

LECTURE 6
DEUTERONOMY OVERVIEW
RENEWAL OF A COVENANT PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION

1. Name

2. Theme

3. Purpose

4. Key verse

5. Key truths

- The Israelites on the Plains of Moab were to learn the importance of loyalty to the covenant from the experiences of the previous generation.
- The laws of Moses were designed to benefit the people of God as they moved into the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership.
- Loyalty to the covenant would be rewarded with blessings, and disobedience would be punished with curses.
- The Israelites were to renew their commitment to the covenant as they waited on the plains of Moab and after they entered the Promised Land.¹

I. AUTHOR

See "Lecture 1: Genesis Overview" regarding general Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

A. CRITICAL VIEWPOINT

The critical reconstruction of Old Testament history contends that Deuteronomy was a forgery created just prior to the great reformation of King Josiah over seven hundred years after the death of Moses. The argument against Mosaic authorship constructs a speculative history of the text as follows:

1. Northern Levites gathered together legal traditions into a "Proto-Deuteronomy" when they defected to Jerusalem.
2. During the time of Josiah's reforms the book was added to and developed (640-609) (2Kgs.22:8).
3. There were further additions in exile (esp. Deut.28). Indeed the critics argue that any part which mentions exile must have been written post-exile.

¹ Ibid., 252.

B. MOSAIC AUTHORSHIP

1. The words of the book are ascribed to Moses (1:1-4; 4:44-46; 29:1; 31:9, 24-26). Indeed Deuteronomy includes about 40 claims that Moses wrote it.

Deuteronomy presents a clearer self-witness concerning its authorship than any of the other books of the Pentateuch.²

2. The details and flavor of the book appears to fit what is known of Late Bronze Age Canaan, not that of Josiah, and geographical and historical details indicate a firsthand knowledge of the period between the Exodus and the Conquest.

The legislation it contains could never have arisen under the conditions which prevailed in the late seventh century BC. The social, economic, and historical situation reflected by this book is quite different from that of Josiah's time.³

3. The remainder of the Old Testament attributes Deuteronomy and the rest of the Pentateuch to Moses (Josh. 1:7; Judg.3:4; 1 Kin. 2:3; Ezra 3:2; Ps. 103:7; Mal. 4:4).

4. Christ Himself directly attributes it to Moses (Matt. 19:7-9 ; John 5:45-47).

5. Recent studies have shown that Deuteronomy appears to follow the treaty form used in the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries BC, a form appropriate for this covenant renewal document.

6. The Book provides an eminently suitable literary and theological conclusion to the Mosaic literature.

The older generation of Israel has died, and the younger must now be confronted with a fresh, contemporary expression of the covenant. Deuteronomy is a covenant initiative to which Israel, on the eve of the adventure of conquest, can and must respond.⁴

7. The theological terminology used, especially for the names of God, do not resemble the language used by the prophets of the seventh century and thereafter.

At the very least a Josianic work should have reflected the divine titles most in vogue during the ministry of Jeremiah, Josiah's contemporary. But the actual statistics show quite the contrary.⁵

8. The numerous references to the danger of Canaanite religion upon Israel suggest a danger still threatening the author's generation. It certainly seems as if it is a future menace to be dealt with, rather than an element of corruption that has already endured for centuries.

9. There are numerous appeals to the hearers to recall past episodes and conditions that are within the hearer's memories.

In the earlier chapters of Deuteronomy particularly, there are numerous appeals to the hearers to recall past episodes and conditions which are within the memory of those who are being addressed. The memory of the Egyptian bondage is especially vivid. Six times the phrase occurs, "the house of bondage"; five times we read, "Remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt"; five times the formula appears, "through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm."⁶

10. The "problem" of Moses' death in 34:1-12 can be explained either as an inspired Mosaic prophecy or as an inspired post-Mosaic addition.

² J. Ridderbos, *Deuteronomy* in "Bible Student's Commentary" (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), p. 19.

³ G L Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), Electronic Edition.

⁴ E H Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 1992), 91.

