

Exposition of the Book of Deuteronomy

Sunset Bible Church Adult Sunday School 2021

Week 1: Introduction to the Book of Deuteronomy

These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness... – Deuteronomy 1:1

And when he (the king) sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. – Deuteronomy 17:18

Outline of the Class/Book

- Week 1: Introduction to the book of Deuteronomy
- Week 2: Moses' First Address: Remembering the Grace of YHWH (1-4)
- Week 3: Moses' Second Address: Explaining the Grace of YHWH (5-8)
- Week 4: Israel's Covenant Relationship with YHWH (9-11)
- Week 5: Celebrating and Demonstrating Covenant Relationship (12-15)
- Week 6: Judges, Kings, Levites, and Prophets (16-18)
- Week 7: Pursuing Covenant Relationship (19-25)
- Week 8: Blessings and Curses and Moses' Third Address (26-30)
- Week 9: The Death of Moses (31-34)

Opening Discussion: Deuteronomy is, in a sense, a sermon that goes back over the Law that was given in Exodus and Leviticus. As such it revisits much of the content of the rest of the Pentateuch. Why would this be necessary? Why do we need a “second-law” in the Bible?

Approach of this class: The scope of this class, as a nine week survey of Deuteronomy is necessarily limited. We will not be turning over every rock and exploring every detail of the book. The goal of this class is to equip and aid you in your understanding of Deuteronomy so that you will glean more benefit from reading it on your own. Because of this, my desire is for you to be participants in this class, not consumers. To be a participant is to engage the text yourself, think about its implications, and contribute to the life of the class by sharing your insights.

Title: Deuteronomy has several names in both the Hebrew and Greek traditions. Perhaps its oldest name is *Misneh Torah*, “The Repetition of the Torah,” a name common in rabbinic literature. This name reflects the fact that Deuteronomy is a retelling of the Law received in Exodus.¹ The name we typically use has been passed down to us from the Greek Septuagint. It comes from the Greek words, *Deuteros*, meaning second, and *nomos*, Law. “Second-Law.”

The traditional Hebrew name for the book is *Devarim* or *Sefer Devarim*, meaning “words” or “Book of Words.” This comes from the first line of the book, “*These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel...*”

¹ Dr Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 1st edition. (Philadelphia: JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY, 2003). xi

Outline/Structure of Deuteronomy: Throughout these notes, I will be adapting Daniel Block's outline in his commentary on Deuteronomy.² He structures the book around Moses' three addresses and death. I've copied down the first 3 levels of his outline below:

1. Moses' First Address: Remembering the Grace of YHWH (1:1-4:43)
 - a. The Preamble to Moses' First Address (1:1-5)
 - b. The Essence of Moses' First Address: The Grace of Calling (1:6-4:40)
 - i. Recollections of YHWH's Grace to the Exodus Generation (1:6-2:1)
 - ii. Recollections of YHWH's Grace to the New Generation (2:2-3:29)
 - iii. Recollections of YHWH's Grace with the Future in Mind (4:1-40)
 - c. Epilogue of Moses' First Address (4:41-4:43)

2. Moses' Second Address: Explaining the Grace of YHWH (4:44-29:1)
 - a. The Preamble to Moses' Second Address (4:44-5:1a)
 - b. The Essence of Moses' Second Address: Explaining the Grace of YHWH (5:1b-26:19)
 - i. The Revelation of the Principles of the Covenant Relationship (5:6-6:3)
 - ii. Proclaiming the Privilege of Covenant Relationship (6:4-11:32)
 - iii. Proclaiming the Dimensions of Covenant Relationship (12:1-26:19)

Interlude: A Call for Covenantal Renewal in the Promised Land (27:1-26)

- iv. The Two Ways of the Covenant: Blessing or Curse (28:1-28:68)
 - c. Epilogue of Moses' Second Address (29:1)

3. Moses' Third Address: Trusting in the Grace of YHWH (29:2-30:20)
 - a. The Preamble to Moses' Third Address (29:2a)
 - b. The Essence of Moses' Third Address: The Grace of Covenant Renewal (29:2b-30:20)

4. The Death of Moses (31:1-34:12)
 - a. Preparing for the Death of Moses (31:1-32:47)
 - b. Announcing the Death of Moses (32:48-52)
 - c. The Benediction of Moses (33:1-29)
 - d. Recounting the Death of Moses (34:1-12)

The Setting and Genre of Deuteronomy: Deuteronomy is set on the cusp of the promised land. It is Moses' final exhortations and benediction on his people and Israel's time in the wilderness closes and they prepare to enter a new chapter in the realizations of God's promise of a land. Large sections of Deuteronomy are laws, but these function as calls to live up to the covenant relationship they have with YHWH. The gift of the land carries with it expectations and a calling – a calling to be a model to the nations of obedience and faithfulness to God of all nations.

