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# DEUTERONOMY

*Nearing his death, Moses gives  
the Israelites a new path to faithful living.*

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NAVPRESS 

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### *Deuteronomy*

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# CONTENTS

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How to Use This Study	7
Deuteronomy Timeline	11
Introduction—Why Deuteronomy?	13
Chart of Deuteronomy	16
Map: The Near East in 1400 BC	17
One—What Is Deuteronomy? (Overview)	19
Two—The Land (1:1–3:29)	29
Map: The Promised Land	31
Map: Regions of Canaan	36
Three—Reminders (1:9–3:29)	43
Four—Reasons to Obey (4:1-43)	55
Five—Love God (4:44–6:25)	67
Six—Law and Faith (5:16-21; 6:20-25)	81
Seven—Holiness (7:1-26)	93
Eight—Pride (9:1–10:11)	103
Nine—Doubting God (8:1-20; 10:12–11:32)	111
Introduction to the Laws in 12:1–26:19	123
Ten—Covenant Renewal (27:1–28:68)	127
Eleven—Choose Life (29:1–30:20)	135
Twelve—Moses' Farewell (31:1–34:12)	145
Thirteen—Review	155
Optional Lessons on Justice (12:1–26:19)	
A. Pure Worship (12:1-32)	163

B. Prophecy and Magic (13:1-18; 14:1-2; 16:21-22; 17:1-7; 18:9-22)	171
C. Ceremonies of Holiness (14:1-21; 16:1-17)	179
D. Tithes and Loans (14:22-29; 18:1-8; 23:19-20; 24:6, 10-18; 26:1-15)	187
E. More Economics (15:1-18; 23:24-25; 24:14-15, 19-22; 25:13-16)	195
F. Justice in the Courts (16:18-20; 17:2-20; 19:1-21; 21:1-9, 22-23; 24:16; 25:1-3)	203
G. War, Women, Kindness, Crime (20:1-20; 21:10-23; 22:1-30; 23:1-8; 24:1-5, 7; 25:5-12, 17-19)	209
Going On in Deuteronomy	215
Study Aids	216



# HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

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## Objectives

Most guides in the LIFECHANGE series of Bible studies cover one book of the Bible. Although the LIFECHANGE guides vary with the books they explore, they share some common goals:

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding and a thirst to return to the book
2. To teach you by example how to study a book of the Bible without structured guides
3. To give you all the historical background, word definitions, and explanatory notes you need so that your only other reference is the Bible
4. To help you grasp the message of the book as a whole
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image

Each lesson in this study is designed to take sixty to ninety minutes to complete on your own. The guide is based on the assumption that you are completing one lesson per week, but if time is limited, you can do half a lesson per week or whatever amount allows you to be thorough.

## Flexibility

LIFECHANGE guides are flexible, allowing you to adjust the quantity and depth of your study to meet your individual needs. The guide offers many optional questions in addition to the regular numbered questions. The optional questions, which appear in the margins of the study pages, include the following:

*Optional Application.* Nearly all application questions are optional; we hope you will do as many as you can without overcommitting yourself.

*For Thought and Discussion.* Beginning Bible students should be able to handle these, but even advanced students need to think about them. These questions frequently deal with ethical issues and other biblical principles. They often offer cross-references to spark thought, but the references do not

give obvious answers. They are good for group discussions.

*For Further Study.* These include: (a) cross-references that shed light on a topic the book discusses, and (b) questions that delve deeper into the passage. You can omit them to shorten a lesson without missing a major point of the passage.

If you are meeting in a group, decide together which optional questions to prepare for each lesson and how much of the lesson you will cover at the next meeting. Normally, the group leader should make this decision, but you might let each member choose his or her own application questions.

As you grow in your walk with God, you will find the LIFECHANGE guide growing with you—a helpful reference on a topic, a continuing challenge for application, a source of questions for many levels of growth.

## Overview and details

The study begins with an overview of the book of Deuteronomy. The key to interpretation is context—what is the whole passage or book about?—and the key to context is purpose—what is the author’s aim for the whole work? In lesson 1, you will lay the foundation for your study of Deuteronomy by asking yourself, *Why did the author (and God) write the book? What did they want to accomplish? What is the book about?*

Then, in lesson 2, you will begin analyzing successive passages of Deuteronomy in detail.

