the section on blessings relative to the section on curses? Why do you think this is so?
- What covenants are referred to here? What is the scope of this renewed covenant (just the last few chapters or broader)?
- Can you think of a time in your past when someone gave you a stern but fair warning? Think about how you felt about it at the time, and how you feel about it today, in hindsight.

### **Further Notes**

In this chapter, the perspective appears to revert to Moses, speaking to the people at Moab. The blessings and curses set out here (and also in Leviticus) are God’s means of enforcing his covenant with the Israelites – the blessings and curses were reiterated time and time again, throughout Old Testament history, by the speaking and writing prophets.

The blessings are given as a set of beatitudes which cover all aspects of life in Israel – family, agriculture, the spiritual, the physical, projects and endeavours. As in previous chapters, emphasis is on the fact that it is God who provides the blessings. While Israel did not merit them, the receipt of the blessings depended on their obedience and devotion to God’s commands. There are many ways the people could respond, but one that should resonate with us today as Christians is that by recognising God’s desire to bless where there was no merit, they (and we) can see God’s love and be motivated to be obey, recognising that the laws are for their own good. Sadly, we can see from history that although there are some exceptions, most did not recognise God’s love and yield a faithful life as a consequence.

From v15 onward, we have 45 verses of what could be considered first of all as a severe warning, designed to discourage the people from breaking the covenant, and secondly as prophetic, since the people would indeed break the covenant. These curses start off as a reversal of the earlier beatitudes,

implying that the curses will also be comprehensive and affect all areas of daily life. The following verses elaborate on this reversal, to paint a picture of greater suffering, and loss of livelihood and life itself. The curses culminate in the loss of the land to invading armies, leading to the exile of the Israelites. The very land the people were being given would be no longer theirs, and in exile the Israelites would revert to being slaves.

We must consider that Moses, who witnessed the oppression and slavery of his people in Egypt, must have been motivated to solemnly warn the people of the consequences of rebellion against God. This must have been especially urgent for him as he was well acquainted with the tendency of the people to rebel. We might note, however, that the current Israelite generation were children when they left Egypt, and it may be that their memory of oppression there was weaker than that of Moses.

We conclude this chapter with 29:1 because if we consider the flow of the wording, it seems to conclude all the words of the covenant, and Dt 29:2 onwards appears to be part of a third speech, being a summary and exhortation to “choose life”.

### **Deut. 29:2-29 ‘Implications of Covenant Renewal’      Mon 4th Feb**

Chapter 29 is the start of a further speech by Moses (the third contained within Deuteronomy). It again contains brief historical recollection, followed by a focus on the essence and meaning of the Israelites’ covenant commitment with God, particularly driving home the force of the curses that would result from Israelite unfaithfulness. In chapters 29 and 30, Moses is forcefully urging Israel to commit wholeheartedly to the covenant – to “choose life”.

- From the text, how does God treat individuals within the congregation who are idolatrous □
- What are the risks to the congregation of the continuing sin of rebellion □
- Are there parallel passages in the New Testament that address the same issues □

### **Further Notes**

The covenant of Horeb (given at Mt Sinai) and the covenant at Moab are linked in the beginning of the chapter. Essentially all of Deuteronomy is a covenant renewal for the new generation. It takes into account the 40 years of history since the Sinai covenant was given. Moses also makes a personal appeal to the people as he explores further implications of the people accepting the terms of the covenant.

Moses recounts the history of God supporting and carrying the people through great acts of deliverance from Egypt, journeying through the desert, miraculously preserving the people and finally making them victorious. This highlights that God has been faithful in fulfilling his promise, all along showing love and concern for his people. This is not a dominant overlord demanding fidelity under threat, as was usually the case with Near Eastern suzerain treaties.

In v4, the text proclaims that the people do not have eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to understand. Perhaps this recognises of an underlying problem of the people: their inclination to rebel against God as demonstrated in history (see 9:4-6). This is a problem that man has no power to solve, but God can solve. Only He can give the ears, eyes and heart they need to be truly obedient. Perhaps this proclamation is pointing to the prophecy of spiritual renewal in the OT and NT.

