

# Deuteronomy 6

## Introduction to Deuteronomy

The children of Israel are poised to enter the land of Canaan and possess the land. They have paid their 40-year debt, and it's time to move in. The Lord and Moses take this opportunity to remind them of the law that was received on Sinai some 40 years previous. They had been trying to live the law, they had been offering sacrifices, but had faltered so many times.

*Deuteronomy* means "repetition of the law." The historical setting requires a stern reminder. That is what we get in Deuteronomy. The Lord spells out the entire plan: the law, the priesthood, the commandments, and importantly, the blessings and cursings associated with the commandments. The reminder is not subtle; it is sorely needed. If the children of Israel possess the land and begin to break the commandments given them, they will be left without excuse. The Lord had given them opportunity after opportunity, miracle after miracle, and blessing after blessing. Now Moses will rid his garments of their blood by spelling out every consequence of disobedience (Deut. 28:15-68). It's a reminder and a warning. The warning turns out to be perfectly prophetic.

"Deuteronomy is a book about covenant-making. Its setting is the east side of the Jordan River as the second generation of the Israelites who came out of Egypt is about to enter the promised land. Years of experience in the wilderness had chastened them and trained them to keep their covenants. (See Deut. 1:1-5.) The book also coincides with the end of Moses' tenure as leader of Israel. Many of the people had been very young when all of Israel last covenanted to obey the Lord at Mt. Sinai. Frequently at such moments of transition to new leadership, the outgoing leader would bring all the people under covenant again to obey God. Such seems to be the case as Moses passed the mantle of leadership to Joshua.

"Thus, the whole book of Deuteronomy seems to have the structure of a covenant ceremony. Throughout history, especially among ancient peoples, such covenant-making and covenant renewal were regular and consistent. They included an introduction of the parties involved in making the covenant, a review of history up to the initiation of the covenant, individual commandments, a recounting of blessings and curses, a witness and oaths of

acceptance, and a reading of the covenant." (Stephen D. Ricks, "Deuteronomy: A Covenant of Love," *Ensign*, Apr. 1990, 57)

## **Deut. 6:1 These are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments**

We rarely take the time to distinguish between commandments, statutes, and judgments. So let's take a moment. We all know what commandments are. There are more commandments than the famous 10. Some of these are listed below:

### **Commandments**

- 10 Commandments Deut. 5
- Love the Lord with all thine heart, soul, might Deut. 6:5
- Keep these words in thine heart Deut. 6:6
  1. Bind them upon thy hand Deut. 6:8
  2. As frontlets between thine eyes Deut. 6:8
  3. Write them on the posts of thy door Deut. 6:9
  4. Beware lest thou forget the Lord Deut. 6:12
  5. Know that the Lord keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him Deut. 7:9
  6. Remember the way the Lord led thee these 40 years Deut. 8:2
- Teach these words unto thy children Deut. 6:7
- Talk of them when thou sittest in thy house
- Talk of them when thou walkest by the way
- Talk of them when thou liest down
- Talk of them when thou risest up
- Thou shalt teach thy son (daughter) the meaning of the testimonies, statutes, and judgments, as well as the Lord's mighty hand in delivering you out of Egypt Deut. 6:20-25
- Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him Deut. 6:13
- Ye shall not go after the gods of the people around you Deut. 6:14
- Ye shall not tempt the Lord thy God as in Massah Deut. 6:16
- Ye shall diligently keep the commandments, testimonies, and statutes 6:17
- Thou shalt smite them and utterly destroy them Deut. 7:2
- Thou shalt make no covenant with them Deut. 7:2
- Thou shalt not show them any mercy Deut. 7:2
- Thou shalt not make marriages with them Deut. 7:3
- Ye shall destroy their altars, images, and groves Deut. 7:5
- Thou shalt not be afraid of them Deut. 7:18

- Thou shalt not bring any of their idolatrous abominations into thine house
- Don't forget the Lord when thou hast eaten and art full Deut. 8:11-18
- Don't say in thine heart my power and might hath gotten me this wealth
- Remember that the Lord giveth thee power to get wealth
- Thou shalt do that which is right and good to cast out all thine enemies in the land Deut. 6:18
- Bless the Lord for his goodness when ye enjoy the fat of the land Deut. 8:7-10

Statutes are a little different. They are not quite as important as commandments; they are more like rules. Since the rules come from the Lord, they are not rules that can be disregarded. The statutes reinforce the commandments. They are part of the law that hangs off the two great commandments (Matt. 22:40). Yet, they may be more culturally specific than the commandments. For instance, the 10 commandments have not lost any luster in the last four millennia. Although there are usually modern day corollaries, not all of the statutes apply in our day.

If you think about it, we have latter-day statutes—we just don't call them *statutes*. A few examples are that we are to fast once in a month. Teenagers are not to date before they are sixteen. Also, we are counseled to our home teaching and visiting teaching at least monthly. These aren't commandments as much as they are statutes of the Latter-day Saints. Don't get offended saying, "these requirements came from the Prophet of the Lord; therefore they are commandments." That attitude is fine, but really they are more like Old Testament statutes. Like commandments, the statutes also come from the Lord through his prophet. The Lord expects us to keep the statutes but they just don't carry the same weight as the commandments. Here are some examples of statutes from Deuteronomy:

## **Statutes**

- When you go in to possess the land, destroy all the places of idol worship, their altars, pillars, groves, images
- Ye shall not worship as they do Deut. 12:2-4
- Ye shall seek the holy place the Lord chooses Deut. 12:5-7
- There ye shall bring your offerings, sacrifices, and tithes
- There ye shall eat before the Lord Deut. 12:7
- There ye shall rejoice with those of your household Deut. 12:7

- Ye shall not do whatsoever is right in your own eyes to offer sacrifice wherever you want but in the place the Lord shall choose Deut. 12:8-14
- Thou may eat flesh wherever you want but ye may not eat the blood
- Thou may not eat the tithe of thy corn, wine, or oil unless it is at the holy place, before the Lord, as the Levites do Deut. 12:17-18; 14:23
- Forsake not the Levite Deut. 12:19; 14:27
- Thou shalt not inquire about the idolatry of the nations Deut. 12:29-31
- Thou shalt not add or diminish from whatsoever I command Deut. 12:32
- Thou shalt not cut yourselves or make any baldness Deut. 14:1
- Thou mayest eat the beasts that have both cloven foot and chew the cud
- The ox, sheep, goat, hart, roebuck (gazelle), deer, pygarg (antelope), ox, and chamois (goat-antelope species) Deut. 14:4-6
- Thou shalt not eat any abominable animals: :
- The camel, hare, coney (badger), or swine Deut. 14:7-8
- Thou shalt eat whatever sealife has both fins and scales Deut. 14:9
- The eagle, ossifrage (bearded vulture), ospray, gledge (a red kite or raptor), kite (a hawk-like bird of prey), vulture, raven, owl, cuckow (type of roadrunner), hawk, swan, pelican, cormorant (medium to large seabird), stork, heron, lapwing (medium sized wading bird), or bat
- Thou shalt eat clean birds, but not the unclean: Deut. 14:11-20
- Ye shall not eat of anything that dieth of itself Deut. 14:21
- Ye shall not seethe a kid in his mother's milk Deut. 14:21
- Thou shalt tithe all the increase of thy field yearly Deut. 14:2
- If the trip to the holy place is too long to carry the tithe, then thou shalt turn it into money, come to the holy place, and use it to buy meat or drink to be enjoyed before the Lord Deut. 14:24-26
- Every third year, thy tithing shall be given to the Levites Deut. 14:28-29
- The Lord's Release: every 7 years, you will forgive all debts which a brother in Israel owes you Deut. 15:1-6
- Thou shalt furnish him or her liberally of thy flocks, grain, and wine
- Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt
- If he doesn't want to be released from thee, bore a hole through his ear as a sign that he is thy servant forever.
- Thou shalt loan (not give) money to any poor among you-even the year of the Lord's Release Deut. 15:7-9
- Ye shall free all Hebrew manservants and maidservants every 7 years on the Lord's Release: Deut. 15:12-18

Lastly, we get to judgments. Judgments are interesting because the Israelites are living in a theocracy. There is no separation of church and state. There is

no police force to enforce civil law. There is no separation between spiritual law and civil law. They are all together. That means punishments for transgressors must be doled out by the people. There is no democracy in setting policy or choosing leadership, but there is a very egalitarian democracy when it comes to executing the Lord's judgments; everyone is to participate. The entire town is to participate when a transgressor is stoned to death. The deterrent effect seems much more powerful this way. This is completely different than we are used to. The Judgments of the Law of Moses must be understood in this context. Many chapters of Deuteronomy deal with these judgments.

Judgments don't have to be all bad. Just as there are punishments or judgments for transgression, there are blessings for obedience. These have been classified as judgments as well.

## **Judgments**

- If ye are obedient, the Lord will love thee, bless thee, and multiply thee Deut. 7:12-24
  1. He will bless the fruit of thy womb
  2. He will bless the fruit of thy land
  3. He will multiply thy flocks
  4. There will be no barren among you or your cattle
  5. Thou shalt consume all the people of the land
- If thou forget the Lord and worship other gods ye shall utterly perish Deut. 8:20
- If ye shall hearken diligently unto the commandments, I will give you rain in due season and grass for thy cattle Deut. 11:13-15
- If thou serve other gods, the Lord's wrath shall be kindled against you that there be no rain, that the land yield not her fruit Deut. 11:16-17
- If ye lay up these words in your heart and in your soul and teach them to your children, your days will be multiplied in the land Deut. 11:18-21
- If ye diligently keep all these commandments, no man shall be able to stand before you for fear of you Deut. 11:22-25
- Mount Gerizim shall represent blessing; Mount Ebal shall represent cursing Deut. 11:29
- Thou shalt not eat the blood that it may go well with thee and thy children Deut. 12:25
- Thou shalt offer sacrifice in the holy place that it may go well with thee and thy children Deut. 12:26-28

- If a "prophet" comes inviting you to worship other gods, you will not believe him, and that prophet shall be put to death Deut. 13:1-5
- If thy brother entices thee to serve other gods, thou shalt not hearken unto him. Thou shalt surely kill him; and thine hand shall be first upon him to stone him to death Deut. 13:6-10
- If men of a city entice the inhabitants to serve other gods, thou shalt utterly destroy that city, its inhabitants, their cattle, and shall burn the spoil Deut. 13:12-18
- If ye withhold money from the poor, it is a sin; if you provide for the poor, the Lord shall bless thee in all thy works Deut. 15:10
- If ye release thy servants every 7 years as commanded, the Lord shall bless thee in all that thou doest Deut. 15:18

### **Deut. 6:2 keep all his statutes and his commandments**

Already the text reinforces what we have just talked about. The text does not say to "keep all his statutes, commandments, and judgments." You can't keep judgments, they are an elucidation of consequences and punishments. It's the statutes and commandments that the Israelites are to keep.

### **Deut. 6:5 thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart**

"When Jesus was asked, 'Which is the first commandment of all?' he responded by quoting from Deuteronomy:

The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. (Mark 12:28-30; see Matt. 22:37; Luke 10:27; Deut. 6:4-5.)

"While this is probably the most well-known citation from Deuteronomy in the New Testament, it is by no means the only one. In fact, that testament cites only the Psalms, Isaiah, and Exodus more frequently. The New Testament contains more than eighty references to or quotations from Deuteronomy, and all but four of its books cite it. The interest New Testament writers had in the book is not surprising, since Deuteronomy is 'a testimony to the primacy of love in God's dealing with men.'

"In his first epistle, John wrote, 'We love him, because he first loved us.' (1 Jn. 4:19.) In his great sermon to his disciples, Christ said, 'If ye love me, keep my

commandments.' (John 14:15.) No book of the Old Testament better reflects the spirit of these verses than Deuteronomy. God demonstrated his love toward the Israelites by choosing them (see Deut. 7:6-8; Deut. 10:15; Deut. 14:2), liberating them from bondage in Egypt, revealing himself to them at Sinai (see Deut. 1:6), and nurturing them in the wilderness on the way to the promised land. The Israelites, as the children of God and the recipients of his blessings (see Deut. 1:31; Deut. 8:2-6; Deut. 14:2), are expected to return his love. Love (Hebrew 'ahab) and reverence (Hebrew yare'), translated in the King James Version as fear, are to be the motivating factors in Israel's relationship with God. (See Deut. 10:12; Deut. 11:1; Deut. 13:3-4; Deut. 19:9; Deut. 30:20.)

"Moses defines that relationship this way: 'And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear [reverence] the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul.' (Deut. 10:12.)" (Stephen D. Ricks, "Deuteronomy: A Covenant of Love," *Ensign*, Apr. 1990, 55-56)

### **Ezra Taft Benson**

*The great test of life* is obedience to God. "We will prove them herewith," said the Lord, "to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them" (Abr. 3:25)

*The great task of life* is to learn the will of the Lord and then do it.

*The great commandment of life* is to love the Lord...

To love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength is all-consuming and all-encompassing. It is no lukewarm endeavor. It is total commitment of our very being-physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually-to a love of the Lord.

The breadth, depth, and height of this love of God extend into every facet of one's life. Our desires, be they spiritual or temporal, should be rooted in a love of the Lord. Our thoughts and affections should be centered on the Lord. "Let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord," said Alma, "yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever" (Alma 37:36).

Why did God put the first commandment first? Because He knew that if we truly loved Him we would want to keep all of His other commandments. "For this is the love of God," says John, "that we keep his commandments" (1 Jn. 5:3; see also 2 Jn. 1:6).

We must put God in the forefront of everything else in our lives. He must come first, just as He declares in the first of His Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3).

When we put God first, all other things fall into their proper place or drop out of our lives. Our love of the Lord will govern the claims for our affection, the demands on our time, the interests we pursue, and the order of our priorities. ("The Great Commandment-Love the Lord," *Ensign*, May 1988, 4)

### **Deuteronomy 6:7 thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children**

"When first we love the Lord with all our hearts, then we can lead our children to Him in all of our interactions. They will grow in their devotion to the Lord as they see our devotion to Him. They will understand the power of prayer as they hear us pray to a loving Heavenly Father who is there listening and answering our prayers. They will understand faith as they see us live by faith. And they will learn the power of love by the kind and respectful ways that we relate to them. We cannot teach truth to our children apart from the trusting, caring relationships that we have with them. **President Howard W.**

**Hunter** said, 'A successful parent is one who has loved, one who has sacrificed, and one who has cared for, taught, and ministered to the needs of a child' (*Ensign*, Nov. 1983, p. 65).

When our children feel our love for the Lord and our unconditional love for them, then our example becomes a meaningful guide to them as they develop their own spiritual strength. Remember the Lord's commandment to the Israelites to, first, put His words in their hearts, and then He said, "Teach them diligently unto thy children" (Deut. 6:7). In all that we do, we can teach our children to love the Lord. At times our most impressionable teaching happens when we don't even realize that we're teaching. (Anne G. Wirthlin, "Touch the Hearts of the Children," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 81-82)

### **M. Russell Ballard**

Clearly, those of us who have been entrusted with precious children have been given a sacred, noble stewardship, for we are the ones God has appointed to encircle today's children with love and the fire of faith and an understanding of who they are.

How can they know of these most important matters unless we teach them? According to the scriptures, parents should teach children "that all men,

everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God" (Moses 6:57). Children should learn "to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord" (D&C 68:28), and "to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ... to love one another, and to serve one another" (Mosiah 4:15). Our children should know "to what source they may look for a remission of their sins" (2 Ne. 25:26), and they should learn that they are to "love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:5).

Quoting Isaiah, the Savior told the Nephites: "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children" (3 Ne. 22:13).

Peace. What a marvelous, desirable blessing to bring to the souls of our children. If they are at peace within themselves and secure in their knowledge of Heavenly Father and His eternal plan for them, they will be able to cope better with the unrest in the world around them and be prepared better for reaching their divine potential. ("Great Shall Be the Peace of Thy Children," *Ensign*, Apr. 1994, 60)

**Deut. 6:7 teach them... when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way**

### **Spencer W. Kimball**

If we follow the program of the Church for our homes, the prophets before have promised and we now promise that great blessings will come to all who prayerfully and conscientiously apply these practices in their home life. We remember the Prophet Moses' wise instructions, which, had Israel followed them, would have led them to a far different end than to where their rebellious actions took them: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." (Deut. 6:6-7.)

But sometimes we hear excuses such as these: "Time is too short," "We have other things to do on Monday nights," "We are too old to enjoy the lessons," "Our children are too young to understand," "Our children must get their school lessons," "We can't get them all together," "We don't like to tie ourselves down," "I'm all alone and don't need it," "There are special TV shows that night."

Why do we contend with the Almighty when he is so strong and we so weak, when he is omniscient and we can see such a little way? We remember the scripture:

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.

They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright. (Ps. 20:7-8.)

God is our Father, and we are his children. He has given us instructions. We are to follow the path. Righteous home life and activities, inspired teaching of gospel truths in the home, wise parental guidance, father presiding, and father and mother in counsel together-that's the cure for the problems of our time, a remedy for ills in our families. ("Therefore I Was Taught," *Ensign*, Jan. 1982, 5)

### **Howard W. Hunter**

Let us not misunderstand. The responsibilities of parenthood are of the greatest importance. The results of our efforts will have eternal consequences for us and the boys and girls we raise. Anyone who becomes a parent is under strict obligation to protect and love his children and assist them to return to their Heavenly Father. All parents should understand that the Lord will not hold guiltless those who neglect these responsibilities. ("Parents' Concern for Children," *Ensign*, Nov. 1983, 65)