In lesson 13, you will review Deuteronomy, returning to the big picture to see whether your view of it has changed after closer study. Review will also strengthen your grasp of major issues and give you an idea of how you have grown from your study.

Each LifeChange guide is a little different, to suit the individual book. Deuteronomy is a long Old Testament book with fifteen chapters of laws for Israel (12:1–26:19). You may be excited to study what these laws can show you about God’s character, Jesus’ work, and our lives (see page 123 for an introduction to the laws). Or you may have only thirteen weeks to study Deuteronomy, so we’ve put seven optional lessons on the laws, organized by topic, in the back of this study guide. You might want to try one or two of them or come back to them later.

## Kinds of questions

Bible study on your own—without a structured guide—follows a progression. First you *observe*: What does the passage say? Then you *interpret*: What does the passage mean? Lastly you *apply*: How does this truth affect my life?

Some of the “how” and “why” questions will take some creative thinking, even prayer, to answer. Some are opinion questions without clear-cut right answers; these will lend themselves to discussions and side studies.

Don’t let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passages as God’s Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray,



“Lord, what do You want me to see here?” “Father, why is this true?” “Lord, how does this apply to my life?”

It is important that you write down your answers. The act of writing clarifies your thinking and helps you remember.

## Study aids

A list of reference materials, including a few notes of explanation to help you make good use of them, begins on page 216. This guide is designed to include enough background to let you interpret with just your Bible and the guide. Still, if you want more information on a subject or want to study a book on your own, try the references listed.

## Scripture versions

Unless otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations in this guide are from the New International Version of the Bible. Another version cited is the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

Use any translation you like for study, preferably more than one. A paraphrase such as *The Living Bible* is not accurate enough for study, but it can be helpful for comparison or devotional reading.

## Memorizing and meditating

A psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). If you write down a verse or passage that challenges or encourages you and reflect on it often for a week or more, you will find it beginning to affect your motives and actions. We forget quickly what we read once; we remember what we ponder.

When you find a significant verse or passage, you might copy it onto a card to keep with you. Set aside five minutes during each day just to think about what the passage might mean in your life. Recite it over to yourself, exploring its meaning. Then return to your passage as often as you can during your day for a brief review. You will soon find it coming to mind spontaneously.

## For group study

A group of four to ten people allows the richest discussions, but you can adapt this guide for other-sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and businessmen’s studies. Both new and mature Christians will benefit from the guide. You can omit any questions you find too easy and leave for later years any questions you find too hard.

The guide is intended to lead a group through one lesson per week. However, feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or omit some questions in a lesson if preparation or discussion time is limited. You can always return to this guide for personal study later. You will be able to discuss only a few questions at length, so choose some for discussion and others for background. Make time at each discussion for members to ask about anything they didn't understand.

Each lesson in the guide ends with a section called "For the group." This section gives advice on how to focus a discussion, how you might apply the lesson in your group, how you might shorten a lesson, and so on. The group leader should read each "For the group" at least a week ahead so that he or she can tell the group how to prepare for the next lesson.

Each member should prepare for a meeting by writing answers for all of the background and discussion questions to be covered. If the group decides not to take an hour per week for private preparation, then expect to take at least two meetings per lesson to work through the questions. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

Two reasons for studying in a group are accountability and support. When each member commits in front of the rest to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray with one another, listen jointly for God's guidance, help one another to resist temptation, assure each other that the other's growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another's commitments and needs at most meetings. Spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons. Then discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow such sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

If you write down each other's applications and prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about them at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

Notes taken during discussion will help you remember, follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and clarify a total view of an issue. But don't let note-taking keep you from participating. Some groups choose one member at each meeting to take notes. Then someone copies the notes and distributes them at the next meeting. Rotating these tasks can help include people. Some groups have someone take notes on a large pad of paper or erasable marker board so that everyone can see what has been recorded.

Pages 219–220 list some good sources of counsel for leading group studies.