² Throughout the notes, I will be adapting the outline used in: Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy* (Zondervan Academic, 2012). 43-48

The Mission of Deuteronomy:³ Deuteronomy is written in the context of an impending cataclysmic cultural shift. Israel is about to enter the Promised Land. In this setting, Moses is reminding Israel of who they are and who they are called to be. Christopher Wright outlines the Missiological emphasis of Deuteronomy:

- **The challenge to loyalty in the midst of cultural change:** Deuteronomy, Wright says, is a book of boundaries. Israel is about to enter into the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey, but also rife with idolatry and polytheistic worship. Deuteronomy is a challenge issued to Israel to remain loyal to YHWH in the midst of temptation that will come about with a change in context.
- **The challenge of Monotheism:** Deuteronomy has a distinct monotheistic emphasis. YHWH is God alone. This has missiological implications. If YHWH is the only true God, then He is not only Israel's God but also the God of the nations. The commitment to monotheism is not a "racist hatred of foreign relations, but a total commitment to saving truth." The tragedy of idolatry and polytheism is that it is turning to lifeless and powerless substitutes away from a saving relationship with the only true source of salvation.
- **Israel as a model to the nations:** Israel is not just receiving the promised land as a benefit of her relationship to YHWH – she has been given a mission to be a light and a model to the nations. God says of Abraham in Genesis 18:18 that "all nations on earth will be blessed through him (Abraham)." God goes on in verse 19 to describe the reason for which Abraham was chosen,

"For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of YHWH by doing righteousness and justice, so that YHWH may bring to Abraham what He has promised him."

Deuteronomy reflects this mission. Israel is a model nation called to be a light to the nations on what a relationship with God looks like. The laws and rules have a purpose and mission beyond the borders of the promised land.

- **Deuteronomy's Theology of History:** Deuteronomy recalls the past, but is primarily a "future-oriented" book. The book anticipates that although God is giving Israel all that they need to be faithful in their relationship with Him, they will ultimately fail in covenant loyalty. The nations will witness God's judgment of Israel, but Israel will ultimately be vindicated and restored resulting in blessing for the nations. Although the book of Deuteronomy is for Israel, it reflects God's larger plan for all nations to worship Him.

The Primary Theological Themes of Deuteronomy:⁴

- **The Character and Nature of God:** YHWH is a God who has revealed Himself to Israel and Deuteronomy is a His self-disclosure of His character and nature. YHWH is both

³ This section is abridged and adapted from Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994).

⁴ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, First Edition. (Nashville, Tenn.: Holman Reference, 1994).

immanent and transcendent. He is God alone and without material form. He is gracious, loving, just, merciful, powerful, holy, glorious, faithful, and upright, but also can become angry and is zealous for His own honor. He is a lawgiver, warrior, benefactor, and judge.

- **The Nature of Israel and Humanity:** Israel is one of the nations, yet set apart from them to model of the Kingdom of God on Earth.
- **The Nature of Israel's Relationship with God:** God in Deuteronomy (and elsewhere) is absolutely exclusive. He is God alone and will tolerate no rivals. Deuteronomy is a book of law – stipulating what covenant relationship with God looks like, but it is also a book of grace – God will remain faithful to His covenant regardless of Israel's faithfulness. Israel will fail, but God will stay true to His promises, restore them, and bless the nations through her.

Reading the Old Testament is profitable for the Christian (Review):

2 Timothy 3:16-17: *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

- **The Old Testament points us towards Christ.**
Luke 24:27: *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*
- **The Old Testament Law has not been abolished, but fulfilled.**
Matthew 5:17: *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*

Reading Deuteronomy Together: You can certainly benefit from this class by attending and taking part in the discussions, but I believe you will benefit that much more by committing to reading through Deuteronomy along with the class. To the end, Nancy Strohm will be preparing reading guides every week with the goal of helping you to observe the text and be prepared to discuss the text the following week. You can choose to read each section in a single sitting, spread it out through the week, or just attend the class and continue with your current Bible reading plan. If you do choose to read with us, here is the reading for each week:

- Week of 9/19: Deuteronomy 1-4
- Week of 9/26: Deuteronomy 5-6
- Week of 10/3: Deuteronomy 7-11
- Week of 10/10: Deuteronomy 12-15
- Week of 10/17: Deuteronomy 16-18
- Week of 10/24: Deuteronomy 19-25
- Week of 10/31: Deuteronomy 26-30
- Week of 11/7: Deuteronomy 31-34

Primary Sources:

- *Deuteronomy, NIV Application Commentary* by Daniel Block
- *Deuteronomy, New American Commentary* by Eugene Merrill
- *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* by Jeffrey Tigay
- *Deuteronomy, Interpretation Commentary* by Patrick Miller
- *Deuteronomy, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series* by Christopher Wright
- *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* by Robert Alter