The speech addressed to the congregation in v10-15 highlights the all-encompassing nature of the covenant, which is not limited to a certain part of the society but to all, including resident aliens, servants and even children. The covenant covers the both present and future generations that will occupy the land.

The people had come from the Egyptian culture and travelled through lands where the worship of idols was rampant. The warnings given in the following verses alert the people to the possible temptation of individuals to secretly embrace idolatry. There would be immediate and irreversible consequences for that individual. Also, if the progression of the text in v18-28 is any indication, the Israelite nation would be implicated over time leading to the destruction and fall from grace or position of prestige among the nations.

### **Deut. 30 ‘Choose Life’ Tue 5th Feb**

Uniquely in the Ancient Near East context, according to the treaty pattern, Deuteronomy makes clear that the falling of the curses need not spell an absolute end to the agreement.

- In v1-2 and the text following, does the text suggest that the curses would indeed overtake the people  If so, when
- Read v1-10. What do you think is the relationship between Israel's obedience and Yahweh's action to restore them
- Look at v3 on "return" – God is the agent of return. See also Jeremiah chapters 29-33. What do you think is the basis for God's action in restoring the people
- List some of the promises and declarations made regarding the restoration of the people. How does this relate to certainties we can have as Christians as we draw back to God

## Further Notes

In v1 we have prophecy and confirmation that a future generation of those present would indeed go into exile. However, even though the curses referred to in the previous chapter would befall the people, the story would not end there; amazing promises are made about how the people would be brought back to the land and ultimately prosper even more than their fathers (v5; see also Jer 30-33 for God's intent on restoration of the exiled people).

In v6, a promise is being made to solve the humanly incurable problem (lacking eyes, heart and ears in 29:4) by a circumcision of the heart performed by God, enabling the people to love Him and return to Him. This prophecy would be fulfilled in the OT timeframe as this return was apparently in the context of obedience to the law (v10). Even as God enabled them, the people were called back to obedience as a choice extended to them (see Dt 10:16 and Jer 4:4). Note that there is double fulfilment of these passages: while there was a partial return of the people in the Old Testament, in the New Testament there is a full return of God's people, empowered by the gospel.

V11-14 encourages the people to embrace the fact that the law is available to them – it is recorded on stones near Mt Ebal, and available to read. It is not too complex and not in obscure language; there is no need to seek and search, as the law is near to them. The scriptures are within the people's capacity to put into practice if they have obedient hearts. As v14 proclaims, the law was to be on the heart and therefore on the mouth, as exhorted in Deuteronomy (Dt 6:6-7). In a NT context (see Rom 10:8-10) these same words are cited by Paul, who extends their meaning to refer to Jesus Christ, and to the fact that belief in him is what saves us.

A central theme is set before the people that they can choose one of two ways. One, through disobedience, leads to destruction, curses, and death. The other leads, through obedience, to God's blessings and life. This reiterates the choice given in Dt 11:26-28 at the close of the general laws. It boils down to a choice, but the expressed interest and actions of a loving and faithful God, demonstrated throughout generations of Israel's history, should be the overarching motivation to choose life. Ultimately God's desire is that the people completely embrace Him with heart and soul (v20).

**Deut. 31:1-29 'Leadership Transition: Moses to Joshua'    Wed 6th Feb**

This would have been considered a farewell speech moments before his death on Mount Nebo. Moses is proclaimed to be 120 years old when he says that he can no longer "go out and come in". This is an idiomatic expression referring to normal physical activity. With respect to Moses, he still showed vigour for his age though he could no longer perform his leadership activities; why was that □

In verse three we see a parallel between God Himself leading His people over the Jordan to the promised land and Joshua the newly appointed leader doing so. We see no dichotomy between divine leadership and human leadership. Although God is the real leader and power, God usually works through Spirit-ed men.