# DEUTERONOMY TIMELINE <sup>6</sup>

2200 BC	2000	1800	1600	1400	1200	1000
<b>OTHER NEAR EASTERN LAW CODES</b> (see page 65)	Law code of Ur (Babylon)	Law code of Hammurabi (Babylon)	Hittite law codes			Assyrian law code
<b>ISRAEL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Abraham</li> <li>■ Isaac</li> <li>■ Jacob/Israel</li> <li>■ Joseph</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Moses' speeches in Moab (Deuteronomy)</li> <li>■ Fall of Jericho under Joshua</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Judges)</li> <li>David ■</li> </ul>
<b>EGYPT</b>			Israelites are slaves in Egypt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Exodus (Sinai covenant)</li> </ul>		
	2134–1786 Middle Kingdom Egypt's second most powerful period				1570–1200 New Kingdom Egypt's greatest period	



# INTRODUCTION

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## Why Deuteronomy?

*“Choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life.”*

*Deuteronomy 30:19-20*

Deuteronomy is one of the four Old Testament books most quoted in the New Testament, along with Genesis, Psalms, and Isaiah. Why is Deuteronomy so foundational to the New Testament?

### Moses

First of all, Deuteronomy gives us the last words of Moses to the people he led for forty years. This man—born a Hebrew slave, adopted by an Egyptian princess, and raised as a prince—lost all hope of making his life a success when at age forty he killed an Egyptian in anger. He fled to the desert and kept sheep for forty years. Then God called Moses to lead His own sheep, the Israelites, out of bondage in Egypt. Moses obeyed, and for another forty years he guided this grumbling mob of fugitive slaves through the wilderness.

That long desert wandering was made necessary by the people’s rebellion against God. But when we join the story in Deuteronomy, the whole original generation who left Egypt has died, and it is time for Israel to enter the land God promised to them. Because of his own disobedience, Moses himself is forbidden to lead Israel across the Jordan River into Canaan. Instead, Joshua, Moses’ lieutenant, will lead the attack on the sophisticated, pagan cities of Canaan. So the people halt their march in Moab, just east of the river, to hear Moses’ final words to them (see the map on page 36). His last three impassioned speeches are the book of Deuteronomy. These are the parting words of Israel’s seasoned leader, the core of what he prayed Israel would remember, expressed with the emotion of one who knows what will happen if the people forget.

## The treaty

Deuteronomy contains Moses' three speeches, but it is structured like an ancient Near Eastern treaty between an overlord and his vassal (a vassal is the chief of a subject clan or tribe; he makes treaties on behalf of his people). Deuteronomy formally states the *covenant* (treaty, pact, testament) between the Lord and Israel. In a way, Deuteronomy is the old covenant. If we want to understand "the new covenant" (Luke 22:20) that Jesus inaugurated and the New Testament describes, we must understand the old covenant that Deuteronomy summarizes.

God first declared His covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, just after the people left Egypt (see Exodus 19:1–31:18). But after forty years in the desert, almost everyone who accepted the agreement at Sinai has died and a whole new generation has grown up. This generation knows of the oppression in Egypt, the miraculous deliverance, and the promises at Sinai only by report. Therefore, on the plains of Moab, Moses asks these people to reaffirm for themselves the covenant their parents made with the Lord.

None of the other nations in the Near East had treaties with their gods, so why did the Lord make one with Israel? Perhaps because it was the best way to express the relationship He wanted to have with His people.

## The Law

The name *Deuteronomy* is Greek for "second law" (*deutero nomos*). The Greek translation of the Old Testament mistakenly renders Deuteronomy 17:18 as "this second law" instead of "a copy of this law." Deuteronomy is a "second law" only in that it repeats the Law for a new generation that was not present at Sinai.

In calling Deuteronomy "this [book of the] law" (30:10; 31:24,26), Moses does not intend it to be a "handbook"<sup>1</sup> for judges. Rather, "law" (Hebrew: *torah*) means "religious teaching given by a priest, a prophet or a wise man."<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy expounds the faith that underlies Israel's desire to obey God. The book details God's faithfulness to Israel in the past (chapters 1–11) and in the future (chapters 12–34).<sup>3</sup> The covenant's basic assumption is that God's faithful care for Israel motivates Israel's faithful obedience to God. Therefore, Deuteronomy puts "laws" (in the narrow sense of rules of conduct) in the context of covenant love and faithfulness.

