GOOD WORD Schedule
"Present Truth in Deutronomy"
October, November, December 2021

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GOOD WORD 2021.4	Preamble to Deuteronomy
Lesson #1 — October 02	Exodus 19:4–8
	—prepared by Mathilde Frey, School of Theology, WWU

Theme: Loyalty as a Response to God's Love

Leading Question: Freedom and Order: Can They Coexist?

Deuteronomy is arguably the most influential book of the Old Testament. It brings the Pentateuch to a climactic conclusion. The title, Deuteronomy, is borrowed from the Greek translation, meaning, "Second Law." In a certain sense this is an apt description because it does repeat many of the laws, including the Ten Commandments, that are found in earlier books of the Pentateuch. The language of Deuteronomy is often inspiring and poetic, portrayed from a retrospective view as the Israelites complete their period of wandering the the wilderness and prepare to enter the Land of Canaan. It is the source of the famous Jewish prayer known as the Shema (Deut 6:4) and the well-known injunction, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength (Deut 6:5), taught by Jesus in Matt 22:37. Echoes of Deuteronomy are found in other prophetic books, especially in Jeremiah.

Among modern biblical scholars, Deuteronomy is much discussed. It is considered to have been composed in the seventh century B.C.E. as part of king Josiah's program to centralize worship exclusively in the Temple of Jerusalem.

Deuteronomy reviews God's gracious acts with Israel and lays the foundation for a humanitarian vision for community life. The book contains Moses' passionate farewell address to Israel cast into the form of an ancient covenant document. Its content is God's faithfulness to His promises to the the forefathers of Israel manifested in the miraculous exodus event and in the instructions to a liberated nation. The people of Israel are called to respond to God's grace with unreserved love and loyalty.

Question: How do you view God's laws – as a barrier to keep those out who don't obey or as a protective fence? A burden or a gift? And, why?

The 120-year-old Moses reminds the Israelites of God's faithfulness and His promises given to their ancestors. The establishing of the Sinai covenant (Exod 19-24) constitutes the backbone for the challenge to remain obedient to God especially in view of the temptations that they would face among the nations of Canaan. In order to motivate the people for the new beginnings in the Promised Land Moses casts his speeches into the framework of a new covenant relationship between God and Israel that places the young people into their parents' footsteps when they crossed the Red Sea and encountered God at Mount Sinai. Each individual Israelite is called to experience the same redemptive events and respond to them in trust and obedience.

Question: If love is all God aks of us why should we follow laws?

The practical form of love for God is not to be confined to religious duties but is to embrace the social and domestic life. The laws in chaps. 12–26 contain details for the moral and social well-being of the nation. Love of God translates into love of one's neighbor. Any act that couldharm a neighbor is to be avoided. The moral principles in Deuteronomy are justice, integrity, equity, philanthropy, and generosity. Judges are to be appointed in every city to administer justice with the strictest impartiality so that these principles are followed (26:18–20). Fathers are not to be condemned judicially for the crimes of their children; nor children for the crimes of their fathers (24:16). Just weights and measures are to be used in all commercial transactions (25:13-16). Grave moral offenses are punished severely (21:18-21; 22:20-27; 24:7).

Compassion and charity are to be shown toward those who suffer hardship, such as one who needs a loan (15:7-11), a slave at the time of his manumission (15:13-15), a fugitive (13:15, 16), a hired servant (14:14, 15), the "stranger [i.e., resident foreigner, immigrant, or refugee], the orphan, and the widow" (cf. 14:29). Israel's recollection of its own past is evoked in order to promote gratitude and a sense of sympathy toward the needy (10:19, "For you were strangers in the land of Egypt," cf. 15:15; 16:12; 24:18, 22; "and you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt"). Deuteronomy promotes a spirit of tolerance, equity, and regard for the feelings and welfare of others as no other book of the Old Testament does. Israel is to live within an atmosphere of generous devotion to God and benevolence toward other human beings.

Question: What are some of the take-aways for us today from a book that seems to be all about laws and requirements for Israel?

GOOD WORD 2021.4	**Moses' History Lesson**
Lesson #2 — October 09	**Deuteronomy 1–3**
	—prepared by Mathilde Frey, School of Theology, WWU

Theme: Remembering the Ups and Downs of the Past

Leading Question: Why should we remember the past?

In the first four chapters of Deuteronomy Moses recalls key events that have occurred during the forty years of desert wanderings. He recaps the history of their journey for a couple of reasons: (1) the young generation of the Israelites did not live through the significant events of the exodus, and (2) he reminded them of what God has done to bring them to this historic moment when they are ready to enter the Promised Land. To understand what is to come, we must understand what has gone before.

Question: What do you remember about the important events in your life? Do you vividly recall every detail of the scene, who was there and what you were wearing? Or do you remember more of how it made you feel at the time?

In these chapters when Moses recalls the past, he becomes emotional. He focuses specifically on those times that were difficult for him, for example, when he needed help in managing the large group of people, when the spies presented their negative report to the people, and when he was told that he would not enter the Promised Land. He surely carried a tremendous burden over the course of the forty years in the desert. In a few places, when he recounts the past, he seems to tell his personal perspective of those events, which, some commentators perceive as contradictions to the original narrative in Exodus and Numbers. For example, Moses implies that it was his idea to appoint judges, whereas in Exodus the idea came from Jethro and in Numbers it was from God. Also, Moses suggests that it was the people who wanted to send spies into Canaan before they took possession of the land. Most surprising of all is Moses' claim that it was due to God's anger over the Israelites' refusal to enter Canaan at Kadesh Barnea that he was refused entry as well (Deut 1:37). He mentions this perceived injustice three times in the first four chapters of Deuteronomy (cf. 3:26; 4:21). It seems that for Moses, time is telescoped into events that tell of the rebelliousness of the people and the consequences of these events.

Emotion seems to be the anchor that keeps memories in our minds. A new study from the Center for Mind and Brain at the University of California, Davis, shows that objective and subjective memory can function independently, involve different parts of the brain, and that people base their decisions on subjective memory — how they feel about a memory — more than on its accuracy (published in "News Medial" on March 11, 2021; see, https://www.news-medical.net/news/20210311/Objective-and-subjective-memory-can-function-independently-shows-study.aspx). Anne Wilson, a professor of psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University whose research broadly focuses on memory, time and identity, put it this way, "We reconstruct what happened in the past on the basis of little bits and pieces of memory. We're acting like archaeologists — picking up the pieces and putting them back together."

Question: How does Moses' subjective (or at least one-sided?) memory of the past make sense when we consider Deuteronomy as God's inspired word?

For us who like to have precise information, it is difficult to understand why Moses' account in the first chapters of Deuteronomy would be so selective in its detail and condensed in scope. This reminds of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. Jesus condensed God's laws of the Old Testament into eight statements that we call the Beatitudes. He didn't do that for the sake of the disciples or for those who were familiar with the laws of the Torah. Jesus spoke to the crowds of people who followed him from all over Galilee, Decapolis, Judea, and beyond the Jordan, all those who were ill, suffering with various diseases and pains (Matt 4:24, 25). They did not come to hear a message of 'don't do this or that'—most of us know when we do things wrong—but they needed words of compassion and courage. Jesus as a speaker was aware of his audience and chose the right words for his audience. Moses chose to focus on the events that he identified as significant, and that pointed to one indisputable fact: the people of Israel had made it to the threshold of the Promised Land not because of the people's faithfulness, but because of God's faithfulness to His promises.

"We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history." There is also the counterpart to this wonderful quote by Ellen G. White. Spanish philosopher George Santayana is credited with the aphorism, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," while British statesman Winston Churchill wrote, "Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

Question: Why is it not only important to remember the past but also to let go of the past? How does one heal from a past that so often brings back pain and trauma?

