

# PREFACE

Attempting to write a commentary provides a lesson in humility. First of all, it is presumptuous to try to clarify God's Word. It is able to stand on its own. "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword . . ." (Heb 4:12). Secondly, a commentary cannot be written without the assistance of numerous people. An enormous amount of valuable in-depth study of Deuteronomy has occurred over the years. Dependence on others will be apparent on almost every page of this work.

Nevertheless, it was with great anticipation that I undertook the task of writing this commentary. Only the Psalms surpass Deuteronomy in importance for understanding the rest of the Old Testament. Deuteronomy's covenant-based theology and deep understanding of God's will for Israel had profound impact on Israel's historians and prophets. It has been a rich experience to mine the depths of this book.

Despite Deuteronomy's theological depth, its message is simple: love and obey God. The call to love God is central to Deuteronomy (6:5) and the Old Testament. Jesus' teaching was not original to him (John 14:15-21) but was based on a profound understanding of Deuteronomy. This fact illustrates just one reason why, in my opinion, Christians should allot a significant amount of time to studying Deuteronomy. They would then understand the New Testament much better.

Deuteronomy was written in sermonic style and involves a great deal of repetition. Moses was an outstanding preacher, and he constructed his sermons so they could be remembered. Consequently, there is considerable intratextual referencing in Deuteronomy. Moses comes back to the main points over and over. The commentary utilizes numerous cross-references so that the reader who might study only one passage can get a sense of this internal unity and emphasis.

The student of Deuteronomy will discover afresh the greatness of God's grace and love for his people. Jesus and Paul did not invent these ideas; they are core attributes of God's character. These essentials of life with God are at the heart of the book. Deuteronomy exhibits their impact in Israel's life again and again.

It is only by God's grace and because of God's people that I have come this far. I am deeply indebted to God for his blessings. It is impossible to thank all the people who have influenced my life. But it is necessary to acknowledge my deep appreciation to several. Lincoln Christian Seminary has been a wonderful place to do teaching and research over the years. Dean Wayne Shaw's leadership and pastoral concern have encouraged me. A sabbatical in the fall of 1998 enabled me to accomplish a significant amount of writing. The "Son-Seekers" Sunday School class at Lincoln Christian Church encouraged me through prayer and responded warmly to a lengthy series of lessons on Deuteronomy. Colleagues and students who continually asked how my work was going kept me on my toes.

However, important as friends are, none of this work would have been accomplished without God's special gift, my family. My wife, Cheryl, will never know how much her faithful support has encouraged me. Loving companionship is one of God's greatest blessings. Stephanie and Nathan, our two children, have brought untold joy. In addition, Stephanie undertook the arduous task of proofreading the rough draft of this book. It is with deep love and gratitude that I dedicate this book to them.

# INTRODUCTION

A study of Deuteronomy quickly dispels some false impressions held by many Christians about the Old Testament and the Old Testament law. Deuteronomy is anything but an outdated, irrelevant, dry, legal text. It brims with profound theological insight. Its laws are set in a specific context that brings them to life. Its language is the lively exhortation of a master preacher and teacher whose admonitions transcend time and culture.

Deuteronomy had a profound influence on the New Testament. It is one of the four most quoted and alluded to Old Testament books.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it was Jesus' favorite book in the Pentateuch.<sup>2</sup> He often quoted from it in his teaching and preaching. He resisted Satan by quoting from Deuteronomy (Matt 4:4,7,10). For him, the greatest commandment was Deuteronomy 6:5 (Matt 22:36-38). Consequently, Christians will reap great dividends from a careful study of Deuteronomy.