We can begin to see the relationship between laws and grace in the structure of the Near Eastern treaty that Deuteronomy follows:

1. A *historical prologue* recounts the Sovereign's unearned kindness (grace, mercy) toward the vassal. The prologue is meant to inspire gratitude (see Deuteronomy 1–3).
2. The *basic requirements* describe the relationship between Sovereign and vassal. (In Deuteronomy 4–11, we find words like "love" and "chose" frequently.)
3. The *specific rules of conduct* expected of the vassal (see Deuteronomy 12–26) are based on the Sovereign's past graciousness and the present relationship.

4. A clause requires the *recording* and sometimes the *renewal* of the covenant (see Deuteronomy 27,29).
5. *Blessings and curses* are promised for obedience and disobedience (see Deuteronomy 28).<sup>4</sup>

## Old and new

Although Deuteronomy is the old covenant and we live under the new covenant, it still has much to say to us. As you look for ways to apply passages you are studying, consider the following facts:

1. The idea of a covenant or treaty with someone is unfamiliar to many modern people. Deuteronomy can show us what it means to have a *covenant relationship* with God.
2. *God's character* has not changed, so anything we observe about Him in Deuteronomy can help us know Him better. Deuteronomy shows us what God cares about, how He wants to treat people, how He wants people to treat people, and how He wants to be treated. The old covenant shows how high God's standards of justice and love are.
3. *Man's nature* has not changed, so Deuteronomy can show us what we are like.
4. The *ritual laws* of sacrifices and festivals are not renewed in the new covenant because Jesus fulfilled them in His self-sacrifice. We worship differently. However, the ritual laws do teach us what God is like, explain why Jesus' death was necessary, and show how it was effective. New Testament concepts like atonement, redemption, and holiness come from the old covenant.
5. The *civil laws* are not renewed in the new covenant, since they were designed for the civil state of Israel. However, they apply principles of justice that are still valid. They show us what God values, and they teach us by analogy what it means to love God and our neighbor. Few modern people know how much our own legal principles and procedures owe to Deuteronomy.
6. Some expectations of the old covenant are renewed in the new covenant. The *ethical laws* of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, and the Ten Commandments (see Deuteronomy 5:6-21), which support them, are explicitly repeated and expanded upon in the New Testament. God still wants us to live by them, although we are no longer condemned if we fail.<sup>5</sup> (See the box "Law and Grace" on page 78.)

