

Deuteronomy

TRENT CASTO



P U B L I S H I N G

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In loving memory of Rev. M. Jack Bohman
(May 11, 1944–January 23, 2022),
evangelist, church planter, preacher, and—above all—pastor.

To Hudson, Anna Kate, William, and the children
of Covenant Church of Naples,
with prayers that you will pass these things on to your children also.

And to Emily,
whose love reflects the covenantal faithfulness at the heart of this book.

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

In every generation there is a fresh need for the faithful exposition of God's Word in the church. At the same time, the church must constantly do the work of theology: reflecting on the teaching of Scripture, confessing its doctrines of the Christian faith, and applying them to contemporary culture. We believe that these two tasks—the expositional and the theological—are interdependent. Our doctrine must derive from the biblical text, and our understanding of any particular passage of Scripture must arise from the doctrine taught in Scripture as a whole.

We further believe that these interdependent tasks of biblical exposition and theological reflection are best undertaken in the church, and most specifically in the pulpits of the church. This is all the more true since the study of Scripture properly results in doxology and praxis—that is, in praise to God and practical application in the lives of believers. In pursuit of these ends, we are pleased to present the Reformed Expository Commentary as a fresh exposition of Scripture for our generation in the church. We hope and pray that pastors, teachers, Bible study leaders, and many others will find this series to be a faithful, inspiring, and useful resource for the study of God's infallible, inerrant Word.

The Reformed Expository Commentary has four fundamental commitments. First, these commentaries aim to be *biblical*, presenting a comprehensive exposition characterized by careful attention to the details of the text. They are not exegetical commentaries—commenting word by word or even verse by verse—but integrated expositions of whole passages of Scripture. Each commentary will thus present a sequential, systematic treatment of an entire book of the Bible, passage by passage. Second, these commentaries are unashamedly *doctrinal*. We are committed to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system

Series Introduction

of doctrine taught in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Each volume will teach, promote, and defend the doctrines of the Reformed faith as they are found in the Bible. Third, these commentaries are *redemptive-historical* in their orientation. We believe in the unity of the Bible and its central message of salvation in Christ. We are thus committed to a Christ-centered view of the Old Testament, in which its characters, events, regulations, and institutions are properly understood as pointing us to Christ and his gospel, as well as giving us examples to follow in living by faith. Fourth, these commentaries are *practical*, applying the text of Scripture to contemporary challenges of life—both public and private—with appropriate illustrations.

The contributors to the Reformed Expository Commentary are all pastor-scholars. As pastor, each author will first present his expositions in the pulpit ministry of his church. This means that these commentaries are rooted in the teaching of Scripture to real people in the church. While aiming to be scholarly, these expositions are not academic. Our intent is to be faithful, clear, and helpful to Christians who possess various levels of biblical and theological training—as should be true in any effective pulpit ministry. Inevitably this means that some issues of academic interest will not be covered. Nevertheless, we aim to achieve a responsible level of scholarship, seeking to promote and model this for pastors and other teachers in the church. Significant exegetical and theological difficulties, along with such historical and cultural background as is relevant to the text, will be treated with care.

We strive for a high standard of enduring excellence. This begins with the selection of the authors, all of whom have proved to be outstanding communicators of God's Word. But this pursuit of excellence is also reflected in a disciplined editorial process. Each volume is edited by both a series editor and a testament editor. The testament editors, Iain Duguid for the Old Testament and Daniel Doriani for the New Testament, are accomplished pastors and respected scholars who have taught at the seminary level. Their job is to ensure that each volume is sufficiently conversant with up-to-date scholarship and is faithful and accurate in its exposition of the text. As series editors, we oversee each volume to ensure its overall quality—including excellence of writing, soundness of teaching, and usefulness in application. Working together as an editorial team, along with the publisher, we are

devoted to ensuring that these are the best commentaries that our gifted authors can provide, so that the church will be served with trustworthy and exemplary expositions of God's Word.

