

(S) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Last week we learned how the book of DEUTERONOMY came into being, its character as divine revelation, its division into five main parts and its teaching about the Messiah. Today we will learn about the main messages in the book of Deuteronomy.

#### **POINT 4. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF DEUTERONOMY**

##### **First. The book of Deuteronomy teaches that Israel is the people of God in the Old Testament.**

Throughout Deuteronomy as well as the whole Old Testament it is taught that there exists a special relationship between the Lord and Israel. The Lord is “the God of Israel” and Israel is “the people of the Lord”. In Deuteronomy 7:6 Moses says, “You are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the people on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.” The word *holy* means that Israel is *separated from the other nations and their way of life* in order to live a holy life for God. In this sense they are *the Lord’s possession*. This special relationship with the Lord is the reason why Israel must keep away from the idolatrous and immoral life-style of the nations of Canaan.

Israel is seen as *a national-political entity*, a real nation. This fact is evident from the following:

##### One. Assembly.

In Deuteronomy 23:1, Israel is depicted as *the assembly of the Lord*, to which aliens from other nations may join. Nevertheless, certain nations like the Ammonites and the Moabites were excluded from this assembly, because of their past opposition to Israel (23:3).

##### Two. Laws.

Certain laws have special reference to Israel as a national-political entity and to its civil life. For example, there are civil laws concerning their kings and their wars with other nations, and there are social laws concerning lawsuits and marriages.

##### Three. Promised Land.

The laws show that the emphasis is on the temporary life on earth in the Promised Land of Canaan. For example, Deuteronomy speaks of blessings and curses, of rewards and punishments, of life and death, and always in the context of Israel as a national-political entity.

##### **Second. The book of Deuteronomy teaches that the relationship between the Lord and Israel is a covenant relationship.**

In Deuteronomy 32:6 the Lord says that he is Israel’s *Father* and Creator. In Deuteronomy 14:1 he says that the Israelites are his *children*, chosen and separated to be his treasured possession. Their relationship is a family relationship. Deuteronomy 33:5 and 26:17-19 say that the Lord is Israel’s *King* and the formal relationship between the Lord and Israel is described in terms of *a covenant*. In this covenant, the two parties are not equal, the judicial aspects of the relationship dominate and the durability of the relationship is dependent on Israel fulfilling certain conditions. Thus on the one hand, the relationship between Israel and the Lord is *a friendship relationship* and on the other hand it is *a legal-relationship*.

Exodus 4:22 says that when Israel departed from Egypt they were already the people of God, and yet God only made his formal covenant at Mount Sinai. Thus, *the covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai is a reconfirmation* and a closer specification of the covenant that already existed since the time of their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In Deuteronomy 4:31 Moses knows God’s covenant with the forefathers. But in Deuteronomy 5:3 it seems as if Moses regarded the covenant at Sinai as a different covenant. This is not so, because according to Deuteronomy 7:8 and 12, Moses says that keeping the laws of the covenant at Sinai is God’s condition for Israel to keep his covenant with the forefathers! Deuteronomy 8:18 also says that *the covenant God made with Abraham is reconfirmed and further elaborated in the covenant at Sinai*. We could say the covenant with the forefathers and the covenant at Sinai are two phases of one and the same covenant.

##### **Third. The book of Deuteronomy teaches that God’s grace is first and decisive.**

##### One. God loved Israel and chose Israel by grace.

The God of Israel is not a local national deity, but the Almighty God who created all the nations of the world (26:19; 4:19) and to whom belongs the heavens and the earth and everything on it (10:14)! The relationship between God and

Israel is based on *God's sovereign and gracious election*. In the beginning, Israel was unknown and unworthy, yet the Lord loved Israel and chose Israel. In Deuteronomy 10:15 is written that the Lord set his affection on Israel's forefathers and loved and chose their descendants above all the other nations to be his people. By grace God loved the forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. By grace God chose the forefathers and made his covenant with them. By grace God continued to love the descendants of the forefathers, Israel. By grace God continued to be faithful to his covenant with the forefathers and reconfirmed that covenant with their descendants, Israel. According to Deuteronomy 7:7-9 and 9:5-6, God did not choose Israel and redeem Israel because they were more numerous or more righteous than other nations, but only because by grace God loved them!

Two. God saved Israel from slavery and sin by grace.

In Genesis 15:13-16 God said to Abraham that he would save Israel from enslavement. In Deuteronomy 7:8-9 is written, "It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is your God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations" God saved his people before he gave them his law.

