

THE GOSPEL COALITION  
2018 WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

listen  
and  
live



**A FIELD GUIDE**  
to the book of Deuteronomy

# A Field Guide to the Book of Deuteronomy

TGCW18

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**We are delighted you are here with us at TGCW18!** This booklet provides some material to help us as we dig into Deuteronomy together, here at TGCW18 and afterwards in our local churches. What a privilege it is to gather together around God's life-giving Word of truth, and respond to his Word in worship. We'll hear the living God speak personally to us in the book of Deuteronomy. We'll hear his words of appeal, calling us urgently to remember his faithfulness and turn from our unfaithfulness. We'll hear his words of promise, spoken to rebel-hearted people like you and me. We'll hear his words of instruction, pointing us to embrace the gospel of grace that shapes every aspect of our lives. We'll hear his words of renewal, offering life through redemption in his Son. We'll aim to listen well to these God-breathed words—and live in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. May God enlarge our hearts as we run in the way of his commandments (Psa 119:32), all for the glory of Christ Jesus the Lord!

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# Deuteronomy Basics



## WHO WROTE IT?

Moses wrote much of the material in Deuteronomy (Deut 31:9, 22, 24), and a later editor assembled Moses's writings and added some material, such as the concluding account of Moses's death.

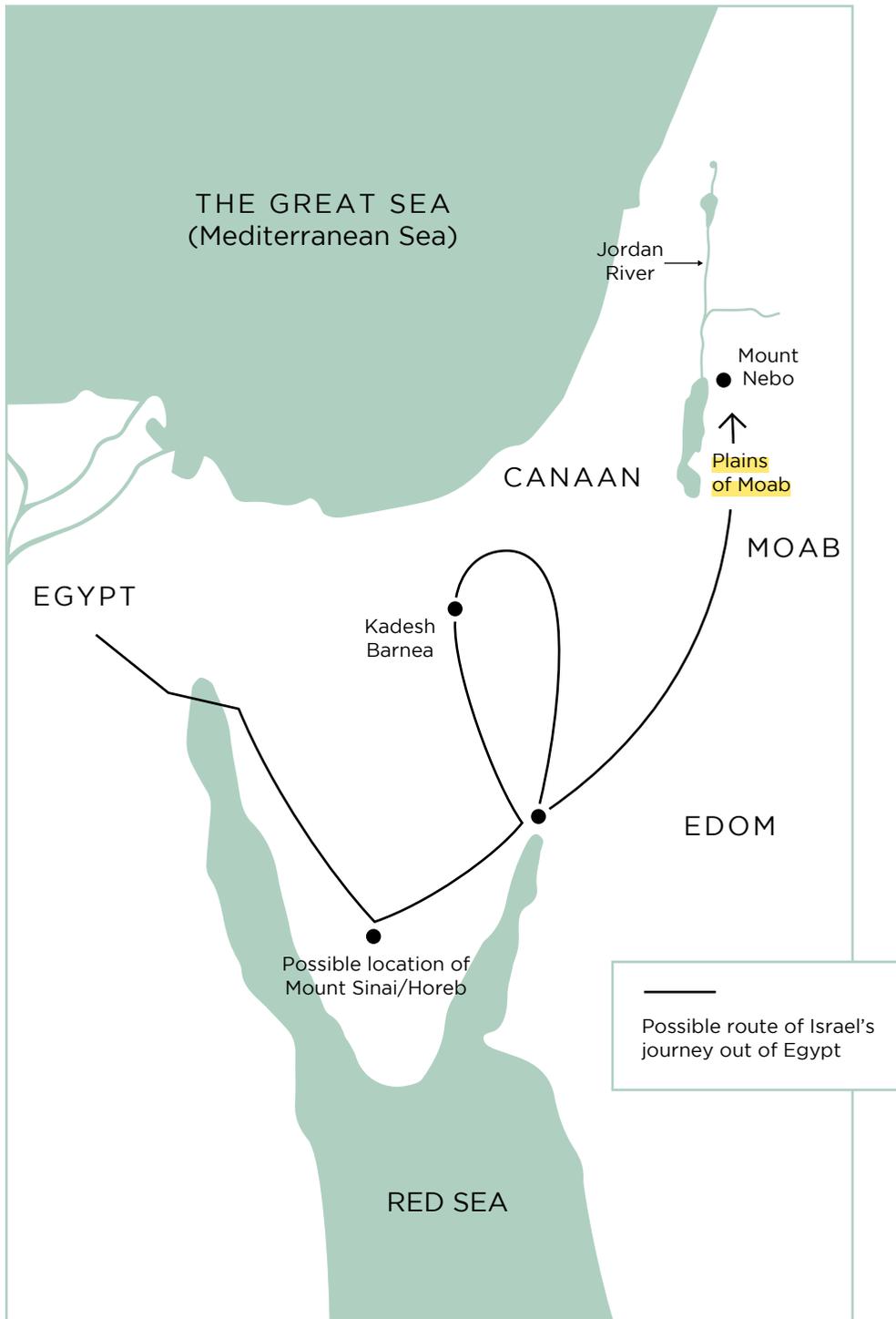


## WHAT'S THE CONTEXT?

Deuteronomy, the fifth and final book of Moses, records the prophet's last words to the Israelites on the brink of the Promised Land. The setting is dramatic: in faithfulness to his promises to Abraham (Genesis), God has used Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt (Exodus) and through the wilderness for forty years (Leviticus–Numbers). Now, on the plains of Moab, 120-year-old Moses gathers the whole assembly to prepare them to go in and take possession of their inheritance, the land God promised to give them. This is what the generation before them had failed to do forty years earlier. The book concludes with Moses's death and burial outside the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy summarizes key themes of the books that precede it, and helps lay the foundation for the books that follow it. The Old Testament (OT) historians, prophets, and psalmists often use Deuteronomy's language and themes in their writings. The New Testament (NT) authors frequently quote Deuteronomy, handling it as God's authoritative Scripture. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy more than any other OT book except for the Psalms. In many different ways, Deuteronomy points to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