⁵ G L Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), Electronic Edition.

⁶ G L Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), Electronic Edition.

This does not endanger in the slightest the Mosaic authenticity of the other thirty-three chapters, for the closing chapter furnishes only that type of obituary which is often appended to the final work of great men of letters. An author's final work is often published posthumously (provided he has been writing up to the time of his death). Since Joshua is recorded to have been a faithful and zealous custodian of the Torah, Moses' literary achievement, it is quite unthinkable that he would have published it without appending such a notice of the decease of his great predecessors.⁷

II. DATE

III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

1. Capstone of the Pentateuch

2. History of the Past

3. History for the Future

4. Preparation for death

5. The Necessity of Deuteronomy.

(1) A new generation had arisen. (2) A new land filled with gross religious corruption was before them. (3) New dangers confronted them. (4) The new prospects, however, were for settlement at last in a homeland. (5) Militarily, economically and spiritually, new challenges faced God's people. (6) The transition from semi-nomadic to agricultural life necessitated the promulgation of new duties. (7) A new leader was about to emerge.⁸

IV. LITERARY ANALYSIS

1. Comparative Outlines

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⁷ Ibid., Electronic Edition.

⁸ J E Smith, *The Pentateuch* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co., 1993), Electronic Edition.

<p>First Address (1:1-4:43)</p>	<p>Preamble (1:1-5)</p> <p>Historical prologue (1:6-4:49)</p>	<p>Preamble (1:1-4)</p> <p>Historical Prologue (1:5-4:43)</p>	<p>Covenant prologue: What God has done (1:1-4:43)</p>
<p>Second Address (4:44-28:68)</p>	<p>Covenant Stipulations/Great Command (5:1-11:32)</p> <p>Ancillary Commands (12:1-26:19)</p> <p>Covenant Sanctions (27:1-30:20)</p>	<p>Stipulations (4:44-26:19)</p> <p>Blessings, curses and ratification (27:1-30:20)</p>	<p>Covenant stipulations: What Israel should do (4:44-26:19)</p>
<p>Third Address (29:1-30:20)</p>	<p>Dynastic Disposition (31:1-34:12)</p> <p>How to hand on the covenant.</p>	<p>Succession (31:1-34:12)</p>	<p>Covenant ratification: What God will do (27-34)</p>
<p>Appendix (31:1-34:12)</p>			

2. Original Audience/Message

3. Deuteronomy as speech

J E Smith divides the speeches into five as follows:

STRUCTURE OF DEUTERONOMY ("The Instruction of the Nation")				
First Discourse	Second Discourse	Third Discourse	Fourth Discourse	Final Words
Review of the Journey	Restatement of the Law	Reemphasis of Responsibility	Renewal of Commitment	Reminder of Duty
Ch.1–4	Ch.5–26	Ch.27–28	Ch.29–30	Ch.31–34

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4. Deuteronomy as a covenant

Second millennium Hittite treaties bear a remarkable resemblance to the format and structure of Deuteronomy.

a. Preamble (1:1-4)**b. Historical Prologue (1:5-4:43)****c. Stipulations (4:44-26:19)**

When a Hittite king renewed a treaty with a vassal state – usually after a change of monarch – he would bring the stipulations up to date, and this may explain some of the changes in the specific laws found in chapters 12–26. The new generation faced special problems as they anticipated life in the land of Canaan. A major change had to do with the location and manner of their worship, and the first and last chapters in this section both deal with the subject of presenting tithes and offerings (12:4–14; 26:1–15).¹⁰

⁹ J E Smith, *The Pentateuch* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co., 1993), Electronic Edition.

¹⁰ H Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), Electronic Edition

d. Blessings, curses, and ratification (27:1-30:20)

e. Succession (31:1-34:12)

f. Witnesses (30:19; 31:28)

g. Public reading (31:9-22)

h. Deposit of copies

5. Deuteronomy as a constitution

Some have argued that Deuteronomy should be understood as the archetype and forerunner of modern Western constitutionalism.

