



EXPOSITORY

*Commentary*

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*Deuteronomy - Ruth*

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## *Commentary*

VOL. II

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### *Deuteronomy—Ruth*

Deuteronomy  
*August H. Konkel*

Judges  
*Miles V. Van Pelt*

Joshua  
*David Reimer*

Ruth  
*Mary Willson Hannah*

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# DEUTERONOMY

*August H. Konkel*

# INTRODUCTION TO DEUTERONOMY

## *Overview*

Deuteronomy is a narrative reporting the words of Moses as delivered in three addresses to Israel in the Jordan Valley just prior to his death. Moses could not cross the river to stand in the Promised Land (Deut. 3:23–29). Instead, he would commission Joshua as his successor to lead the people into the realization of the promises God made to the patriarchs. The book concludes with an epilogue in chapters 31–34—a short account of the last words and deeds of Moses, the succession of Joshua, and the provision for the continuity of the Torah given by Moses via a copy placed in the ark in the custody of the priests and a song of Moses taught by memory to the people.

Deuteronomy contains a diversity of material. The book ranges from the very words spoken by Moses in the receiving of the covenant (5:1) to the written Torah, which was to be carried by the priests responsible for the transportation of the ark containing the covenant (31:9) and other incidental historical objects. The book draws on sources apart from the Torah, such as the lengthy poems found in chapters 32–33. Deuteronomy is not a mere repetition of the previous giving of the covenant at Sinai. It is a reaffirmation of that covenant, given as a guide to enable the tribes to live together when they enter the land they are about to inherit. The book places a great deal of focus on the one central place of worship and the annual pilgrimages all the tribes are to make, but it contains very little description of the actual ceremonies or rituals required at the tabernacle. Instead, it presents a strong emphasis on the care of the needy and the marginalized. Love and fear of God required in the covenant is shown through justice and harmony in the community.

The book of Deuteronomy has been helpfully described as the “Gospel according to Moses.”<sup>1</sup> It offers the most systematic presentation of theology in the entire OT. The book functions as a manifesto calling on Israel to respond to God’s grace with fear and love (10:12). True love for the Lord brings a fear that one might have taken the name of the Lord in vain in entering the covenant. It is tragic to be unfaithful to that commitment and thus suffer the curse of covenant violation. Love and fear together enable the people to walk in all of God’s ways and to serve

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the book of this title by Daniel I. Block, in which he provides theological and ethical reflections on the book of Deuteronomy (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012).

him with a devoted mind. It is not outward circumcision that is fundamental but rather what that rite represents, namely, a circumcision of the heart that speaks of an uncompromising commitment to the covenant vow (10:16).

Such love begins with a proper understanding of the person of God. The revelation at Mount Sinai brought to Israel the One who alone is worthy to be called God; there Israel learned that there can be no other God (4:35–39). This declaration emerged as a crescendo from the description of the blazing fire that flamed brilliantly into the heart of heaven, piercing the thick darkness. The import of this sermon of Moses is that the One who made a covenant with them at Sinai is incomparable to any other being. This is a proper understanding of the Holy One. This God is independent of all that is common; he is set apart from the material world. It must be clear that everything within the common is dependent on him, but he is in no sense dependent on the common—in contrast to all other gods or beings. Such a concept of divinity is otherwise unknown in ancient times. This knowledge of God is nothing less than a gracious gift to Israel, a grace and mercy that began with their fathers. Knowing this God revealed in the burning mountain is the essence of the mandate to love and fear him. Such knowledge of God will enable Israel to live with a circumcised heart.

The total requirement of the covenant is stated in what is known as the great Shema (6:4–5). The Shema is the command to hear the words that state what Israel must know. Every person of the covenant must love God with all of his mind, desire, and wealth (as explained in the exegesis of these verses). Love cannot be reduced to a feeling or some general notion of doing what is right. It is defined in the Ten Words of revelation that begin with confession of the one God and allegiance to him through an oath. This confession is demonstrated in stated life values, beginning with honor of Sabbath, parents, life, marriage, property, and truth. These must not be violated by so much as a wrong desire for another's wife or property. These requirements are expanded through an exposition of community life. This will include a unified confession of all the tribes making pilgrimage to one central place three times a year. It will be protected by purging from the community all who teach some other allegiance. It will be observed in daily practices of foods eaten, in making provision for the vulnerable members of the tribes, and in establishing the necessary judicial and educational institutions necessary to maintain good order.

In the instructions of the written Torah of Moses is provision for dealing with the various contingencies that in due course will affect the life of the tribes in the land. These include times of war, protection of property, provision for families in times of death and disruption, and maintenance of good order when disrupted by unruly and ruthless individuals. Observance of the covenant will bring blessings; conversely, failure to love God will bring the consequences of the curses.

The requirements of the covenant are concluded with provisions for renewal and continuity. Moses will no longer be present to mediate the words of God. Instead, they are written down and are to be repeated every seven years at the

place God will choose for all Israel to worship. The book of this Torah will be stored permanently in the ark; its presence there makes this chest the ark of the covenant. It will forever be known as the footstool of the great King (cf. 1 Chron. 28:2), the One who created Israel and gave them the mandate to be a kingdom of priests among all the nations. The covenant at Sinai will become the enduring instruction of how Israel will love God and their neighbor.

The book of Deuteronomy is thus both a conclusion to the books of Moses and a foundation for the words of the prophets. It brings Israel to the initiation of its inheritance of the Promised Land. The covenant at Sinai is renewed, and the promises to the patriarchs have begun to be realized. The book brings to conclusion the life of Moses and provides a transition to the new generation under Joshua. This will be the generation that will enter the promised rest (Deut. 3:20), and this book provides the instructions that will make that territory a land of rest. The prophets who write the narrative of Israel from Joshua through Kings evaluate the nation in terms of the words of this covenant. The great prophets of Israel, especially Isaiah and Jeremiah, use Deuteronomy as the source of their instruction to Israel.

### *Title*

The popular Hebrew name for Deuteronomy is *Sefer Devarim* (“scroll of words”), an abbreviation of *’elleh haddebarim* (“these are the words”) This title is simply the first two words of the book, the standard Hebrew way of naming books. A second way of rendering the title is “the repetition of the Torah,” which appears frequently in rabbinic literature. Although Deuteronomy is in one sense a repetition of the covenant introduced at Sinai, this version of the covenant displays a significantly different emphasis. Exodus and Leviticus are concerned mostly with the tabernacle, its construction, and its ritual. The tabernacle is part of Deuteronomy only by inference, which emphasizes the one place of worship but contains nothing of the ritual that should take place there. Thus Deuteronomy is not a simple repetition.

Deuteronomy is the conclusion of a single entity constituting the first section of the Hebrew canon known as the Torah, which refers to the teaching or instruction received at Sinai. This is an appropriate title, since these books not only introduce the people of faith to the Creator and his creation but also place most of their focus on the instruction of the covenant, which governs how people are to relate to God and to each other.

The name “Deuteronomy” is based on the Greek translation of Deuteronomy 17:18. However, as a name it could convey a somewhat distorted concept of the book. This passage concerns instructions to the king, where he is told in Hebrew to have at his side *mishneh hatorah hazo’t* (a “copy of this instruction”). The translation of this phrase for Greek-speaking Jews was rendered as *to deuteronomion touto*, which could be read as “this second law.” Standing alone, the term could convey the sense of a “second law” rather than a commitment to the law as demonstrated by a readily available copy. As is the case with most of the books of the OT, names in the Greek version were extended through the Latin Vulgate into English translations.

*Author*

Traditionally both Jews and Christians have accepted Deuteronomy to be written by Moses. The German translation of Martin Luther named the books of the Pentateuch in numerical sequence as books of Moses; Deuteronomy is *das fünfte Buch Mose* (“the Fifth Book of Moses”). The predominant view in Judaism before the time of Christ was that God dictated the entire Torah to Moses. However, since the times of the Talmud and the Fathers, about three hundred years after Christ, sages have held the matter to be more complex than that. The account of the death of Moses in Deuteronomy 34:5–12 is unlikely to have been written by Moses. The note that the burial place of Moses is not known “to this day” (v. 6), an expression found five other times in Deuteronomy (2:22; 3:14; 10:8; 11:4; 29:4), suggests that the account was written in final form sometime after Moses. This expression is found fifty-five times in the books of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings, which may be an indication of the time when scribes gave final form to these writings.

In accordance with ancient Near Eastern literary practice, the book of Deuteronomy presents itself as anonymous; no author is given for the book within its pages. It is written in the third person as an account reporting the words and actions Moses, which are sometime in the first person. And yet the book of Deuteronomy tells us more about its composition than does any other book of the OT. Deuteronomy 31:9–13 declares that Moses wrote “this law [Torah],” which the book itself identifies as the longest section, constituting most of the second speech of Moses (4:44–28:68). This written document was placed in the custody of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant. There are numerous references to the written Torah (6:6–9; 11:18–21; 17:18–20; 28:58), all of which point to an early transcription of the teaching that Moses delivered in oral form on the fields of Moab.

According to biblical testimony, some version of the Torah came across the Jordan with Joshua and the Israelites. The Israelites are exhorted to be resolute and courageous as they enter the Promised Land, with the assurance that the promise of God cannot fail so long as they are faithful to the words of the Torah (Josh. 1:5–9). Joshua faithfully carries out the renewal of the covenant according to the words of the Torah once Israel has crossed the Jordan (8:30–35) and taken possession of the land (23:3–6; 24:24–26). At minimum, this must have consisted of the largest part of the second speech of Moses.

These instructions of Moses continued as an authoritative word through the work of scribes. The teaching of Deuteronomy is the basis of covenant evaluation in the sequel of prophetic words to Israel. Joshua and Judges are characterized by the concerns of Deuteronomy. Two accounts of the death of Joshua explain the themes of covenant fulfillment and failure (Josh. 24:29–31; Judg. 2:6–10). The instruction of Deuteronomy concerning the proper role of a king is evident as Samuel warns the nation how kings of the other nations rule (1 Sam. 8:11–18). Deuteronomy warns against the building of armies and a royal elite (Deut. 17:14–20), a sin committed by most of the kings of Israel and Judah. The king is to be an equal among



the people under the covenant. Deuteronomy is the measure of the success of each of the kings of Israel and Judah.

The words of Moses are characterized by their warning Israel against conforming to the ways of the Canaanites in worshiping their idols. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah are judged by their obedience to this exhortation of Deuteronomy. Loyalty to the covenant, not political success, determines whether a king is good or bad. Omri is known by the Assyrians as one of the greatest of Israel's kings, but his achievements are assigned a mere six verses in 1 Kings 16:23–28. He was responsible for establishing the capital city of Samaria, but he did what was wrong in the Lord's eyes, as his dynasty was characterized by Phoenician idolatry. His dynasty was a mere forty-five years (885–841 BC), but the account of combating idolatry during this time occupies about one-third of the books of Kings (1 Kings 16:23–2 Kings 10:27), which itself covers four and a half centuries from David to the exile.

The short period of the Omride dynasty typifies the burden of the narrative of Kings. The books of the Former Prophets in the Hebrew canon (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) are rightly referred to as Deuteronomistic; the scribes of these prophets carry on the language of Deuteronomy as they apply its message through the centuries. Deuteronomy in its canonical form is complemented with information that explains the revelation given to Moses. Features such as historical notes and explanations of people groups in the prologue (Deut. 2:10–12, 20–23; 3:9, 11, 14) were added by scribes in their presentation of the speeches of Moses as a living word for generations of Israel.

### *Date and Occasion*

The superscription of Deuteronomy states clearly the time and occasion of these speeches of Moses (Deut. 1:1–5): in the fields of Moab at the end of the fortieth year from the time they were at Horeb. The chronology is worked out very specifically. The Israelites traveled from Mount Sinai in the second year following the revelation of the covenant (Num. 10:11–12). Then they departed from Kadesh-barnea and crossed the Wadi Zered in the thirty-eighth year after leaving Sinai, after all of the warriors had died from the time of the first making of the covenant. The occasion is the final command of Moses to renew and keep the covenant when the Israelites enter the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua.