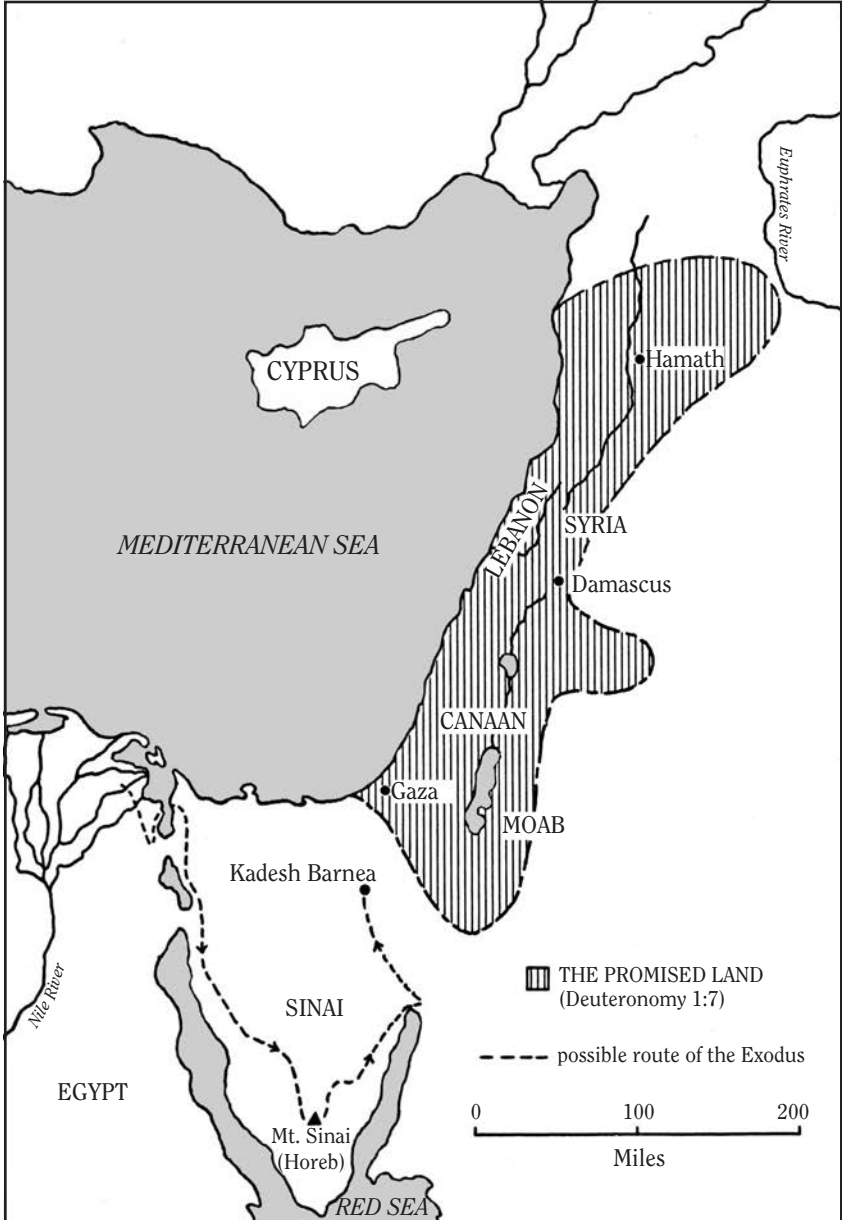
1. J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: InterVarsity, 1974), 13.
2. Thompson, 12.
3. J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1966), 212.
4. Thompson, 19.
5. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 135–147. Christians understand the nature of the "new covenant" and the extent to which Old Testament laws should apply to us in widely different ways. You might ask your pastor how your church views these issues.

## CHART OF DEUTERONOMY

Historical Prologue 1:1–3:29	First Speech	1 Promise and unbelief
		2 Conquest
		3 Land allotted; Moses' plea
Basic Stipulations 4:1–11:32	Second Speech	4 Listen and live; God's nature
		5 Ten Commandments: response to God's nature
		6 The Lord is One . . . Love the Lord
		7 Holy People
		8 Grace remembered
		9 Disobedience remembered
		10 Covenant remembered
		11 Covenant summary
		12 The place of worship
		13 Idolatry
		Specific Cases 12:1–26:19
15 Release		
16 Feasts		
17 Leaders		
18 Tithes; prophecy		
19 Legal procedures		
20 Holy war		
21 Various laws		
22 Various laws		
23 Various laws		
24 Various laws		
25 Various laws		
26 Firstfruits		
Document Clause	Second Speech	
Blessings and Curses		28 Blessings and curses
Recapitulation 29:1–30:20	Third Speech	29 Recap: the things revealed
		30 Return and choose life
Transfer of Leadership 31:1–34:12	Third Speech	31 Transfer of authority
		32 Song of accusation
		33 Blessings
		34 Moses' death



# The Near East in 1400 BC





# OVERVIEW

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## What Is Deuteronomy?

Bible teachers agree that it is important to do an overview of a book before studying it in detail. Because Deuteronomy is a long book, you might plan two weeks for the overview. This will give you plenty of time to absorb the “How to Use This Study” section on pages 7–10, the introduction on pages 13–17, and this first lesson. Many people find Deuteronomy intimidating at first glance, but it soon becomes manageable if taken gently at first. If you are studying with a group, see the “For the group” section on pages 25–27.

### First impressions

If you have read the introduction on pages 13–17, you have some idea of what is in Deuteronomy. Still, there is no substitute for reading the book quickly yourself. If you spend ninety minutes doing this, you will have a much better sense of how particular passages fit into the whole work.