It is our goal and prayer that the Reformed Expository Commentary will serve the church by renewing confidence in the clarity and power of Scripture and by upholding the great doctrinal heritage of the Reformed faith. We hope that pastors who read these commentaries will be encouraged in their own expository preaching ministry, which we believe to be the best and most biblical pattern for teaching God's Word in the church. We hope that lay teachers will find these commentaries among the most useful resources they rely on for understanding and presenting the text of the Bible. And we hope that the devotional quality of these studies of Scripture will instruct and inspire each Christian who reads them in joyful, obedient discipleship to Jesus Christ.

May the Lord bless all who read the Reformed Expository Commentary. We commit these volumes to the Lord Jesus Christ, praying that the Holy Spirit will use them for the instruction and edification of the church, with thanksgiving to God the Father for his unceasing faithfulness in building his church through the ministry of his Word.

Richard D. Phillips
Philip Graham Ryken
Series Editors

PREFACE

Ignorance of the Old Testament constricts our Christian faith. To understand what Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jesus, Paul, or James said, we need to be thoroughly grounded in the same texts as they were. If we desire to understand the theology of the Old Testament to live more faithfully as Christians in the present day, there is no better text to study than Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is the central theological text of the Old Testament. Thus, I intend to show in this commentary how the theology and themes of love and loyalty developed in Deuteronomy are expressed throughout the rest of the Bible.

The book of Deuteronomy presents itself to us as the words of Moses. This commentary will approach it as such, while recognizing that someone else must have put the book into its final form, as evidenced by occasional references to Moses in the third person¹ and an account of his death in chapter 34. But the words of the book are the words of Moses. At its most basic structural level, Deuteronomy is a series of three messages that Moses preached to the people of Israel on the plains of Moab at the end of their wilderness wanderings. More helpfully, the book follows the general pattern of Hittite suzerain-vassal treaties from the second millennium B.C., and its similarities to those treaties helps us date the book to the time of Moses or shortly thereafter. It therefore functions as a renewal of the covenant made at Sinai to prepare the people of God for life in the land after Moses.

Following that treaty framework, Deuteronomy 1:1–5 is the preamble that introduces Moses as the one who speaks on behalf of God as the mediator of this covenant. Deuteronomy 1:6–4:40 forms the historical prologue, reminding the people of Israel what God had done for them in the past, and

1. Deut. 1:1, 3, 5; 4:41, 44–46; 5:1; 27:1, 9, 11; 29:1–2; 31:1, 7, 9–10, 14, 16, 22, 24–25, 30; 32:44–45, 48; 33:1, 4; 34:1, 5, 7–10, 12.

Preface

what he would continue to do in the future. The stipulations of the covenant are found in the large middle section of Deuteronomy 5:1–26:19. These are the laws that God expects his people to abide by as a show of their loyalty to him and their recognition of his ownership of them, the land, and everything in it. I will interpret and apply the law by making use of the moral, civil, and ceremonial law categories as described in the Westminster Confession of Faith, while also recognizing the limitations of that framework. We are no longer under the terms of the covenant that God made with his people at Sinai, but the law of God continues to be of tremendous use to us as those under the terms of the new covenant, and his moral law forever binds all people. Following the Hittite treaty pattern, the blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience are laid out next in chapters 27–28. Witnesses are called in chapter 30, and in chapter 31 the people are commanded to assemble occasionally to be reminded of what is in this document. Finally, chapters 32–34 close with the transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua.

The basis of this commentary was a series of sermons I preached to the people of Covenant Church of Naples. I felt a burden to preach through this book long before I had the courage to finally do it. For those pastors and Bible teachers who are considering doing so, I pray that this book will be an encouragement for you to go forward. It never ceased to amaze me or the people of our church how much God had to say to us through this profound book. At its core, the book of Deuteronomy is about what it means to live as the covenant people of God. Here Moses recounts God's love for his people expressed in their rescue from Egypt, preservation in the wilderness, and instruction in the law. All the while, Deuteronomy calls forth a loving response from God's people: to remember what he has done in the past, to trust him in the present, and to obey him going forward into the future. My prayer for you is that this commentary, alongside your study of Deuteronomy, will likewise lead you to remember, trust, and obey.