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<sup>1</sup>The four are Isaiah, Psalms, Deuteronomy, and Genesis. Exact numbers of quotations are difficult to uncover because of differing definitions of what is a quote and what is an allusion. The United Bible Society's Greek Text lists 195 quotes and allusions in the New Testament from Deuteronomy. Elizabeth Achtemeier believes there are 83 quotes from Deuteronomy in the New Testament (*Deuteronomy, Jeremiah* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978], p. 9). Other authorities give different figures. J. Gordon McConville's assessment of the influence of Deuteronomy on the New Testament is exemplary, but his assertion that Deuteronomy is cited more frequently in the NT than any other OT book is inaccurate (*Grace in the End* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993], p. 145).

<sup>2</sup>When Jesus quotes or alludes to the Pentateuchal books in his teaching, Deuteronomy is referenced two times as often as any other of the five books.

## TITLE OF THE BOOK

Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Old Testament and the last book in the Pentateuch.<sup>3</sup> The title of Deuteronomy in the Hebrew Bible, אֵלֶּה דְּבָרִים (*’ēlleh debārîm*, “these are the words”) follows the custom of naming a book after the first few words in the text. The English title, Deuteronomy, comes from the Latin Vulgate translation *Deuteronomium* that was dependent on the Greek Septuagint title, *Deuteronomion*. The Greek title was based on its translation of Deuteronomy 17:18, “this second or repetition of the law.” The translators apparently understood the Hebrew to refer to a second law in addition to the law of Exodus. However, the Hebrew text means “a copy of this law,” not a second law.<sup>4</sup>

The Hebrew title accurately reflects the fact that Deuteronomy is both the words of Moses (1:1) and the words of God that he told Moses to speak. It is not merely a copy of the law of Exodus but a restatement and expansion of the original covenant and covenant law. The new time and setting, forty years after the original reception of the law at Sinai (Exod 20–24), required both updating of the law and a renewal of the covenant.

## AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

The traditional view of Christian and Jewish scholars until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was that Moses was the author of Deuteronomy. This view did not deny that there might be post-Mosaic material in the book (chapter 34 on Moses’ death, for example), but it affirmed that the majority of the book came from Moses. This traditional view was based on the many references to Moses’ speaking (1:1,5,9; 5:1; 27:1,9; 29:2; 31:1,3; 33:1) or writing (31:9,24). Other Old Testament books attributed the book to Moses also (Josh 1:7-8; Judg 1:20; 3:4; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 14:6; Ezra 3:2). Christian schol-

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<sup>3</sup>Pentateuch is the name given to the first five books of the Bible, reflecting that they are seen as a discrete unit of books. Jewish tradition refers to them as the Torah.

<sup>4</sup>Deuteronomy is also known among Jews as *Mishneh Torah* from the Hebrew of 17:18.

ars gave great weight to the numerous New Testament references that suggested that Moses wrote the Pentateuch and, by implication, Deuteronomy (Matt 19:8; Mark 12:26; Luke 24:27,44; John 7:19,23; Acts 13:39; 15:5; 28:23; 1 Cor 9:9; 2 Cor 3:15; Heb 9:19; 10:28).<sup>5</sup>

Mosaic authorship implies the setting and date of the book. The place was the plains of Moab just east of the Jordan River.<sup>6</sup> The date was nearly forty years after receiving the law at Sinai, at the end of the wilderness period, just prior to Moses' death. Israel was poised to enter into the Promised Land in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. The generation that had exited Egypt with Moses was dead. The new generation needed to renew their covenant relationship with God and hear the law once again. This generation also needed to be prepared for the transition to a new leader, Joshua. Furthermore, they needed instruction on how to live in the land and deal with the many social and religious pressures they would experience there. Moses, through sermonic exhortation and teaching, prepared them for what was ahead. The key for Israel's future was faithfulness to the covenant through obedience to the covenant law.

The exact time of Moses' preaching Deuteronomy is a matter of debate. Two dates have been proposed: around 1400 B.C. and somewhere in the thirteenth century B.C. The details are too involved to be included in this brief introduction.<sup>7</sup> Whichever date is accurate, the cultural and historical situation in Canaan was similar. The Promised Land was inhabited by Canaanites who were distinguished by their religious fertility cults. These posed an extreme threat to Israel and were to be destroyed (chapter 12). There was also a power vacuum in the land. Neither Egypt nor a Mesopotamian country was in control of Palestine. This presented Israel with an opportune time to move in and take the land.

