

# *Jesus's Use of Deuteronomy*

Speaking to Israel at the end of his life, Moses said, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him” (Deut. 18:15). Peter identified Jesus as the One who fulfilled this prophecy (Acts 3:22). Readers of the Gospels should not be surprised, therefore, to see that Jesus quoted frequently from Deuteronomy.

## **THE WILDERNESS OF TEMPTATION**

Deuteronomy consists of a series of three messages Moses delivered to the second generation of Israelites after the exodus. The first generation failed to enter the land (Num. 14:22-23) and died in the wilderness after forty years of wandering. Deuteronomy was a warning to Israel not to make the sinful choices of the first generation and not to forget the Lord when they entered the promised land.

Jesus, like Israel, faced temptations in the wilderness in preparation for His public ministry (Matt. 4:1). His responses in the

wilderness, however, were quite different from those of unfaithful Israel. Jesus faced three temptations from the devil, and after each one He responded with a quotation from Deuteronomy. In each instance Jesus demonstrated obedience to the Father in contrast to the Israelites' failure in their wilderness experiences.

In the first temptation to turn stones to bread (Matt. 4:2-3), Jesus responded with Deuteronomy 8:3, which referred to God's provision of manna for Israel in the wilderness. The Israelites grumbled and complained when they lacked food or water (Ex. 16:2). Jesus trusted the father to take care of His needs and refused to yield to the devil's suggestion.

In the second temptation (for Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the temple) Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16. This verse warned young Israelites not to test God as their fathers had done at Massah. Israel had grumbled against the Lord when they lacked water at Rephidim (later named “Massah,” Ex. 17:1-2). God provided water

but only after a rebuke for their lack of faith and testing of Him (v. 7). Jesus demonstrated His trust in God's promises and refused to test Him by jumping from a great height.

In the third temptation, the devil offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world if He would bow down to him. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20, which command worship of God alone. Israel turned to idolatry at Sinai (Ex. 32:1-6) and later at Moab (Num. 25:1-3). Jesus maintained His obedience to the Father and did not deviate from absolute submission to His will.

Jesus succeeded where Israel failed by steadfastly trusting the Lord in the wilderness and keeping His commands. He was the "true Israel" who obeyed. He demonstrated His agreement with the commands of Deuteronomy as He wielded "the sword of the Spirit" to defeat Satan (Eph. 6:17).

### **THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT**

During His public ministry, the scribes and Pharisees interpreted Jesus's rejection of their human

traditions as a violation of the Mosaic law (Matt. 15:1-2). Jesus responded by dismissing their rules as human inventions and charged them with specific violations of the Mosaic law (vv. 3-9). He said He had not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them (5:17-18). Unlike anyone before or after Him, Jesus obeyed the law of God in its entirety. He was supremely qualified to answer every question about the meaning and proper application of the law.

In Matthew 22:36, an expert in the law asked Jesus, "which command in the law is the greatest?" Jewish scribes traditionally taught that the law contained 613 individual commandments. They differentiated between 365 negative commands and 248 positive commands. Jesus did not hesitate; He quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 as the greatest of the commandments.

Deuteronomy 6:4 begins with the Hebrew verb "listen" (*shema*). Verses 4-9 became the most famous Old Testament passage in Judaism (often referred to as "the Shema"). Verses 4-5 taught two essential truths. Verse 4

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***"Love and obedience are inseparable."***

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described the uniqueness of the one true God who revealed Himself to Israel. Verse 5 commanded believers to love God supremely. If we love God with the greatest love, we will seek to obey all of His commands. Love and obedience are inseparable, as Jesus taught His disciples (John 14:15). This is the greatest command because it is the basis for obedience to every command.

In Deuteronomy, Moses challenged Israel to love the Lord and obey His commands. They were to impress their children with God's Law for their safety and well-being. Deuteronomy was written in the form of the suzerainty treaties of the Ancient Near East. The king would establish laws, and the people accepted the responsibility of obeying them. Obedience would bring blessings and disobedience curses. God framed His covenant with Israel as their King. Israel failed repeatedly until God removed them from the land and sent them into exile.

Moses was a type of Christ. He led Israel out of the bondage of Egyptian slavery, baptized them in the Red Sea, and led them to the promised land (1 Cor. 10:1-2). Hebrews states that Jesus is superior to Moses because Jesus built the house (people of God), whereas Moses was only a servant in the house (Heb. 3:4-6). Moses revealed the law of God as the mediator of the Old Covenant, but only Jesus fully obeyed the

law of God. Moses gave the law, but grace and truth were realized through Jesus (John 1:17).

Jesus did not quote Deuteronomy 6:5 to offer a way of salvation through obedience to the law. Everyone has broken the perfect law of God (Rom. 3:23). Jesus revealed the law to demonstrate sinners' need for grace and to make obvious the necessity of His substitutionary atonement. The elaborate institution of an Old Testament sacrificial system and priesthood pointed to the universal violation of the law. Deuteronomy 6:5 uniquely described the eternal relationship of God the Son with God the Father (John 14:31). Perfect love resulted in perfect obedience—making Jesus uniquely the only acceptable sacrifice for sin.

We should not be surprised at the prominent place Jesus gave Deuteronomy in His private life and public ministry. He echoed Moses's words and amplified them through obedience to every divine command. He revealed that love—not fear—was the motivation of every genuine believer. He summons us to resist temptation and love God more than sin so that we (the Church) may be His holy people who love and obey His commandments as well (Deut. 7:6-13; John 14:21-24).

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# COMING **NEXT QUARTER**



## **MATTHEW 1-13**

Session 1: **Affirmation** (Matthew 3:13-4:11)

Session 2: **Invitation** (Matthew 4:12-25)

Session 3: **Worship the King** (Matthew 2:1-12)

Session 4: **True Righteousness** (Matthew 5:13-20,43-48)

Session 5: **Treasure** (Matthew 6:19-34)

Session 6: **Authority Acknowledged** (Matthew 7:15-29)

Session 7: **Every Life Valued** (Matthew 8:1-4,14-17; 9:1-8)

Session 8: **Mercy Extended** (Matthew 9:10-19,23-26)

Session 9: **Loyalty Tested** (Matthew 10:16-20,26-34)

Session 10: **Confronting Doubts** (Matthew 11:1-6,16-24)

Session 11: **Rejecting Legalism** (Matthew 12:1-14)

Session 12: **Judgment Coming** (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43)

# *Explore*

“You will seek me and find me when you search for me  
with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:13



## NUMBERS AND DEUTERONOMY

As road trips wind down, travelers start thinking about the work waiting for them back home. The ancient Israelites were no exception. The books of Numbers and Deuteronomy recount how the nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness for four decades and how God taught them to be His people as they approached the promised land. He wanted to remind them how much still needed to be done once they got “home.” As you study these final two books of the Pentateuch, ask God to show you what He longs to accomplish in you and through you. Learn how to avoid a life of spiritual wandering and embrace the best He has to offer.

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