### TIME OF THE EXODUS

Israel is named as a people group in the Egyptian stele of Pharaoh Merneptah (1212–1182 BC), which ends with a poem celebrating his military campaign through the land of Canaan.<sup>2</sup> Some scholars deny that this Israel has anything to do with the Israel of the Bible, mainly on grounds that these scholars' conception of biblical Israel could not have existed at this early point in time. However,

<sup>2</sup> The stele is in the Egyptian museum in Cairo. It was discovered in 1896 by Flinders Petrie in western Thebes and contains the earliest inscription that names Israel, described as a regional people in Canaan, as they are in Judges. A translation of the concluding poem on Canaan is provided by James K. Hoffmeier, *COS*, 2.6.

the Israel of this stele is inscriptional evidence that the account of a migration to Canaan as given in the Bible did take place in the Late Bronze Age by the time of the reign of Rameses II (1279–1212 BC). This great pharaoh built the store city known historically as Raamses, which the Bible declares to have been done by the work of Israelite slaves (Ex. 1:11).<sup>3</sup> If this is the actual city meant in the biblical reference, the date of the exodus was in the thirteenth century.

Two reasons lead some to believe that the exodus occurred two hundred years earlier. The first is the date given for the building of the temple: 480 years from the time of the exodus (1 Kings 6:1). Solomon's reign ended in approximately 930 BC, which would place the exodus in the fifteenth century. This dating is correlated with archaeological evidence of the fall of key Canaanite city-states that brought an end to Middle Bronze Age. The inference is that this phase of Canaanite history was the result of the conquest described in the book of Joshua.<sup>4</sup> In such an interpretation, the Israelites would have built a city that was a predecessor to Raamses, which is renamed in the exodus account. A possible way to solve the discrepancy between the two dates could come from the schematic periods of forty years in which much of the early chronology in the Bible is given, particularly in the early period of the judges. Forty years refers to the generation of each judge concerned. Since the reference to the building of the temple includes this time period, it is reasonable to interpret the 480 years given in Kings as twelve generations of forty years. In actual chronology, children are born when a woman is in her twenties, so a living generation in chronological years is approximately half the time given in representative terms. The chronological information for this period is both ambiguous and limited. The interpreter of the biblical information must make a choice between two options: either the city of Raamses in Exodus or the number in Kings must be deemed representative, because the total time between Rameses II and Solomon is only about three hundred years.

#### COMPOSITION OF DEUTERONOMY

In the early nineteenth century the scholar W. M. L. de Wette became highly influential in dating the composition of Deuteronomy to the time of Josiah. He connected the book with the reform described in 2 Kings 22–23, where Josiah makes worship exclusive to a central location in Jerusalem. In the process of restoring the temple a book is found, identified by Huldah the prophetess as a Torah. De Wette concluded that Deuteronomy was composed during the reign of Josiah to serve as a blueprint for his reforms. Critical scholarship after de Wette has continued the theory that

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the correlation of Egyptian history with the date of the exodus of Israel cf. W. H. Shea, "Exodus, Date of the," *ISBE* 2:230–38. It is tricky to correlate known Egyptian history with what is stated or implied in Scripture. A defense of a thirteenth-century exodus is provided by Kenneth Kitchen, "Egyptian and Hebrews, from Raamses to Jericho," in *The Origin of Early Israel—Current Debate: Biblical, Historical and Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. Shmuel Ahitov and Eliezer D. Oren (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1998), 65–131; cf. also Kitchen, "The Exodus: Time and Place," *ADB* 2:702–704.

<sup>4</sup> A defense of an early date for the exodus may be found in John J. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and the Conquest*, JSOTSup 5 (Sheffield, UK: Almond Press, 1981). Bimson's arguments are based on his archaeological interpretation of the Middle Bronze Age and the fall of key cities named in Joshua, such as Jericho, Hazor, Hebron, Arad, and Dan. To make the correlation, Bimson must lower the standard date for the end of the Middle Bronze Age about one hundred years, to about 1450 BC.

the composition of Deuteronomy is to be associated with the book discovered in the purification of the temple (2 Kings 22:8).<sup>5</sup> It can be affirmed that the actions of Josiah were inspired by Deuteronomy, but that does not establish the time of the origin of the book found in the temple. The Chronicler's accounts of Judaeen kings from Hezekiah to Josiah report efforts to centralize worship in Jerusalem.

Contrary to critical scholarship, which asserts that Deuteronomy was written in the time of Josiah, the regulations of Deuteronomy are earlier than the reforms of centralization described in Kings. The book of Deuteronomy without doubt provided authority for Josiah to undertake his reforms, but its specific instructions antedate them. For example, various discrepancies exist between his reforms and Deuteronomy. In Kings, priests coming to Jerusalem cannot serve there (2 Kings 23:9), contrary to Deuteronomy 18:6–8, in which all Levites are equal. Deuteronomy provides for examination of false prophecy (13:2–6) but not for examining idolatry of priests (2 Kings 23:5, 20). The key requirement of centralization had already begun a century earlier than Josiah under Hezekiah, as made clear in Chronicles (2 Chronicles 29–31). Ahaz introduced various forms of idolatry under Assyrian influence that bear no mention in Deuteronomy (2 Kings 23:5–8, 11–13). Thus Deuteronomy is a record of the covenant of Moses, perpetuated by scribes and preached by the prophets, as evidenced in reforms carried out by the kings of Judah following the exile of Israel.

#### TREATY LANGUAGE OF DEUTERONOMY

Since the middle of the twentieth century it has been observed that Deuteronomy shares many linguistic features with ancient treaties and laws used to regulate interpersonal and international relationships. In 1955 more than 350 fragments of treaties were discovered near a temple of Nabu at Nimrud (ancient Kalhu; biblical Calah). These treaties were made by Esarhaddon, the Assyrian king during the days of Manasseh, with other vassal states, requiring them to swear loyalty to his son and heir, Assurbanipal. These were thought by some to have close affiliation with Deuteronomy, particularly with the curses in Deuteronomy 28:20–57. The more recent discovery of this same treaty in the ancient Syrian territory at Tell Ta'yinat, near the famous city of Alalakh, shows that the kings of Judah would have been subject to this same treaty and would have had a copy of it in the temple.

However, such literary comparisons are not useful for dating, since scribes made continual use of similar traditions in the making of treaties for millennia. No claim can reasonably be made that the scribes of Deuteronomy were dependent on one known treaty. The curses of Esarhaddon such as drought (28:23), death (v. 26), boils and sores (v. 27), blindness (vv. 28–29), rape (v. 30), loss of property (v. 33), and cannibalism from starvation (vv. 53–57), with their typical descriptions, all have

<sup>5</sup> It should not be assumed there was a consensus about the origin of Deuteronomy. Cf. William Creighton Graham, "The Modern Controversy about Deuteronomy," *JR* 7 (1927): 396–418. Graham discusses the views of G. Hölscher and Adam Welch. The former regarded Deuteronomy as a much later postexilic book, long after the prophets, while the latter associated Deuteronomy with prophetic groups originating with Samuel. The vast differences are an indication of the subjectivity involved in this kind of literary criticism.

roots in ancient treaties going back to the Middle and New Kingdom periods of Egypt, long antedating Moses. Such comparisons are of no value as external evidence in dating Deuteronomy, since such terminology would be familiar to Moses as well as Israelite scribes of any period.

An extensive analysis of treaty, law, and covenant in the ancient Near East by Kitchen and Lawrence brings together a detailed analysis of over a hundred such documents from the third to first millennium BC across the entire Levant.<sup>6</sup> The analysis shows that the general form of Deuteronomy corresponds most closely with treaties of the late second millennium, the time of Moses, just before the fall of the Hittite Empire and its many associated Syrian client states. These are distinct from earlier law collections, with the inclusion of stipulations, deposit of the document, reading of the document, and witnesses. The presence of a historical prologue sets apart late second-millennium treaties from all those known before and after that time. It is often denied that this is evidence for the dating of Deuteronomy, since evidence of first-millennium treaties is partial, but it is at least notable that all current information indicates that the form of Deuteronomy is consistent with the time of Moses.

One notable correlation with Deuteronomy is found only in a Hittite-Egyptian treaty of 1259 BC. Two aspects of the superscription bear resemblance to Deuteronomy. The first is a title to the work: "The Treaty which Rameses II made . . . with Hattusil III," which is like that found in Deuteronomy 1:1 ("the words that Moses spoke"). The second is the description that follows: "Thus (says) Rameses II . . . [genealogy follows]," which is just like Deuteronomy 1:5 ("Moses undertook to explain this law"). If Moses was brought up in a court at Raamses and served in a foreign office there, he would have participated in drafting this type of treaty and could have used the skills and literary forms learned there in his communicating and writing to the people of Israel. Such correlations should be accounted for. At the least, it is evident that the elements of Deuteronomy have their closest affiliation with documents that come from the time of Moses.

#### HISTORY OF DEUTERONOMY

As with all the books of the Bible, Deuteronomy is a living text, not a buried historical document like the ancient treaties discussed above. It has its original occasion in the final address of Moses to Israel but is preserved as an address to Israel for all the prophets that follow Moses, particularly those who declare God's judgment on Israel in the long and sordid narrative of Joshua through 2 Kings. These scribes and prophets continue to make Deuteronomy a living word through clarifications and explanations for a later time. The language of Deuteronomy has remarkable affiliations with the prophets of these later books. The phrase "to this day" is specifically used of Deuteronomistic interests in the period before the exile: the use of non-Israelite forced labor (1 Kings 9:21), the destruction of altars

<sup>6</sup> The complete text of all known treaties is provided by Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. N. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012).

of false worship (2 Kings 10:27), the ark (1 Kings 8:8), and the rebellion of Edom (2 Kings 8:22; 14:7; 16:6). This phrase is used in Deuteronomy with reference to the preexilic period of the first temple, when the nation underwent revolutionary cultural reforms such as those culminating in the days of Josiah.

Deuteronomy exhibits a focus on one central place of worship in the celebration of its feasts and the purposes they serve. The book never names the central location, but it is quite clear the capital established by David is intended. Deuteronomy does not conceive of more than one location at which God places his name; it is only Jerusalem that qualifies for the place God will choose. Before the conquest of Jerusalem there is no center that serves for all of the tribes. During that period the place chosen by God is limited to an Israelite or Judaeen place of worship, wherever it might be. The prohibition is to exclude worship at Canaanite shrines.

The occasion of Deuteronomy, as Israel is about to enter the land, may explain some significant variation in aspects of the legislation of the renewed covenant. In renewing the covenant, Moses envisages a situation of central government in which it will be possible for all of Israel to worship at the location of the temple. These directives are not found in earlier legislative material. Deuteronomy further makes provision for offices of a centralized government, especially that of a king, with appropriate supporting functions of judges and priests. The book evinces notable differences in other regulations as well, such as the release from debt slavery and the protection of the rights of women in relation to property. The law concerning divorce appears only in Deuteronomy, where it is a provision to protect the woman's dowry and other property in the case of marriage breakdown. It is obvious that these modified regulations for Israel as a nation in the land cannot take effect immediately. It will be twelve generations before Solomon dedicates the temple as the one central place of worship for the nation (1 Kings 6:1). Until that time, Israel is a federation of largely independent and often warring tribes, as seen in the narratives of Judges and Samuel. Deuteronomy therefore should be read not as a second law that *replaces* the first at Mount Sinai but as one that *renews* that original covenant. In renewed form, the covenant terms and obligations are suitable to a new situation of living as one nation once the land is fully occupied, including the city of Jerusalem.