Despite the recent victories against the Amorites of the Transjordan, why do you think Joshua was told to be “strong and courageous”, an exhortation that is repeated after Moses’ death by God and the people in Joshua 1 □

Why was the law of Moses written down for the people, and why was it given to the priests as custodians □

Moses gave instructions on the public reading of the law every seven years, at the beginning of the civil new year (September/October), at the Feast of Tabernacles. This would coincide with the time when Hebrew slaves were set free and debts were cancelled. In light of the fact that many were illiterate and without personal copies of the scripture, why would the public reading be important □ How often and readily do you have access to the scriptures □

God called both Moses and Joshua to meet at the Tent of Meeting so that Joshua could be publicly commissioned by God before the people. This tent appears to have been a separate meeting place outside the camp, where Moses alone used to meet with God’s presence in order to receive God’s will (Ex 33:7-11). (Some translations may use “tabernacle of meeting” but this is not to be confused with the sacred tabernacle into which only the priests and appointed Levites were permitted to enter.) This commissioning was an endowment of leadership by God; it was a divine blessing and the resting pillar of cloud confirmed God’s approval to the whole congregation.

In a parallel passage (Num 27:16-20), God called Moses to commission Joshua publicly by laying his hands on him. Were these two separate commissions or the same event □ This was to signify the transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua. Both divine and human testimony was needed to give the people confidence in Joshua.

With respect to “Joshua” of the New Testament (i.e. Jesus), which testimonies did he have to authenticate who he was (John 5) □

God foresaw that after Moses’ death Israel would become unfaithful to the Lord and subject to His wrath. The song of Chapter 32 was written as a witness to remind them of this. Many times in Israelite history God called His people to turn back to Him and His covenant (Dt 11:26; 30:19; Ezek 18:23,30). Does God’s ability to see the future affect our freewill choices □

When you read a story book you may be tempted to read the ending first to see the final conclusion to the story. But even if a reader knows how the story ends, can he influence any of the events in the narrative □ God is outside of our space and time; our past, present and future is God's eternal present (see Luke 20:38).

Witnesses were significant in many ancient covenant treaties outside the Mosaic covenant. Usually the pagan gods of the heavens and the earth of both the suzerain and the vassal would witness to the provisions of the covenant. Since God Himself is the suzerain all of his creation alone is called to witness. Which other witnesses are mentioned in this chapter □

If you knew that your whole life was being publicly recorded on CCTV before Christians and non-Christians alike would this affect the way you live □ The witness of God's Spirit and His word is much weightier than this. He bears witness to sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:8).

### **Deut. 31:30-33:29 'The Witness Song and Final Blessing' Thu 7th Jan**

The song spoken by Moses was both prophetic and poetic, portraying a central theme of Deuteronomy: Israel's apostasy resulting in God's judgement.

God describes Himself as a Rock, an image featured many times in the OT. Jesus uses this metaphor with reference to himself as the foundation of the church (Matt 16:18). This word represents the stability and permanence of God. This is contrasted with the unstable, fickle nature of Israel. Furthermore, rocks in the desert were a source of shelter and protection from the elements as well as from enemies, and as such the metaphor does double duty.

God is described as nurturing Israel having settled them in the Promised Land. The song is written with a future perspective. Jeshurun is a nickname for Israel meaning "upright one". God is sarcastically expressing how Israel has not lived up to the covenant in committing flagrant idolatry, stirring God to anger.

God promises judgement in the form of curses (Dt 28) for the sins committed. In the witness song what do you notice happens after God judges Israel (32:19-25) □ After showing the worthlessness of the false gods, he finally reminds them that there is only one God and no other (32:39) who has the power to give and take life.

Moses warned Israel to heed the words of this song as a matter of life and death (32:47). Is the Bible a book of interesting stories for you, or is it life and death for you □

When Moses is called to go up the mountain range of Abarim (one of the

peaks being Nebo), he gives a farewell blessing for every Israelite tribe. Why are there specific blessings for every tribe when God addresses the tribes as one unit Israel? How does this compare to the patriarchal custom of a dying father's will/blessing as seen in Genesis 27 and 49?

