

Introduction to Deuteronomy



The Plan

Once again here is an introduction. We are venturing into the Old Testament. Once again we are looking at the book as a *whole*, getting that perspective on it will really help to getting some understanding of it. We will need to work on together how we read and apply the OT, which will be interesting, as well as get hold of some huge biblical themes that run from beginning to end. We will definitely not be able to read all of the book, so it will be by far the best if we read it through individually as we go.

Introduction

The Israelites were finally there on the edge of the Promised Land. They had just the river Jordan to cross to enter the homeland God had promised Abraham about 600 years before. Not only that but Moses, the man who had led them for the last 40-odd years through the wilderness is about to hand over the leadership to a new man. How do you mark such a significant moment? How do you ensure that this new era for God's chosen people continues the way that God wants it to? The book of Deuteronomy is Moses' and God's answer to these questions. It is a book of Moses' last words to God's people, words that he hopes will keep them on God's path for many years to come. However Moses seems a little low, whether because he has seen enough to know it will not all go well, or because he is so disappointed that he has to stay behind, it is clear that he is going to lay it on thick for the people, hoping they will really get it. The book is written in the form of a treaty or covenant between two parties, in this case God and Israel, and works to renew the covenant made at Sinai to secure Israel's allegiance to God, just as God promised allegiance to them.

So Deuteronomy lays out the basics, the things that are important in a way that Israel understands and can grasp. God is laying out an agreement with them: he has committed himself to them, he has saved them from Egypt, he has brought them through the desert, he has revealed himself to them; now, as God's people, God wants them to live like his people both in relation to Him and in relation to each other, both individually and corporately. It is the book of the law ... and a book of grace.

As with any treaty/covenant, it has instructions on where the treaty is to be stored (31:24-26), how it should be reread (31:9-13), and how it should be copied (10:18-19). There is much to be suggest that it is in fact the book that is brought out and read by Josiah in 2 Kings 22 when he wanted to call the nation back to God 800 years later! That worked then!

Things to look out for

1) **Covenant** – Covenant is a core biblical idea that runs from beginning to end and reflects the way God works relationally with the world. A covenant is a commitment between two parties, of which marriage is our main example today, which involved both promise and obligation. In fact the prophet Hosea writes about God's relationship with his people as a marriage, with his people being the unfaithful wife not fulfilling her obligations. Through a succession of covenants that build on each other through the OT, the prophets long for and dream of a new Covenant that was fulfilled in Jesus. This is not new in the sense that it wipes out all the others, but in the sense that it fulfils the others by sorting out the bit that always seemed to go wrong – the human side. Deuteronomy then gives us great insight into the idea of covenant including most amazingly God's undying faithfulness to his covenant that even goes beyond the failings of his people. The basic structure of an ancient covenant document was something like this:

- a. **Identification and Historical Background** – the story of the relationship so far.
- b. **Stipulations** – the expected actions of the parties based on (a).
- c. **Deposit, Public Reading, Witnesses, Blessings and Curses** – how the covenant was going to be managed from here on in.
- d. **Ratification ceremony** – the ceremony that puts the covenant in place.

2) **Commandments/Law** – As a book of the law Deuteronomy records laws as part of the covenant. These laws are many and varied, covering everything from individual behaviour to general community life; from their relationship to God to how the nation's justice system should be run. The laws are of different types and can't all be applied the same way, since some could

be said to be 'principle law', such as the ten commandments, and some 'case law', culturally appropriate application of the principle law. These laws were held with great value by the Israelites since they were a gift that reflected God's choice of them as his people. The observant ones will notice this through the amount of times Deuteronomy is quoted in the NT. Some of the laws are specifically revoked in the NT, and some are clearly no longer relevant but what about the others?

- 3) **Remembering** – Deuteronomy is big on remembering. You will notice that around 12 times it says “remember that you were slaves in Egypt”, also there is constant reminder of the mistakes their ancestors made in the past. The reason for this memory is not just to keep a sense of history, but to provide a link with the past and allow it to affect life in the present. Remembering the past kept a common community identity and provided a direct influence on how they were to conduct themselves now. The reason that it was instructed that they should periodically re-read this covenant document was to again provide a memory of the past in order the next generations would also decide to keep it. To forsake these and forget was not merely absentmindedness; it was being unfaithful to the covenant. It is clear that these people were to identify themselves with their ancestors and see it as though throughout history God was making his covenant with *them* (5:3).
- 4) **Generosity and Grace** – It may surprise some, but God's generosity and grace towards Israel comes through as a theme through the book. It is clear that God is the originator of this covenant, of Israel's release from Egypt and the giving of the land. God is working for and with Israel despite their weakness and insignificance. This covenant book, partly from Moses past experiences (!) anticipates the fact that Israel will not manage to keep it and as well as outlining the consequences, makes provision and promise that God will stick with them nonetheless. This book is clear that God is the generous faithful gracious God, and it looks forward to a different future when God will solve the problem of an unfaithful people.

Running Order *(italics bullet points is the session planning)*

- 1) Preamble (Ch 1:1-5)
 - *Preamble – Introduction to covenant and Deuteronomy (1:1-5)*
- 2) The Story so far (Ch 1-3) – “Historical Background”
 - *The story so far – Moses point of view (1:6-3 – especially ch 1 & 3:21-29)*
- 3) Introduction to the Covenant (Ch 4)
 - *Introduction to the covenant – Watch yourselves (4:1-24)*
 - *Introduction to the covenant – Watch God (4:25-49)*
- 4) Basic Commandments (Ch 5-11)
 - *Basic Commandments – The Ten Statements (5)*
 - *Basic Commandments – Love God (6)*
 - *Basic Commandments – How to take the Land (7)*
 - *Basic Commandments – Keeping the faith (8:10-9:6)*
 - *Basic Commandments – Learn the lesson of your history (9:25-10:2;10:12-22)*
- 5) How Israel is to Live the Life (Ch 12-26)
 - *Living the life – The Luxury of Meat Eating (12; 14:1-21)*
 - *Living the life – Set apart for the Lord (14:22-29; 15:19-23; 26)*
 - *Living the life – The Festivals! (15:1-18; 16:1-17)*
 - *Living the life – Judges, Kings, Priests and Prophets (16:18-17:20; 18)*
 - *Living the life – Means of justice (19; 21:1-9)*
 - *Living the life – Various laws (21:22-22:12)*
 - *Living the life – Various laws (23:15-25:19)*
- 6) What happens if you do, what happens if you don't (Ch 28)
 - *Blessings and curses (27:11-28:1-68)*
- 7) What happens next? (Ch 29-34)
 - *Invoking the Covenant (27:9-10; 29:1; 30)*
 - *Final Arrangements (31)*
 - *In Conclusion (32-34)*