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<sup>5</sup>There were a few scholars through the centuries who expressed doubts about Mosaic authorship, but they were in a minority. See the survey by R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 3-11.

<sup>6</sup>See comments on chapter 1:1-5.

<sup>7</sup>For convenient and detailed discussion see any of the following: Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), pp. 66-75; W.H. Shea, "Exodus, Date of the," *ISBE*, 2:230-238; K.A. Kitchen, "Exodus, The," *ABD*, 3:700-708. Merrill and Shea support a late fifteenth century date, Kitchen supports a mid-thirteenth century date.

## DEUTERONOMY IN MODERN OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

Beginning in the early nineteenth century the traditional view on the date and authorship of Deuteronomy was called into question and eventually abandoned. In 1806, W.M.L. de Wette, a German scholar, published a work that revolutionized Old Testament study.<sup>8</sup> De Wette identified the law book discovered by the high priest Hilkiah in 2 Kings 22:8 as the book of Deuteronomy. He also suggested that the book had been written at that time (622 B.C.). Based on a purely history-of-religion approach and his views on Deuteronomy, de Wette asserted that the biblical view of Israelite religion was false. There was no central sanctuary in Jerusalem until the time of Josiah, and the books of Chronicles read later developments back into the past. Further, the complex priestly laws of Leviticus were late, not early. Therefore, the history of early Israel presented to us in the Pentateuch is myth.

De Wette's ideas had little impact at the time because of conservative opposition from scholars such as Hengstenberg and Keil. However, in 1878 Julius Wellhausen published a brilliant synthesis based on de Wette's position and made it the "cornerstone" of Pentateuchal studies.<sup>9</sup> Wellhausen showed that Israel's history had three periods: 1) the early monarchy with its many sanctuaries, simple religion, absence of priests, and much spontaneity, as seen in the books of Samuel and Kings; 2) the seventh century, which was marked by Josiah's reform and the centralization of worship at Jerusalem based on the newly discovered book of Deuteronomy or some form of it; 3) the postexilic period when the priesthood gained control and instituted elaborate sacrificial rituals. In this scheme the late seventh-century date of the book of Deuteronomy and its contents

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<sup>8</sup>His doctoral thesis (*Dissertatio critica, qua Deuteronomium . . .*) in which he argued for his view was written in 1805. More detailed arguments were published in his *Beitrage zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, vol. 1 in 1806. For a convenient discussion see the essay on de Wette in Donald McKim, ed., *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), pp. 298-302.

<sup>9</sup>E.W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), p. 1. Wellhausen's book has been published in English as *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Edinburgh, 1885).

became the “linchpin” in Old Testament studies.<sup>10</sup> Language in the Pentateuch could now be styled as “pre” or “post” Deuteronomic. The details of the history of Israel’s worship and theology could also be identified as being earlier or later than Deuteronomy.<sup>11</sup>

A further feature has come to dominate Old Testament studies. Scholars have recognized that the history of Israel contained in the books of Joshua through Kings was written from the perspective of the book of Deuteronomy. These books are now called “The Deuteronomistic History.”<sup>12</sup> Thus the importance of the book of Deuteronomy for current Old Testament studies is enormous.

Chapter 12 is crucial to modern scholars’ understanding of Deuteronomy. It calls for Israel to destroy all Canaanite sanctuaries (12:2-3) and to worship at “the place the LORD your God will choose” (12:5,11,14,18,21,26). For Wellhausen and others this place was Jerusalem, and Josiah’s reform, which included the destruction of all sanctuaries outside of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 23:8-9,15), was based on Deuteronomy 12.<sup>13</sup> For scholars chapter 12 has become a major text and its contents a major theme of the book.<sup>14</sup>

The language of Deuteronomy has become another key point in modern discussions of its date.<sup>15</sup> The language of the book is clearly distinct from the rest of the Pentateuch. It is sermonic, verbose, repetitive, and sprinkled with words and phrases that do not occur elsewhere in the first four books of the Old Testament. Its language does, however, resemble that of several written compositions that undeniably come from the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. such as the book of Jeremiah and the books of Kings.