GOOD WORD 2021.4	The Everlasting Covenant
Lesson #3 — October 16	Deuteronomy 5; 26:16–19
	—prepared by Mathilde Frey, School of Theology, WWU

Theme: Promise and Responsibility

Leading Question: Why is keeping a promise important?

The book of Deuteronomy makes repeated reference to the word "covenant." It appears no less than twenty-seven times. What is more, the entire book is structured along the lines of an ancient Near Eastern covenant. But it is the transformation of an ancient covenant into biblical thought that is so radical and revolutionary. Essentially, ancient covenants were peace treaties, sometimes between individuals, clans, and tribes, at other times between nations. So, for instance, Abraham made a covenant with Abimelech, king of Gerar (Gen 21:27), as did Isaac (26:28). Jacob made a covenant with Laban (31:44).

Archaeological discoveries in the twentieth century brought to light covenants between neighbouring powers in the region of Mesopotamia dating from the third millennium BCE, that is, before the time of Abraham. These could be between nations of roughly equal strength, known as parity treaties, or they could be between a strong power and a weaker one, known as suzerainty treaty. The covenant between God and the Israelites at Mount Sinai (Exod 19–24; Lev 25–26), and the renewal of that covenant in Deuteronomy (chaps. 1–31), have the basic form of a suzerainty treaty, obviously so since God is infinitely powerful. The form of the covenant is borrowed, but its substance is entirely unprecedented. Instead of being a political document to establish power and rule the subjects, it becomes the theological frame through which the love relationship between God and humanity is understood.

There are definitely dangers when the biblical covenant is misunderstood. First, it can lead to overconfidence, the belief that "God is on our side." This was the message of the false prophets whom Jeremiah denounced in his day. Second, it can lead to moral self-righteousness. People can come to think: We are the chosen people. We know God, therefore, we are morally better than the rest. The prophet Malachi addresses this issue with biting irony: "From where the sun rises to where it sets, My name is great among the nations and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering *that is* pure; for My name *will be* great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts. But you are profaning it, in that you say, The table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised" (Mal 1:11–12). In the twentieth century, Reinhold Niebuhr delivered this same message in his powerful critique, *The Irony of American History*. Third, it can easily slip into nationalism: the worship not of God but of the nation, the people, or the land, as European history has testified.

Question: How do we make sure that we don't think less of those who worship differently from us or don't believe in God?

Read Deut 5:1–5 and 29:13–14.

Question: How do you explain the strange statement of Moses, "not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today," given the passing of the Exodus generation (Num 14-16; 26:64–65)? Could it be a deliberate theological and rhetorical strategy that he employs? What about Deut 29:13–14? Isn't there a discrepancy in the passages?

When you live your life within a covenant something extraordinary happens. Your parents and grandparents live on in you. You live on in your children and grandchildren. They are part of your life. You are part of theirs. We are part of a story that began long before we were born and will continue afer we are no longer here. The question for us today is: Will we live our lives inside that story?

Read Deut 5:12–15 and compare to Exod 20:8–11.

Question: Why is there a different version of the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy?

Question: How can we talk about God's covenant without making it all about legal issues?

When you live your life within a covenant something extraordinary happens. Your parents and grandparents live on in you. You live on in your children and grandchildren. They are part of your life. You are part of theirs. That is what Moses meant when he said, near the beginning of this week's parsha:

It is not with you alone that I am making this covenant and oath, but with whoever stands with us here today before the Lord our God *as well as those not with us here today*. (Deut. 29:13-14)

In Moses' day that last phrase meant "your children not yet born." He did not need to include "your parents, no longer alive" because their parents had themselves made a covenant with God forty years before at Mount Sinai. But what Moses meant in a larger sense is that when we renew the covenant, when we dedicate our lives to the faith and way of life of our ancestors, they become immortal in us, as we become immortal in our children.

GOOD WORD 2021.4	**To Love the Lord Your God**
Lesson #4 — October 23	**Deuteronomy 6:4, 5; 10:12**
	—prepared by Mathilde Frey, School of Theology, WWU

Theme: All You Need Is Love

Leading Question: How do you love God?

The book of Deuteronomy is saturated with the language of love. The Hebrew root *a-h-v* for "love" appears in Deuteronomy 23 times. Deuteronomy is a book about societal beatitude and the transformative power of love.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains, nothing could be more misleading and unfair than the contrast that is so often drawn between the New Testament as promoting a religion of love and forgiveness and the Old Testament as speaking of a religion of law and retribution. Forgiveness is born in the stories of the Old Testament. Interpersonal forgiveness begins when Joseph forgives his brothers for selling him into slavery. Divine forgiveness is central to the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) as the supreme day of divine pardon following the sin of the Golden Calf.

> Similarly with love: when the New Testament speaks of love it does so by direct quotation from the book of Leviticus ("You shall love your neighbour as yourself") and Deuteronomy ("You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might"). As philosopher Simon May puts it in his splendid book, *Love: A History* (pgs. 19–20): "The widespread belief that the Hebrew Bible is all about vengeance and 'an eye for an eye,' while the Gospels supposedly invent love as an unconditional and universal value, must therefore count as one of the most extraordinary misunderstandings in all of Western history. For the Hebrew Bible is the source not just of the two love commandments but of a larger moral vision inspired by wonder for love's power."

The love with which God created the universe is not just divine. It is to serve as the model for us in our humanity. We are bidden to love the neighbour and the stranger, to engage in acts of kindness and compassion, and to build a society based on love. "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awesome God who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Soyou must love the stranger, for you yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deut 10:18–19). In short: *God created the world in love and forgiveness and asks us to love and forgive others.*

Genesis contains many references about love. Abraham loves Isaac. Isaac loves Esau. Rebecca loves Jacob. Jacob loves Rachel. He also loves Joseph. There is interpersonal love in plentiful supply. But almost all love in Genesis turns out to be divisive. It leads to tension between Jacob and Esau, between Rachel and Leah, and between Joseph and his brothers. Implicit in the stories in Genesis is the profound observation that love in and of itself is not sufficient as a basis for society until it is combined with justice. Hebrew t*zedek*, "justice,"

turns out to be another key word of Deuteronomy, appearing 18 times. Love and justice must go hand in hand. As May writes in *Love: A History* (pg. 17):

> [W]hat we must note here, for it is fundamental to the history of Western love, is the remarkable and radical justice that underlies the love commandment of Leviticus. Not a cold justice in which due deserts are mechanically handed out, but the justice that brings the other, as an individual with needs and interests, into a relationship of respect. All our neighbours are to be recognised as equal to ourselves before the law of love. Justice and love therefore become inseparable.
>
> Love without justice leads to rivalry, and eventually to hate. Justice without love is devoid of the humanizing forces of compassion and mercy. We need both. This unique ethical vision – the love of God for humans and of humans for God, translated into an ethic of love toward both neighbour and stranger – is the foundation of Western civilization and its abiding glory. It is born here in the book of Deuteronomy, the book of law-as-love and love-as-law.

Question: How important is it for you to demonstrate your love for God by obeying His commandments?

One of the most important prayers in the Jewish religion is taken from Deuteronomy 6. It is known as "The Shema," because of the first Hebrew word in v. 4, which comes from the root, *shama',* which means "to listen." The first line of The Shema reads like: *Shema Yisrael Adonai Elohenu Adonai echad,* "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" (Deut 6:4).

The Shema has high significance in Jewish tradition from very early times. This is reflected by the fact that in a liturgical text, in the Nash Papyrus, dating to the second century AD, The Shema appears immediately after the Decalogue. Also, in a first-century phylactery text found in Cave 8 at Qumran, The Shema is written in a rectangle and surrounded by other texts. To this day, orthodox Jews recite The Shema twice daily as part of their prayers in the morning when they wake up, and at night before they fall asleep following the instruction in Deut 6:7. Some Jewish groups take the command "bind them as a sign on your hand and as frontals on your forehead" (v. 8) to mean that God's laws in written form should literally be bound to the body. Others have understood these instructions as symbolic emphasizing the need to remember the commandments of God.