### *Genre and Literary Features*

Deuteronomy is the narrative of covenant reaffirmation under Moses on the plains of Moab. At the end of the covenant reaffirmation is the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:1–43), a form of witness to the renewed covenant of Yahweh with Israel. The song ends with a colophon, common in ancient texts, that provides details about the recording of the text (vv. 44–47). The whole narrative concludes with Moses' viewing the land of Canaan (vv. 48–52) and then pronouncing a type of patriarchal final blessing on the people (33:1–29). This is followed by a description of the death and burial of Moses (34:1–8) and his succession by Joshua (v. 9). The book ends with an encomium for Moses (vv. 10–12), making him superior to all the

other prophets of Israel. The largest portion of the book consists of the covenant form (1:1–32:47), made up of elements similar to those found in other treaties of the ancient Near East.

Roughly one hundred extant laws, treaties, and covenants have been preserved in inscriptions of clay and stone from the world of the ancient Near East. These inscriptions were made at the time the covenant oaths were taken. A comprehensive survey of all such documents from the third millennium into the Persian period across the Levant may be analyzed in terms of fifteen possible components.<sup>7</sup> No document contains all these components, and formats vary through the centuries, with various features appearing in specific times and places. The book of Deuteronomy may be analyzed according to the following outline, using the categories of ancient covenants. Several of these elements are interspersed with historical reflections. For the sake of simplicity, the historical reflections are not separated in this outline.<sup>8</sup>

- I. Title (1:1–5)
- II. Historical Prologue (1:6–3:29)
- III. Stipulations (4:1–26:19)
  - A. Introduction (4:1–49)
  - B. Basic Stipulations (5:1–11:32)
  - C. Detailed Stipulations (12:1–26:19)
- IV. Solemn Ceremony (27:1–26)
- V. Blessings (28:1–14)
- VI. Curses (28:15–68)
- VII. Recapitulation and Oath (29:1–31:8)
- VIII. Deposit and Reading (31:9–13; cf. 24–26)
- IX. Witnesses (31:14–30)
- X. Song as Witness (32:1–43)
- XI. Colophon (32:44–47)

The covenant narrative of Deuteronomy is recorded as three sermons of Moses. The whole is introduced with a descriptive title: “These are the words that Moses spoke” (1:1). This type of title is predominant in the first millennium BC but is known as early as the third millennium (at Ebla). This is followed with the verbal variant “thus speaks” format, in which Moses “undertook to explain this law, saying . . .” (v. 5). The phrase “this law [Torah]” is found fifteen times in the book of Deuteronomy, mostly at the beginning and the end of the book. The portion of Deuteronomy referred to as “this law [Torah]” is introduced in 4:44: “This is the law that Moses set before the people of Israel.” The exposition of this Torah concludes with the curses of 28:15–68. “This law” is referenced repeatedly in the

<sup>7</sup> A full translation and analysis of these documents is provided by Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*. A set of charts in the third volume shows the elements common to each of the periods. The geographical variations are not as significant.

<sup>8</sup> The outline provided here is an adaption of that found in the analysis of Deuteronomy given by Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*.

deposit and reading (29:27; 31:9–12, 24), occurring for the final time at the end of the Song of Moses (32:46). The exposition of this Torah is the second sermon of Moses, constituting the greatest part of the book of Deuteronomy. The first sermon mainly provides the title and prologue, with several historical reports (2:10–12, 20–23; 3:9, 11, 14). “This law” is introduced in chapter 4 with a lengthy exposition of the significance of Mount Sinai, concluding with the profound “The LORD is God; there is no other” (4:35). The final sermon of Moses following the exposition of this Torah includes the instructions for the deposit and reading of the covenant and the conclusion of the narrative with the death of Moses.

### *Theology of Deuteronomy*

The book of Deuteronomy concerns itself with the necessity to love and fear Yahweh. God must be known by his name specifically, the deity revealed at Sinai and in the Torah. There can be no god apart from him if his person and being as a holy God are properly understood (Deut. 4:35, 39). As Moses asks in his prayer for mercy, “What god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as yours?” (3:24). The Holy One is the creator of all things and the source of all life; all that can be known is completely dependent on the God revealed to Israel. Israel has been instructed by his voice; they heard Yahweh from the midst of the blazing fire (4:36). It is only his love for Israel that has made them the object of his revelation and redemption (v. 37). This is not meant to imply that Israel was merely selected from among other nations. Rather, God *created* Israel through his provision to the patriarchs and redeemed their descendants from the land of Egypt. Therefore it is incumbent upon the people of Israel to devote themselves to Yahweh their God in all their thinking, with all their desire, and with all their means (6:5). The Shema (v. 4) is a good summary of Deuteronomy. The confession that Yahweh our God is one is to say that there is none other who may be compared to him. This is not primarily a statement against polytheism, though whatever other gods may be deemed to exist have no significance of any kind for those who know Yahweh. Rather, the Shema primarily declares that Yahweh is unrivaled, a statement made explicit by Isaiah (Isa. 40:18, 25). The creator of space and time cannot be likened to anything or anyone bounded by space and time. Israel therefore can do nothing other than devote its complete allegiance to his love and care.

### SOVEREIGNTY OF YAHWEH

The theology of learning to love and fear God is expressed in the form of a people governed by the treaty of a great suzerain. A suzerain is to be the benefactor of the people he governs, both providing for their well-being and protecting them from danger. Deuteronomy presents a suzerain unlike any other of ancient times, in terms of both his mercy and his sovereignty. God has acted on behalf of Israel simply because he is merciful, as revealed at Sinai (Ex. 33:17–19; 34:5–6). This people has been continuously rebellious. The clear point of Deuteronomy is that these people are not worthy of this gracious divine rule (Deut. 9:4–7). From the

beginning this nation has been nothing but recalcitrant against its Lord. But the Lord of mercy is also the God of history; he has created Israel to fulfill his purposes through it. The people come to possess the land and enjoy its blessings because the Lord is loyal to the promises he made to their fathers, beginning with the statement to Abraham that through him all nations might receive a blessing (Gen. 12:3).

This nation is the result of God's choice to redeem a people for himself. This nation represents God as a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:5–6), a treasured people among all the peoples of the earth. Through the covenant they represent God to the nations and are the means of accomplishing his destiny for humanity. No other king or nation can stand in the way; it is for this reason alone that they are able to enter a land of kings much mightier than any army they could muster. Their continuance in the covenant is because of his mercy; their status has nothing to do with their righteousness or upright mind. Their Suzerain cannot fail in his rule, and his sovereignty includes the ability to fulfill his purpose. He is the creator of all things, including the nation of Israel, and will fulfill his redemption.

Love and fear for Yahweh in keeping the covenant are not simply a matter of volition. A covenant is entered by means of decision, but observance of the covenant is something that must be learned. Moses repeatedly exhorts the Israelites toward the necessity of learning to fear the Lord (Deut. 4:10; 14:23; 17:19; 31:12–13). If learning is to take place, teaching must be pursued. Moses is required to teach the Israelites (4:1, 5, 14; 6:1), and the Israelites in turn must teach their children. This instruction is not only of a formal nature in understanding the actual requirements of the covenant and in knowing how to implement those requirements in each situation. This teaching must take place through the activities of daily life as well; it is something to be etched in the mind through observance, repetition, and symbol.

The immediate sequel to the Shema, the confession of the power and presence of Yahweh that demands devotion of mind, desire, and material goods (6:4–5), is the demand that these words be spoken from the time of rising to that of retiring, whether at home or on the road (vv. 6–9). They are to be bound to the wrist and to the forehead and written on the doorposts of the house. This mandate is repeated in the context of taking the vow once Israel has entered the Promised Land (11:18–20). This is the means of receiving the blessing of the covenant. It is essentially this thought that introduces the psalter in Psalm 1. This psalm describes the person who has received divine approval and therefore enjoys the blessings of life that God provides. This person does not walk in the advice of the ungodly, follow the way of sinners, or join the cynics that cannot find good in anything. Instead such a person delights in the Torah, the source of meditation day and night.

This is not to suggest that the mind is occupied constantly with the words of the Torah but rather to require that these words have been learned so that they spontaneously govern behavior. They are bound to the hands and the forehead, controlling what a person does and sees and thinks. These are the people with fruitful lives, the ones who enjoy the blessings of the covenant. This is both a collective and an individual matter. Every seven years, this Torah must be read publicly to the



entire nation (Deut. 31:11–13), and the king must take responsibility for knowing it and ruling according to it (17:18–19). The effects of knowing and keeping this Torah are that the wisdom of Israel will be known to the nations (4:6–8). Learning the ways of the Torah becomes a way of life for the whole community so that it elicits exclamations of wonder from the nations around. What nation has a God so near to it as this people's, and what is the source of the regulations that govern it with such wisdom? Learning the life of the covenant is a matter both of intellectual discernment and of the judicial exercise of a way of life.

#### FIDELITY TO THE COVENANT

The Ten Words given by Moses (called the “Ten Commandments”) state the covenant commitment in relation to God, the family unit, and the wider community. They are inclusive, dealing with the foundational issues of accountability for loss of life, responsibility to parents, commitment to family, and respect of property. Especially relevant to every individual is their use of words, which so readily misrepresent the truth, whether in legal situations or in everyday life. As such, the values of the Ten Words must always be on the minds of those who have taken the covenant oath. Those under the covenant must not covet, that is, they must not even contemplate doing any of the things that violate interpersonal relationships. Even looking upon a woman with adulterous eyes or conniving of ways to obtain another's property are violations of the relationship with God and with other people.

In addition to these broad and important aspects of the life of the people, Deuteronomy also envisions the practice of the covenant as extending to those activities that are part of the very routines of daily life. The requirement of achieving centralized worship to unite all of Israel has a significant impact on the daily life of the individual. For example, nothing is more basic to human life than food; with centralization, distinctions must be made between sacred food that is sacrificial and food that is common, to be eaten anywhere. Thus Deuteronomy contains the first discussion of slaughter for food that is not sacrificial. There must be a consciousness of food that is sacrificial, dedicated to God, and eaten at the temple. There must also be a consciousness of that food that complies with the classifications of created order and is edible, or which may be suitable for human consumption but is acceptable only for those outside the covenant. Landowners are responsible for producing food that is sacred, and they are a means of providing for the dependent of the community, particularly those without access to property.

The Sabbath requirements and temple rituals repeatedly emphasize the redemptive aspect of the covenant. Israel must not only be vigilant with tithes and offerings of the firstborn but must also be generous with offerings of thanksgiving (Deut. 15:19–16:17). The people must remember that they were once dependent slaves in Egypt and were redeemed by the mercy of God, apart from any merit of their own. In Deuteronomy all of the temple rituals have the function of providing food for the needy of the community. The festivals are fixed times according to the

phases of the moon and must be calculated and rigidly observed because of those who are dependent on them for their own food supply. Food is the blessing of God, a confession made in every aspect of its production, distribution, and consumption. Individual confession of God's provision for the essentials of life is to be made at the temple with a solemn declaration that nothing has been withheld from the obligations to care for dependents, such as Levites or widows (26:1–15). To love God in every thought is encouraged when much thinking must concentrate on the covenant requirements of daily food. The economy and the activities of daily life revolve around the use of land, the problem of debt, the production of food, and care for the orphan, widow, and Levite. Love and fear of God is expressed in virtually every activity of daily life.