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<sup>10</sup>Gordon Wenham, “The Date of Deuteronomy: Linch-pin of Old Testament Criticism,” *Themelios* 10,3 and 11,1 (1985): 15-20 and 15-18.

<sup>11</sup>R.E. Clements, *Deuteronomy* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), p. 9.

<sup>12</sup>Martin Noth first proposed this idea. See *The Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981) which is a translation of his *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen, 1957), pp. 1-100. We cannot go into any details here on this issue. Those interested can consult Walter Rast, *Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

<sup>13</sup>See the commentary on chapter 12 for more observations on this issue.

<sup>14</sup>“The law of the central sanctuary in Deut. 12:2-14 must certainly be regarded as one of the most distinctive features of the Deuteronomic legislation.” R.E. Clements, *Deuteronomy*, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup>Wenham, “Linch-pin,” p. 17.

Other arguments have been advanced for denying Mosaic authorship.<sup>16</sup> 1) The perspective in Deuteronomy seems to be from the west side of the Jordan, not the east side. 2) The laws in Deuteronomy presuppose conditions after Israel had been settled in the land for some time and city life had developed. 3) Chapter 17 assumes kingship had been instituted. 4) The priestly functions described in chapter 20 come from a later time since the priesthood was not developed in Moses' day. 5) The person of address in Deuteronomy changes from singular "you" to plural "you" and back again which points to different sources. 6) The form of the book resembles ancient Near Eastern treaties from the seventh century B.C. not the fifteenth century as once thought.<sup>17</sup>

Although the Wellhausen scheme for the development of Israelite religion has been maintained, de Wette's position that Deuteronomy was a fiction from Josiah's time has been abandoned.<sup>18</sup> Many scholars recognize that major portions of the book had to be earlier and could not have been a late, pious fraud. They have advanced conflicting theories about where and how the material in Deuteronomy originated. We can present only a few of the ideas here.

Several scholars have seen evidence of strong influence from the Northern Kingdom on the book. G. von Rad suggested that much of Deuteronomy originated in priestly and Levitical circles in the north. The Holy War traditions and the fight against Canaanite religion fits well the situation in the north. Much of the material was connected with the cult, and therefore the old worship site of Shechem or Bethel may have been the original setting (ch. 27). The date would have been mid-eighth century. These traditions were brought to the south and revived by Levitical priests in Josiah's day.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ian Cairns, *Word and Presence: A Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 1-2; Achtemeier, *Deuteronomy, Jeremiah*, p. 10. The texts in Deuteronomy used to support these arguments are open to other interpretations that support Mosaic authorship. The case for Mosaic authorship is made below. Comments throughout the commentary address these issues as well.

<sup>17</sup>For more discussion on the treaty form see below on structure of the book.

<sup>18</sup>S.R. Driver led the way over a century ago (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895], pp. lvi-lxii).

<sup>19</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy* (London: SCM Press, 1966), pp. 23-26.

E.W. Nicholson believes prophetic, not priestly, circles in the Northern Kingdom were responsible for much of the book. Disciples of these circles took the sermons and reflections south after 722 B.C. and wrote them down during the dark days of Manasseh in Judah. They hoped the material would be used for reform in the south. Nicholson thinks chapter 27 was a later addition.<sup>20</sup>

N. Lohfink thinks the language of Deuteronomy is more probably that of the court rather than country priests. Many texts in the book were originally legal and liturgical texts to be read to large assemblies. Its origin is most likely Jerusalem. Therefore, it should be connected with the court of Hezekiah in the late eighth century when the king instituted the first reform movement. In Josiah's time the court secretary Shaphan and the priest Hilkiah played important roles in the discovery of the law.<sup>21</sup>