It would seem logical that in a book of commands as Deuteronomy to have a verb that means "obey."

> Yet there is no verb in biblical Hebrew that means to obey. This is an astonishing fact.
> So glaring is the lacuna that when Hebrew was revived in modern times a verb had to be found that meant "to obey." It was obviously necessary, for example, in the case of Israel's defence forces. An army depends on obedience to the command of a superior officer. The word chosen was . . . an Aramaic word that does not appear in this sense in the Hebrew Bible. The Torah itself uses a quite different word, namely shema, meaning, "to hear, to listen."[1]

In Deuteronomy, the verb "to listen" appears ninety-two times. It's meaning is wide-ranging:

- To pay focused attention, as in "Be silent, Israel, and listen" (Deut 27:9)

[1] Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation Deuteronomy: Renewal of the Sinai Covenant* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2019), 66.

- To hear, as in “I heard your voice in the garden” (Gen 3:10)
- To understand, as in “Let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other” (Gen 11:7)
- To internelise, take to heart, as in “As for Ishmael, I have heard you” (Gen 17:20)
- To respond in action, as in “What Sarah says to you, do as she tells you” (Gen 21:12).

It is in the last sense that the verb “listen” is closest to a sense of “obey,” and yet, it is not the same. The Hebrew verb *shama* is untranslatable in its full and deep meaning of the word. To listen in Hebrew is not to obey blindly, without thinking or questioning. The commands in Deuteronomy are nor the arbitrary will of God. To the contrary, they were given for the benefit of the people.

Question: Why is love not enough to keep a relationship going?

In most cases, the laws in Deuteronomy are grounded in Israel’s history of slavery in Egypt. The people knew from personal experience what it meant to live in an unjust and tyrannical regime. For that reason, the people who have been freed from slavery must be just, compassionate, and generous. Slaves must rest on Sabbath, depts must be cancelled, the poor should not go without food. In other words, when God commands something or asks to refrain form something, it is not because of an arbitrary will, but because He cares for every human being. And so, God does no demand blind obedience, instead He wishes us to pay close attention and understand why the commandmant is important.

Shema Israel then means, “Hear. Listen. Give the word of God your most focused attention. Understand. Engage all your faculties, intellectual, emotional. Make His will your own. For what He commands you to do is not irrational or arbitrary but for your welfare and that of your people, ultimately for the benefit of all human beings.”

There is something profoundly spiritual about listening, both, listening to God and listening to one another. It is one of the most effective ways of conflict resolution. Many things can create conflict, but what sustains it is the feeling on the part of one who has not been heard. We have not “heard their pain.” There has been a failure of empathy, a failure of “love . . . with all your heart and with all your sould and with all your might” (Deut 6:5).

Question: Could it be that God **needs** us to listen to Him? Could it be that He wants us to hear His pain? How would it look like if we would truly show empathy for the God we so often say we love?

GOOD WORD 2021.4	The Stranger in Your Gates
Lesson #5 — October 30	Deuteronomy 10:1–19; 23:7; 24:19, 20
	—prepared by Mathilde Frey, School of Theology, WWU

Theme: How to Treat the Other

Leading Question: Why do we have trouble with a God who calls for justice?

You will not find the term "refugee" in the Bible. But the Bible has plenty to say about people called "strangers," "sojourners," or "foreigners," and some Bibles even have "aliens." The book of Deuteronomy has the most occurrences of the Hebrew word *ger*, meaning "stranger" (22 times). A "stranger" refers to anybody who was from another ethnic group but lived among the tribes of Israel. Often the reason was that such a person came to find refuge because of hardship, famine, and war, or the stranger was brought into the land as a slave.

For instance, Ruth was from the tribe of Moab and came to live with her mother-in-law in Bethlehem. In Ruth 2:10 we see her ask Boaz, in whose field she is gleaning, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me — a foreigner?" She understands her status as not being part of the tribes of Israel.

Hagar is the Bible's paramount stranger. While in English, we call her Hagar by name, in Hebrew, *hager* means "the stranger." She was an Egyptian woman taken as a slave into Abraham's and Sarah's household. Her story, as told in Gen 16 and 21, is heartbreaking.

Read: Deut 10:14–19 and Deut 27:19

Question: Why did God pay so much attention to how Israel treated the strangers?

We use many different terms today for what the Bible calls strangers, foreigners, and sojourners. Here are a few:

- **Displaced persons** — those who have been forced to leave their homes (community) due to violent conflict, war, or a natural disaster. These people temporarily live in another community in their country and usually return home when things improve.
- **Refugees** — people who have been forced to leave their nation due to violent conflict or war. These people want to return to their country once the war or conflict is over. These situations often lead to years of displacement.
- **Migrants** — those who have chosen to leave their home country, mainly to escape poverty. These people are making a permanent move and would not return unless conditions improved significantly.
- **Immigrants** — very similar to "migrant." Someone who moves to another country for any number of reasons, including marriage or other family ties, employment/business opportunity, etc. Some distinguish between immigrants with legal papers to enter a country and those without legal permission. This would not have been a consideration in Bible times.

- **Asylum seekers** — individuals who ask to live in another country to escape severe religious or political persecution or another violation of their human rights. These people would not return home unless the reason for their move came to an end.
- **Stateless persons** — those who are not a citizen under the laws of any country. People can become stateless in many ways, such as when a country ceases to exist or when a country adopts discriminatory laws that do not recognize certain ethnic groups within its borders.
- **Visitors** — people coming into a country or community for a defined time. Some come for a vacation or sabbatical. Others come for an education. These individuals return home when that time period is over.

In the Bible, providing justice for the stranger, the widow, and the orphan means caring for those in society who live on the margins and need to be cared for. This can mean helping them monetarily as well as setting up the proper social structures to combat their plight. God calls all nations to implement and embody justice and righteousness for the strangers and the poor. This view of government existed throughout the ancient Near East where legitimate rule was predicated on the basis of "justice" and "righteousness" for the oppressed and the lowly. Accordingly, rulers who did not maintain a just social order would be deposed (Daniel 4:27).

"Anyone who oppresses the poor insults their Maker, but anyone who is kind to the needy honors him" (Proverbs 14:31).

Rabbi Abraham Heschel said, "It is not enough to be concerned for the life to come. Our immediate concern must be with justice and compassion in life here and now, with human dignity, welfare and security" (Heschel, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, 147).

> God's concern for justice grows out of His compassion for man. The prophets do not speak of a divine relationship to an absolute principle or idea, called justice. They are intoxicated with the awareness of God's relationship to His people and to all men. Justice is not important for its own sake; the motivation for justice, and the validity of its exercise lie in the blessings it brings to man. For justice, as stated above, is not an abstraction, a value. Justice exists in relation to a person, and is something done by a person. An act of injustice is condemned, not because the law is broken, but because a person has been hurt. What is the image of a person? A person is a being whose anguish may reach the heart of God (Heschel, *The Prophets*, p. 276).

Question: What allows some individuals to take a stand against oppression while others choose to participate in it?

Question: Has there ever been a time when your idea of justice and compassion and God's idea of justice and compassion were different? How did you reconcile those feelings?

Question: How can I look out for others—the stranger, the poor, the marginalized—as if they are an extension of me?

GOOD WORD 2021.4	For What Nation Is There So Great?
Lesson #6 — November 06	Deuteronomy 4:1–9, 32–39
	—prepared by Mathilde Frey, School of Theology, WWU

Theme: From Small to Great

Leading Question: Should Adventists be special?

According to Deut 4:1–9, Moses was convinced that something had happened to the people of Israel, something of world-transforming significance. As an unsignificant group of people, slaves of Egypt, they had encountered a God who was not like other gods. They had been chosen for a task that would not only affect them but also those who would come in contact with them. The laws given to Israel were different from the laws of other people.

> "So keep and do *them,* for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?" (Deut 4:6–8)

The late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote regarding this passage that it was "the Torah that served as a model for how to undertake the journey from slavery to freedom, from oppression to law-governed liberty." There was nothing special about the people, it was not their righteousness, nor their size that made them exceptional or superior (Deut 9:5–6; 7:7). It was and still is today their story with God that inspires others to undertake the long walk to freedom.

Question: What are some of the dangers produced by Christian or Adventist exclusivism?

According to the book of Deuteronomy, Israel was a unique nation in the context of the ancient world. While other people worshiped humanly crafted images set up in temples or objects of nature, Israel worshiped and an unseen God. Nonetheless, in the worship texts of Israel God is said to hear the cries of his people, to feel their burdens, and respond with saving acts.

In addition, Israel's God expected of his people to live in accordance with laws that would establish a just and righteous society in that it included and cared for people groups that usually lived on the margins. Righteousness was not an abstract norm but was related to concrete ethical acts directed toward the interests of others. Israelite laws cared for widows, orphans, the poor, and the foreigners. For Israelite judges, bribary from the wealthy or higher-class people was considered a crime and blind justice was an unknown concept. According to Deut 24:10–17, a judge was called to be on the side of the poor and marginalized people. The laws of the sabbath, the sabbatical year, and the year of jubilee would be exemplary in establishing a society that provided means to live and rest days for slaves, indentured servants, individuals who lost their property, etc. Even a person who killed could escape revenge by fleeing into a designated city of refuge. In this way, Israel would be a model among the nations.

Question: How can we make a positive impact when we are such a small community of people in the world?

Question: What are some of the challenges produced by nationalism relative to Christian belief?

Beyond nationalistic convictions are actions that take on extremism. Some actions in the Old Testament could indeed be viewed as religious intolerance. Today the linking of religion with nationalism is way beyond being proud of the God you serve. A United Nations report on Religious Intolerance says, "The worldwide trend as regards religion and belief is towards increased intolerance and discrimination against minorities and a failure to take account of their specific requirements and needs . . . Sadly, intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief are ever-present in the world . . . [with an] ever-worsening scourge of extremism. This phenomenon, which is complex, having religious, political and ethical roots, and has diverse objectives (purely political and/or religious), respects no religion. It has hijacked Islam . . . Judaism . . . Christianity . . . and Hinduism . . . The casualties of this aberration are . . . religions themselves."

As a world movement we need to avoid nationalistic sentiments. We need to proclaim our God as a God for all human beings, who is the Savior of the World. In that way we can be true to the sentiments in Deuteronomy without fracturing the body of Christ on national or religious lines.

Question: What did Paul mean when he wrote that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek (Gal 3:28)?

Question: How can we best represent God without falling into exclusivism?

GOOD WORD 2021.4	Law and Grace
Lesson #7 — November 13	Deuteronomy 7; 9:1–6; 10:1–15
	—prepared by Mathilde Frey, School of Theology, WWU

Theme: Law and Grace

Leading Question: What makes you feel better about yourself: following rules or accepting a gift?

Question: How important is it for you to show that you obey God's commandments? Would you break the rules because of something/someone you care about?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes about Deuteronomy as a book that calls us to obey the commandments of God.

> Yet there is no verb in biblical Hebrew that means to obey. This is an astonishing fact. So glaring is the lacuna that when Hebrew was revived in modern times a verb had to be found that meant "to obey." It was obviously necessary, for example, in the case of Israel's defence forces. An army depends on obedience to the command of a superior officer. The word chosen was . . . an Aramaic word that does not appear in this sense in the Hebrew Bible. The Torah itself uses a quite different word, namely *shema*, meaning, "to hear, to listen."[2]

In Deuteronomy, the verb "to listen" appears ninety-two times. It's meaning is wide-ranging:

- To pay focused attention, as in "Be silent, Israel, and listen" (Deut 27:9)
- To hear, as in "I heard your voice in the garden" (Gen 3:10)
- To understand, as in "Let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other" (Gen 11:7)
- To internelise, take to heart, as in "As for Ishmael, I have heard you" (Gen 17:20)
- To respond in action, as in "What Sarah says to you, do as she tells you" (Gen 21:12).

It is in the last sense that the verb "listen" is closest to a sense of "obey," and yet, it is not the same. The Hebrew verb *shama* is untranslatable in its full and deep meaning of the word. To listen in Hebrew is not to obey blindly, without thinking or questioning. The commands in Deuteronomy are nor the arbitrary will of God. To the contrary, they were given for the benefit of the people.

Read Deut 7 and 9:1–6.

Question: How do you reconcile the idea of a God who commands to dispossess and kill the Canaanites with a God of grace?

"God commanded the Israelites to kill the Canaanites because of their awful moral practices. When you consider the terrible things those people must have done, you can understand why God wanted to teach them a lesson." This kind of logic may seem to work until you start considering the specifics.

[2] Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation Deuteronomy: Renewal of the Sinai Covenant* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2019), 66.

Notice that not all wicked people in the Old Testament are punished, and even when Israel or Judah sins grievously against God, never are they wiped out by God. God forgives and is merciful, even in the context of the Covenant in the Old Testament.

Question: What about the killing of those usually deemed innocent of atrocious acts like babies and young children?

Unless one subscribes to word for word dictation by God of the texts in Deut 7; 9; and similar ones that raise the moral and theological dilemma about God, the following questions could be asked: Could it be that the commands for conquest and killing entire nations have more to do with the foreign policy of ancient Israel about clearing the land of its prior inhabitants than with teaching a lesson about God? Could it be that the texts attribute these commands to God, so that warrior heroes like Moses, Joshua and David can claim divine authority when they do those things?

The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy by Jeffrey H. Tigay 1996 contains the following discussion about, *"The Proscription of the Canaanites* (7:1-2, 7:16and 20:15-18):

> "According to Deuteronomy 7:1-2, 7:16 and 20:15-18, when the Israelites enter the promised land they are to wipe out the Canaanites living there. The terms referring to this requirement are the verb *haHarem,* "proscribe," and the noun *Herem,* "proscription," "a thing proscribed." Deuteronomy states this as an unconditional mandate and leaves no room for sparing any Canaanites in the promised land. Modern critical scholars and traditional Jewish exegesis hold, each for different reasons, that at the time when Israel entered the promised land there was actually no such policy of unconditional proscription of the Canaanites. Traditional exegesis holds that Deuteronomy in fact does not require *unconditional* proscription. Modern scholars hold that it does, but that this policy is purely theoretical and did not exist when Israel entered the land.
>
> "In 7:1-2, 7:16, the command to doom the Canaanites is clearly unconditional and offering them terms of submission is prohibited. That 20:15-18 is also meant unconditionally is indicated by its opening clause, "Thus you shall deal with all towns that lie very far from you," that is, *with foreign, non-Canaanite* cities. "Thus" refers back to verse 10, which requires Israel to offer to spare cities that surrender. Verses 15-17 indicate that this offer is made only to cities *outside* the promised land and that the Canaanites *in the land* are to be denied this option. This interpretation of the law is consistent with Joshua 6-11 (except for 11:19-20, mentioned below), according to which surrender was not offered to the cities of Canaan when Joshua conquered them.
>
> "According to 20:18, the aim of this unconditional requirement is to rid the land of Canaanites, who might influence Israelites to adopt their abhorrent rites, such as child sacrifice and various occult practices (12:31;18:9-12). Note that it is particularly abhorrent rites, and not beliefs, that prompt this policy. By itself, worship of astral bodies and other gods by Canaanites and other pagans is not counted against them as a sin, since Deuteronomy holds that God assigned such worship to them (see 4:19; 32:8; and Excursuses 7 and 31). Exodus, too, requires ridding the land of the Canaanites to prevent them from influencing Israel, though it prescribes expulsion rather than annihilation. The aim of these policies is defensive, and no action is prescribed

against idolatry or idolaters outside Israelite territory. These policies are not based on ethnicity; Deuteronomy prescribes the same treatment for Israelite cities that lapse into idolatry (13:13-19).