If Deuteronomy was in fact a treaty-covenant document, as well as having features of a law code, it in effect became the “constitution” of ancient Israel. It was the written deposit that defined her social order, the codification of her legal principles and procedures, and her self-understanding under the rule of God. As a document it administered the covenant life of God’s people.¹¹

6. Deuteronomy as an exposition of the Decalogue

It is a hortatory description, explanation, and enforcement of the most essential contents of the covenant revelation and covenant laws, with emphatic prominence given to the spiritual principle of the law and its fulfillment, and with a further development of the ecclesiastical, judicial, political, and civil organization, which was intended as a permanent foundation for the life and well-being of the people in the land of Canaan.” In no sense is its legislation to be regarded as a new or second law, differing essentially from that of the previous books of the Pentateuch.

¹¹ R Dillard and T Longman III, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 99.

The Book of Deuteronomy can be summarized in the caption “Preaching and Pleading.” Here Moses poured out his heart in urging Israel to be faithful to the Lord. The book contains thirty-four chapters, 958 verses, and 28,461 words. Almost every verse in the book is filled with exhortation, instruction, warning or promise. Deuteronomy speaks of the past but not with the purpose of presenting a chronicle. Rather Moses reminded his auditors of selected events which then become the basis for exhortation and warning in the present.¹²

7. Deuteronomy as chiasm

- a A look backwards (1-3)
 - b The covenant summary (4-11)
 - c Covenant stipulations (12-26)
 - b' Covenant ceremony (27-30)
- a' A look forwards (31-34).

This literary analysis of Deuteronomy in a chiasmic structure helps to emphasize the central point of Deuteronomy, the body of legal instruction for ancient Israel.

8. Canonical context

Deuteronomy is the foundation stone for the so-called Deuteronomistic history. The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings comprise a unit of historical books with a strong Deuteronomistic emphasis. Deuteronomy sets the stage on which the drama described in the historical books takes place. The covenant’s call to choose between life and death, blessings and cursing, is a prelude to the story of national Israel. God’s people stand on the verge of nationhood in Canaan. Deuteronomy becomes the nation’s formative constitution. It is a covenant renewal document, which also prescribes their future relationship with God, with each other, and with surrounding nations. The expression of Israel’s relationship to God in the form of a covenant is the most important Old Testament expression of Israelite faith. This is the distinguishing characteristic of Hebrew religion.¹³

V. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

1. Principles of Deuteronomy

Spirituality of God	4:12 , 15 , 16
Uniqueness & Unity of God	4:35 , 39 ; 6:4 ; 7:9 ; 10:17
Relationship of love between God and His covenant people	4:37 ; 7:13 ; 33:3
Love for God the dynamic principle of the believer’s life	6:5 ; 7:8 ; 10:12 , 15 ; 11:1 , 13 , 22 ; 13:3 ; 19:9 ; 30:6 , 16 , 20
Idolatry to be totally shunned	6:14 , 15 ; 7:4 ; 8:19 , 20 ; 11:16 , 17 , 20 ; 13:2–12 ; 30:17–18
Live as a holy people	7:6 ; 26:19 ; 28:9

¹² J E Smith, *The Pentateuch* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co., 1993), Electronic Edition.
¹³ B Arnold and B Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 152.

Faithfulness rewarded; violation punished	Chaps. 28–30
Retain and obey the revealed truth from God “Remember and forget not”	9:7

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2. The Promised Land

While Exodus deals with Israel’s redemption from Egypt, Deuteronomy emphasizes the borders of the Promised Land right at the outset (1:7-8) and throughout.

4. Law and Love

a. Law

¹⁴ J E Smith, *The Pentateuch* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co., 1993), Electronic Edition.

Analyzing the emphasis on obedience in Deuteronomy, Griffith Thomas offers the following:

- (i) The necessity of obedience: the law of God.
- (ii) The motive for obedience: the goodness of God.
- (iii) The standard of obedience: the word of God.
- (iv) The incentive to obedience: the faithfulness of God.
- (v) The alternative to obedience: the justice of God.¹⁵

b. Love

Law in Deuteronomy is complemented with the command to love God, which is but a just return for God's love to Israel.