Moshe Weinfeld believes that the time from Hezekiah to Josiah was a time of religious revival all over the ancient Near East. Under this influence, a group who was familiar with the treaty forms of the day revived the traditions of the old covenant and brought in wisdom traditions. Some northern influence came in, especially from the prophet Hosea. Some of the material may go back to Joshua's day, and some even back to Moses' time. According to Weinfeld, the book itself was created by a school of scribes during the time of Hezekiah who intended it as a handbook for the king (ch. 17).<sup>22</sup>

From the time of de Wette, many scholars challenged the perspective on Deuteronomy presented above.<sup>23</sup> These challenges can only be considered briefly. The reader should consult the sources listed for fuller discussion.

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<sup>20</sup>E.W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), chapter IV.

<sup>21</sup>N. Lohfink, "Deuteronomy," *IDBS*, pp. 229-232.

<sup>22</sup>Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 44-53.

<sup>23</sup>Not all were conservatives. For a detailed review see Harrison, *Introduction*, pp. 33-82, although he covers the larger area of source criticism also. James Orr, *The Problem of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1906), pp. 245-284, provided an early, detailed critique. R.N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), provides a recent critique from within the critical school. Many of the criticisms he proposed were those put forth by conservative scholars over the last century and a half.

1) Deuteronomy claims to be from Moses and consists of three sermons (ch. 1–4, 5–28, 29–30) and two poems from him (32, 33). This claim should be taken seriously unless there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary. There is no clear evidence of pseudo-authorship in the Old Testament with a possible exception of Ecclesiastes.<sup>24</sup> Often arguments against Mosaic authorship proceed on assumptions about development of laws and concepts from simple to complex, with complex automatically being later.<sup>25</sup> Suggestions that Deuteronomy was not written by Moses but expresses “authentic Mosaic tradition”<sup>26</sup> seem like attempts to circumvent the persistent claim of the book. However, it is necessary to recognize that there are non-Mosaic additions to the book. Chapter 34 is a clear example. What other portions might be additions is unclear.<sup>27</sup>

2) The concept of inspiration suggests the integrity of what the Bible claims and goes closely with point one. Not all scholars who claim a non-Mosaic authorship and a late date deny inspiration. Their understanding of inspiration would include pseudo-authorship, anachronistic language, and complex source theories. However, it is certainly proper to raise the question whether a biblical view of inspiration and these theories are compatible.

3) The argument from language usage is difficult to nail down. Style is dictated by genre. Wenham has pointed out how both religious language and literary language are basically conservative. There are examples in both ancient Babylon and Egypt of this conservatism. Old Babylonian remained as a literary language for a millennium after the spoken language was changed. In Egypt, Middle

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<sup>24</sup>Pseudo-authorship refers to a text’s claim that someone other than the real author wrote it. Ecclesiastes claims that a “son of David” wrote it. Tradition and many scholars believe this to be Solomon. However, since Solomon is not actually named in the book, Ecclesiastes would not seem to fit the category of “pseudo-authorship.” “Son of David” could refer to any Davidic king. For the case both for and against Solomonic authorship see Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), pp. 254-267.

<sup>25</sup>Clements, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 24-27, is a good example of this kind of thinking.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>27</sup>J.A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1974), pp. 67-68.

Egyptian was the universal written language for one thousand years.<sup>28</sup> In the modern era the influence of the King James Version of the Bible for three hundred and fifty years is an example of the same conservatism. Therefore, in ancient Israel so-called Deuteronomistic language could have been invented long before the seventh century. That would explain “Deuteronomistic” language elsewhere in the Pentateuch, in the eighth century prophets, and in seventh and sixth century compositions.