“Modern scholars hold that this law is purely theoretical and was never in effect. In their view, the populations of only a few Canaanite cities were annihilated, but most were not. There is much evidence in favor of this view. Archaeology has found only a few Canaanite cities that seem to have been destroyed by the Israelites when they arrived in the land at the beginning of the Iron Age (ca. 1200 B.C.E.). As noted above, pre-Deuteronomic laws, in Exodus, speak of the Canaanites being expelled rather than annihilated, and the narratives of Judges, Kings, and Joshua 15-17 indicate that many were neither expelled nor annihilated but were spared and subjected to forced labor. Some scholars suggest that even Deuteronomy did not originally require annihilating the Canaanites. In their view, Deuteronomy's original law consisted only of 20:10-14, according to which *all* cities are to be offered terms of submission. They note that Joshua 11:19; Joshua 15-17, and Judges all reflect this form of the law. In this view the following paragraph in Deuteronomy, verses 15-18, is a later supplement that modifies the original law by restricting the requirement to offer the option of surrender to foreign, non-Canaanite cities. This supplement is reflected in Deuteronomy 7:1-5, 16-26, and the narratives of Joshua 6-11 (except for Joshua 11:19-20), but it is based on a theoretical reconstruction, conceived at a later time when the Canaanites had ceased to exist as a discernible element of the population in Israel, to account for their disappearance.

“If this is the case, where did the idea of proscribing the Canaanites come from? The historical books, as noted, indicate that the invading Israelites did proscribe some Canaanite cities. Proscription was a well-known practice in the ancient world. One type of proscription was the religious practice of devoting property, cattle, or persons (perhaps the victims of sacrificial vows, such as Jephthah's daughter) irrevocably to a deity, that is, to a sanctuary and the priests, sometimes by destruction or killing. Another type was punitive proscription, which consisted of executing those who committed severe offenses against the gods. This type is prescribed by Exodus 22:17 for individual idolaters, and by Deuteronomy 13:13-18 for idolatrous cities. Proscription of enemy armies and populations to the gods is known from various places in the ancient world. King Mesha of Moab proscribed the Israelite inhabitants of some towns in Transjordan to his god when he recaptured former Moabite territory there. Other parallels are known from Mesopotamia and ancient Europe. In the context of ancient warfare, in which the gods were believed to be the main fighters and human antagonists their enemies, proscription of the enemy's population seemed to be a natural way for an army to express devotion to a deity. A case in point is God's command to Saul to proscribe the Amalekites to avenge their ancient ambush of the Israelites. Proscription was not considered necessary or obligatory in most cases, but was something that an army might vow to do to induce divine aid in critical circumstances, such as before a crucial battle or a counterattack following a defeat. Examples of this are Israel's proscription of Arad and Ai after initial defeats by them, and the proscription of Jericho at the start of Israel’s campaign for the promised land.

“Deuteronomy appears to have inferred from cases like these that the disappearance of the Canaanites was due to a systematic policy of proscription. Aware that there were no discernible Canaanites left in Israel, aware from Exodus and Numbers that the land was to be rid of them, aware of Exodus 22:17, which requires proscription of Israelite idolaters, and mindful of its own

law requiring proscription of idolatrous Israelite cities, Deuteronomy must have assumed that God, in His zeal to protect Israel from exposure to pagan abominations, had required eliminating the Canaanites by the same means. It is interesting, however, that Deuteronomy never speaks of proscribing the victims *to God.* It uses proscription in a purely secular way, meaning simply "destruction." It is not a sacrifice to God but a practical measure to prevent the debasement of Israelite conduct.

"Traditional Jewish commentators, as mentioned, do not believe that Deuteronomy means to proscribe the Canaanites unconditionally. The Sifrei and other halakhic sources reason that since the express purpose of the law is to prevent the Canaanites from influencing the Israelites with their abhorrent religious practices (v. 18), if they abandoned their paganism and accepted the moral standards of the Noachide laws they were to be spared. Maimonides holds that verse 10 requires that Israel offer terms of surrender to all cities, Canaanite included. In his view, when verse 15says *"thus* you shall deal" with non-Canaanite cities, it is not referring to, and limiting, verse 10, but verse 14, which calls for sparing the women and children of a city taken in battle. In his view this means that all cities must be given the option of surrender; the difference between Canaanite and foreign cities is only that if foreign cities reject the offer, only their men are to be killed, but if Canaanite cities reject the offer, their entire population is to be killed. This view is compatible with Joshua 11:19, which implies that Canaanite cities could have saved themselves by surrendering: "Not a single city made terms *[hishlimah]* with the Israelites; all were taken in battle."

"These arguments notwithstanding, it is clear from 7:1-2 and 16 that Deuteronomy's demand for proscription of the Canaanites is indeed unconditional. The rabbis' rejection of this view is a reflection of their own sensibilities. As M. Greenberg has observed, they must have regarded this understanding of the law as implausible because it is so harsh and inconsistent with other values, such as the prophetic concept of repentance and the prediction that idolaters will someday abandon false gods, and the halakhic principle that wrongdoers may not be punished unless they have been warned that their action is illegal and informed of the penalty. In effect, they used interpretation to modify and soften the law in deference to other, overriding principles."

Question: Why are law and grace so often set in opposition to each other?

GOOD WORD 2021.4	**Choose Life**
Lesson #8 — November 20	**Deuteronomy 30:1–20**
	—prepared by Mathilde Frey, School of Theology, WWU

Theme: Choose Life

Leading Question: What does life expect of us?

Here is an excerpt from an essay with the title, "Yes to Life: In Spite of Everything" written by Victor Frankl (1905–1997), the Viennese neurologist and psychiatrist imprisoned in the Auschwitz concentration camp, where he lost his mother, father, and brother. His 1946 memoir *Man's Search for Meaning* remains one of the most profound and vitalizing books ever written, abounding with wisdom on how to persevere through the darkest times.

> The question can no longer be "What can I expect from life?" but can now only be "What does life expect of me?" What task in life is waiting for me?
>
> Now we also understand how, in the final analysis, the question of the meaning of life is not asked in the right way, if asked in the way it is generally asked: it is not we who are permitted to ask about the meaning of life — it is life that asks the questions, directs questions at us… We are the ones who must answer, must give answers to the constant, hourly question of life, to the essential "life questions." Living itself means nothing other than being questioned; our whole act of being is nothing more than responding to — of being responsible toward — life. With this mental standpoint nothing can scare us anymore, no future, no apparent lack of a future. Because now the present is everything as it holds the eternally new question of life for us.
>
> The question life asks us, and in answering which we can realize the meaning of the present moment, does not only change from hour to hour but also changes from person to person: the question is entirely different in each moment for every individual.
>
> We can, therefore, see how the question as to the meaning of life is posed too simply, unless it is posed with complete specificity, in the concreteness of the here and now. To ask about "the meaning of life" in this way seems just as naive to us as the question of a reporter interviewing a world chess champion and asking, "And now, Master, please tell me: which chess move do you think is the best?" Is there a move, a particular move, that could be good, or even the best, beyond a very specific, concrete game situation, a specific configuration of the pieces?
>
> One way or another, there can only be one alternative at a time to give meaning to life, meaning to the moment — so at any time we only need to make one decision about how we must answer, but, each time, a very specific question is being asked of us by life. From all this follows that life always offers us a possibility for the fulfillment of meaning, therefore there is always the option that it has a meaning. One could also say that our human existence can be made meaningful "to the very last breath"; as long as we have breath, as long as we are still conscious, we are each responsible for answering life's questions.

Question: What does it mean for you to meaningfully live in the present?

Read Deut 30:15, 19.