These words were for God's people, who were redeemed from slavery in Egypt and preparing to enter the Promised Land—and these words are for God's people today, who are in Christ redeemed from the curse of the law and awaiting our promised imperishable inheritance.



— Possible route of Israel's journey out of Egypt

PRESENT-DAY MOUNT NEBO OVERLOOKING  
THE PLAINS OF MOAB



**WHAT'S IT ABOUT?**

Moses has led this people for forty years, out of slavery and through the wilderness. For one last time, he gathers all the people of Israel and preaches three sermons (1-30), makes arrangements for their future (31), sings to them (32), and blesses them (33), all right before he dies (34). The dying prophet reminds the Israelites about who God is, what God has done for them, and what God promises to do for them in the future. On this basis, Moses motivates God's people to trust God's word and follow his commands. Specifically, Moses appeals to the Israelites to take possession of the Promised Land, and to keep God's instruction about loving God and one another. He expounds the law God had given them forty years earlier at Horeb (Mount Sinai) and applies it to their future situation in the Promised Land. Moses assures them that God intends to bless his faithful people in this land of abundance, but that God will judge them if they rebel against him. To put it simply, Moses is appealing to God's people to listen to God's voice and live in light of his word. Above all else, Moses wants them to hold fast to God, who is their life and source of blessing.

But there's a problem, and it's a problem we know. This is a hard-hearted people that God is calling to whole-hearted obedience. The people are rebellious, and a law, no matter how good, is powerless to change the human heart. What's Deuteronomy's solution? God promises to perform the spiritual heart surgery his people need, which confirms that the book's optimism is grounded in the grace of the gospel. In other words, Deuteronomy does not anchor ultimate hope in the perfect law keeping of God's people, but in God's mercy to his sinful people. So Deuteronomy defies legalism. The grace God extends to his people on the plains of Moab utterly depends upon his promise to send the prophet and mediator greater than Moses, the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot understand Deuteronomy apart from the promised Christ to whom it points. As we take in Moses's sermons we will see how all of Scripture points us to the Lord Jesus and puts forth a single remedy for rebel hearts: faith in the God of grace, who calls us to himself and saves us through his Son.