Use the chart on page 16 as a guide to the book’s structure. The chart shows various ways of dividing Deuteronomy:

1. The far left column divides the book into the sections of a treaty to emphasize that this is the Sovereign Lord’s covenant with Israel.
2. The center column shows where Moses begins and ends his three speeches. Notice that the first speech contains part of the basic requirements as well as the prologue.

3. The far right column suggests titles for each chapter of the book. Later in this study, you will make up your own titles.

For this overview, don't feel you must read every word of the book. In the upcoming questions, some important passages are suggested, but you need not limit yourself to these. The more effort you give to overview, the better prepared you will be for detailed study. Prayerfully consider the amount of the time you can devote to this.

The study guide allows space to answer questions, but if you want more room for further thoughts, optional questions, discussion notes, prayer requests, and plans for application, you can get a small notebook.

Most of the places named in Deuteronomy are on one of the maps on pages 17, 31, and 36.

1. Deuteronomy 1:1–3:29 is like the historical prologue in a treaty (see #1 on page 14); in it, Moses describes the Sovereign's unearned kindness toward His subjects.

a. Read at least 1:1,19-46; 2:14-15,24-25,31-37. Of what events does Moses remind Israel?

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b. What can we learn about the Lord from these events?

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2. In chapters 4–11, Moses states the basic things the Lord expects of Israel under the covenant.

a. Read two or three of these passages: 4:1-8,32-35; 5:1-21; 6:4-9,20-25; 7:7-11; 9:4-6. What are some of the Lord’s basic expectations? Notice the words that describe the covenant relationship between God and Israel (*love, choose . . .*) and those that describe God’s expectations (*love, serve . . .*).

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b. What impressions of the Lord does this section give you?

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3. The basic requirements of 4:1–11:32 are elaborated into specific laws in 12:1–26:19. Read a few of the laws, such as 15:12-18; 16:9-12,18-22; 19:15. (The chart on page 16, the subtitles in your Bible, and the optional lessons on pages 163–214 may help you find topics that interest you.)

a. What kinds of matters do the laws cover?

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**For Further Study:**

What do the following verses say about God's nature: Deuteronomy 4:24,31,37; 5:8-10; 7:7-9; 10:15-16; and 23:5?

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b. What do you observe about God (His justice, priorities, values, and so on)?

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4. Chapters 27–34 include a ceremony for renewing the covenant with each generation, a final exhortation to obey, and some things that happened when Moses transferred leadership to Joshua.

Read at least 30:19-20; 31:24-32:7; 33:1-4. Notice on page 16 how these chapters fit into the treaty. What do you observe about God's character and the old covenant?

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5. From the introduction and your first reading, what would you say Deuteronomy is about? Summarize it in a sentence, or give the book your own title.

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### Study Skill—Application

Second Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that *all* Scripture “is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Romans 15:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:6,11 explain that Old Testament laws and history were recorded to teach, encourage, and warn us and to give us examples to follow. Therefore, the last step of Bible study is always to ask ourselves, *What difference should this passage make to my life? How should it make me want to think or act?* In your overview of Deuteronomy, you may have encountered:

1. An aspect of God’s unchanging character. You can meditate (see page 9) on the verse or verses that show this aspect. Mull them over in your mind and ponder their significance. How should God’s character affect the way you pray, treat your family, act at work, use your time or money, and so on? Write your conclusions and decisions in a notebook or the blank space at the end of this lesson. Tell someone what you decided.
2. An ethical principle repeated in the New Testament, such as 5:7-21. How can you apply this principle to your life this week?
3. A moral lesson from Israel’s experience. How is it relevant to your life?

6. a. In your first reading of Deuteronomy, did you find anything you would like to commit to memory or apply? If so, what one truth would you like to concentrate on this week?

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b. How can you apply this truth in your life? Try to think of at least one specific way.

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7. As you skimmed Deuteronomy, you may have come across statements you'd like clarified or questions you'd like answered as you go deeper into this study. While your thoughts are still fresh, jot down your questions here to serve as personal objectives for your investigation of this book.

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## For the group

This “For the group” section and the ones in later lessons suggest ways of structuring your discussions. Feel free to select and adapt what suits your group.

**Get acquainted.** Because Deuteronomy is a long book, group members might appreciate two weeks to do the overview. If so, you can take a whole meeting to cover the following:

1. Ask the group to read “How to Use This Study” on pages 7–10 at home, but go over any important or difficult aspects as a group. Explain anything you think might be unfamiliar to the group. Let people ask questions about the study guide.
2. The beginning of a new study is a good time to lay a foundation for honest sharing of ideas, to get comfortable with each other, and to encourage a sense of common purpose. One way to establish common ground is to talk about what each member hopes to get out of your group—out of your study of Deuteronomy, and out of any prayer, singing, sharing, outreach, or anything else you might do together. Why are you studying the Bible, and Deuteronomy in particular? You can also discuss what you hope to give in your group. If you have someone write down each member’s hopes and expectations, then you can look back at these goals later to see if they are being met.

It is important that everyone knows what the group is going to do and what he or she is supposed to do. Also, you will be better able to discuss personal application if you begin to establish trust.

**Worship.** Some groups like to begin their meetings with prayer and/or singing. Some share requests for prayer at the beginning, but leave the actual prayer until after the study. Others prefer just to chat and have refreshments for a while and then move to the study, leaving worship until the end.

**Introduction.** Here are some questions to ask the group, to remind everyone of the main points in the introduction (pages 13–16):

1. Where does the name *Deuteronomy* come from?

2. What does *Law (Torah)* mean?
3. What is a *covenant*?
4. In what ways is Deuteronomy like an ancient Near Eastern treaty between a sovereign and a vassal? Why is this important? Why did God make a treaty with Israel?
5. The book of Deuteronomy contains three speeches by Moses to Israel. Who was Moses? Where and when was he speaking? What was the purpose of this series of speeches?

**Observations.** Taking each section of the book in turn, ask someone to summarize what it is about. Then let group members state their observations and impressions (questions 1–4). When you have discussed each section, summarize what you have learned so far about (1) God’s character and (2) the old covenant. These will be the focuses of the whole study.

Let each person share his or her summary or title of the book (question 5). If you begin with a clear idea of what you think the book is about, you have something to reconsider and revise as you study in detail.

**Application.** Ask specifically how Deuteronomy is relevant to your lives. If the group is unfamiliar with making applications, try this exercise together:

1. Pick a verse that seems relevant to you. For instance, look at Deuteronomy 8:3, which Jesus quotes in Luke 4:4.
2. State the truth that is relevant to you.
3. Describe in general how you fall short of what this verse teaches.
4. Name one specific way you can act on what this verse teaches. For Deuteronomy 8:3, you can make fifteen minutes in the Bible a priority each day before breakfast or lunch. Pray for the grace to do this so that you are not relying on your own resources. Plan to memorize 8:3 and meditate on it for further applications.
5. Decide how you can hold yourself accountable for keeping this commitment. For example, plan to come to your next meeting ready to tell on which days you had to miss breakfast to spend time in the Bible, on which days you had both devotions and breakfast, and on which days you chose food rather than Scripture. At that time, if necessary, the

group can help you assess whether your commitment was unreasonable or how you can change your schedule so that you will have time for both food and the Bible.

**Questions.** You may have questions about Deuteronomy that you can't answer yet. You can make a list of everyone's questions so that you can look for answers as you study. If this study guide and your reading of Deuteronomy can't answer a question, you might consult one of the references listed on pages 216–220 or ask your pastor for help.

**Wrap-up.** The group leader should have read through lesson 2 and its “For the group” section. At this point, he or she might give a one- or two-sentence summary of what members can expect in that lesson and in the coming meeting. This is a chance to whet everyone's appetite, assign any optional questions, omit any numbered questions, or forewarn members of any possible difficulties.

**Worship.** Many groups like to end with singing and/or prayer. This can include songs and prayers that respond to what you've learned in Deuteronomy, or prayers for specific needs of group members. Many people are shy about sharing personal needs or praying aloud in groups, especially before they know the group well. If this is true of your group, then a song and/or some silent prayer and a short closing prayer spoken by the leader might be an appropriate end. You might pray in pairs, if appropriate.