The commandment to choose life is perhaps the most fundamental commandment in Deuteronomy for it presumes that human life overflows with significance. Even if we cannot fully comprehend life, Deuteronomy reassures us that God's will for us is to live a full and satisfactory life. This is almost inexplicable in the ancient environment with its preoccupation with death. The ancient Egyptians were obsessed with death. Their monumental buildings were an attempt to defy death. The pyramids were giant mausoleums. More precisely, they were portals through which the soul of a deceased pharaoh could ascend to heaven and join the immortals. The most famous Egyptian text that has come down to us is The Book of the Dead. Only the afterlife is real: life is a preparation for death.

Life is good, death is bad. Life is a blessing; death is a curse. These are Deuteronomy's truisms. Why even mention them? Because they were not common ideas in the ancient world. They were revolutionary. And, they still are.

How do we defeat death? Yes, there is resurrection (1 Sam 2:6; Isa 25:7–9; Dan 12:2). It is at the heart of salvation through Christ (1 Cor 15:12–19). But Moses does not focus on this aspect. He tells the people to choose life by being part of a covenant—a covenant with eternity itself, that is to say, a covenant with God. Faith in God, Moses says, is not like that of the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, or virtually every other civilisation known to history. We do not search for God in a realm beyond life, in heaven, or after death, or in mystic disengagement from the world, or in philosophical contemplation. We find God in life. We find God in love for lifand joy. To find God, you don't have to climb to heaven or cross the sea (Deut 30:12–13). God is here. God is now. God is life.

Question: Why does Deuteronomy puts so much stress on choice?

The truth is that some of the most important facts about us we did not choose. We did not choose to be born. We did not choose our parents. We did not choose the time and place of our birth. Yet each of these affecs who we are and what we are called to do. We are part of a story that began long before we were born and will continue after we are no longer here, and the question for all of us is: Will we continue the story? Moses' words resonate: "It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with . . . whoever is not here with us today" (Deut 29:14). We are part of the story. We can live it. We can abandon it. But it is a choice we cannot avoid, and it has consequences.

GOOD WORD 2021.4	Turn Their Hearts
Lesson #9 — November 27	Deut 4:25–31; 5:22–29; 30:1–10
	—prepared by Mathilde Frey, School of Theology, WWU

Theme: Repentance

Leading Question: Why is it not good enough to say sorry?

Deuteronomy 30 brings Moses' third speech to the Israelites to a climactic end. After placing blessings and curses before the people according to the ancient custom of a covenant ceremony, the tone changes. Moses offers an exceptional word of assurance to the descendants of slaves, namely, if they should be slaves again in exile, God will surely act on their behalf and reinstate them as free people. The first ten verses in Deut 30 stress an element that will be essential should this situation come to pass.

The chiasm below (Deut 30:1–8, my close translation from the Hebrew text) shows that the keyword in this section is the verb "to turn" or "return" (Hebrew *shuv*). The seven clauses where the word is used express a threefold act, Israel's return to God, God's turning to Israel, and God's act of returning Israel to a state of well-being. At the center of the chiastic structure is God as the agent who brings the "return" about, and how this act is accomplished.

A It shall be when all these words come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you ***return*** them to your heart in all the nations where the Lord your God has banished you, and you ***return*** to the LORD your God and listen to His voice with all your heart and soul . . . then the LORD will ***return*** you from captivity and have compassion on you. He will ***return*** you from all the people where he has scattered you (vv. 1–3)

X Moreover, the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live (v. 6)

A' You will ***return*** and listen to the voice of the LORD, and observe all His commandments which I command you today, . . . and the LORD will ***return*** to rejoice over you, . . . for you will ***return*** to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul (vv. 8–10)

Moses places the most important part at the center of the chiastic structure: Circumcision of the heart and love for God come from the heart (v. 6). Circumcision of the heart becomes a metaphor of removal of all barriers that hinder a person to be totally committed to the Lord. As a result, devotion to the Lord will be evident in undivided love and obedience. Those who the Lord will bring back from the exile will have undergone a "surgery of the heart." As a result, the former exiles will be restored to their place among the nations.

Question: What images of repentance are better than others in explaining what God really wants? How does repentance fit into the context of God's laws?

"Circumcise the foreskin of your hearts and stiffen your necks no more" (Deut 10:16). What is circumcision of the heart? The second half of verse 16 elucidates the first part: A circumcised heart is

the antithesis of a stiffened neck. Bible scholar Moshe Weinfeld explains that "an uncircumcised heart, like an uncircumcised ear (Jeremiah 6:10) and uncircumcised lips (Exodus 6:12, 30), means than an organ is incapable of absorbing feelings and impressions from the outside." To circumcise the heart, then, is to open it, and thereby to become genuinely receptive to God and God's command. The image of a circumcised heart thus symbolizes "achieving a condition of responsive openness to God's word."

Scholars have long struggled to understand just what the heart (Hebrew *lev*) symbolizes in biblical thinking. The heart in Hebrew thought is "the preeminent metaphor for the inner being of a person, the seat of intelligence; the seat of emotions; and the seat of volition, i.e., the will." Moses demands that the people totally transform their inner lives, so that they will respond to God's command with loyalty, readiness, and faithfulness. As Bible scholar Richard Nelson explains, "circumcising the heart is a metaphor for a radical, interior renewal that makes love and obedience fully possible."

Question: How can we know the difference between being sorry for the consequences of our sins and being sorry for the sins themselves? Why is this distinction so important?

The New Testament, of course, is filled with the idea of repentance. In fact, John the Baptist began his ministry with the call to repentance.

Read Matthew 3:1–8.

Questions: How does the idea of "return" appear in these verses in Matthew 3? In other words, what is John the Baptist telling that reflects on what is written in Deuteronomy?

"God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart. David had the true conception of forgiveness when he prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." Psalm 51:10. {MB 114}

Question: How do we explain the concept of repentance to people today?

Question: How do we deal with those who believe they've committed the unpardonable sin?

GOOD WORD 2021.4	Remember, Do Not Forget
Lesson #10 — December 04	Deut 4:32–39; 5:15; 8:7–18
	—prepared by Mathilde Frey, School of Theology, WWU

Theme: Remember the past, but don't be a captive to it!

Leading Question: Is it always good to remember the past?

The book of Deuteronomy upholds a religion of memory. The verb "remember" (Hebrew zachor) appears 15 times in this book. Actually, throughout the entire Old Testament memory is a prominent word with no fewer than 169 occurrences. "Remember that you were strangers in Egypt"; "Remember the days of old"; "Remember the seventh day to keep it holy."

The first paragraph in the official Sabbath School lesson for this week begings as follows, "Two words appear all through the Bible: *remember* and *forget*. Both refer to something human, something that happens in our minds."

However, in the Bible memory begins with God. Four times in the book of Genesis God is spoken of as remembering. "God remembered Noah" and brought him out of the Ark onto dry land. When God spoke of the rainbow as a sign for his promise to never again destroy the earth, he said, "I will remember my covenant … When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the [a]everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." "God remembered Abraham" and saved his nephew Lot from the destruction of the cities of the plain. "God remembered Rachel" and gave her a child. Furthermore, to remember is more than just the mental act of recalling memories and is more about the actions that are taken because of remembering. God didn't suddenly recall that there was a boat out there with Noah on it. When it says that God remembered, He does so in acting on behalf of the people, toward their future, and for their lives.

Question: What does it mean to you when you read about God remembering his people?

In fact, we understand that memory is different from the events that happened in the past. The events of history are someone else's story. They are events that occurred long ago to someone else. Memory, on the other hand, belongs to me, it is my story. It's about the question where I come from and of what narrative I am a part. History answers the question, "What happened?" Memory answers the question, "Who am I in relation to the past?" It is about identity and the connection between the generations. In the case of the collective memory of biblical stories, all depends on how we find ourselves in that story, and how we tell it to the future generations.