Other aspects critical to the exclusive bond of the covenant are the possession of the land and the prohibition against compromising with the religions of Canaan. Retaining the gift of the land requires uncompromised loyalty to the covenant relationship. The curses for breaching the covenant conclude with the warning of removal from the land (28:63–65); such warnings are also found in the introductory speech of Moses (4:25–26) and again in the concluding exhortations (30:15–19). One threat to keeping covenant is syncretism with surrounding religions. This danger must be minimized by purging such influences from their midst. The Hebrew word for this is *kherem* (“devoted to destruction”; 2:34; 3:6). This word falls under the semantic domain of being holy, designating that which belongs to God. Vows dedicating things to God, the Hebrew *qadash*, set them apart for sacred use within the common. This could be in support of priest or temple, but it also includes tithes given for the support of the poor (26:13). The devotion of other items, such as the firstborn, constitutes removal from the common (Lev. 27:26–28); these belong to God and have no more ordinary function. As such, living animals will be put to death. This could also include humans, as indicated in Deuteronomy.

In the case of conquest, cities are irrevocably dedicated because God fights the battles and grants the land forever to his people. Divine judgment falls on the inhabitants of Canaan because of their sins. But apostasy could arise within Israel, in which case the same kind of purging will be necessary (Deut. 13:16–17). The same requirement of irrevocable dedication pertains to the peoples of the land (20:16–18). Deuteronomy does not specify just how this is to be carried out in practice, as it clearly assumes that not all Canaan will be put to the sword, but the theological intent is absolute. The practice of idolatry cannot be tolerated—not only idolatry by Israelites but also that of the various groups of Canaanites. According to Deuteronomy, a measure of actual physical separation is necessary if the practice of the covenant is to be carried out consistently. Love and fear of God does not exclude judgment—and sometimes requires it.

### *Relationship to the Rest of the Bible and to Christ*

Deuteronomy came to be one of the books most referenced in the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures. The biblical manuscripts of Qumran provide a guide to the use

of Scripture in the times immediately antecedent to the NT. The three books represented by the most manuscripts are Psalms (39 in total), Deuteronomy (32), and Isaiah (22). This is proportionate to the use of Scripture found in the NT as well.

#### DEUTERONOMY IN THE FORMER PROPHETS

In Hebrew tradition the prophetic writings are divided into two groups, known as the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets. The former group consists of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The latter group consists of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve. These divisions were substantially followed in the great codices of the earliest Christian Bibles of Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus. There the first prophetic history consisted of Joshua, Judges, and 1–4 Kings, with the one variation being that Ruth was inserted after Judges as a story that took place during that time. But both traditions recognize that these books were one great prophetic composition encompassing the story of Israel from the conquest to the exile. They are all anonymous, as is usual for all ancient writings, but they are a continuous narrative that assesses the story of Israel according to their adherence to the Torah as given in Deuteronomy.

Joshua continues the narrative of Deuteronomy in the exhortation to be resolute and courageous, to be careful to observe everything Moses commanded, to be sure the book of “this law [Torah]” (cf. Genre and Literary Features) never leaves the people’s speech, and to meditate on it day and night (Josh. 1:6–8). Directly upon the conquest of Jericho and Ai is a report of the Israelites’ building an altar at Mount Ebal (Josh. 8:30–35), just as required in Deuteronomy (Deut. 11:29; 27:4–8). There the blessing and curse are read, just as given in the book of the Torah. This event is reported again at the end of Joshua, following the description of the inheritance of all the tribes. Here we find an extensive report describing the gathering of all the tribes at Shechem and a long speech of Joshua, summarizing in Deuteronomistic fashion the challenge to choose life by following the Lord (Josh. 24:1–24). Following the commitment of the people to obey, Joshua makes a covenant written in the words of “the Book of the Law” (Josh. 24:25–26), a stone monument providing continuous testimony to the vows taken there as required in Deuteronomy.

The death of Joshua is reported at the end of Joshua and again at the beginning of Judges to illustrate the conduct of the people in relation to the demands of the book of Deuteronomy. At the end of Joshua, following the making of the covenant, the people are dismissed to their respective inheritances (Josh. 24:28–31). Joshua is buried in his own territory in Ephraim, north of Gaash, while all the generation of Joshua is similarly faithful to the covenant. This passage is verbally repeated in the introduction to the narratives of Judges (Judg. 2:6–10), but the last line of the report is changed to say that the generation following Joshua did not know the Lord. Although the conquest is not complete until long after the death of Joshua, as stated in Joshua 13:1, the presentation is broken down topically into the books of Joshua and Judges. Joshua tells of how the Lord is faithful to the covenant in

keeping his promises to the patriarchs, and Judges tells of how Israel is unfaithful in keeping the instructions Moses gave. Joshua tells of how the land of Canaan comes to be the possession of Israel through the gift of the Lord, and Judges tells of how Israel becomes Canaanite through its association with the people of the land.

This point is made specifically in Judges 19, in the narrative of a Levite who goes to Bethlehem in Judah to bring his concubine back to Ephraim. On his return with his concubine, the day becomes late while they are near the city of Jebus (later called Jerusalem). They need to find lodging, but they deliberately avoid pagan Canaanite cities and go on to Gibeah of Benjamin to find a place for the night (Judg. 19:11–26). They find no hospitality, a fundamental failure in ancient society. Finally an old man, not an Israelite, coming home from his work in the field, invites them into his house. The men of that city demand sexual relations with the guests. Being denied their primary desire, they abuse the concubine of the Levite until she dies. The narrative intentionally mirrors that of Lot in Sodom in Genesis 19:4–10 (cf. Judg. 19:22–25); only the names and the places are changed. Sodom epitomizes the sins of Canaan, and it is that kind of conduct that now characterizes Israel.

#### A DEUTERONOMISTIC HISTORY

The narrative of the Former Prophets has frequent allusions to the language of Deuteronomy and its warnings. Under the oppression of the Midianites, the Israelites cry out to God (Judg. 6:7–10). An unnamed prophet arises to rebuke their failure with words reminiscent of the warnings of Deuteronomy. When the people desire a king like the other nations, Samuel the prophet warns them with a description of taxation and servitude typical of ancient kings (1 Sam. 8:10–18). This is the converse of a king who keeps a copy of the Torah to live by because he is under the covenant alongside his brother Israelites (Deut. 17:18–20). When Israel goes into exile under the Assyrian king Shalmaneser, the book of Kings provides a long sermon in the terminology of Deuteronomy (2 Kings 17:7–18), cataloging the ways Israel has failed to heed the words of Moses. Specific mention is made of the building of high places and the worship of idols, the failure to hear the warnings of the many prophets who have testified against them, and their stubbornness in being stiff-necked.

The influence of Deuteronomy in the Former Prophets is so significant that it led to a paradigm shift in critical studies of the Pentateuch. Martin Noth recognized that this prophetic history was the work of an author who brought together varied traditions according to a carefully conceived plan.<sup>9</sup> Noth made a case for a form of Deuteronomy serving as an introduction to the four books now known as the Former Prophets. He described the whole as a composition by a scribal editor or author carrying out this work in the middle of the seventh century after the release of Jehoiachin from prison (2 Kings 25:27–30). He believed that this author

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Noth's study was published in English as *The Deuteronomistic History*, trans. by Jane Doull et al., JSOTSup 15 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1981).

composed a chronological framework for the whole period and created a comprehensive historical work of Israel. These traditional materials were independently arranged and ordered into a sequence created by summaries that anticipate and recapitulate. These passages have the monotonous repetition of the same simple expressions and continual reference to the divine law, the necessity of obedience, and the disastrous consequences of disobedience. The Former Prophets have subsequently come to be termed the Deuteronomistic History.

But Deuteronomy is not an introduction to the Former Prophets, as Noth proposed. It is the last words of Moses, which form an appropriate conclusion to his life and teaching.<sup>10</sup> The work of Noth is, however, instructive for understanding better the influence of Deuteronomy in the exhortations, warnings, and promises of the Former Prophets. Since Noth, the theories of early histories of Israel, labeled J, E, D, and P, which were assumed to include much of the material found in Joshua–2 Kings, have been gradually abandoned. Deuteronomy is a unified work that stands alone, and the prophetic work that follows is a continuation of the life of Israel composed from a great variety of records of Israel brought together to form a complete work with a unified message. Deuteronomy provides the literary and historical context for this great work. This was not the work of one person in the exile, as Noth opined.

There is a consensus that some form of this prophetic work existed in the time of Josiah, when there was great hope for the establishment of a centralized worship and the rule of a Davidic king in Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> Josiah followed the Torah precisely as prescribed by Deuteronomy (2 Kings 23:25), but his reign ended tragically with his death at the hands of Pharaoh Neco at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29). From then on Jerusalem was under the control of Egypt and then Babylon until the exile. Second Kings blames Manasseh for the doom of the exile that could not be reversed even by a king so worthy as Josiah (2 Kings 23:26–27; 24:3–4), an assessment that may have been part of the completion of Kings after Judah went into exile. But Kings covers a period of more than four hundred years, one that stretches from David to the exile and involves numerous prophets. Isaiah is a prominent example of a prophet involved in royal affairs, as shown in the account used in 2 Kings 18–21. Earlier versions of Kings can be detected in the distinct formula used for the books' sources.<sup>12</sup> Some form of the prophetic history of Israel was already in existence by the time of Hezekiah.

The process of dividing this long prophetic history into books as we have them is no longer known, but they are a continuous narrative telling the story of Israel according to Israel's faithfulness to the covenant as expressed in Deuteronomy.

<sup>10</sup> An instructive study on the origin and function of Deuteronomy may be found in Daniel I. Block, "Recovering the Voice of Moses: The Genesis of Deuteronomy," *JETS* 44/3 (2001): 385–408. It is evident that Moses did not write everything in Deuteronomy, which is updated for later generations, but Moses was responsible for a Torah that Israel brought with them from Egypt.

<sup>11</sup> Hope expressed in Kings is developed by Frank M. Cross, "The Themes of the Book of Kings and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History," in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 274–289.

<sup>12</sup> Evidence for earlier versions is provided by August H. Konkel, "Hezekiah in Biblical Traditions," (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1987), 124–126.

Israel as a political entity would come to an end, but that would not be the end of the covenant. The Former Prophets include the confirmation of a divine kingdom through the ordination of a king celebrated in Psalm 2, and they anticipate a realization of the kind of kingdom taught by Moses in Deuteronomy.

#### DEUTERONOMY IN THE LATTER PROPHETS

The book of Deuteronomy was apparently very influential in the reforms of Josiah in centralizing all worship to the temple in Jerusalem. The requirement of reading the Torah would likely have been followed during his reign (Deut. 31:10–11). The prophecy of Jeremiah begins around the time of Josiah's reformation in 622 BC and continues until after the exile in 586. The language and influence of Deuteronomy might be expected to be prominent in Jeremiah, as seems to be the case in many of its prose sermons, such as Jeremiah 19:1–20:6, which is also reminiscent of his temple sermon in chapter 7. Jeremiah uses the object lesson of a shattered flask to depict the fall of the people of Jerusalem (Jer. 19:1–2, 10). Notable in this chapter is the Deuteronomistic language in the warning of Jeremiah 19:3–9. Here Jeremiah addresses the kings of Judah, warning them against the shedding of innocent blood and the idolatry of the high places. Onlookers will whistle at the destroyed city reduced to cannibalism. Although these verses are well integrated in the passage, particularly with a play on the word for flask (Hb. *baqbuk*) and the shattering of the plans of Jerusalem (*baqqoti*), they distinguish themselves as language of the covenant applied to the rebellious city. As the prophet of the exile who applies the curses of Deuteronomy against those who break the covenant, Jeremiah frequently exhibits the influence this book of the Torah has in his preaching.