4) The relationship between Deuteronomy and the eighth century prophets is open to different interpretations. There is a close relationship between Deuteronomy and Hosea. Both are grounded in the Sinai covenant and find God’s saving act in the Exodus. Hosea faults Israel for disobedience and wages war on syncretism and apostasy, which were concerns of Deuteronomy. Both view Israel’s election as based solely on God’s love.<sup>29</sup> There are similarities in other prophets as well. Which way did the influence go? Were prophetic Deuteronomistic editors following Hosea? Or is it more sensible to suppose that Deuteronomy was an authoritative work that influenced Hosea, Amos, other prophets, and the compilers of Kings?<sup>30</sup>

5) It is true that Deuteronomy 12 is concerned about worship at one place, but there is no evidence in the book that the place was Jerusalem. Could not Moses, as the greatest of the prophets (34:10-12), point to Jerusalem as the place if that was his intention? The one site that Deuteronomy does specify as the place to worship is Mt. Ebal near Shechem (chapter 27:4-8; cf. Josh 8:30-35; 24; 1 Kgs 12).<sup>31</sup> Worship in the Pentateuch and Samuel–Kings centered on the Ark of the Covenant, not a place. The Ark was housed at several

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<sup>28</sup>Wenham, “Linch-pin,” 10,3:18-19.

<sup>29</sup>Nicholson, *Deuteronomy*, p. 70. These ideas, which are scattered throughout Deuteronomy, are found in Hosea in the following texts: 11:1ff; 4:1-2; 5:3-4; 6:7-8; 6:5; 12:11; 4:12; 8:5-6; 2:14-23.

<sup>30</sup>Wenham suggests that if every trace of Deuteronomy influence were excised from Hosea and Amos, as some scholars try to do, there would be little left. This suggests Deuteronomy was already an authority for the prophets. (“Linch-pin,” 10,3:18).

<sup>31</sup>It is hardly logical to suggest that chapter 27 is a later addition (Nicholson, *Deuteronomy*, p. 34). The chapter is an integral part of the covenant renewal nature of the whole book. Furthermore, under what circumstances would a later editor think it appropriate to add such a reference to a book whose major function was to centralize worship in Jerusalem?

different places including Gilgal, Shechem, Bethel, and Shiloh.<sup>32</sup> Eventually David moved the Ark to Jerusalem and made it the place of worship. The important issue was theological, not geographical.

6) Josiah's reform in the late seventh century began several years before the law book was discovered in the temple (see 2 Chr 24). Furthermore, Josiah's response to the law which he read was to vigorously eliminate idolatry from the land, not demand worship in Jerusalem (2 Kings 23). Idolatry even existed in the temple.<sup>33</sup>

7) Many of the laws make sense if from an early period, but not from later. Most of the laws that are unique to Deuteronomy are aimed at protecting Israel from Canaanite influence, which fits an early date well but not a later period.<sup>34</sup> Many of the laws stand closer to the situation pictured in the book of Judges than to the seventh century. They reflect reinterpretation of older laws in the light of God's new act, the gift of the Promised Land.<sup>35</sup>

8) Major theological themes of Deuteronomy can already be found in the Song of Moses in Exodus 15, a hymn that is recognized by everyone as ancient. These themes include commitment to one God, God as a Warrior and King, and the centrality of the Exodus event.<sup>36</sup> These key features support an early date for the material in Deuteronomy.

9) The structure of Deuteronomy is similar to ancient Near Eastern treaties. The book more nearly parallels the Hittite treaties from the mid-second millennium than Assyrian treaties from the seventh century (see the discussion below).

Further observations on these issues will be made throughout the commentary. The position taken here is that Deuteronomy is Mosaic. The sermonic and teaching style of the book is more likely to come

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<sup>32</sup>Jeremiah 7:12 asserts that Shiloh was a place where God had placed his name. This was in a sermon preached after Josiah's death. Jeremiah apparently did not understand Deuteronomy 12 to refer to Jerusalem as many modern scholars do.