This farewell speech has a central theme of praise for God. The speech opens by describing the Lord coming to His people from Sinai, Paran and Seir. These physical mountains are associated with the giving of the covenant law throughout Israel's wilderness years. The "holy ones" or "saints" accompanying God were probably the angels who assisted God when the law was being mediated to Moses at Sinai (Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). The "king in Jeshurun" points to the majesty of God who is unique and Israel's protector and provider (33:5,26-27).

Moses prayed that Reuben would survive in large numbers and that Judah would be powerful in leading the nation, especially in battle, though the Lord's help. He also prayed that the Levites would perform the tasks for which they were set apart by God, including teaching the people God's law and statutes. It is unfortunate to see centuries later that the people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hos 4:6), for which the priests and Levites shared some responsibility. Moses' request for Benjamin was for him to live in security and peace, and the request for Manasseh and Ephraim was prosperity and military might. Moses prayed that Zebulun and Issachar would thrive economically through sea trade.

Israel was to be blessed because they were saved by the Lord, Israel's helper (33:29). Do you think the people of Israel felt blessed and saved? Why would they be apprehensive?

As a Christian do you often feel blessed and saved? What factors in your life govern your state of feeling? In what ways do you relate to Israel?

## **Deut. 34 'Epilogue: Moses' Death' Fri 8th Feb**

Who do you think wrote this last chapter? Where does the book of the law end?

Moses probably stood 3300 feet above sea level (at Mt Nebo's peak) surveying the panorama of the whole Promised Land. Imagine being at the top of a skyscraper four times the height of the Kutub Minar building. This energetic 120 year old man had to climb such a mountain just to get a glimpse of the land before his death!

The gift of the Promised Land for God's people to enter was just a visual gift for Moses. Moses sacrificed his energy, time and even his life in leading the people. But Moses was not allowed to enter the land, because he had dishonoured God at Meribah Kadesh (Num 20:1-13). Do you think this was harsh?

Moses sinned in response to Israel's sin of grumbling. Who met the needs of the people – Moses or God? Moses dishonoured God by honouring or trusting in himself: "must we (Moses and Aaron) bring you water out of this rock?" (Num 20:10). This was toward the end of 40 years in the wilderness. God was angry with Moses (and Aaron) for this, but Moses blamed the people (Dt 1:37; 3:26). Do you think Moses was bitter? Do you think Moses died of old age?

One can almost see Moses suffering for the sins of the nation he led. In this respect, his life foreshadowed to some extent the life of Jesus, the suffering servant. For the change from one leader to another, spiritual wisdom was necessary. Having been endowed with this gift, possibly during his inauguration (Num 27:18; Dt 31:14-15), Joshua was now ready to commit faithfully to the Lord. This Joshua is also a type (foreshadow) of Jesus, who also is anointed with the Spirit of wisdom and understanding (Isaiah 11:2), and who saves by leading his people into the spiritual Promised Land, heaven. There his people will dwell in safety (see Jer 23:6). Remember that Joshua (in Hebrew) and Jesus (same name in Greek) mean "the Lord saves". Note the spiritual analogy: Moses (representing the law) could not bring God's people into the Promised Land (heaven); only Joshua (Jesus) could do so.

Has there been no other prophet like Moses? In terms of human prophets, no. But which prophet would come after Moses and be like Moses, according to Dt 18:15? He would be Jewish. He would be a mediator and giver of a covenant. He would perform miracles and wonders like Moses to confirm God's spoken word. He would be Jesus!

## **Conclusion**

This should not be the first and last time you ever read Deuteronomy. Hopefully the quiet time series has helped you to engage more with the text. Naturally it may have triggered questions of your own. If you did not have the opportunity to read all sections of the series don't worry. The main goal is to read the text itself. Do find the time either during or after the Deuteronomy series to review what you have learnt, especially with respect to the themes such as: the gospel, the power of God, redemption, grace, love, obedience, judgement, justice and leadership. Please feel free to send any comments, criticisms and questions by email to <[cocumbai@rediffmail.com](mailto:cocumbai@rediffmail.com)>.