Three. God blessed Israel with earthly blessings by grace.

In the book of Deuteronomy, God reveals the blessings of salvation. Throughout the book of Deuteronomy Israel is regarded as the people of God in a national-political sense. Therefore *the blessings of salvation are especially earthly and temporary*. When God chose Israel, they were poor and had to receive everything out of the hand of God. According to Deuteronomy 26:5, Israel was previously a wandering Aramean who went down into Egypt with a few people. With respect to the past, it was by grace that God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt and it was by grace that God cared for Israel during their journey through the desert. With respect to the future, it would be by grace that God would destroy the idolatrous nations living in Canaan and give their land as the Promised Land to Israel (7:1). By grace God would give Israel a long time to live in that Promised Land (4:40). By grace God would bring the Israelites to a land with large, flourishing cities that they did not build, to houses filled with all kinds of good things that they did not provide, to wells that they did not dig, and to vineyards and olive groves that they did not plant (6:10-11). By grace God would give Israel the ability to produce wealth (8:18). In Deuteronomy 8:7-9 Moses says, "The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land - a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills." By grace God would increase the numbers of Israel (13:17). By grace God would bless Israel in all the work of their hands (14:29) and with abundance, so that Israel would be able to lend to many nations (28:12). By grace God would raise Israel in praise, fame and honour high above all the other nations (26:19; 28:13).

However, the enjoyment of all these earthly and temporary blessings may not be the highest goal of Israel! According to Deuteronomy chapter 8, whenever the Israelites had eaten and were satisfied, they should praise the Lord for the good land he had given them. They should not forget that it is the Lord who has given them all these blessings by grace. The highest goal for Israel was to acknowledge and glorify the Lord!

Four. God gave Israel the special revelation and great promises by grace.

God has not only given Israel earthly and temporary blessings, but also by grace *entrusted to Israel the Old Testament revelation*. The Old Testament is the first part of the specific revelation of his will. In Deuteronomy 4:8 Moses asks, "What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?" By grace God also gave to Israel great promises concerning the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ. In Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses says, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him."

Five. God enabled Israel to obey by grace.

The reception and keeping of all these earthly and temporary blessings are dependent on both God's grace and Israel's obedience. On the one hand, by grace Israel had already received God's salvation: Israel had already been rescued from the slavery of Egypt; it had already experienced God's care and protection in the desert; and it had received the reconfirmation of God's covenant with the forefathers. On the other hand, Israel would only inherit the Promised Land if it believed and obeyed God's words. In Deuteronomy 11:23-25 God says, "If you carefully observe all these commands I am giving you to follow - to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways and to hold fast to him - then ... every place where you will set your foot will be yours and no man will be able to stand against you."

Although the fulfilment of these promises is dependent on Israel's obedience, the fulfilment is certainly going to happen! And although a whole generation of Israelites did not enter the Promised Land, because of their unbelief and disobedience, it is no uncertain fact that Israel would enter the Promised Land. Israel is promised that it would certainly inherit the Promised Land. It would certainly be blessed. And it would certainly receive the promised Messiah! It is a fact that God himself would make sure that Israel would believe and would obey.

#### **Fourth. The book of Deuteronomy teaches the responsibility of man to obey.**

##### One. Israel must obey the Ten Commandments.

The relationship to the Lord is characterised on the one hand by grace and salvation and on the other hand by obedience. Israel must obey God's religious-ethical demands, God's ritual demands and God's civic-social demands. In Deuteronomy 4:13 is written, "The Lord declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets. The Lord commanded Israel to obey the covenant, and the nucleus of this covenant is the Ten Commandments.

##### Two. Israel's obedience of all the Old Testament laws is the condition for blessing.

The obedience of these laws are conditions for entering the Promised Land, for remaining in the Promised Land and for receiving the Lord's abundant blessings in the land. Especially in Deuteronomy 26:17-19, it seems as if the relationship between the Lord and Israel consists of *a contract*, in which merit and reward correspond to one another. Israel declared that the Lord is Israel's God and that it would obey the Lord's commands and the Lord declared that Israel is his people and that he would raise Israel above all the nations.

##### Three. Israel's disobedience of all the Old Testament laws would result in a curse.

If Israel follows other gods, God will destroy them from the Promised Land (6:15). If Israel marries unbelieving foreigners, God will quickly destroy them (7:4). In Deuteronomy 11:26-28 we read, "See I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse - the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord, ... the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord." Deuteronomy chapters 27-28 and 30:15-20 gives a whole series of curses and blessings. It seems as if the covenant is equally a covenant of curse as it is a covenant of blessing.

##### Four. The characteristic of God's grace dominates in the covenant.

It is not true that Israel must first obey and then God would show his grace to them. It is rather the opposite: God's grace is first and on the ground of God's grace Israel is called to obey God! Deuteronomy 5:6 says that God first led Israel out of their slavery in Egypt by grace and then he commanded them to obey the Ten Commandments. Deuteronomy 7:7-11 says that God first set his affection on Israel and chose them, loved them and redeemed them by grace and then he demanded that Israel take care to follow the commands, decrees and laws. In the light of this truth, all the laws in the Old Testament acquire a completely different character. All the laws in the Old Testament serve to show Israel how they should be thankful for all God's grace. Israel should show their gratefulness to God by living the kind of life God called them to live.

**Fifth. The book of Deuteronomy teaches that the underlying principles of the Old Testament Law are grace, faith, and obedience.** Although the Old Testament contains many laws, they definitely point to a deeper unity. The many specific laws in the Old Testament form an inner unity. How?

##### One. The Ten Commandments are the constitution or the foundation of all the laws in the Old Testament.

The Ten Commandments were given in a very special way to Israel. In Deuteronomy 5:22 Moses says, "These are the commandments the Lord proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and he added nothing more. Then the Lord himself wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me." The only laws God wrote with his own finger, were the Ten Commandments. This is to show that obedience of the Ten Commandments is the foundation of obedience of all the Old Testament laws.

##### Two. The religious-ethical demands are summarised in principles like love, faithfulness, self-sacrifice, justice, humility and thankfulness.

Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Leviticus 19:18 says, "Love your neighbour as yourself." All the religious-ethical demands are summarised in the command love the Lord and love your neighbour.

##### Three. God's demands in the law contrasted with God's grace in the covenant.

Deuteronomy 4:25-31 and 30:1-6 warned that in the future Israel would be scattered among the nations because of their idolatry and unrighteousness. However, the Lord promised that if the Israelites repented of their sin and sought the Lord with all their heart and soul, the Lord would allow them to find him and return to him. Then the Lord would bring them back to the Promised Land. Then the Lord would circumcise their hearts so that they would be able to love him and as a consequence live. In Deuteronomy, the grace of God seems to be dependent on Israel's repentance and turning back to God. However, already in the book of Deuteronomy it has been revealed that God is merciful and that the mercy of God is stronger than the curse of the Old Testament laws! The book of Deuteronomy also teaches that God's grace is first and decisive.

The conclusion is thus that there are two series of statements in the book of Deuteronomy: the statements concerning *God's demands in the law* and the statements concerning *God's grace in the covenant*. In the statements concerning God's Old Testament laws, the *temporary* form dominates, while in the statements concerning God's covenant, the

*unchangeable* nature of God's covenant is revealed. If we would look at these two series of statements all by themselves, they would form a contradiction. It would seem as if *the legal principle* and *the faith principle* are opposed to one another. The legal principle says, "Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them" (Lev 18:5). The legal principle says that righteousness is gained by doing the works of the law. And the faith principle says, "Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6). The faith principle says that righteousness is gained by faith.

However, the Old Testament teaches us clearly that the law was given, not as the condition for salvation, but rather as the outworking of salvation. The law was given, not before salvation, but rather after salvation. Deuteronomy 5:6 begins with the Lord who redeemed Israel from the slavery of sin and then teaches the Ten Commandments as the way in which the saved people of God should live! In this light, obedience to all the laws and decrees in the Old Testament are expressions of living by faith, that faith that took hold of God's grace in the covenant. Thus, taking the statements concerning *the demands of the law* and the statements concerning *the grace of the covenant* together in the book of Deuteronomy, we find in principle exactly the same teaching as in the New Testament: God's salvation begins with his grace and is dependent on his grace. *By grace God saves his people. By faith God's people accept God's salvation. By obedience God's people show they love God for what he has done for them.* Moreover, the New Testament in Galatians 3 teaches us clearly that God never intended the legal principle to be the way of salvation in the Old Testament. God always intended the faith principle to be the way of salvation.

### **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. During the next week, read Deuteronomy chapters 26-34. Next time we will introduce the New Testament.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net)

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".