

Deuteronomy *in the* Later Writings



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Kings 22, Neh. 9:6, Jer. 7:1–7, Ps. 148:4, Jer. 29:13, Mic. 6:1–8, Dan. 9:1–19.*

Memory Text: “The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day.” (*Deuteronomy 10:15, NKJV*).

One of the fascinating things about the Bible, especially the Old Testament, is how often it refers or alludes to itself; that is, later writers in the Old Testament refer to earlier ones, using them and their writings to make their point.

Psalm 81, for example, goes back to the book of Exodus and then almost quotes verbatim from the preamble of the Ten Commandments when the psalmist writes: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (*Ps. 81:10, NKJV*).

All through the Old Testament, Genesis—especially the Creation story—is referenced, such as in “I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void; and the heavens, they had no light” (*Jer. 4:23, NKJV; see also Gen. 1:2*).

And, yes, many times the later writers of the Old Testament, such as the prophets, referred back to the book of Deuteronomy, which played such a central role in the covenantal life of early Israel. This week we will focus on how the book was used by later writers. What parts of Deuteronomy did they use, and what points were they making that have relevance for us today?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 11.

The Book of the Law

King Josiah of Judah, who was eight years old when he became king, reigned 31 years (640 B.C.–609 B.C.) before his death on the battlefield. In the eighteenth year of his reign, something happened that, at least for a while, changed the history of God’s people.

Read 2 Kings 22. What lessons can we learn from this incident?

Scholars have long concluded that the “Book of the Law” (*2 Kings 22:8, NKJV*) was Deuteronomy, which apparently had been lost to the people for many years.

“Josiah was deeply stirred as he heard read for the first time the exhortations and warnings recorded in this ancient manuscript. Never before had he realized so fully the plainness with which God had set before Israel ‘life and death, blessing and cursing’ (Deuteronomy 30:19). . . . The book abounded in assurances of God’s willingness to save to the uttermost those who should place their trust fully in Him. As He had wrought in their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, so would He work mightily in establishing them in the Land of Promise and in placing them at the head of the nations of earth.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 393.

All through the next chapter, we can see just how seriously King Josiah sought “to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart and all his soul” (*2 Kings 23:3, NKJV; see also Deut. 4:29, Deut. 6:5, Deut. 10:12, Deut. 11:13*). And this reformation included a cleansing and purging of “all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD” (*2 Kings 23:24, NKJV*).

Deuteronomy was filled with warnings and admonitions against following the practices of the nations around them. The actions of Josiah, and all the things that he did, which included the execution of what must have been idolatrous priests in Samaria (*2 Kings 23:20*), revealed just how far the people of God had strayed from the truth entrusted to them. Instead of remaining the holy people they were supposed to be, they compromised with the world, even though they often thought, *We are just fine with the Lord, thank you.*

What a dangerous deception.

In our own homes or even in church institutions, what things might we need to purge thoroughly in order truly to serve the Lord with all our heart and soul?

The Heaven of Heavens

Deuteronomy makes it so clear that the law and the covenant were central, not only to Israel's relationship to God, but also to the nation's purpose as the "chosen" people (*Deut. 7:6, Deut. 14:2, Deut. 18:5*).

Read Deuteronomy 10:12–15, where much of this idea of law and Israel's chosen status is stressed. What, however, does the Bible mean by the phrase "heaven of heavens"? What point is Moses making with that phrase?

What "heaven of heavens" means isn't absolutely clear, at least in this immediate context, but Moses is pointing to the majesty, power, and grandeur of God. That is, not only heaven itself but also "the heaven of the heavens" belongs to Him, most likely an idiomatic expression that points to God's complete sovereignty over all the creation.

Read the following verses, all based on the phrase that appears first in Deuteronomy. In each case, what point is being made, and how do we see the influence of Deuteronomy there?

1 Kings 8:27 _____

Neh. 9:6 _____

Ps. 148:4 _____

Especially clear in Nehemiah 9 is the theme of God as the Creator and the One who alone should be worshiped. He made everything, even "the heaven of heavens, with all their host" (*Neh. 9:6, NKJV*). In fact, Nehemiah 9:3 says that he "read from the Book of the Law" (*NKJV*), most likely, as in the time of Josiah, the book of Deuteronomy, which explains why a few verses later the Levites, amid their praise and worship of God, used the phrase "heaven of heavens," which came directly from Deuteronomy.