The language and themes of Deuteronomy are also found in other prophetic literature. The themes of Deuteronomy include the struggle against idolatry, the centralization of the cult, the exodus, the covenant, the election of Israel, the observance of the law, and the inheritance of the land.<sup>13</sup> Like Deuteronomy, Hosea engages in polemics against idolatry, arguing that idols are the handiwork of a craftsman (Hos. 8:6; 13:2). He speaks of “transgressing the covenant” (Hb. *‘aberu berit*; Hos. 6:7; 8:1;), words characteristic of Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut. 17:2). The breaking of the covenant is the equivalent of forgetting God (Hos. 13:6; Deut. 8:11–14). The book of Isaiah begins with God's condemnation of Israel because of her disobedience to the covenant in language prominent in Deuteronomy. Isaiah opens with God's calling for the testimony of witnesses against the disobedience of Israel. Witnesses to the ancient covenant and the conduct of Israel are the heavens and the earth (Isa. 1:2), an appeal found repeatedly in Deuteronomy (Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1). Isaiah speaks of God's bringing up sons, which is one of the metaphors of the relationship of God and Israel used in Deuteronomy (14:1; 32:6, 18). Isaiah 1 opens with a condemnation of Israel and an appeal to learn to do

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 320–365. Weinfeld has proposed that a scribal circle began its work in the time of Josiah and continued into the exile, prominently influencing the Former Prophets and the book of Jeremiah. He has produced an inventory of Deuteronomistic phrases around the themes of Deuteronomy in a lengthy appendix to his book.

good and seek justice, as Moses exhorted (Isa. 1:2–20). Jerusalem and its leaders particularly come under denunciation, as they have utterly failed to care for the orphan and widow, as demanded by Deuteronomy.

#### DEUTERONOMY IN THE NT

Deuteronomy is also prominent in the life of Jesus. One of the most critical points in the life of Jesus is when he is tested by the Devil (Matt. 4:1–11). This event follows immediately upon the baptism of Jesus, by which he voluntarily identifies with those acknowledging their need of forgiveness by making a public confession of repentance in submission to baptism. After this identification with those pursuing righteousness (cf. Isa. 51:1), Jesus is led by the Spirit to face the testing of the Devil. This is a crucial part of his preparation in submitting to the will of the Father in his glorification through the cross. The circumstance of Jesus in the wilderness has its parallel with that of Israel in its journeys. The forty days of Jesus' fasting are a complete period, much as the measure of a generation was forty years in the wilderness. In this circumstance, Jesus is completely dependent upon God as his body has reached the extremity of its endurance. In the same way, the entirety of Israel in the wilderness was utterly dependent on God for its provision.

But Israel failed the test of trusting in God; in Deuteronomy, Moses exhorts them to learn the lessons of the wilderness and the necessity of trusting in God. They will now come to a land of abundance, but this will not change their need. They are still dependent on God for their existence in the same way. The manna provided by God is a lesson that mortals do not live by bread alone (Deut. 8:3). Humans cannot prevent death; therefore, human well-being is dependent on more than the ability to produce bread, a temporary provision of life. When the Devil tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread (Matt. 4:3), Jesus appropriately responds with the word of Moses to Israel. Our dependence on God is for more than bread; bread alone cannot produce life.

The Devil's second temptation is for Jesus to jump off a tower of the temple, arguing that God protects the life of his own and citing Psalm 91:12 as a proof-text. The deception in this test is that leaping from the temple shows a lack of trust rather than proof of it. When Israel comes to the land and the people have houses full of good things, they must not test the Lord as they did at Massah (Deut. 6:16), forgetting the God that brought them out of Egypt (v. 12). Their very life is proof of the divine presence. Jesus answers the Devil with the exhortation of Moses (Matt. 4:7), arguing that God is to be trusted, not tested to demand proof of his presence as Israel had done in their complaining.

The final test of the Devil is one of simple idolatry; he promises to give Jesus the kingdoms of the world in return for allegiance (Matt. 4:8–9). This is the fundamental warning of Moses when the Israelites receive God's abundance: they must guard themselves and be sure they serve the Lord alone, taking the vow of allegiance without taking his name in vain (Deut. 6:13). After this clear and decisive

word from the exhortation of Moses, the Devil leaves Jesus (Matt. 4:10–11). God in turn sends his provision to Jesus through the service of angels.

Among the apostle Paul's letters, the theology of Deuteronomy is exemplified in his defense of the restoration of Israel in Romans 9–11. Paul first establishes that the promises of God have not failed, since God has always worked through the elect (Rom. 9:6–29). Paul then addresses the current situation of Israel (Rom. 9:30–10:21). In the third section Paul addresses the question of whether God could have rejected his people Israel (Rom. 11:1–36). Paul addresses the current situation of Israel through his interpretation of the message of Moses in Deuteronomy. The answer comes in two parts. The first concerns the nature of the gospel (Rom. 9:32–10:13) and the second God's relation to Israel through the gospel (Rom. 10:14–21).

Israel has stumbled in not realizing that Christ is the goal of the Torah (Rom. 10:4), the fulfillment of its teaching. The righteousness of God expounded in the Torah is to be found in Christ. Israel has not understood that God is impartial in his righteousness and that it is God's gift to all those who have faith in Christ. Paul presents his argument for covenant renewal in Romans 10:6–11. He explains this renewal in terms of what is happening through the preaching of the gospel. The exile of Israel, anticipated in Deuteronomy 29:21–28, continued until the coming of Christ. That time of exile was brought to an end with his coming. Jesus has instituted the new covenant and brought about covenant renewal as anticipated in chapter 30. The sign of membership in this renewed covenant is faith that confesses Jesus Christ as Lord. The nearness of the word promised by Moses in 30:11–14 is now heard in the preaching of the gospel. This is the word of faith preached in Paul's gospel (Rom. 10:8–9). Paul applies what is said about the word of the Torah to the Messiah as its fulfillment; he is not far away, for he has come down from heaven. As such, when the word of his preaching is in the mind, it is a sign that the work of the new covenant has taken place through faith.

Paul views the latter chapters of Deuteronomy as a prophetic description of the story of the covenant from Moses to his own day and beyond. This same expectation of the fulfillment of the covenant of Deuteronomy is expressed by the teacher of righteousness in the Qumran community in the concluding exhortation of a reconstructed document known as 4QMMT. The teacher at Qumran also believed that at long last his community was experiencing the renewal promised by Moses. The stumbling of Israel at this covenant fulfillment does not put them outside the reach of God's grace (Rom. 10:14–21). God continues to extend his grace to a disobedient and rebellious people. He will provoke them to recognize this grace through the Gentiles, those who had not understood the Torah.

This sampling of the influence of Deuteronomy throughout the Scriptures illustrates the profound influence this sermon of Moses has had throughout the story of redemption—from its inception, when God established the covenant at Sinai, until the fulfillment of the new covenant in Christ and the ultimate redemption of Israel. Allusions to Deuteronomy or direct reference to it can be found in virtually all the writings of Scripture.



### *Preaching from Deuteronomy*

In his last exhortation to Israel, Moses lays out clearly the demands of faith that are fundamental for all time. The first demand of faith is a trust in God that Deuteronomy describes as learning to fear God and to love him (Deut. 6:1–2; 11:1–2). These words are defined in Deuteronomy according to the requirement to keep the commandments. This requirement is not to be taken in a legalistic sense; the commandments do not lend themselves to legalistic interpretation. When Jesus is asked about the greatest commandment, his response is that of 6:4–5: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). The commandment to love cannot be observed by supplementing it with a list of rules, as was Pharisaic practice. Thus Jesus has no patience with the Pharisaic method of interpretation. For all of its good intentions, its zeal, and its pride, it was a complete misunderstanding of the divine demand in Deuteronomy. Love and fear are internal motives of trust and surrender. Love is a commitment made in the confidence that care and support will be found; submission is the response of fearing the consequences of disobedience.

Confessions of love for God are found in the first four of the Ten Words in Deuteronomy 5:6–15. These include exclusive trust in God (words one and two), an oath commitment regarding the name of God (word three), and the observance of the Sabbath to confess the reality of being a redeemed people entering God’s rest (word four). These words are at the heart of preaching Deuteronomy and must be articulated in Christian terms. The oath of allegiance to the new covenant is expressed in commitment to the Lord Jesus (Rom. 10:6–10); confession of this commitment is made in baptism. The Sabbath observance is a way of declaring divine redemption, entering the rest that began with the exodus, as taught in Hebrews, especially 3:1–4:11. The Christian remembrance of redemption, the Israelites’ Passover meal, is communion, as Jesus teaches his disciples at his last Passover meal. The resurrection is the new covenant fulfillment of that redemption, and it is why Christians already in NT times began to set apart the first day of the week as their confession of redemptive rest.

#### LIVING IN FAITHFULNESS TO GOD

When Jesus is in Jerusalem, one of the scholars of the law comes to him with a test question about the greatest commandment (Mark 12:28–34). Jesus responds with the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4 and adds a corollary: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). The very words demanding love of a neighbor are found in Leviticus 19:18, but the requirement to love one’s neighbor is explained in Deuteronomy. Words one through four in Deuteronomy 5:6–14 demand an uncompromising commitment to God, who alone is holy. God is the source of life and all material well-being; everything belongs to him. This demands the total devotion of our lives to him and the requirement to love others.

Words five through nine in Deuteronomy 5:15–19 are the means of loving one’s neighbor and include protection of life, family, property, and truth. If all of these

words are observed in relation to other people, then one loves a neighbor as oneself. The learned man asking Jesus the question about the greatest commandment recognizes this fully in his response: all of the rituals of sacrifice carry no worth apart from these observances (Mark 12:32–33). Jesus acknowledges the rational response of the erudite man; this man understands what God is looking for in a citizen of his kingdom. In Deuteronomy sacrifice is limited to the great gatherings of harvest that are the occasions of making provision for the poor. The words of Jesus are an exposition of Deuteronomy in his context. In the same way, these words of Deuteronomy must be contextualized in our preaching. This is the gospel of the kingdom.

On another occasion a rich ruler asks Jesus about how he might inherit eternal life (Mark 10:17). Jesus answers with reference to the words found in Deuteronomy 5:16–20, the six words (commandments) of instruction for human relations (Mark 10:19). The ruler replies that he has kept these stipulations from the time he was young. Jesus responds with a short lesson from Deuteronomy: sell everything you have and give it to the poor (Mark 10:21). The ruler must understand what it means to love God with his mind, his desire, and his wealth. It means that possessions belong to God. If this ruler is to love God as demanded in Deuteronomy, he must know that his great wealth is not his own to use for himself. Good preaching explains how our lives and possessions are shared with others because they belong to God. It is the demand of love for the Creator and Redeemer.

#### LIVING IN FAITHFULNESS TO OTHERS

Human life functions in family units. The essence of the fifth word, which requires people of the covenant to honor father and mother, is that human life depends on family. This is another of the laws of Deuteronomy that cannot be reduced to rules. This did not prevent interpreters of Deuteronomy in the time of Jesus from creating rules around it, though they were hardly the kind that showed love for God. The Pharisees were scrupulous about cleanliness, but when it came to honoring their parents, their rule was that they could make a gift of their property in lieu of care for their parents (Matt. 15:2–8). This annulled the word of God in Deuteronomy.

The tenth word in Deuteronomy expresses clearly the demand of love. It begins in the mind, in how a person thinks. One must not desire the wife of his neighbor (Deut. 5:21). Not only is committing adultery forbidden, but lusting after the wife of another is already to commit adultery and is a violation of love for God and neighbor. Honor of parents, faithfulness in marriage, and control of sexual desires are essential to family. This is the preaching Deuteronomy demands. It provides many examples that state the required response that will implement these commands.

Family requires the support of community, which means that individuals must not desire any of the property of their neighbors (5:19). Theft begins not with the act of appropriation but with the desire to have the property of another. Similarly, controlling wrong desires is the frame of thinking that lends to telling the truth, not using deceptive words to elude the truth in self-interest. These are fundamental to neighborliness and should be among the pillars that support good preaching.