In today's fast-moving culture, we undervalue acts of remembering. Computer memories have grown, while ours have become shorter and shorter. Our children no longer memorise chunks of poetry. Their knowledge of history is often all too vague. Our sense of space has expanded while our sense of time has shrunk.

That cannot be right. One of the greatest gifts we can give to our children is the knowledge of where we have come from, the things for which we sacrificed in our lives. None of the things we value — freedom, human dignity, justice — was achieved without a struggle. None can be sustained without conscious vigilance. A society without memory is like a journey without a map. It's all too easy to get lost.

Question: How important is it for you to remember your past, or where you came from?

We should all cherish the richness of knowing that each of our lives are but a chapter in a book begun by our ancestors long ago. To this chapter we add our contributions and then we are handing it on to our children. Life has meaning when it is part of a story, and the larger the story, the more our imaginative horizons grow. Besides, things remembered do not die. That's as close as we get to immortality on earth.

Read Deut 5:15

Question: Why is it important to for us to remember the hard times?

Read Eph 2:8–13

Question: Why does Paul urge Christians to remember our state before we were "in Christ?"

When God says that he will forgive our wickedness and remember our sins no more, it means that He chooses not to act and seek justice for our sins. God treats our sins "Like it never even happened."

GOOD WORD 2021.4	Deuteronomy in The Later Writings
Lesson #11 — December 11	2 Kings 22; Jer 7:1–7; 29:13; Dan 9:1–19
	—prepared by Mathilde Frey, School of Theology, WWU

Theme: The Importance of Deuteronomy for the Prophets

Leading Question: Why is a book of law so important?

Scott Redd, Bible scholar and president of the Reformed Theological Seminary in Washington D.C asks, "What would Plato be without Socrates, or Timothy without Paul, or Luther without Augustine, or Foucault without Nietzsche, or Bob without Woody, or Elvis, The Beatles, and every hair-spritzed glam rocker to follow them without the blues riff? Ask this and you get a sense of the architectonic influence that the book of Deuteronomy has over the prophet Jeremiah … Jeremiah drank deeply of the theological vintage of the book of Deuteronomy."

Most Bible scholars link the discovery in 622 B.C. of the "Book of the Law of Moses" (2 Chron 34:14; 2 Kings 22:8) to the book of Deuteronomy. Two parallel accounts, 2 Kings 22–23 and 2 Chronicles 34–35 provide details about the finding of the book and king Josiah's reform actions taken in connection with the repairs of the Temple. As a consequence of reading Book of the Law, the king ordered the removal of the cultic objects installed by Manasseh (2 Kings 23:4ff.). Second Chronicles 34–35, informs us that the Temple, which was ruined by the previous kings of Judah (2 Chron 34:11), underwent repairs followed by the restoration of the priestly services and festivals.

Question: What lessons can we draw from the rediscovery of the "Book of the Law" in the time of King Josiah?

Jeremiah receives his prophetic calling during this time of Temple reform. How would he have understood Deuteronomy? Redd writes, "Imagine you were a constitutional lawyer, and a new clause of the Constitution is discovered, one that fills in some previous lacuna of the document and further connects ideas which you had always thought to be unsourced. This new discovery would occupy your thoughts, reframing everything you knew before. Now imagine an exhaustive review of the government was called for by the president in light of this discovery, and you were involved in the investigation. It would be kind of a big deal."

For this reason, the life and prophecies of Jeremiah might be described as an extended exploration of the theology of Deuteronomy in the late pre-exilic period. No doubt due to the rediscovery of the aw book and King Josiah's subsequent reforms (2 Kings 22-23), the covenant looms large in the imagination of the prophet who is called to minister to the kings and the people in Jerusalem and Judah through their final days before the exile. Deuteronomic language pervades the prophet's sermons and prayers, including his call narrative (Jer 1:5–12), which borrows language from Deut 18:15–19. The Temple Sermon in Jeremiah 7 illustrates Jeremiah's concern for the "sojourner, the orphan, and the widow" (Jer 7:6), which is a common Deuteronomic refrain (Deut 18:6; 23:8; 24:17; 27:19). The allegations against the leadership in Jerusalem are heightened in light of the holiness of the

Temple which bears the Lord's name (Jer 7:14; or Shiloh, Jer 7:12), and their disobedience to the voice of the Lord (Jer 7:28; cf. Deut 8:20; 13:18; 15:5; 21:18; 27:10; 28:1, 2, 15, 45, 62; 30:8, 10).

Question: While the repeating of the law takes up much of the book, what is the essential message of Deuteronomy?

Perhaps more than any other part Jeremiah's theology of the heart is strongly evocative of the same in Deuteronomy focus on love and repentance which are to come from the heart, are particularly emphasized in the book of Jeremiah. The Shema (Deut 6:4–9) which calls for a love that is whole-heartedly devoted to the Lord turns into Jeremiah's call drawing the peoples' attention to their own great deficit of heart. Their hearts are depicted as "deceitful above all and desparately sick" (Jer 17:9). Jeremiah borrows the image of a circumcised heart from Deuteronomy (Jer 4:4; cf. Deut 10:16; 30:6) to explain how covenantal faithfulness must be a matter of a person's inner life and not merely the outer body. Unless the people repent sincerely and "wash [their] evil hearts" (Jer 4:10-14), they will suffer judgment.

Furthermore, the heart problem facing Judah can only be remedied by the Lord's provision of a "new heart," a heart of faithfulness, which will come about as a result of exile. With this new heart, the remnat of the exile will be equipped to seek the Lord with their "whole hearts" (Jer 24:7; 29:11–14), and this new heart will have the law of the Lord written upon it that it might never be forgotten (Jer 31:31–34). For Jeremiah, this new heart is the center of the New Covenant for them and for their children (Jer 32:38–39).

Question: What does Deuteronomy have to say to us today?

GOOD WORD 2021.4	Deuteronomy in the New Testament
Lesson #12 — December 18	Matt 4:1–11; Deut 8:3
	—prepared by Mathilde Frey, School of Theology, WWU

Theme: The Importance of Deuteronomy for Jesus

Leading Question: Is the law still important even for Christians?

There are about 60 references to the book of Deuteronomy in the New Testament, with 44 direct quotes. Jesus quoted and used the book of Deuteronomy more than any other book in the Old Testament. In Matt 4:1–11 he used Deut 8:3; 6:16; and 6:13 to counter Satan's temptations. Acts 10:34 references Deut 10:17 that God doesn't show favoritism. Paul speaks of the "Book of the Law" in Gal. 3:10 and references Deut 27:26. In Gal 3:13 he references Deut 21:23. Luke quotes Deut 18:18 and applies the prophecy to Jesus (Acts 7:37). Two verses from Deut 32 are referenced in Heb 10:28–31.

Read Matt 4:1–11.

Note how John T. Carroll (New Testament professor at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia) interprets Matt 4:1–11:

> Though seemingly driven by the devil, the ordeal of testing is actually depicted as divinely purposed: the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the desert for the purpose of undergoing the devil's testing (4:1). Publicly revealed by heaven to be the beloved Son of God (3:17—"this is" differs from "you are" in Mark 1:11), Jesus must embrace a particular understanding of that status: "If [indeed] you are the Son of God . . ." (Matt 4:3, 6). Not exploiting special powers to benefit himself, not expecting divine intervention to rescue him from mortal danger at the Temple Mount, not coveting glorious rule over the nations at the expense of loyalty to God, but—as 3:15 anticipates and the course of Jesus' ensuing ministry will confirm—a life of integrity, obedient to God's purpose, so as "to fulfill all righteousness." The wilderness testing presents Jesus' "no" to a wrongly conceived messianic vocation. The rest of the story will display the content of his "yes" to God.

Question: How do Jesus' three references from the book of Deuteronomy relate his "no" to what Carroll calls "a wrongly conceived messianic vocation"? How would such a "no" look like in our time today?