Trent Casto
Naples, Florida

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Preaching through Deuteronomy requires tremendous patience and effort for any pastor. But it may require even more from his congregation! I want to acknowledge the people of Covenant Church of Naples for their patience with me as I attempted to preach my way through this tremendous book of Moses. Your insatiable hunger for God's Word gave me the confidence to launch into a deep exposition of this book. Thank you for the inspiration and your encouragement along the way. All proceeds from this book return to Covenant Church for the advancement of the gospel from Naples to the ends of the earth.

Writing a book on Deuteronomy required the help of many people, only some of whom I can mention here. I first want to acknowledge my wife, Emily, and our children, who have continually supported me in my writing, even though it means that I'm in my study or away from home more often than I would be otherwise. Without the stability and love that you each contribute to our home, a project such as this would not be possible. Thank you for your part in holding me up and helping this book come to life. I love you and our life together.

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and made countless improvements to this book before it ever reached our formal editors. Thank you, all.

When our editors did finally get their chance to work on this manuscript, they did their work thoroughly, for which I am deeply grateful. Iain Duguid and Rick Phillips offered excellent feedback, corrections, and suggestions, and Karen Magnuson and John Hughes continue to amaze me by their ability to take an already finely edited book and make it even better. Thank you.

I also want to acknowledge my parents, Jerry and Vickey Casto, who did their best to embody Deuteronomy 6:6–7 in our home and who continue to live sacrificially in obedience to the Great Commission. Finally, I want to thank God for Pastor Jack Bohman, who faithfully shepherded my family for many years. Long after I left my childhood home, Pastor would continue to call on occasion to check in on me. In our last conversation, I was able to share with him the vision for this book and hear some of his thoughts. Though he's no longer here on earth to see the book in print, it wouldn't exist except for his long and faithful ministry at the Buckhannon Alliance Church. May the gospel seed he sowed continue to bear fruit for generations to come.

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|--|
| ApOTC | Apollos Old Testament Commentary |
| BDB | Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, <i>The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> (Hendrickson, 2005) |
| CBQ | <i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i> |
| CSB | Christian Standard Bible |
| EDEJ | <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism</i> , ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (Eerdmans, 2010) |
| EPSC | Evangelical Press Study Commentary |
| ESV | English Standard Version |
| IC | Interpretation Commentary |
| ISBE | <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> , ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 4 vols. (Zondervan, 1979–88) |
| JETS | <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i> |
| JPSTC | Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary |
| JSOT | <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> |
| KJV | King James Version |
| NAC | New American Commentary |
| NASB | New American Standard Bible |
| NBD | <i>New Bible Dictionary</i> , ed. I. Howard Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, and Donald J. Wiseman, 3rd ed. (InterVarsity Press, 1996) |

Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|---|
| NDBT | <i>New Dictionary of Biblical Theology</i> , ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy (InterVarsity Press, 2000) |
| NIBC | New International Biblical Commentary |
| NICOT | New International Commentary on the Old Testament |
| NIDOTTE | <i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> , ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, 5 vols. (Zondervan, 1997) |
| NIV | New International Version |
| NIVAC | NIV Application Commentary |
| NSBT | New Studies in Biblical Theology |
| s.v. | <i>sub verbo, sub voce</i> (“under the word”) |
| TOTC | Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries |
| WCF | Westminster Confession of Faith |
| WLC | Westminster Larger Catechism |
| WSC | Westminster Shorter Catechism |



Deuteronomy

REMEMBER, TRUST, AND OBEY:
LIVING AS GOD'S COVENANT PEOPLE

1

GOD'S COVENANT PEOPLE

Deuteronomy 1:1–5

*Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses
undertook to explain this law. (Deut. 1:5)*



he world as we're experiencing it right now is not the way it's supposed to be: the scenes of devastation caused by a seemingly endless series of natural disasters, the sad stories of violence and repressive regimes always on the move, and the constant reports of the latest flu or other virus threatening the population. It wasn't supposed to be like this. It won't always be like this. But right now, the world is enslaved in the clutches of sin and death (1 John 5:19). Our estate of misery is a consequence of our rebellion against the one true God. Yet despite our rebellion, God loves his creation, and he has a plan to redeem his covenant people, to bring us into a place of rest, and to bless us with his presence forever.