Life, family, and property are the three basic values that provide stability in every society, and these three values permeate the whole book of Deuteronomy. God has granted Israel life and is leading them to his chosen place of rest. There they must protect their families, value their property, guard the integrity of the community, and care for the poor. The detailed instructions of this Torah give many examples from daily life as to how this must be done. This is the teaching that is the basis of discipleship for the follower of Jesus. These fundamental truths are developed throughout the book of Deuteronomy as Moses prepares the people for life in the Promised Land. This gospel of Moses is brought to its goal in the work of Jesus Christ, who is leading us to the place of rest, our final redemption (Heb. 4:1–10). The exhortation of Deuteronomy is repeated in Hebrews: “While the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it” (Heb. 4:1). This is the fear of true faith. Love of God is to live according to the teaching of Deuteronomy. Faith is the fear of falling short in completing the instructions that Moses exhorts Israel to keep. This book is the most comprehensive for preaching Christian discipleship.

### *Interpretive Challenges*

Deuteronomy is largely straightforward prose that is not difficult to exegete. The text is among the best preserved in the Hebrew Bible. There is rarely a case at which a textual difference known from the Greek translation makes a substantial difference to the interpretation of a passage or has any influence on the message of the book. The main challenges in Deuteronomy come from differences with parallel texts, sometimes within Deuteronomy but at other times in comparison with other passages from the Pentateuch. Three important problems concern the appointment of the judicial system, the route of the exodus, and the function of the priesthood.

Three accounts of judicial organization must be related to each other. The first is that of Moses’ establishing a system of military order on the directive of his father-in-law, Jethro (Ex. 18:13–27). The second is in Numbers 11, which recounts the choosing of seventy elders as directed by God in connection with the Israelites’ murmuring about manna. The third is in Deuteronomy, as the initiative to appoint judges is taken by the people and carried out under the direction of Moses. These do not seem to be variants of one single event, but they do all describe one system of leadership in the wilderness.

The exodus route is described in Numbers and Deuteronomy, but with differences between the two accounts. According to Deuteronomy the Israelites leave Kadesh in the second year after the exodus and travel southeast toward the Gulf of Elath, where they spend thirty-eight years on the borders of Seir and Edom (Deut. 1:46–2:3, 14). They cross the gorge of the Arabah at its southern end near Elath and travel north toward Wadi Zered, where they enter Moab. According to the itinerary of Numbers 33 the Israelites camp at Ezion-geber on the Gulf of Elath before journeying to Kadesh-barnea. They leave Kadesh in the thirty-eighth year from the

exodus, the time when Aaron dies on Mount Hor (Num. 33:37–39). From there they journey along a northern route toward the border of Moab (Num. 33:41–44). According to Numbers 20:1 the visit to Kadesh is in the fortieth year. The narrative in Numbers requires two visits to Kadesh, one at the time of the spies (Num. 13:26) and another during the journey to Moab (Num. 33:36–37). The itinerary in Numbers 33 does not describe travel south to the Gulf of Elath in the journey to Moab. All of the locations are on a northern route around the south side of the Dead Sea. The two descriptions of entering Moab suggests to some that there is more than one migration, on different routes.<sup>14</sup> The narratives of Numbers and Deuteronomy present Moses as the leader of a single exodus to Kadesh-barnea, where rebellion results in forty years of wilderness wandering before entering the Promised Land through Moab. Whatever the differences in the journey, the accounts are united in portraying a united exodus.

When it comes to the function of the priesthood, Deuteronomy makes no distinction between Levites and the more limited group of Aaron's descendants serving as priests. Levites are given tasks and remuneration otherwise limited to the sons of Aaron (Deut. 18:1–8). In the census summary of Numbers 4:47, however, the work of the Levites is limited to the duties of service and portage of the tent of meeting. In Numbers the Hebrew term *'abodah* ("service"; e.g., Num 3:26) is used exclusively for the work of the Levites in providing for the physical structure of the tabernacle; it is never used for the work of the priests. Elsewhere, though, the word refers to any activities dealing with the ritual function of the temple. Deuteronomy specifies that the priests, the sons of Levi, are the custodians of the ark that contains the writing of the Torah (Deut. 31:9), but this is a marked contrast with the description of the work of priests given in Numbers.

The oldest means of dealing with these differences is to find ways to harmonize them. This method goes back to the Pentateuch texts themselves, which sometimes insert a portion from another book to harmonize accounts. The commentary will point out an example of this in the matter of sending the spies, as the Samaritan Pentateuch inserts Deuteronomy 1:22–23 at the beginning of Numbers 13 to harmonize the two books. All of the accounts are partial and structured in a somewhat topical fashion, so it may be assumed that they describe different aspects of the same event. Harmonization was especially adopted in seeking to bring various locations and descriptions of the exodus into a complementary relationship.

There is much to be said for this kind of interpretation, but the influence of the passage of time must also be taken into account. Scribes inherited traditions, which they made relevant for their audience. Deuteronomy anticipates an entirely new situation for the people of the covenant in the Promised Land. The role of Levites would necessarily change when the portage of the tabernacle ceased.

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, rev. ed., trans. and ed. A. F. Rainey (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 200–206. Aharoni explains this historically as territorial change over time. In his book's historical geography, he explains that Midian was a sophisticated civilization before the arrival of Edom and had good relations with Egypt. At that time there was no resistance to a direct journey to Heshbon, the kingdom of Sihon. Subsequently settlements developed in Edom and Moab that forced Israel to take a longer route from the south.

Deuteronomy looks forward to a time of one temple and a single place of worship. This would be centuries after Moses, but scribes writing after Moses would have been living at a time when some of these changes were beginning to be realized. By the time the Torah was discovered in the temple in the days of Josiah, the relevance of its message for one place of worship would be immediate, along with the role of Levites in carrying out that function.

A further method of the scribes was to structure material in order to present certain topics in a certain way. Numbers deals with the exodus as a transition toward the Promised Land. Deuteronomy looks back on the exodus events as an exhortation to avoid the failure of faith that had brought them to the plains of Moab a generation later. The locations of the wanderings and the significance of the names may already have become generalized by the time the scribes inscribed the messages Moses left the people. The contours of the events were well known and articulated for the hortatory lessons. The information of the wilderness traditions is insufficient to establish a chronology of events synchronous with the locations to which God guided his people. Differences in Deuteronomy must be interpreted within the limits of the purpose of the book, as there is insufficient information for developing a more precise portrait of the whole. This does not compromise the significance of the events; enough is known to serve the purposes of each composition.

### *Outline*

- I. First Address of Moses (1:1–4:43)
  - A. Setting of the Last Words of Moses (1:1–5)
  - B. Wilderness Journeys (1:6–3:29)
    1. Journeys about Kadesh-barnea (1:6–2:1)
      - a. Preparations at Horeb (1:6–18)
      - b. Rebellion at Kadesh-barnea (1:19–2:1)
    2. Journeys until Beth-peor (2:2–3:22)
      - a. Journey across Wadi Zered (2:2–15)
      - b. Journey across the Arnon (2:16–37)
      - c. Possession of Transjordan (3:1–22)
    3. Prayer of Moses (3:23–29)
  - C. Exhortation to Faithfulness (4:1–40)
    1. Wisdom of Israel (4:1–8)
      - a. The Word of Life (4:1–4)
      - b. Obedience to the Word (4:5–8)
    2. Be On Guard for Your Life (4:9–22)
      - a. Guard against Neglect of the Teaching (4:9–14)
      - b. Guard against Idolatry (4:15–22)
    3. Consequences of Idolatry (4:23–31)
      - a. Punishment of Exile (4:23–28)
      - b. Restoration of Repentance (4:29–31)

4. Israel's Incomparable God (4:32–40)
  - a. God's Choice of Israel (4:32–38)
  - b. Israel's Commitment to God (4:39–40)
- D. Cities of Refuge (4:41–43)
- II. Second Address of Moses (4:44–29:1)
  - A. Setting of Receiving This Torah (4:44–49)
  - B. Prologue to This Torah (5:1–11:32)
    1. Covenant at Horeb (5:1–21)
      - a. People of the Covenant (5:1–5)
      - b. Words of the Covenant (5:6–21)
    2. Mediation of the Covenant (5:22–6:3)
      - a. Frightful Revelation at Horeb (5:22–27)
      - b. Appointment of Moses as Mediator (5:28–33)
      - c. Condition of Covenant Blessing (6:1–3)
    3. Exhortation of This Torah (6:4–11:32)
      - a. Sermon on Word One (6:4–25)
      - b. Serving the Lord in Canaanite Culture (7:1–26)
      - c. Remembering the Lord as a Covenant People (8:1–20)
      - d. Warning to a Rebellious People (9:1–24)
      - e. Reinstatement of the Covenant People (9:25–10:11)
      - f. Fear and Love the God of Gods (10:12–22)
      - g. Listen to the Mighty God (11:1–17)
      - h. Remembrance through Covenant Ritual (11:18–32)
  - C. Exposition of This Torah (12:1–25:19)
    1. Instructions for Worship (12:1–16:17)
      - a. Worship at the Place the Lord Will Choose (12:1–31)
      - b. Seduction to False Worship (12:32–13:18)
      - c. Rituals of Holiness (14:1–21)
      - d. Cycles of Civic and Ceremonial Duties (14:22–16:17)
    2. Regulations for Community Life (16:18–18:22)
      - a. Judicial Procedures (16:18–17:13)
      - b. Role of the King (17:14–20)
      - c. Provisions for Levitical Priests (18:1–8)
      - d. Prophetic Authority (18:9–22)
    3. Judicial and Military Regulations (19:1–21:9)
      - a. Judicial Regulations for Protection of Life (19:1–21)
      - b. Procedures in War (20:1–20)
      - c. Atonement for Unobserved Homicide (21:1–9)
    4. Domestic and Civil Regulations (21:10–25:19)
      - a. Regulations for Family Conflicts (21:10–23)
      - b. Order and Holiness in Domestic Affairs (22:1–12)
      - c. Sexual Regulations Protecting Marriage (22:13–30)
      - d. Regulations for Community Purity and Integrity (23:1–25)

- e. Provisions for Welfare of the Vulnerable (24:1–22)
  - f. Provisions for Order in Community Life (25:1–19)
- D. Confessions of a Treasured People (26:1–19)
  - 1. Confession in the Offering of Firstfruits (26:1–11)
  - 2. Confession at the Completion of the Tithe (26:12–15)
  - 3. Divine Mandate to Be a Holy People (26:16–19)
- E. Covenant Ceremony at Shechem (27:1–26)
  - 1. Erection of an Altar (27:1–8)
    - a. Inscription of the Commandments (27:1–3)
    - b. Offering of Sacrifices (27:4–8)
  - 2. Instructions for the Ceremony (27:9–26)
    - a. Blessings and Curses (27:9–13)
    - b. Curses for Secret Sins (27:14–26)
- F. Covenant Blessings and Curses (28:1–29:1)
  - 1. Blessings (28:1–14)
    - a. Resumption of the Covenant Sermon (28:1)
    - b. Declaratory Blessings (28:2–5)
    - c. Divine Promise of Blessing (28:6–14)
  - 2. Curses (28:15–44)
    - a. Declaratory Curses (28:15–19)
    - b. Threats of Divine Punishment (28:20–44)
  - 3. Curse of Siege Warfare (28:45–57)
    - a. Proof of Disobedience (28:45–48)
    - b. Invasion of Ruthless Nation (28:49–51)
    - c. Starvation during Siege (28:52–57)
  - 4. Plagues and Exile (28:58–68)
    - a. Failure to Observe the Words of the Torah (28:58)
    - b. Plagues and Decimation (28:59–62)
    - c. Exile to a Distant Land (28:63–68)
  - 5. Subscription to the Covenant in Moab (29:1)
- III. Third Address of Moses (29:2–30:20)
  - A. Covenant Sworn in Moab (29:2–29)
    - 1. History of Covenant Vow (29:2–9)
    - 2. Oath of the Covenant (29:10–15)
    - 3. Life of Israel under Oath (29:16–28)
      - a. Experience among Nations (29:16–17)
      - b. Deception of Oath Violation (29:18–21)
      - c. Destruction of a Land under Curses (29:22–24)
      - d. Explanation for a Desolate Land (29:25–28)
    - 4. Theological Reflection on Life under Oath (29:29)
  - B. Call to Choose Life (30:1–20)
    - 1. Restoration of the Fortunes of Israel (30:1–10)
    - 2. Call to Love God (30:11–20)

- a. Possibility of Life (30:11–14)
  - b. Choice of Life or Death (30:15–20)
- IV. Epilogue (31:1–34:12)
- A. Covenant Continuity through Witness of the Torah (31:1–30)
    1. Joshua Designated Successor to Moses (31:1–8)
      - a. Moses Speaks to All Israel (31:1–6)
      - b. Moses Speaks to Joshua before All Israel (31:7–8)
    2. Torah in Word and Song Given as Witness (31:9–30)
      - a. Torah Written and Given to the Priests (31:9–13)
      - b. Joshua Stationed at the Tent of Meeting (31:14–15)
      - c. Moses to Teach Israel the Song as Eternal Witness (31:16–22)
      - d. Yahweh Appoints Joshua as Leader of Israel (31:23)
      - e. Completed Torah Placed in the Ark as Eternal Witness (31:24–27)
      - f. Heaven and Earth Witnesses to Israel Accepting the Song (31:28–30)
  - B. Song of Moses (32:1–44)
    1. Rock of Israel (32:1–6)
      - a. Exordium to the Name of Yahweh (32:1–3)
      - b. Perfect Work of Yahweh (32:4)
      - c. Foolish and Perverse People (32:5–6)
    2. Relations with Israel (32:7–18)
      - a. Patronage to Israel (32:7–14)
      - b. Rebellion of Israel (32:15–18)
    3. Sovereignty of God in Redemption (32:19–42)
      - a. Wrath against Israel (32:19–25)
      - b. Punishment of the Nations (32:26–35)
      - c. Redemption of Israel (32:36–42)
    4. Coda: Celebration of Divine Vindication (32:43)
    5. Subscription (32:44)
  - C. Final Exhortation of Moses (32:45–47)
  - D. God Summons Moses to Mount Nebo (32:48–52)
  - E. Blessing of Moses (33:1–29)
    1. Yahweh Blazes Out from Sinai (33:1–5)
    2. Tribal Blessings (33:6–25)
    3. Blessedness of God's Provision (33:26–29)
  - F. Death of Moses (34:1–12)
    1. Moses Sees the Promised Land (34:1–4)
    2. Death and Burial of Moses (34:5–7)
    3. Empowerment of Joshua (34:8–9)
    4. Eulogy to Moses (34:10–12)



## DEUTERONOMY 1:1–18

**1** These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab. <sup>2</sup>It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea. <sup>3</sup>In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him in commandment to them, <sup>4</sup>after he had defeated Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth and in Edrei. <sup>5</sup>Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to explain this law, saying, <sup>6</sup>"The LORD our God said to us in Horeb, 'You have stayed long enough at this mountain. <sup>7</sup>Turn and take your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negeb and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. <sup>8</sup>See, I have set the land before you. Go in and take possession of the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their offspring after them.'

<sup>9</sup>"At that time I said to you, 'I am not able to bear you by myself. <sup>10</sup>The LORD your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are today as numerous as the stars of heaven. <sup>11</sup>May the LORD, the God of your fathers, make you a thousand times as many as you are and bless you, as he has promised you! <sup>12</sup>How can I bear by myself the weight and burden of you and your strife?' <sup>13</sup>Choose for your tribes wise, understanding, and experienced men, and I will appoint them as your heads.' <sup>14</sup>And you answered me, 'The thing that you have spoken is good for us to do.' <sup>15</sup>So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and set them as heads over you, commanders of thousands, commanders of hundreds, commanders of fifties, commanders of tens, and officers, throughout your tribes. <sup>16</sup>And I charged your judges at that time, 'Hear the cases between your brothers, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the alien who is with him. <sup>17</sup>You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's. And the case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.' <sup>18</sup>And I commanded you at that time all the things that you should do."

### *Section Overview: Superscription; Territory of the Land of Promise; Appointment of Chiefs*

The circumstances of the instruction of Moses is laid out in a full description of place and time. Although the information of this complex superscription to the sermons of Moses appears to be a fragmentary association of times and places, it

has a sensibly ordered symmetry. The description of this setting must be understood according to the way in which it is ordered:

- (A) Site in the wilderness before the journey through Moab (v. 1)
- (B) Time addressed in the first sermon of Moses (v. 2)
- (C) Date at which the instruction of Moses began (v. 3)
- (B') Time addressed in the second sermon of Moses (v. 4)
- (A') Site in Moab after the conquest of Transjordan (v. 5)

The first two lines of the chiasm identify the beginning of the wilderness journey; the last two identify its termination in the plains of Moab. This comprehensive *inclusio* explains the fortieth year of these sermons.

The Hebrew text indicates a break after Deuteronomy 2:1, dividing the introductory narrative into two units: 1:1–2:1 and 2:2–29. Following the heading in 1:1–5, the first part of the narrative includes events in the year following the exodus, beginning with the command to leave Horeb (v. 6). The second part begins at the end of the forty-year sojourn, when God said they had traveled the hill country of Kadesh-barnea long enough (2:3). Deuteronomy 1:6 and 2:3 have a certain rhyme: *shevet bahar* (“you have stayed about this mountain,” AT; 1:6) and *sob ‘et har* (“you have been travelling about these hills,” AT; 2:3). The superscription introduces each of these two sections: the first when they left Horeb and the second when they arrived in Moab.

This complex heading sets out the background for the exposition of “this law” expounded by Moses (1:5). “This law” is the heart of Deuteronomy, its teaching being foundational to the life of the people. The first address of Moses begins with the journey from Mount Sinai in 1:6. The second sermon introduces “this . . . law” in 4:44, when Moses explains it to Israel. “This law” refers to the exhortations of chapters 5–11 and the regulations of 12–28. These instructions and responsibilities of the covenant are concluded with the exhortation of the third sermon in chapters 29–30. The exposition of this Torah is given after the defeat of Sihon and Og (1:4), when the forty years of wilderness wandering are complete (v. 3). The superscription introduces the times and places covered in the three sermons of Moses.

### *Section Outline*

- I.A. Setting of the Last Words of Moses (1:1–5)
- I.B. Wilderness Journeys (1:6–3:29)
  - 1. Journeys about Kadesh-barnea (1:6–2:1)
    - a. Preparations at Horeb (1:6–18)
      - (1) Land of Promise (1:6–8)
      - (2) Appointment of Chiefs (1:9–18)

### *Comment*

1:1–2 The locations named in the first verse are found in the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula. The years of wilderness wandering were spent almost entirely in

this wilderness. The wilderness named “Arabah” is a deep rift that extends a valley south of the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba (see 1:7; 2:8). The term also commonly includes the Jordan Valley from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. The name “Suph” (= “reeds”) was a designation of the Red Sea in ancient times. When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, the people went through the *Yam Suf* (Ex. 15:4). That location is not known, but it cannot be the one here in Deuteronomy. Ancient writers also referred to the port of Elath (Gulf of Aqaba) on the Red Sea as *Yam Suf* (Deut. 1:40; 2:1), which is the context of the places mentioned in this verse; the Israelites were in this area at a time in which Moses could have delivered his exhortation.

In verse 1, Suph appears to be a further definition of Arabah. “Opposite Suph” is a natural translation of the Hebrew *mol suf*, referring to the location at which the Israelites began their march in the Arabah from Seir toward Moab. The other five locations define a region in the southern Sinai Peninsula. The Desert of Paran refers to the Sinai Peninsula; the name Paran in this verse may designate the largest oasis in southeast Sinai (Feiran), near traditional Mount Sinai. Tophel is known only in this reference as a place near Paran.<sup>15</sup> Hazeroth was the site of the second encampment after Sinai (Num. 11:35; 33:17). Laban may be the same as Libnah in the Sinai (Num. 33:17–21). Dizahab is located on the Gulf of Aqaba.

Kadesh-barnea is the largest oasis in the Sinai Peninsula, just west of the modern Egypt-Israel border. It is a site of fertile fields and several springs, situated near the junction of the “Way to Shur” leading to Egypt and the road linking Raphia to Elath on the Gulf of Aqaba.<sup>16</sup> The Mount Seir route ended in Edom, the area south of the Dead Sea. Israel later requested permission to travel this route from Kadesh-barnea to Edom (Num. 20:16). The journey from Mount Sinai to Kadesh-barnea on this route was only eleven days.<sup>17</sup> This was all the time Israel needed to arrive at the entrance to the Promised Land. The events at Kadesh-barnea, however, resulted in Israel’s wandering this wilderness for thirty-eight years. The consequences of not trusting in God are one of the themes of the first address of Moses.

**1:3–5** The three sermons of Deuteronomy given at the command of Yahweh are dated precisely to the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year in order to integrate them into the previous chronology of the books of the Torah (cf. Num. 10:11; Deut. 2:14). The time of the rebellious generation is now over. The sermons preached earlier in Sinai, described in the opening verse, must be repeated to another generation. The time is described in relation to the critical military conquests that enabled Israel to camp in the Transjordan (Num. 21:21–22:1), which are

<sup>15</sup> The customary location on maps is on the King’s Highway between Punon (a copper mine) and Wadi Zered. This is based on the journey to Moab but cannot be the reference of this verse.

<sup>16</sup> The name Raphia does not occur in the Bible but is found in both Mesopotamian and Egyptian writings in early biblical times. Throughout antiquity it was an important boundary between Canaan and Egypt. It is about 30 miles (48 km) north of Wadi el-Arish.

<sup>17</sup> The actual location of Mount Sinai will remain a mystery, and the traditional location (Jebel Musa) will not change. For discussion cf. Hershel Shanks, “Where is Mount Sinai? The Case for Har Karkom and the Case for Saudi Arabia,” *BAR* 40/2 (March–April 2014): 30–41, 66–67. Shanks reports on a colloquium held in Israel defending Har Karkom as the location. He discusses the traditional location and the establishment of a church around a plant identified as the burning bush, today the location of St. Catherine’s Monastery.

the second key theme in the first sermon of Moses. These events begin to reverse the disastrous outcome of the failure of faith at Kadesh-barnea.

The kingdoms of Sihon and Og were to the east and north of where Israel was encamped at the Jordan. Heshbon, the capital of Sihon, is preserved as Tell Hesban, 15 miles (24 km) north of where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea. Based on archaeological excavations, the actual location of the city in the days of Moses appears to have been about 7 miles (11.3 km) south of the current tell. Tell Ashterah is a site along the King's Highway in Syria, referred to as "Ashteroth-karnaim" in Genesis 14:5. It is mentioned in correspondences between Egypt and Canaan in the time of Moses in clay tablets known as the Amarna Letters (cf. Deut. 1:26–28). Edrei has been identified as Daraa, a town south of Ashtaroth near the tributary of Yarmuk. It is mentioned in Ugaritic inscriptions and in Joshua 12:4; 13:12, 31.

Moses explains this "law" to the people. The Hebrew word *torah* carries the sense of teaching rather than legal requirement. The noun *torah* is derived from the verb *to teach* (*yarah*), which is the kind of "instruction" revealed in Exodus 24:12. On the mountain at Sinai, Moses was given the Torah on two tablets of stone to teach (*lehorot*) Israel. The noun *torah* includes civil and ritual procedures (Ex. 18:16), prophetic teaching and reproof (Isa. 1:10), moral exhortation (Prov. 1:8), and didactic narrative (Ps. 78:1). In Deuteronomy Torah is the instruction of the covenant to which all are subject; it reveals the sovereign will of God. The king must read these covenant words so that his heart will not be lifted above the people's (Deut. 17:19–20). This instruction creates equality for all people no matter one's status in society. King and people are bound to the same instruction, an ideal otherwise unknown in the time of Israel.

**1:6** Moses reminds the people of the command given at Mount Sinai to the previous generation; they were to proceed to the land formally tendered to them. At Mount Sinai, after the idolatry of the golden calf, God revealed his name to Moses to assure the beleaguered leader that he would find rest in the Promised Land (Ex. 33:14). The name Yahweh would become synonymous with the mercy of the God of the covenant (Ex. 33:19; 34:5–6; Ps. 103:7–8; Jonah 4:2). This mercy would make possible the continuation of the covenant and the promise. The fiery glory cloud of divine presence led Israel away from Mount Sinai in the second year, on the twentieth day of the second month (Num. 10:11–12). The entire retrospection that constitutes the prologue of the covenant renewal deals with Israel's response to the command to enter the land and the consequences of its lack of faith.

**1:7–8** The Land of Promise is described in terms of its regions. The "hill country of the Amorites" refers to the central highlands that will become the heartland of Israelite settlement. The Amorites will be the first peoples Israel encounters when it enters the land. The Arabah in this context is the Jordan Valley, from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. The hill country of the Shephelah is the rolling region to the west of the central highlands, which becomes low hills as it extends to the coastal plain along the seashore. The Negeb in biblical times is limited to the area

beginning about 15 miles (24 km) north of Beersheba and extending south to the wilderness of Zin. The eastern part of the Negeb belongs to Seir-Edom. It is a dry area, as the term signifies. The land of Canaan extends north along the sea coast to the Lebanon mountain ranges and up the Beka Valley as far as the bend in the Euphrates River. The northern boundary of Canaan during the Hittite Empire (c. 1275 BC) was set at Lebo-hamath on the Orontes River.

1:9–13 Moses recalls the provisions for leadership that took place at Horeb before the journey from Mount Horeb to Kadesh-barnea. He appointed chiefs to serve as officers and judges. This introduction serves as a reminder to the way Yahweh prepared the people to enter their inheritance. The extraordinary growth that necessitated the appointment of leaders was also a reminder of the fulfillment of the divine promise. This event is recorded in Exodus 18:13–27, at the occasion of a visit from Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. The appointment of chiefs is not explicitly initiated by God. Jethro advises Moses that he will be exhausted unless an organizational structure is put in place. Moses here recounts how he commanded the people to select proven leaders from among their tribes.

“At that time” refers to the year the people camped at Horeb. Although the arrival of Jethro is placed before the giving of the covenant at Sinai in the narrative, Exodus 18:5 states that Jethro arrived with his daughter and her sons when the people had encamped at the mountain of God, and he left them immediately after the process was complete (Ex. 18:27). According to Numbers 10:29–32 Jethro left as the Israelites were preparing to leave Horeb, almost one year after they had arrived. According to Exodus 19:1 the Israelites arrived at Horeb (= Sinai) on the first day of the third month after leaving Egypt, and according to Numbers 10:11 they left Horeb in the second year on the twentieth day of the second month.

Both Numbers and Deuteronomy are explicit regarding the need for a structure of chiefs to distribute the work of leading the people. According to biblical tradition, the number of men of military age at the time of the exodus was six hundred thousand. One person could not keep order in a multitude of that size. The “weight” (Hb. *torakh*; v. 12) included the issues of finding food and water as well as settling disputes. At the time of Isaiah the appointed festivals and ritual became a *torakh* to the Lord (Isa. 1:14). These are the only two occurrences of this noun in the Hebrew Bible, but the generic use of the term indicates the inclusive nature of the burdens involved.

The selection of chiefs was done by the people. Those selected were previously known for their leadership ability in their respective tribes. The qualifications required men who were wise, discerning, and experienced. This is in keeping with the emphasis of wisdom in Deuteronomy. Divine revelation and keeping of the covenant are wisdom for Israel that is recognized by all the surrounding nations (Deut. 4:6, 8). Failure to follow the values of the covenant or any perversion of the truth is an obvious lack of wisdom (Deut. 16:19). “Wise, understanding, and experienced” (1:13) are the same three nouns that define the wise person in

Ecclesiastes 9:11, which indicates that they are a standard description of wisdom. Jethro tells Moses that the chiefs must be capable men who fear God, trustworthy men who spurn ill-gotten gain. These qualities of wisdom are spoken of repeatedly in Proverbs.

1:14–18 Chiefs of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands would have involved tens of thousands of leaders according to the biblical numbers of the exodus. The chiefs of the tribes are called “commanders” (Hb. *sarim*), leaders whose duties are both military and judicial. The seventy elders who usually serve as leaders for the people along with Moses are not mentioned (Ex. 24:9; Num. 11:16). Appointment of military officers to provide order and adjudicate civil disputes was a common practice in ancient societies. Pharaoh Horemheb, who lived shortly before the time usually assigned to Moses (c. 1333–1306 BC), issued a decree for the Egyptian judiciary, seeking persons of integrity and good character. An inscription from a later time found at an Israelite fortress at Yavneh-Yam (c. 630 BC) is an appeal for justice addressed to the commander (*sar*) from someone in his company.<sup>18</sup> Israel is frequently depicted in the exodus as an army marching out of Egypt in military formation to the Promised Land. The term “hosts” (*tseba’ot*) is used to describe the people (e.g., Ex. 6:26; 7:4; 12:17, 41, 51) and typically refers the troops of an army.

The choosing of leaders does not give the Levites a specific role. According to Chronicles, Levites have a central role when David organizes the administration over his kingdom. David appoints judges and officers to keep order in the outer districts of his kingdom from the ranks of the Levites (1 Chron. 26:29). Moses in similar manner appointed “heads” (*shoterim*) to serve with the chiefs in their judicial work (Deut. 1:15), but they were not related to the Levites. The role of these officers is usually associated with the judiciary. Record keeping would be essential to the judiciary. These officers were subordinate to the *sar*, but the work of leading and judging depended on them.

Emphasis is placed on the impartiality of judgment, which includes the “alien” who lives among the Israelites. All persons are subject to God, who is the supreme Lawgiver. This law therefore applies equally to all people. Judges act as divine representatives; “the judgment is God’s.” A hierarchy in judicial affairs is part of the military organization. The most difficult cases are to be brought to Moses. Difficult cases would include those situations not known in the law, and Moses would need to consult God directly (Ex. 18:19). This is seen in practice at various times (Lev. 24:10–23; Num. 9:1–14; 15:32–36; 27:1–11; 36:1–10). The laws of the covenant Moses references Deuteronomy 1:18 must be those given at Horeb. Unique to Israel is its teaching the law to all the people. This is the goal of Moses in Deuteronomy, and it is necessary because *torah* is not limited to civil regulations; it is the integrated instruction of the covenant necessary to living a life of trust and obedience.

<sup>18</sup> Horemheb attempted to curtail corruption of officials. For his appointment of judges cf. James Henry Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, vol. 3, *Historical Documents from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906), §63. For the Israelite appeal cf. J. Naveh, “A Hebrew Letter from the Seventh Century B.C.,” *IEJ* 10/3 (1960): 129–139.

### *Response*

No other migration is comparable to that described as the circumstances in which Moses explains the covenant to a new generation of Israelites. This is a miracle no smaller in scope than the exodus from Egypt with the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea. The events given in the superscription as the precedent to this sermon are appropriately celebrated at the great festival of the seventh month. This festival celebrated the completion of harvest and the beginning of the new agricultural year. It was known not only for the gathering of the harvest (Lev. 23:39) but also for the building of temporary shelters (Hb. *sukkot*) to commemorate the journey of Israel through the wilderness (Lev. 23:43–44), and thus was known as the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles). This was a pilgrimage festival at which all family representatives were to go to the chosen place, and every seventh year they would renew the covenant in the reading of the Torah (Deut. 31:10–11). This celebration grew over time with the lighting of giant menorahs in the temple courtyard, all-night dancing to flutes by torch light, dawn processions ending with libations of water and wine at the bronze altar, prayers for rain and the resurrection of the dead, and people carrying fruit and waving palm branches (Mishnah, Sukkah). The wilderness wandering was a severe mercy, harsh and punishing, but was also a preservation of the covenant people to inherit the promises of the patriarchs.

It is all too common that camps of migrants or refugees go on for a generation or more as described in this account. What is virtually impossible in all such cases is the maintenance of some sense of order and support over such a long period of time. The choosing of leaders during the migration of Israel is explicit in Exodus 18:13–27 and Numbers 11:16–30. Unique to Deuteronomy is the initiative of Moses in choosing leaders with approval of the people. Moses begins with those who have already demonstrated ability because of wisdom and experience. The proposal of governance is an extensive structure involving thousands of individuals at all its levels. It is done by appointment in the hierarchical manner of military order, though apparently with individual participation at all levels of authority. A military formation is appropriate, as Israel is marching to war once it leaves the encampment. But in a nonmilitary situation this governance provides for all matters of dispute to be appropriately adjudicated, since leaders are provided for groups as small as ten. These are integrated with ranked officials as cases become more difficult. Other officers are appointed to keep records. Supervised leadership to the level of detail described by Moses can go a long way for maintaining order in contemporary refugee camps that go on for generations. Even so, the success of maintaining order in the magnitude of the Israelite camp over the length of a full generation is supernatural. It begins with a prophet and lawgiver appointed by God, whose influence extends through others to everyone in the camp.

God cares about migrants forced out of their land of birth. They are not perfect, but that does not alter their worthiness for provision both materially and socially. The grandparents of this author were forced out of their homeland by Stalin and lost all of their property. In Canada a local agent was fraudulent and after ten

years robbed them of all their possessions a second time. Their church community was very minimally supportive of them. That legacy lives on with the children's children. Provision for migrants is one of the most critical aspects of God's work in the world today.

## DEUTERONOMY 1:19–2:1

<sup>19</sup>“Then we set out from Horeb and went through all that great and terrifying wilderness that you saw, on the way to the hill country of the Amorites, as the LORD our God commanded us. And we came to Kadesh-barnea. <sup>20</sup>And I said to you, ‘You have come to the hill country of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us. <sup>21</sup>See, the LORD your God has set the land before you. Go up, take possession, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has told you. Do not fear or be dismayed.’ <sup>22</sup>Then all of you came near me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, that they may explore the land for us and bring us word again of the way by which we must go up and the cities into which we shall come.’ <sup>23</sup>The thing seemed good to me, and I took twelve men from you, one man from each tribe. <sup>24</sup>And they turned and went up into the hill country, and came to the Valley of Eshcol and spied it out. <sup>25</sup>And they took in their hands some of the fruit of the land and brought it down to us, and brought us word again and said, ‘It is a good land that the LORD our God is giving us.’

<sup>26</sup>“Yet you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God. <sup>27</sup>And you murmured in your tents and said, ‘Because the LORD hated us he has brought us out of the land of Egypt, to give us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. <sup>28</sup>Where are we going up? Our brothers have made our hearts melt, saying, “The people are greater and taller than we. The cities are great and fortified up to heaven. And besides, we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.”’ <sup>29</sup>Then I said to you, ‘Do not be in dread or afraid of them. <sup>30</sup>The LORD your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, <sup>31</sup>and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place.’ <sup>32</sup>Yet in spite of this word you did not believe the LORD your God, <sup>33</sup>who went before you in the way to seek you out a place to pitch your tents, in fire by night and in the cloud by day, to show you by what way you should go.

<sup>34</sup>“And the LORD heard your words and was angered, and he swore, <sup>35</sup>‘Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers, <sup>36</sup>except Caleb the son of Jephunneh. He shall see it, and to him and to his children I will give the land on which he has trodden, because he has wholly followed the LORD!’ <sup>37</sup>Even with me the LORD was angry on your account and said, ‘You also shall not go in there. <sup>38</sup>Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it. <sup>39</sup>And as for your