God is the Creator not only of earth but also of "the heaven of heavens." And then to think that this same God went to the cross! Why is worship such an appropriate response to what God has done for us?

Deuteronomy in Jeremiah

Years ago, a young man, an agnostic, was a passionate seeker for truth—whatever that truth was and wherever it led him. Eventually he came not only to believe in God the Father and in Jesus, but he also accepted the Seventh-day Adventist message. His favorite verse in the Bible was Jeremiah 29:13, which reads: “And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (*NKJV*). Years later, however, he found that verse again while studying his Bible, but way back in the book of Deuteronomy. That is, Jeremiah got it from Moses.

Read Deuteronomy 4:23–29. What is the context of this promise to Israel, and how could it relate to us today?

As we already have seen, the book of Deuteronomy had been rediscovered during the reign of King Josiah, and it was under Josiah’s rule that Jeremiah began his ministry. No wonder, then, that the influence of Deuteronomy can be seen in the writings of Jeremiah.

Read Jeremiah 7:1–7. What is Jeremiah telling the people to do, and how does it relate to what had been written in the book of Deuteronomy?

Again and again in Deuteronomy, Moses stressed how the Israelites’ existence in the land of Canaan was conditional, and that if they disobeyed, they would not remain in the place that God had chosen for them. Look at the particular warning in Jeremiah 7:4, the implication being that, yes, this was God’s temple and, yes, they were the chosen people, but none of that mattered if they weren’t obedient.

And that obedience included how they treated strangers, orphans, and widows—an idea that goes directly back to Deuteronomy and some of the covenant stipulations that were incumbent upon them to follow: “You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow’s garment as a pledge” (*Deut. 24:17, NKJV; see also Deut. 24:21; Deut. 10:18, 19; Deut. 27:19*).

Read Jeremiah 4:4 and compare it to Deuteronomy 30:6. What is the message there to the people, and how does the principle equally apply to God’s people today?

What Does the Lord Require?

So much of the writings of the prophets consisted of appeals to faithfulness. And not just faithfulness in general, but, in particular, faithfulness to the Israelites' end of the covenant, which was reaffirmed just before they entered the land. This is what the book of Deuteronomy depicted: the reaffirmation of God's covenant with Israel. The Lord was now, after the 40-year detour, about to fulfill (or to begin to fulfill) more of His covenant promises, His end of the deal. Thus, Moses admonished the people to fulfill their end, as well. Indeed, much of the writings of the prophets was basically the same: appeals for the people to uphold their side of the covenant.

Read Micah 6:1–8. What is the Lord telling the people there, and how does it relate to the book of Deuteronomy? (See also Amos 5:24 and Hos. 6:6.)

Bible scholars have seen in these verses in Micah what is known as a “covenant lawsuit,” in which the Lord “sues” or brings a case against His people for violation of the covenant. In this case, Micah says that the Lord “has a complaint against His people” (*Mic. 6:2, NKJV*), in which the word “complaint” (*riv*) can mean a legal dispute. That is, the Lord was bringing a legal case against them, imagery that implies the legal (besides the relational) aspect of the covenant. This shouldn't be surprising because, after all, central to the covenant was law.

Notice, too, how Micah borrows language directly from Deuteronomy: “‘And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?’” (*Deut. 10:12, 13, NKJV*). Instead, though, of quoting it directly, Micah modifies it by exchanging the “letter of the law” of Deuteronomy for the “spirit of the law,” which is about being just and merciful.

What seems to be happening here is that whatever the outward appearance of religion and piety (lots of animal sacrifices, i.e., “thousands of rams”), that's not what constitutes Israel's covenant relationship with God. What good is all this outward piety if, for example, “they covet fields and take them by violence, also houses, and seize them. So they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance” (*Mic. 2:2, NKJV*)? Israel was supposed to be a light to the world, about which the nations would say, with wonder: “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” (*Deut. 4:6*). Hence, they were to act with wisdom and with understanding, which included treating people with justice and mercy.

Daniel's Prayer

One of the most famous prayers in all the Old Testament is in Daniel 9. Having learned from reading the prophet Jeremiah that the time of Israel's "desolations" (*Dan. 9:2*), 70 years, was soon to be up, Daniel earnestly began praying.

And what a prayer it was—a poignant and tearful supplication in which he confessed his sins and the sins of his people, while at the same time acknowledging God's justice amid the calamity that had befallen them.

Read Daniel 9:1–19. What themes can you find that directly relate back to the book of Deuteronomy?

Daniel's prayer is a summary of exactly what the nation had been warned about in Deuteronomy regarding the fruits of not keeping their end of the covenant. Twice Daniel referred back to "the law of Moses" (*Dan. 9:11, 13*), which certainly included Deuteronomy and, in this case, might have been specifically referring to it.

As Deuteronomy had said, they were driven from the land (*see Deut. 4:27–31 and Deuteronomy 28*) because they didn't obey, exactly what Moses had been told would happen (*Deut. 31:29*).

How tragic, too, that instead of the nations around them saying, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (*Deut. 4:6*), Israel became a "reproach" (*Dan. 9:16*) to those same nations.

In all of Daniel's tears and supplications, he never asked the common question that so many ask when disaster strikes: "Why?" He never asked because, thanks to the book of Deuteronomy, he knew exactly why all these things happened. In other words, Deuteronomy gave Daniel (and other exiles) a context in which to understand that the evil that came upon them wasn't just blind fate, blind chance, but the fruits of their disobedience, exactly what they had been warned about.

But, and perhaps more important, Daniel's prayer expressed the reality that despite these events, there was hope. God had not abandoned them, no matter how much it might have seemed that way. Deuteronomy not only provided a context for understanding their situation, but it also pointed to the promise of restoration, as well.

Read Daniel 9:24–27, the prophecy of Jesus and His death on the cross. Why would this prophecy be given to Daniel (and to the rest of us) in the context of Israel's exile and the promise of the people's return?

Further Thought: “This [Micah 6:1–8] is one of the great passages of the OT. It, like Amos 5:24 and Hos. 6:6, epitomizes the message of the eighth-century prophets. The passage opens with a beautiful example of a covenant lawsuit in which the prophet summons the people to hear the charge Yahweh has against them. The mountains and hills are the jury because they have been around a long time and have witnessed God’s dealing with Israel. Rather than directly charging Israel with breaking the covenant, God asks Israel if they have any charges against [Him]. ‘What have I done? How have I wearied you?’ In the face of injustice some of the poor people may have become ‘weary in well doing.’ In the face of opportunities to get rich quick some of the land-owners might have grown weary of keeping the covenant laws.”—Ralph L. Smith, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 32, *Micah-Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Word Books, 1984), p. 50.

“In the reformation that followed, the king [Josiah] turned his attention to the destruction of every vestige of idolatry that remained. So long had the inhabitants of the land followed the customs of the surrounding nations in bowing down to images of wood and stone, that it seemed almost beyond the power of man to remove every trace of these evils. But Josiah persevered in his effort to cleanse the land.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 401.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Sure, we’re Seventh-day Adventists, and with our present-truth message, we see ourselves and (rightly so) in the same place that the people of ancient Israel had been in: having truths that the world around them needed to hear. It’s a great privilege for us. How well, though, do you think we are living up to the responsibilities that come with such privilege?
- ② Imagine being Daniel, having seen your nation invaded and defeated, and knowing that the temple, the center of your whole religious faith, was destroyed by idolatrous pagans. How, though, could knowledge of the book of Deuteronomy have been very faith-sustaining for him (or any other Jew) at this time? That is, how did the book help him understand all that was happening and why it happened? In a similar way, how does our understanding of Scripture as a whole help us deal with trying times and events that otherwise, without our knowledge of Scripture, could be very discouraging to us? What should the answer teach us about how central the Bible must be to our faith?
- ③ In class, go over the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27. What role does the covenant have in that prophecy, and why is the idea of covenant so important to it—and to us?