### HOW DOES THE BOOK HOLD TOGETHER?

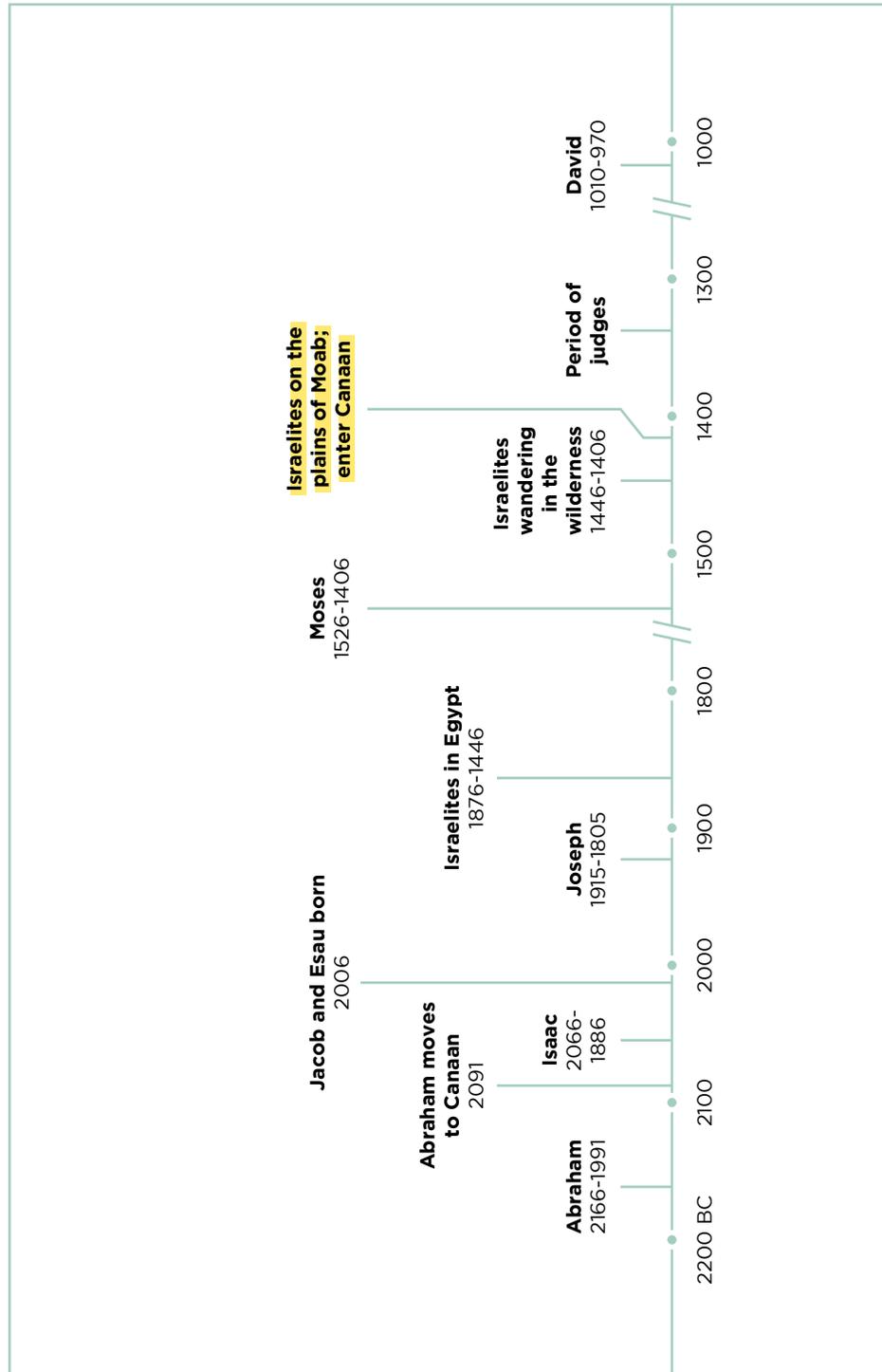
The left column of the chart below shows that Deuteronomy mostly consists of Moses's last words. The right column shows that covenant renewal lies at the heart of the book—that is, Moses calls the people to renew their covenant relationship with God established forty years earlier at Horeb (Mount Sinai). In fact, Deuteronomy's structure resembles that of ancient treaty documents prevalent in Moses's day in which a mighty king would formalize a relationship of mutual obligation with a less powerful foreign kingdom. Moses and the narrator, then, shape these words in Deuteronomy in a way that shows the nature of God's covenant relationship with his people. God has proven himself faithful to his covenant promises. Will his people choose to respond to God by shaping their lives according to his grace?



### WHAT IS A "COVENANT"?

Though not all biblical covenants are the same, a covenant essentially establishes a family-like relationship of love and commitment, which is sealed with a specific and binding oath that one or both parties undertake. God takes the initiative throughout history to make a series of covenants between himself and various individuals or groups, and God always fulfills his covenant promises. Deuteronomy speaks in different ways about the covenant relationship between God and the Israelites, whom God redeemed from Egypt to be his treasured possession among all the peoples (Exod 19:4–6). God accomplished this redemption in faithfulness to his ancient covenant promise to Abram (Gen 15). At various points within the Scriptures, God expresses the heart of his covenant relationship with his people in this way: “I will be your God, and you will be my people” (for example, Exod 6:7; Jer 31:33; 1 Pet 2:9–10; Rev 21:7). The old covenant anticipates the new covenant, which Jesus Christ mediates and inaugurates in his blood (Heb 9:11–22).

Speeches	Text Divisions	Covenant Flow
	1:1–5	Preamble
<b>Moses's First Sermon (1:6–4:43)</b>	1:6–3:29	Historical Review of Covenant Relationship
	4:1–40	Overview of Covenant
<b>Moses's Second Sermon (4:44–29:1)</b>	4:44–49	Introduction
	5–11	Covenant Obligations: General Exhortation
	12–26	Covenant Obligations: Specific Laws
	27:1–29:1	Covenant Blessings and Curses
<b>Moses's Third Sermon (29:2–30:20)</b>	29:2–30:20	Call for Covenant Renewal
<b>Moses's Final Words and Actions (31–34)</b>	31	Provisions for Covenant Relationship
	32–34	Final Acts of Covenant Mediator (Moses): Song of Witness, Blessing, Death



\* Dates accepted by many scholars. Adapted from the NIV Study Bible.

# Listen and Live!

## PROMISED GRACE FOR REBEL HEARTS

### Session 1 | Deut 1 | *A Faithful God and His Unfaithful People*

Moses begins his final sermon series with an historical review, in which he underscores God's faithfulness to his people and Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Moses here recounts events that occurred about forty years earlier, including the people's failure to take possession of the Promised Land.

### Session 2 | Deut 5:1-6:3 | *Defining the Relationship*

Moses begins his second sermon by recounting how God appeared on Horeb (Mount Sinai), spoke to his people out of the midst of fire, and confirmed Moses as his covenant mediator.

### Session 3 | Deut 6:4-25 | *The Greatest Commandment for Every Generation*

After reminding the Israelites of the covenant God graciously made with them at Horeb, Moses calls them to respond by loving God with their whole heart. He begins to show them what this will look like in their relationships and in their new situation in the Promised Land.

### Session 4 | Deut 12:1-7 | *The Greatest Commandment in a Pluralistic Age*

Moses details in chapters 12-26 God's specific commandments that his people must obey in the Promised Land, and he begins in Deut 12:1-7 with legislation relating to worship.

### Session 5 | Deut 15:1-18 | *Open Wide Your Hand!*

Throughout Deut 12-26, Moses calls upon the Israelites to respond to God's love for them by loving God and loving their neighbor. In Deut 15:1-18, Moses focuses specifically on how they must love the poor and vulnerable among them.

### Session 6 | Deut 18:15-22 | *A Prophet Like Me*

God graciously assures his people that in the future he will raise up a prophet like Moses from among them. They must listen to this prophet, and not to false prophets.

### Session 7 | Deut 29-30 | *A Matter of Life and Death*

In his final sermon, Moses appeals to the Israelites to choose life and blessing, and not death and curse.

# Digging Deeper

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY



### **SUGGESTED PLAN FOR TWELVE WEEKS IN DEUTERONOMY**

1. God Reminds His People of Their History \_\_\_\_\_  Deut 1-3
2. God Speaks to His People Words They Must Keep \_\_\_\_  Deut 4:1-43
3. God Defines His Relationship with His People \_\_\_\_\_  Deut 4:44-6:3
4. God Calls His Chosen People to Remember His Grace \_  Deut 6:4-8:20
5. God Spares His Rebellious People for Relationship \_\_\_\_  Deut 9-11
6. God Commands His Beloved People to Love, Part 1 \_\_\_\_  Deut 12-14
7. God Commands His Beloved People to Love, Part 2 \_\_\_\_  Deut 15:1-16:17
8. God Commands His Beloved People to Love, Part 3 \_\_\_\_  Deut 16:18-21:23
9. God Commands His Beloved People to Love, Part 4 \_\_\_\_  Deut 22-26
10. God Sets Before His People the Consequences  
of Disobedience and Obedience \_\_\_\_\_  Deut 27:1-29:1
11. God Urges His People to Choose Life and Not Death \_\_\_\_  Deut 29:2-30:20
12. God Prepares His People for Their Future \_\_\_\_\_  Deut 31-34

# God's big story of redemption



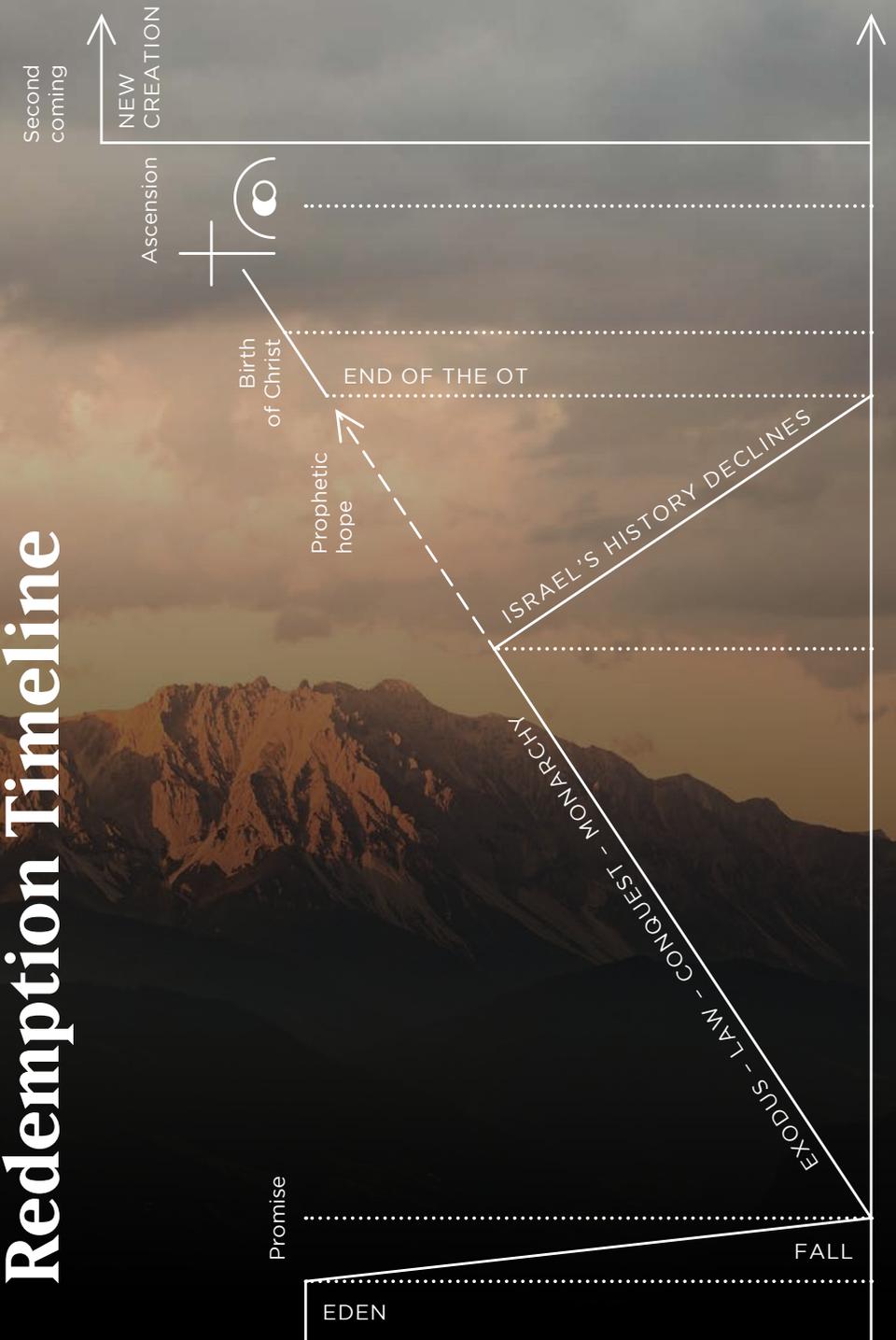
## GOD'S BIG STORY OF REDEMPTION

The Scriptures tell one unified story of redemption through Christ. This is no fictional story, but rather real history. It is the true account of the salvation God has accomplished in his Son. The Bible's storyline has a clear shape: creation—fall—redemption—consummation.

It's important to bear in mind the basic framework of salvation history whenever we study a biblical text. We want to ask, "To what point in God's salvation story does this text refer?" Paying attention to where the events of Deuteronomy occur within the most basic flow of the Bible's storyline, for example, helps us interpret it properly. We also want to ask, "Where are we now in God's salvation story?" Believers in Christ Jesus are those who are shaped by our reflection upon what God has accomplished through his Son, and by our anticipation of what God will accomplish one day very soon when his Son returns and makes all things new. May seeing our place in this story deepen our joy in Christ and our sense of urgency in the mission of his gospel!

\* For more resources on the God's big story of redemption see page 29.

## Redemption Timeline



Adapted from God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible by Vaughan Roberts



## SOME BASIC QUESTIONS TO ASK OF ANY BIBLICAL TEXT

**Genre:** A book's genre is simply the kind of literature it is. The Scriptures are full of a variety of literary genres, such as narrative, poetry, letters, sermons, and so on. These genres show forth the beauty, creativity, and clarity of God's Word.

- How does the text indicate what kind of literature it is?
- How does this passage's genre affect our understanding of it?

**Structure:** The structure of a book or passage is its shape from beginning to end.

- If you had to divide this book into several main parts, how would you do so, and why?
- What are the distinct parts of this passage and how do they hold together?

**Context:** The context of a book or passage is the world and the words that surround it.

- Immediate historical context: What historical circumstances (time, place, people, culture) does the book reflect or address? How does the historical context shed light on this particular passage?
- Immediate literary context: How do the passages right before and after this one shed light on this passage's meaning? Where does the passage come in the flow of the whole book, and how does the passage contribute to that flow?
- Broader literary/historical contexts: How does this book fit in the flow of the books of the Old and New Testaments? At what point in the big story of salvation history does this book come? In general, how does the whole-Bible context help us understand this passage and this book?
  - If someone asked you what this book communicates about God, how might you respond, in one sentence?
  - If the whole Bible is about God redeeming a people for himself through his Son, for his glory, then how might you explain in one sentence just how this book fits into the Bible's storyline of redemption?
  - How does this text point us to the truths of the gospel and the person of the Lord Jesus?

**Unifying Theme:** By "unifying theme" we mean the big idea of a book or a passage. Every book or passage has themes (recurring ideas) at work in it; the unifying theme is the main message communicated as these themes combine, develop, and pierce our hearts.

- What are some of the main themes that stand out in the whole book?
- If someone asked you what is the unifying theme of the book, how might you respond, in one sentence?
- If someone asked you what is the unifying theme of the passage, how might you respond, in one sentence? How does the passage's unifying theme relate to the whole book's unifying theme?

**Aim and Application:** An author's aim is what he/she intends to accomplish through his/her words. Once we begin to grasp the author's aim for the original audience, then we can resonate with that same aim in our own lives and in the lives of those to whom we minister. Application, then, is the process of bringing that aim to bear on the specifics of our lives today: How will this passage make a difference in our hearts and actions?

- Discerning an author's aim in a passage:
  - Does the book tell us why the author wrote it (e.g., John 20:30-31)? If the author does not tell us explicitly, what other indications in the book are there as to why the author wrote it?
  - How would you summarize the author's aim in writing this passage? And how does the aim for this passage relate to the author's overarching aim in writing the whole book?
- Applying the passage to people's heart in a way that grows out of the text's unifying theme and aim:
  - In what ways do you find this passage accomplishing the author's aim in your own heart? As you align your aim in teaching this passage with the author's aim in writing it, what kinds of concrete applications might you develop for your audience?
  - How do these applications exalt Christ Jesus the Lord and turn us toward him?

# Additional Resources



## RESOURCES ON GOD'S BIG STORY OF REDEMPTION

- Begg, Alistair and Sinclair B. Ferguson. *Name Above All Names*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. A celebration of the person and work of Jesus Christ according to seven biblical themes, such as “Jesus Christ, the Son of Man.” Each chapter strengthens the reader’s understanding of how Jesus fulfills God’s OT promises, thereby training how to interpret various parts of Scripture in light of its whole story of salvation.
- Carson, D. A. *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God’s Story*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010. A Bible overview that deepens our appreciation for the whole of Scripture by evaluating its parts. Carson has also written a Leader’s Guide for this book, so that together they make a great small group resource. For an online video course from Carson on this material, see learn.thegospelcoalition.org.
- Goldsworthy, Graeme. *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. Goldsworthy lays out basic principles to interpret the Scriptures in light of God’s progressive revelation of his redemptive purposes across history.
- Roberts, Vaughan. *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. A concise book providing a bird’s eye view of God’s story of redemption, with study questions included in each chapter. This is a great book to read with beginners of various ages or those who want to solidify their understanding of the Bible’s big story and learn to articulate it clearly. For an online video course from Roberts on this material, see godsbigpicture.co.uk.



## DEUTERONOMY RESOURCES

Block, Daniel I. *Deuteronomy*. NIVAC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

McConville, J. G. *Deuteronomy*. ApOTC 5. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002.

Millar, J. Gary. *Now Choose Life: Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy*. NSBT 6. Leicester: Apollos, 1998.

Wright, Christopher J. H. *Deuteronomy*. NIBCOT 4. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996.

### AUDIO RESOURCES:

Help Me Teach the Bible with Nancy Guthrie (TGC podcast): Scott Redd on Deuteronomy

The Theology of Deuteronomy for Preachers (TGC13), Gary Millar



## RESOURCES FOR ONGOING BIBLE STUDY

Beynon, Nigel and Andrew Sach. *Dig Deeper: Tools for Understanding God's Word*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010. Simple, clear set of tools for biblical exposition, with good detailed examples and practice questions.

DeYoung, Kevin. *Taking God at His Word: Why the Bible is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough, and What That Means for You*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014. An extremely helpful and concise volume for understanding the nature of the Scriptures and why we study, teach, and love them.

Helm, David. *One-to-One Bible Reading: A Simple Guide for Every Christian*. Sydney, NSW: Matthias Media, 2011. Wonderfully practical and sound wisdom for those eager to learn how to work through a biblical text with another person. A brief and easily digestible volume.

Nielson, Kathleen. *Bible Study: Following the Ways of the Word*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011. Offers a clear approach to Bible study—one that explores the distinctive qualities of God's inspired Word, asking how we should study it in light of what it is.

Wilkin, Jen. *Women of the Word: How to Study the Bible with Both our Hearts and Our Minds*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014. This book will encourage you to engage God's Word in a way that trains your mind and transforms your heart.