



Deuteronomy: Moses' Final Words

Script References

Introduction

00:00–00:31

Tim: The book of Deuteronomy, the epic conclusion to the Torah. And spoiler alert: Moses is going to die. Now, in order to understand this book we need to remember the story so far.

Jon: So Israel has escaped from slavery in Egypt.¹ Then they spend one year at Mount Sinai.²

1. Exodus 14
2. Exodus 19:1-40:38

Tim: This is where they made the covenant with God to obey all of these laws.

Jon: Then they wander around in the desert for 40 years before they make it to the Jordan River, which is right across from the land God promised them. They are ready to go in. This is where the book of Deuteronomy begins.

Moses' Final Speech

00:32–01:09

Tim: And what this book is, really, is a speech. Moses gives these final words. It's like a pep talk to the new generation of Israel that's about to go into the land. And the speech, it's broken up into three large sections.³

Jon: Moses begins the first part of the speech⁴ with a somber tone because he's highlighting Israel's rebellion and resistance which has been going on for the last 40 years.

3. Deuteronomy 1-11, 12-26, 27-34
4. Deuteronomy 1-3

Tim: And that sets up the rest of this opening section,⁵ which is Moses' challenge to this new generation to be different from their parents and to respond to God's grace with love and obedience. So he reminds them of the ten commandments, like the basics of the covenant, and then he gives them this very famous line.

5. Deuteronomy 4-11

Listen and Love

01:10–02:40

Jon: "Listen, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."⁶

6. Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Tim: Now in Jewish tradition, this is called the Shema, because the first Hebrew word in this line is “*Shema*, Israel.” And this became a very important prayer in Judaism, said twice a day. And it emphasizes the Israelites’ exclusive commitment to their God, the one true God who loved them and who rescued them from slavery.

Jon: Right because they are about to go into a land where people are worshiping many other gods.

Tim: And Moses thinks that loyalty to the Lord their God is the only way to life. Now, notice these keywords in the Shema: “listen” and “love.” You’re going to find these words all over this opening section of the speech. The word “listen” in Hebrew means more than just let sound waves come into your ears. It includes the idea of responding to what you hear. So for Israel, this means responding to God’s grace by obeying the laws of the covenant.

Jon: And then listen is always followed by love.

Tim: Yeah. So love is the true motivation for obeying the laws. Israel won’t obey without love. And they don’t truly love if they don’t obey. So there’s this tight connection between loving and listening that runs through the entire book.

And so Moses tells them that if they do listen and love, they will fulfill their original calling as the family of Abraham—to show all the nations the wisdom and justice of God and so become a blessing to them.

A Second Law

02:41–03:31

Jon: The second big section in Deuteronomy is a large block of laws and commands.

Tim: And this is where the book gets its name. Deuteronomy means a “second law.” And it’s because many of these laws we’ve heard before. In fact, in the first line of the book, we’re told that Moses is here explaining or clarifying the laws.⁷ So he’s repeating and expanding on the laws, making them relevant to this new generation.

7. Deuteronomy 1:5

Jon: There’s laws about how Israel is to worship God,⁸ laws about their leadership structure,⁹ laws about social justice,¹⁰ and then some more laws about their worship.¹¹

8. Deuteronomy 12-16

9. Deuteronomy 16-18

10. Deuteronomy 19-25

11. Deuteronomy 26

12. Deuteronomy 27-30

Tim: Now, after all the laws,¹² Moses warns Israel of the consequences of their obedience or disobedience, or in his words, “the blessing or the curse.” If they listen and love, they will experience blessing and abundance in the land. And if they don’t, there’s going to be famine, and plagues, and they’ll be forced off their land into exile.

Invitation to Choose Life

03:32–04:40

Jon: And that brings us to the final section of his speech.

Tim: Yeah. Here Moses says, “I’ve set before you today life or death, blessing or curse. So choose life!”¹³ But then things get really interesting because after 40 years with these people, Moses knows they’re not going to obey. And so he predicts their failure and even their future exile from the promised land.¹⁴ And he focuses on what he thinks is the true source of the problem, that they have hard and selfish hearts. It’s as if Israel is incapable of truly loving God in a way that brings about obedience.

13. Deuteronomy 30:19-20

14. Deuteronomy 32:15-43

Jon: But this problem isn’t unique to Israel.

Tim: Yeah. In fact, Moses, when he’s using this language of blessing and curse, he is tying Israel’s story all the way back to all humanity’s story from Genesis 1-3.

Jon: So Adam and Eve, they were blessed by God, just like Israel, and given a choice to trust and obey God, like Israel.

Tim: And then they rebelled and brought a curse on the land,¹⁵ like Moses knows Israel is going to do. And so these stories, they’re about Israel’s hard heart, but they’re actually a window into the universal human condition.

15. Genesis 3

New Transformed Hearts

04:41–05:52

Jon: But Moses doesn’t give up hope entirely.

Tim: That’s right. He says that somehow, on the other side of Israel’s exile, God promises to transform their hearts so that one day they truly can listen and love.¹⁶

16. Deuteronomy 30:6

Jon: In the final chapters, Joshua is appointed as the new leader of Israel.

Tim: And then Moses takes the entire law code.

Jon: The one he just predicted Israel would break.

Tim: That’s right, and he puts it into the ark of the covenant.¹⁷ And then Moses hikes up to the top of a mountain so he can see the promised land from afar, and then he dies.¹⁸ And that’s how the Torah ends.

17. Deuteronomy 31:24-26

18. Deuteronomy 34

Jon: Which is a strange place to end a story. I mean, it is right there at the climax. Will they obey the laws and live faithfully in the land or not?

Tim: Well, the story does continue right into Joshua, the next book of the Bible. But this is the end of the Torah, and it’s been ended here for a reason. The Torah is written for people who are either outside of the land or who are still waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promise to bless the whole world. And so now as each generation reads the Torah, they find themselves called to hope in what Moses hoped for, a new transformed heart that one day can truly listen and love.