In the book of Genesis, after humanity rebelled against him, God made a promise to the serpent who had lured Eve into rebellion against God: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). The story of history is going to be a story of conflict between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman. The serpent

God's Covenant People

and his offspring represent evil and everything that has gone wrong with God's good creation. The woman and her offspring represent God's covenant people, and one offspring in particular who will bruise the serpent's head. The serpent will be defeated. But how is this going to take place? The rest of the Bible tells the story.

A PROMISE OF LAND, PEOPLE, AND BLESSING

In Genesis 12, God called a man named Abram who was worshiping idols in the city of Ur, and God made this promise to him:

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Gen. 12:1–3)

God promised Abram a land, a people, and a blessing so that he would be a blessing. God chose one man to begin his project of redemption, but with the intention to bless all the families of the earth in him.

In Genesis 15, God made a covenant with Abram. At this point in the story, Abram was not a great nation. In fact, he did not even have a single child or one parcel of land. So God brought him outside and reaffirmed the promise of offspring: "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them. . . . So shall your offspring be" (Gen. 15:5). Then God reaffirmed the promise of land: "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess" (v. 7). Abram believed God, but also asked God how he could know for sure that he would have this land. So God instructed Abram to cut some animals in half, leaving a little path for walking between them. Then as the sun was going down, Abram fell asleep and God spoke:

"Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your

fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.” (Gen. 15:13–21)

God told Abram in advance how his descendants were going to go into a land of affliction without mentioning Egypt specifically. But God also promised to bring them out and then bring them into the land currently occupied by the various nations listed. Then, just a couple of chapters later, God reaffirmed the covenant with Abram again, changing his name to Abraham and giving him the covenant sign of circumcision. God promised:

And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God. (Gen. 17:7–8)

As a sign of these covenant promises to make Abraham a great nation, to give him a land, and to be the God of his descendants, every male in Israel was to be circumcised.

As we fast-forward through the rest of Genesis, we see God give Abraham a son, Isaac, who would be the inheritor of these great promises. Isaac fathered Jacob, and Jacob fathered many sons, who would become a great people in the land of Egypt where they went to escape famine. The family of Abraham was afflicted for four hundred years in the land of Egypt, exactly as God had said it would happen in Genesis 15:13. But God did not forget his promise. Exodus tells the story of how God raised up a redeemer to set his people free from their slavery in Egypt. Through Moses, God poured out ten different plagues on the most powerful nation on the earth, humiliating their so-called gods. Just as God promised, they did come out of slavery with great possessions.

God's Covenant People

But what next? If we suppose that these newly liberated slaves were just going to go and start a new nation from scratch, we underestimate the impact of four hundred years of slavery. The Israelites knew nothing about war or governance or nation building. Sandra Richter helps us appreciate just how improbable it would be for Israel to succeed:

In addition to their theological confusion, the people of Israel had been shaped by generations of slavery. Pause to consider the long-term effects of such conditions. Stripped of the opportunity to organize their own lives and society, illiterate, abused and dominated, how would this mob become a nation? By what laws would they rule themselves, structure their religion, organize their calendar? How would they be shaped into a fighting force that had any chance of conquering Canaan?¹

They had a number of high hurdles to overcome if they were going to be a light to the nations as God intended. So what did God do? He brought them out of Egypt, and he led them to a desert place in the Sinai Peninsula called Horeb. (Outside Deuteronomy, it is normally referred to as Mount Sinai.) There at Horeb, Yahweh, the God of Israel, defined the relationship for his people. At Horeb, God established the descendants of Abraham as a new nation by making a covenant with them. The events are recorded beginning in Exodus 19.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GOD'S COVENANT PEOPLE

To understand God's covenant relationship with his people in the book of Deuteronomy, we need to understand the suzerain-vassal treaty. When Deuteronomy was written, sometime around 1400–1200 B.C. (depending on when the exodus is dated), there was a common kind of covenant relationship called a suzerain/vassal treaty. In this arrangement, the suzerain was the greater military power and the vassal was the lesser. The suzerain would take authority over the vassal kingdom, demanding its submission. The suzerain had authority over the people and the land of the vassal nation and ultimately

1. Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (IVP Academic, 2008), 83.

owned everything they produced. Some portion of that produce was required as tribute from the vassal nation. The suzerain ruler then bound himself to protect his vassal and to fight for it if an enemy arose. If the vassal called for help and salvation from an enemy, the suzerain was expected to come. In return, the vassal was to remain loyal to the suzerain and not make any other alliances. This kind of loyalty had a name in Hebrew: *hesed*. We typically translate it as “steadfast love,” but at its heart the word refers to “covenant faithfulness.”² If the vassal did not remain loyal, the suzerain would turn his power against the vassal, and likely take away the land grant and send the people into exile.³ Typically in this kind of covenant arrangement, the suzerain-vassal would be referred to as father/son or lord/servant. To keep the covenant was “to love” one’s suzerain, and to break the covenant was “to hate” him.⁴ Does any of this sound familiar?

This background is so important because in the 1950s, biblical scholars studying these Hittite suzerain-vassal treaties made the compelling case that God’s covenant with his people follows the same pattern, and it can be seen in the structure of the book of Deuteronomy.⁵ These treaties were common and had a standard form, much like a marriage license or a bill of sale today. Here are the standard components of a second-millennium B.C. Hittite suzerain-vassal treaty: (1) *Preamble*: In the preamble, the suzerain identified himself, frequently using language such as this: “These are the words of . . .” (2) *Historical prologue*: In the historical prologue, the suzerain reminded his vassal of the basis of his obligation to the suzerain. Usually, it was a reminder of how the suzerain had saved, protected, or provided for the vassal. (3) *Stipulations*: These were the detailed expectations required of the vassal in terms of economics, warfare, and so on, as well as the expectations of loyalty to the suzerain. (4) *Blessings and curses*: Blessings were promised if the vassal remained faithful and loyal to the suzerain, and curses promised if not. (5) *Witnesses*: Typically, deities were called on to witness the covenant that was made to ensure the loyalty of all the parties involved. After oaths

2. Richter, 75.

3. Richter, 74.

4. Richter, 79.

5. J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (InterVarsity Press, 1974), 17. The pattern can also be seen in Exodus 19:1–23:19, an event being recounted here in Deuteronomy.

were made and sacrifices offered to seal the covenant, each partner was to go home with a copy of the covenant and instructions to read it periodically so that everyone would remember the deal.⁶

DEUTERONOMY AS A COVENANT TREATY

When we look at the big picture of Deuteronomy, we see that it is laid out very much like a Hittite suzerain-vassal treaty. In other words, the idea of a suzerain's forming a covenant with his vassal people was not something that God created to advance redemptive history. But by God's providence, the covenant concept was already prevalent in the ancient world when God entered into a covenant with Israel in Exodus. God co-opted the concept of covenant to communicate his plan of redemption to his people.⁷ He is the suzerain, and his people are the vassals.

In Deuteronomy 1:1–5, the preamble introduces Moses, who speaks on behalf of God as the mediator of this covenant. Deuteronomy 1:6–4:40 forms the historical prologue. It reminds the people of Israel what God has done for them in the past, and what he will continue to do in the future. The question raised in this section is not whether God will be faithful to keep his promises, but whether his people will be faithful to their God. Success in taking the land is going to depend on their relationship to their suzerain more than on their military might.⁸ The stipulations of the covenant are found in the large middle section of Deuteronomy 5:1–26:19. These are all the laws that God expects his people to abide by as a show of their loyalty to him and their recognition of his ownership of them, the land, and everything in it. The sheer breadth and diversity of laws illustrate that no area of life is unimportant in this covenant community.⁹ The people that the Lord rescued from Egypt are not just any people; they are his people, and they are to learn to live as his people in every area of life. The blessings

6. Peter Craigie rightly understands the covenant structure of Deuteronomy to be the key to interpreting its theological significance. For a helpful overview of some of the key theological themes following the basic breakdown of the covenant form, see Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Eerdmans, 1976), 36–45.

7. Richter, *Epic of Eden*, 82.

8. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 92.

9. Craigie, 43.

for obedience and curses for disobedience are laid out in chapters 27–28, and then in chapter 30 witnesses are called:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them. (Deut. 30:19–20)

These are the words of a suzerain to his vassal, the words of God to his people. If they reject this covenant, they are choosing death, and neither they nor their children will remain in the land. Finally, in chapter 31 there is a command to assemble the people periodically to reread the words of this covenant and remember them.

Why are we considering this information so closely? Because Deuteronomy presents God to us as a suzerain king fulfilling his promises to his vassal people, and posing the question whether his people are going to be faithful to him and experience life or reject his ways and end in death. These questions still confront every reader of Deuteronomy today because God still demands of us the same love and loyalty as he did of the people of Israel: will we remember what he has done, trust him to be faithful to his promises, and obey his commands?

THE LONG WAY OF DISOBEDIENCE

That background information brings us to the opening words of Deuteronomy 1:1, “These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab.” Deuteronomy’s opening words serve as the title of the book in Hebrew: “These are the words.” Deuteronomy consists of the words that Moses spoke to the people of Israel before they began their conquest of the promised land under Joshua. In fact, it is basically three speeches that can be delineated by key words of introduction: 1:1–4:43; 4:44–28:68; 29:1–30:20. Where does Moses deliver these speeches? Deuteronomy 1:1 says, “These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan

in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab.” But verse 5 states, “Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to explain this law.” So which is it? It is probably best not to see this as an either/or situation. The place names mentioned in verse 1 are difficult to identify, although most likely they refer to various places in the Sinai Peninsula or perhaps the Arabah south of the Dead Sea.¹⁰ It is possible that Moses originally delivered some of the content of Deuteronomy at these places along the way over the course of the Israelites’ forty years of wandering.¹¹ But now here on the plains of Moab (1:5), he is summing it all up and preaching to them these messages in preparation for their entry into the land as God’s covenant people. In other words, the content of Deuteronomy is not necessarily new to the Israelites when Moses delivers it here on the plains of Moab. Rather, Deuteronomy is a renewal of the covenant that God made with his people at Sinai nearly forty years earlier.¹² In fact, our English word “Deuteronomy” comes from a word in the Greek translation of Deuteronomy 17:18, *deuteronomion*, which means “second law.” Deuteronomy is not a second law, but an exposition of the law that God gave at Sinai forty years earlier. As we read Deuteronomy, we recognize that it is Moses’ exposition of the law to God’s people. Why is it necessary for Moses to preach this law to them and remind them of this covenant?

The answer is cleverly crafted in Deuteronomy 1:2 and easy to miss if we are not paying attention: “It is eleven days’ journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea.” “Horeb” is Deuteronomy’s preferred name for Mount Sinai.¹³ Moses says that it is an eleven-day journey from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea by the way of Mount Seir.¹⁴ Since we do not know exactly

10. See Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, JPSTC (Jewish Publication Society, 1996), xlv, for possibilities. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 90, locates these places in the general region of the Transjordan.

11. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 3.

12. Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, NIBC: Old Testament 4 (Hendrickson, 2007), 1.

13. The only place in Deuteronomy where “Sinai” is used is in Deuteronomy 33:2. Everywhere else, it is referred to as Horeb. Outside Deuteronomy, “Horeb” is used only a handful of times.

14. If Mount Seir is located southeast of the Dead Sea at Jebel Esh-Shera as some believe, it is not clear why the Israelites would have gone there before going to Kadesh-barnea. Yet the Hebrew word for “mount” frequently refers not to a particular mountain, but to a highlands or hill country region (such as the familiar “hill country of Ephraim” used throughout the Old Testament). Additionally, route names in the Bible are usually designated by their terminating points. Much as a subway line in the city is identified by its terminating point, so “the way of Mount Seir” was likely a road that ran through Kadesh-barnea and ended at Mount Seir or in the Seir Highlands. For more, see Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 4.

where Horeb was located, it is impossible for us to identify this road. But we know that it is supposed to be only an eleven-day journey from Horeb, where Israel received the law, to Kadesh-barnea, which is on the southern border of the promised land. But verse 3 tells us that Moses is speaking in the “fortieth year.” Why does Moses mention this little detail, juxtaposing the eleven days’ journey with its being the fortieth year since the exodus? He does so to serve as a reminder to Israel and to us that the people’s last thirty-eight years of wandering in the wilderness were completely unnecessary. The death of that whole generation was completely unnecessary. If the people of God had only remembered that God delivered them from the mighty power of Egypt, if they had only trusted in God to fight for them as their suzerain, if they had only obeyed his command to go up and take the land, they could have avoided the suffering of the last thirty-eight years. It needed to be only an eleven-day trip!

It is like a family road trip in south Florida from Naples to Miami. One day a family sets out from Naples, and thirty-eight years later they arrive in Miami. An observer notes, “It’s only a two-hour drive to Miami from Naples.” But the observer does not say it to the parents who started out on the journey, because they died in the Everglades along the way! Instead, their children are wondering, “How did a two-hour trip turn into thirty-eight years?” And the answer is this: by not following directions. Or to put it more biblically: disobedience resulting from a failure to trust resulting from a failure to remember. If we were one of the people in this new generation poised to enter the promised land now, we would not want to repeat the same mistake as the last generation. But of course, this remains to be seen.

Deuteronomy 1:3-5 sets the scene for the rest of the book:

In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him in commandment to them, after he had defeated Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth and in Edrei. Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to explain this law.

It has now been forty years since God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and established his covenant with them. Rather than going in immediately and taking the land as God’s vassal nation, they did not remember, they did

not trust, and they did not obey, as we will see in coming chapters. They have spent thirty-eight years wandering in the wilderness, and now they are about to get a second chance at taking the land that God promised them. On the eastern border of the promised land, they have just defeated two kings, Sihon and Og. It is a good sign that their suzerain, God, is fighting for them and will give them more victories going forward. But before they go in, Moses reminds them of this covenant that God made with them to be his people when he brought them out of Egypt. Over the course of our study of this book, we are going to learn in detail what God has promised to do for his people as their suzerain, and what it means to remember, trust, and obey as his covenant people. But right at the outset, we are reminded of the consequences of not remembering, not trusting, and not obeying.

LIVING AS GOD'S COVENANT PEOPLE TODAY

We are no longer under the terms of the covenant that God made with his people at Sinai, but we *are* under the terms of the new covenant, a covenant that is far greater than the covenant God made at Sinai. Despite Moses' best intentions for the people of Israel, he knew that they were not going to live up to the terms of this covenant. They were going to seek out other suzerains and ultimately bring the curses of the covenant upon themselves and be exiled from the land that God had given them. But God was not yet done with his covenant people.

After repeated generations of his people failed to keep his covenant, God initiated the new covenant. Knowing that all his people were so corrupted by sin that none of us could be faithful, God himself stepped out of heaven and into human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, and in our place, Christ fulfilled the requirements of the covenant for us. Then he took the curses that a covenant-breaker deserves upon himself. The effect is that for those who trust in Jesus, there remains only covenant blessing, which Christ deserved and earned for us.

Now we are in Jesus Christ and he is the Mediator of God's new covenant, and those who trust in Christ as their Lord and Savior are God's covenant people. Under the old covenant, God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt and, with the blood of sacrificial animals, sealed his promise to be their God and to have Israel as his people. Under the terms of the new covenant,

God has rescued us from our greater slavery to sin and the fear of death and has sealed that covenant with his own sacrificial blood. He is our suzerain Lord, and we are his vassal people. He is the Mighty One who fights for us, and we are his treasured possession, and no one can snatch us out of his hands. Though we falter and fail, he will never send us into exile, for Jesus has already taken the whole curse for us. We are safe and secure in him.

In grateful response to his entering into covenant with us, like Israel, we are now called to live as his covenant people. Every single part of our lives is to be brought into alignment with God's good purposes for us and his creation. Though we no longer live under the terms of the covenant made in Deuteronomy, our study of this book will help us learn more deeply what it means to remember, trust, and obey and live as God's covenant people.