The totality of the law is thus comprehended in one demand (Deut. 6:4-5). Love, however, is more than mere affection or devotion. Love always appears in association with some activity: walking in the Lord's ways (10:12), keeping the Lord's commandments (5:10), obeying the Lord's voice (13:4). Love thus demands that the person engage in practices that demonstrate covenant fidelity. We need to understand that Deuteronomy sets the context for love and the demands that flow from love. Israel is constantly reminded of her previous servitude in Egypt. Redemption has now made her a bond-slave to Yahweh.¹⁶

5. God's Name

Deuteronomy refers to the name of God twenty-one times. Some critics have argued that this is a "demythologizing" of the divine presence. In other words, what is present is not God himself (for he dwells in heaven), but his "name." However, the contexts in which the "name" is invoked usually involved personal devotion and relationship where covenant is the predominant theme. Proclaiming God's name, therefore, is to publicly declare His character especially in His relations with His people (32:3). Also, when God places His name on a place, nation or person this implies ownership.

In Deuteronomy, where the emphasis is on possessing the land and on Israel's covenant with God, expressing God's presence through his "name" reminds the nation of his ownership and dominion. Rather than diminish or correct the notion of God's presence, God's name in Deuteronomy affirms the very real presence of God in the fullness of his character and covenantal commitment to those on whom he had set that name.¹⁷

6. God's Word

¹⁵ J E Smith, *The Pentateuch* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co., 1993), Electronic Edition.

¹⁶ W J Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 66-67.

¹⁷ R Dillard and T Longman III, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 103.

7. Centralization of Worship

Deuteronomy repeatedly describes Israel's worship at "the place the LORD your God will choose" (12:5,11,14,18,21,26; 14:23-25; 15:20; 16:2,6,11, 15; 17:8,10; 18:6; 26:2). This made critical scholars conclude that the book springs from the time of Josiah's efforts to centralize worship

Just as God had chosen the nation, so also he would choose the place and the character of worship there. What is new in the later choice of Jerusalem is not the idea of centralization itself, but rather that Israel would now have a permanent sanctuary instead of a portable one. Worshiping God at the place he had chosen and in the way he had prescribed was but one part of Israel's covenant allegiance; it reflected at a national level the status of Israel as a treasured people (7:6; 14:2; 26:18), set apart as holy to the Lord. But this law did not eliminate the possibility that the chosen place might change at various times.¹⁸

Perhaps the formula "the place which the Lord your God shall choose" (Deut. 12:5) establishes the principle of the sole altar but, for the time being, leaves the particular site undecided. In any case, the emphasis is on Yahweh and not on the place. It is noteworthy, in connection with the sanctuary, that the key chapter of Deuteronomy 12 opens (vv. 1-4) and closes (vv. 29-31) with a polemic directed against Canaanite gods. In Deuteronomy we probably have to distinguish between a central sanctuary and a sole sanctuary. Josiah's reform gives the impression of the desire to create Jerusalem as a sole sanctuary and not merely as the central sanctuary.¹⁹

8. Uniqueness

Three fundamental truths are taught in Deuteronomy.

- a. Yahweh is unique (6:4; 4:35; 10:17; 7:25)
- b. Israel is unique (7:6; 4:31; 6:23).
- c. God and Israel have a unique relationship (29:13; 32:6; 10:12ff)

In some respects Deuteronomy portrays what an ideal Israel would be. It presents an Israel with "one God, one people, one land, one sanctuary, and one law."²⁰

VI. NEW TESTAMENT ANALYSIS

1. Quotations

¹⁸ R Dillard and T Longman III, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 104.

¹⁹ W J Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 65.

²⁰ R Dillard and T Longman III, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 102.

2. Parallel with John's Gospel

3. Covenant Mediator

4. The Promised Land

VII. THE MESSAGE OF DEUTERONOMY

Original Message:

Present Message: