

# THE ONE AND ONLY



9 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR  
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



DEUTERONOMY

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SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

BRYSON SMITH



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# » CONTENTS

How to make the most of these studies .....	5
STUDY 1: What's this about bird's nests? <i>[Deuteronomy 1:1-40]</i> .....	9
STUDY 2: Know who you're dealing with <i>[Deuteronomy 4]</i> .....	15
STUDY 3: A gracious God <i>[Deuteronomy 5]</i> .....	25
STUDY 4: A grateful people <i>[Deuteronomy 6]</i> .....	31
STUDY 5: Love and trust <i>[Deuteronomy 8-26]</i> .....	37
STUDY 6: Love and obedience <i>[Deuteronomy 8-26]</i> .....	43
STUDY 7: The leader we had to lose <i>[Deuteronomy 30:11-31:13]</i> .....	53
STUDY 8: Happily ever after? <i>[Deuteronomy 31:14-32:20]</i> .....	61

## »» HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

### 1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God's word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty 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

The studies contain four main components:

- sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- numbered questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- ‘Implications’ sections that help you think about what the passage means for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

## 3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text, answering the questions about the Bible passage.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learnt.

## 4. How to use these studies in a small group

- 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 triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.
- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how sidetracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.

- 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 the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, 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.
- If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
- 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 of the Bible, 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.



## » STUDY 1

# WHAT'S THIS ABOUT BIRD'S NESTS?

[DEUTERONOMY 1:1-40]

“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...”

**T**HE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY, LIKE much of the Old Testament, is daunting for a lot of people. 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 that 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 get some Jewish fashion tips on cloak making. We start to wonder why we are reading it at all—how can these

ancient commands given through Moses 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 21st-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 we are dealing with the same Creator of the universe as Israel did. 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



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## 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 the Israelites messed up a previous attempt. Moses reminds them of this in the rest of the chapter.

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### Read Deuteronomy 1:19–40.

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

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## Keeping old promises

AS WE'VE NOW DISCOVERED, DEUTERONOMY opens with Israel poised on the eastern edge of the Jordan River. In other words, Israel is standing on the edge of what was called 'the Promised Land'. This description dates back to an ancient promise. This was a region that 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 Genesis 12:1-9.) Genesis 12 is set at a time when sin was running out of control. The world had been created good (Genesis 1) but ever since the Fall, when Adam and Eve rebelled against

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God (Genesis 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 (which almost happened in Genesis 6-9).

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

- i) Abraham will have many descendants
- ii) they will be blessed
- iii) 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 (Exodus 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 the Israelites out of Egypt, gathering them together at Horeb (also called Mount Sinai). At Horeb, God speaks to them 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 (Deut 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 her 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.

## Three talks

With the Israelites 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 Moses gave to the Israelites 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.



- 
- Why does God discipline us?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - Which of these instructions do you find easy to obey, and which do you find difficult to obey? How can Christians help each other to obey them?

### » Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for his mercy to Israel.
- Ask for wisdom over the next seven studies as you study Deuteronomy.
- Ask God to help you learn from the example of Israel so that you “might not desire evil as they did”. Ask for his help in enduring temptation, particularly in the areas in which you find it difficult to obey God.



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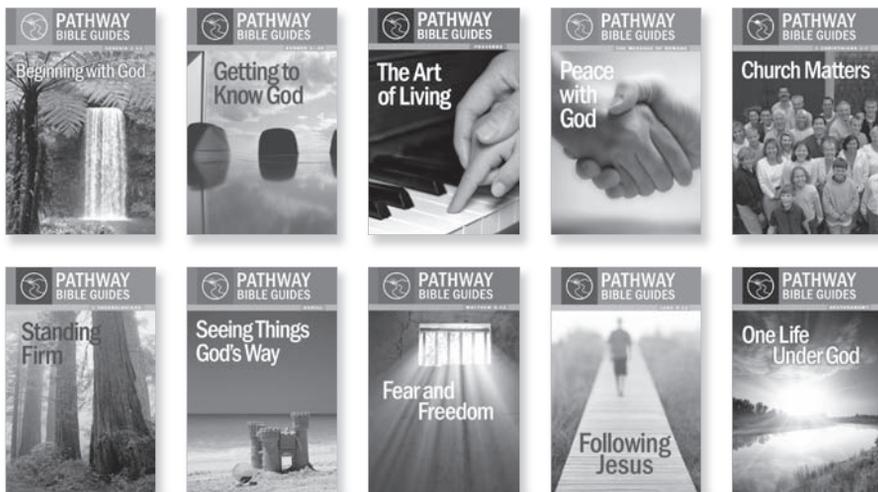
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# THE ONE AND ONLY



As the Israelites are poised on the edge of the Promised Land, God speaks to them through Moses.

But what do you say to a nation who has a record of not listening? How can Moses persuade them to live a life worthy of the mercy God has shown them? Will they respond to Moses' charge to love God with all of their heart, soul and strength?

On one hand, Deuteronomy tells the story of God's people, Israel—their history, their laws, their way of life, their hopes and dreams. On the other hand, and most importantly, it is the story of Israel's God, Yahweh, the creator of the universe. The One and Only.

**The One and Only** explores Deuteronomy with New Testament eyes. It leaves you with a picture of an awesome and wonderful God who has kept his promises and, in his Son, delivered salvation to his worldwide people, as we wait on the edge of a heavenly inheritance.

An ideal study book for individuals and small groups.

