

The One & Only

Deuteronomy



**8 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS**



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Deuteronomy

by Bryson Smith

The One and Only
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How to make the most of these studies

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

These ‘interactive’ Bible studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. The studies will take you on a tour through Deuteronomy, pointing out things along the way, filling in background details, and suggesting avenues for further exploration. But there is also time for you to do some sight-seeing of your own—to wander off, have a good look for yourself, and form your own conclusions.

In other words, we have designed these studies to fall half-way between a sermon and a set of unadorned Bible study questions. We want to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do a lot of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of ‘interaction’—interaction with the Bible, with the things we’ve written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The Format

Each study contains sections of text to introduce, summarize, suggest and provoke. We’ve left plenty of room in the margins for you to jot comments and questions as you read. Interspersed throughout the text are two types of ‘interaction’, each with its own symbol:



Investigate

Questions to help you investigate key parts of the Bible.



Think it through

Questions to help you think through the implications of your discoveries and write down your own thoughts and reactions.

When you come to one of these symbols, you'll know that it's time to do some work of your own.

3. Suggestions for individual study

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in Deuteronomy and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it. You may be spurred to pray again at the end of the study.
- Work through the study, following the directions as you go. Write in the spaces provided.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the *Think it through* sections. It is important to think about the sections of text (rather than just accepting them as true) and to ponder the implications for your life. Writing these things down is a very valuable way to get your thoughts working.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you've learnt.

4. Suggestions for group study

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and threesomes. Get together with a

friend/s and work through them at your own pace. You don't need the formal structure of a 'group' to gain maximum benefit.

- It is *vital* that group members work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how side-tracked you get!), but only if all the members have done the work and are familiar with the material.
- ***Spend most of the group time discussing the 'interactive' sections—Investigate and Think it through.*** Reading all the text together will take too long and should be unnecessary if the group members have done their preparation. You may wish to underline and read aloud particular paragraphs or sections of text that you think are important.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining important sections of text to emphasize, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

5. Bible Translation

Previous editions of this Interactive Bible Study have assumed that most readers would be using the New International Version of the Bible. However, since the release of the English Standard Version in 2001, many have switched to the ESV for study purposes. So with this new edition of *The One and Only*, we have decided to quote from and refer to the ESV text, which we recommend as a more accurate and reliable translation.

1

What's this about bird nests?

“You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of the garment with which you cover yourself.”

“You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.”

“If you come across a bird's nest in any tree...”

For a lot of people, the book of Deuteronomy, like much of the Old Testament, is daunting. We start to read it with all good intentions, but have to abandon the task a quarter of the way in because it's just so long! To make things worse, there are certain parts of Deuteronomy which just don't seem to make sense. In chapter 22 we find instructions about what to do if we find a bird's nest in a tree. A couple of verses later we are given some Jewish fashion tips on cloak making. We start to wonder why we are reading it at all. We are hard pressed to see how these ancient commands given through Moses can be of any relevance to us.

These studies are written to help us see how and why Deuteronomy is important for Christians. When we boil it down, Deuteronomy is about *our* God. As we read Deuteronomy we're reading about how *our* God does things. We're reading about how people ought to be responding to *our* God.

Certainly, there are some differences between twenty-first century Christians and the Israelites led by Moses. But as we'll see, there are also a lot of similarities. The biggest similarity is that both we and Israel are dealing with the same Creator of the universe. God himself is the common link between Deuteronomy and us. The God of Deuteronomy is exactly the same God to whom we pray.

We can't afford to have merely a polite, historical curiosity about what's in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is God's word to *us*. If you're a Christian, Deuteronomy is part of your heritage as one of God's people. As we start our journey through Deuteronomy, we can expect that the God of Moses and Israel will reveal things about himself and about us that will shake us to the core!

Let's jump straight in to chapter 1.



Investigate

Read Deuteronomy 1:1-8.

1. *Where* is the action taking place? Find the location on an Old Testament map.
2. How long *can* it take to travel from Horeb to the edge of Kadesh-barnea? Find these on a map and note the distance.
3. How long *has* it taken Israel to get here? (v. 3)

Late for a date

The first three verses of Deuteronomy 1 set the scene for most of the book. Verses 2 and 3 tell us that Israel has taken over 40 years to travel what could have taken 11 days. Israel is 39 years, 354 days late in getting to the Promised Land! Obviously, something terrible has happened.

So what went wrong? Did Moses have the map upside down? Did they get all the red lights? Were they just slow walkers? How on earth could Israel take so long?

The short answer is that Israel messed up a previous attempt. Moses reminds them of this in the rest of the chapter.



Investigate

Read Deuteronomy 1:19-40.

In your own words summarize what happened last time Israel tried to enter the Promised Land. What made God angry?

Keeping old promises

As we've now discovered, Deuteronomy opens with Israel poised on the eastern edge of the Jordan River. In other words, they are standing on the edge of what was called 'the Promised Land'. This description dates back to an ancient promise. This was a region

which God had promised to give to Abraham's descendants way back in Genesis 12.

Genesis 12 is a very important chapter of the Old Testament. (If you're not familiar with this chapter, it might be a good idea to turn back now and read Gen 12:1-9.) Genesis 12 is set at a time when sin was running out of control. The world had been created good (Gen 1), but ever since the Fall, when Adam and Eve rebelled against God (Gen 2-3), the world had degenerated into a squalid wasteland of murder, sexual immorality, conspiracy and deceit. Indeed, things were *such* a mess that God would have been quite justified to simply wipe everyone out and start again (this almost happened in Gen 6-9).

But in Genesis 12, God appears to Abraham (who is called Abram in the chapter) and very generously promises three things which, rather than heralding destruction, will help restore God's friendship with mankind. God promises that:

- i) Abraham will have many descendants,
- ii) that they will be blessed, and
- iii) that they will have their own land, stretching up the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea.

Over time, God begins to fulfil these promises. Abraham's descendants *do* start to increase. In fact, they grow so numerous that the Egyptians become scared and put them into slavery (Ex 1). But God keeps his promise to bless them and, under Moses' leadership, God rescues Israel in a blaze of miracles in the Exodus. God parts the Red Sea and leads them out of Egypt, gathering them together at Horeb (also called Mt Sinai). At Horeb, God speaks to Israel and then leads them out towards the Promised Land.

As we open the book of Deuteronomy, we find all of Abraham's descendants on the edge of that Promised Land. But they have been here once before. They reached the outskirts of the Promised Land fairly quickly after receiving God's commandments at Mt Sinai. But they failed to trust God and refused to enter the Promised Land (Dt 1:26-33). As a punishment, God turned them around and made them wander in the wilderness for 40 years (vv. 34-40).

Just like you might send a disobedient child to his or her room, God sent a disobedient Israel into the desert to think over their 'attitude problem'. But now it's time to open the door and come out. The time of discipline has finished. The 40 years are over and Israel is back to receive the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham.



Think it through

1. Imagine you are one of the Israelites standing on the edge of the Promised Land in Deuteronomy 1:1. What are your hopes and fears for the future?

2. From a single nomad, Abraham, God has brought forth a nation. He has miraculously rescued them from the superpower, Egypt. He has left Israel wandering in the desert for forty years because of their disobedience.

What have you learned about the character of our God from Deuteronomy 1?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13.

3. What should we learn from the punishment of Israel in the desert?

4. Why does God discipline us?

5. Are these hard instructions to obey? How can we help each other to obey them?

Three talks

With Israel standing on the edge of the Jordan River and looking across to the destination they have taken so long to reach, Moses “spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him in commandment to them” (v. 3).

Verse 3 pretty well summarizes what Deuteronomy is all about. It isn't a collection of strange commandments about bird's nests and tassels. The book is a collection of three talks which Moses gave to Israel just before they made their second attempt to enter the Promised Land. In all three sermons, Moses passes on God's instructions in order to make sure that Israel has learnt from her previous mistakes. We also have much to learn from Israel's mistakes.