Read Deut 10:17–19.

Question: How do the NT authors make use of Deuteronomy 10:17 in Acts 10:34, Romans 2:11, Galatians 2:6, Ephesians 6:9, Colossians 3:25, and 1 Peter 1:17? What is the significance of the diverse use of the same text? How do we, as community of Jesus' followers, still show partiality? How can we counteract the tendency for partiality in today's world?

What is the definition of a stranger in the context of Deuteronomy? It could mean one of the original inhabitants of the land of Canaan. It could mean one of the "mixed multitude" who left Egypt with the Israelites. It might mean a foreigner who has entered the land seeking safety or a livelihood. Sometimes the stranger is mentioned along with the poor; at others, with the widow and orphan. On several occasions we read: "You shall have the same law for the stranger as for the native-born" (Exod 12:49; Lev 24:22; Num 15:16, 29). Not only must the stranger not be wronged; he or she must be included in the positive welfare provisions of Israelite society.

But the law goes beyond this; the stranger must be loved: "When a stranger lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The stranger living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were strangers in Egypt. I am the Lord your God" (Lev 19:33–34). This provision appears in the same chapter as the command, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev 19:18). Later, in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses makes it clear that this is the attribute of God Himself: "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger residing among you, giving them food and clothing. You are to love those who are strangers, for you yourselves were strangers in Egypt" (Deut 10:17–19).

To convey God's reason to include and love the stranger is because you once stood where he stands now. You know the heart of the stranger because you were once a stranger in the land of Egypt. If you are human, so is he. If he is less than human, so are you. I made you into the world's archetypal strangers so that you would fight for the rights of strangers – for your own and those of others, wherever they are, whoever they are, whatever the colour of their skin or the nature of their culture, because though they are not in your image, says God, they are nonetheless in Mine. There is only one reply strong enough to answer the question: Why should I not hate the stranger? Because the stranger is me.

GOOD WORD 2021.4	The Resurrection of Moses
Lesson #13 — December 25	Num 20:1–13; Deut 34:1–12; Jude 9
	—prepared by Mathilde Frey, School of Theology, WWU

Theme: Legacy

Leading Question: Why is the resurrection so central to the Christian faith?

"So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab according to the word of the LORD. And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows his burial place to this day" (Deut 34:5–6).

"What an extraordinary way to end a book: not just any book but the Book of books – with Moses seeing the Promised Land from Mount Nebo, tantalisingly near, yet so far away that he knows he will never reach it in his lifetime. This is an ending to defy all narrative expectations. A story about a journey should end at journey's end, with arrival at the destination. But the Torah terminates before the terminus. It concludes in *medias res*. It ends in the middle. It is constructed as an unfinished symphony."[3]

Question: How do you explain this record in the only book of the Pentateuch that is attributed to Moses by the words, "the book of the Law of the Lord by the hand of Moses"(2 Chron 34:14)?

Read Numbers 20:1-13.

Question: How can we read the story without making it into an arbitrary divine punishment of Moses? How is this story connected with a similar story in Exod 15:22-26? What was Moses' own understanding of what happened (Deuteronomy 1:37; 3:26; 4:21)? How does God correct Moses' understanding (32:48-52)?

Question: Why is Moses' death described in such a mysterious way, "he died there . . . but no man knows his burial place to this day" (Deut 34:5–6)?

Moses dies, alone on a mountain with God as he had been all those years ago when, as a shepherd in Midian, he caught sight of a bush in flames and heard the call that changed his life. "It is a scene affecting in its simplicity. There are no crowds. There is no weeping. The sense of closeness yet distance is almost overwhelming. He sees the land from afar but has known for some time that he will never reach it. Neither his wife nor his children are there to say goodbye. They disappeared from the narrative long before. His sister Miriam and his brother Aaron, with whom he shared the burdens of leadership for so long, have predeceased him. His disciple Joshua has become his successor. Moses has become the lonely man of faith, except that with God no man, or woman, is lonely even if they are alone."

[3] Jonathan Sacks, retrieved 13 September 2021, https://rabbisacks.org/end-without-an-ending/

The obituary given to him is equally unsurpassed in the biblical record: “Never again did there arise a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to display in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land, and for all the mighty acts and awesome sights that Moses displayed in the sight of all Israel” (Deut 34:10–12).

In the last month of his life, he challenged the people with vigor dor. At the very moment that they were getting ready to cross the Jordan and enter the land, Moses warned them of the challenges ahead. The greatest trial, he said, would not be poverty but wealth, not slavery but freedom, not homelessness in the desert but the comfort of home. Until the very end he challenged the people and pleaded with God for them.

Question: What do we learn from the life and death of Moses?

- For each of us, there is a Jordan we will not cross, a promised land we will not enter, a destination we will not reach. What we began, others will continue.

- “No man knows his burial place” (Deut 34:6). What a contrast between Moses and the heroes of other civilizations whose burial places become monuments, pyramids, shrines, and places of pilgrimage. The greatest sin is to worship human beings as if they were gods.

- No human is infallible. Perfection belongs to God alone. Only when we honor this essential difference between heaven and earth can God be God and humans, human. That is what Moses wanted the people to never to forget. Moses sinned and the Bible did not hide this from us. “Because you did not sanctify me before the people” (Num 20:12). The Bible does not hide anyone’s sin. It is fearlessly honest about the greatest of the great. Bad things happen when we try to hide people’s sins.

- Never lose the idealism of youth. The Torah says of Moses that at the age of 120, “his eye was undimmed and his natural energy unabated” (Deut 34:7). We are as young as our ideals.

- At the burning bush, Moses said to God: “I am not a man of words. I am heavy of speech and tongue.” By the time we reach Deuteronomy, the book named “Words” (Hebrew *Devarim*), Moses has become the most eloquent of prophets. God chose one who was not a man of words, so that when he spoke, people realized that *it was not he who was speaking but God who was speaking through him*.

- Moses defended the people. Did he always like them? Was he liked by them? The books of Exodus to Deuteronomy leave us in no doubt about these questions. Yet he defended them with all the passion and power at his disposal. Even when they had sinned. Even when they were ungrateful to God. Even when they made a Golden Calf. He risked his life to do so. He said to God: “And now, forgive them, and if not, blot me out of the book you have written” (Exod 32:32).

Read Jude 9. This is, without question, a rather perplexing text!

There are various biblical texts which can be rather difficult to interpret and understand. This verse would certainly be one of them. The verse in question says this: “But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for

slander but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" The general context of the verse involves Jude's concern with false teachers

Jude relies here on information that is recorded in the apocryphal book the Testament of Moses or the related work known as the Assumption of Moses. Unfortunately, the ending of this testament is no longer extant, but scholars have been able to reconstruct it from early Christian sources.

Because of this allusion to a non-canonical book and the direct quote from the apocryphal book I Enoch, the church in the first few centuries hesitated to accept the Epistle of Jude as canonical. The fact remains, however, that although Jude uses material from other sources, he does not recognize these books as inspired. He borrows examples from apocryphal literature or from the oral tradition of his day to illustrate and clarify his own teachings. In this apocryphal story Satan is accusing Moses of sin and saying that he should not be allowed to enter into God's presence.
New Testament scholar Richard Baukham offers an explanation about how this text ties in with the larger context of Jude's letter:

> Michael's behavior contrasts with that of the false teachers when they reject the accusations which the angels, as spokesmen for the Law, bring against them. They do so because they claim to be above all such accusations, subject to no moral authority. In fact, even if they had the status of Moses or Michael, they would remain subject to the divine Lawgiver and Judge. Given the context of the allusion, which Jude's readers knew, v 9 effectively exposes the spiritual conceit of the false teachers, whose attitude to the angels reveals a resistance to authority which will not even be subject to God.

Question: What difference did the thirteen weeks of studying the book of Deuteronomy make for you?