<sup>33</sup>Of course elimination of idolatry throughout the country would result in concentrating worship at the temple in Jerusalem. But that was a consequence, not the central focus.

<sup>34</sup>G.T. Manley, *The Book of the Law* (London: Tyndale, 1957).

<sup>35</sup>J.G. McConville, *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), pp. 66, 87, 122-123, 155.

<sup>36</sup>Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 61-66.

from one brilliant leader and thinker than a committee. One can easily visualize Moses during the nearly forty years in the wilderness era constantly teaching and exhorting the people to obedience to the law. Forty years is a lifetime career for most people.<sup>37</sup> Moses could have taught and preached the same themes many times (see 4:5). Deuteronomy would then represent the best of his sermons and teaching, presenting one final call to faithfulness and obedience.

## STRUCTURE

The structure of Deuteronomy can be analyzed in several ways. The book itself suggests the contents focus around three speeches by Moses: chapters 1–4, 5–28, 29–30. References to Moses words (1:1) or his speaking (5:1; 29:2) introduce these sections. In addition the poems in chapters 32 and 33 are ascribed to Moses. Recognizing smaller discrete units in the book often further refines this macrostructure. Chapters 5–11 share a common exhortation to obey the law. Chapters 12–26 form the core of the Deuteronomic law itself. Chapters 27–28 sum up the presentation with a focus on blessings and curses.

A close analysis of the poetic features of Deuteronomy has yielded a concentric literary pattern in the book.<sup>38</sup> This pattern is sometimes called chiasmus. It consists of balancing the sections in a composition. The initial units lead up to a central focus or theme. The following units repeat the themes of the first units in reverse order away from the center until the composition ends where it began. This technique is common in Hebrew poetry but is also found in Hebrew narrative. It appears often in Deuteronomy. Christensen has suggested a macrostructure for the book.

- A. The Outer Frame: A Look Backward (Deut 1–3)
- B. The Inner Frame: The Great Peroration (Deut 4–11)
- C. The Central Core: Covenant Stipulations (Deut 12–26)
- B'. The Inner Frame: The Covenant Ceremony (Deut 27–30)
- A'. The Outer Frame: A Look Forward (Deut 31–34)<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>A well-known evangelical preacher and scholar who died in his early 60s in August of 2000 wrote and contributed to over 60 books.

<sup>38</sup>Duane Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991).

<sup>39</sup>Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, p. xli.

Christensen suggests the outer frame could be read continuously since it is connected by the figure of Joshua. The inner frame could also be read continuously, for chapter 11 ends with references to a covenant ceremony at Mounts Ebal and Gerizim and chapter 27 continues with the details.

Concentric structures are found throughout the book of Deuteronomy. Chiasm is a poetic device and lends itself to the sermonic and teaching style of Deuteronomy. The macrostructure has implications for the unity of the book and for how it should be read.

Deuteronomy is also structured around the Decalogue. Chapters 6–26 are organized according to the arrangement of the Ten Commandments.<sup>40</sup> Although some details are not precise, this organizing principal seems well established. Details can be found in the outline below. Recognition of this order helps explain the logic of laws in chapters 12–26.

Several decades ago scholars discovered that ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties all exhibited similar structure. They also realized that Deuteronomy followed this structure. The treaties had several main features that are paralleled in the book.<sup>41</sup>

- A. Preamble, that identified speaker and recipient (Deut 1:1-5)
- B. Historical prologue, that reviewed the history of relations between the two parties (Deut 1:6–4:49)
- C. General stipulations, that outlined the treaty in general terms (Deut 5–11)
- D. Specific stipulations, that listed the specific requirements the overlord or state made on the vassal (Deut 12–26)
- E. Blessings and curses, promulgated as sanctions and motivations for observing the treaty (Deut 27–28)
- F. Witnesses, called upon as enforcers of the treaty

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<sup>40</sup>Dennis Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994); John Walton, “Deuteronomy: An Exposition of the Spirit of the Law,” *GTJ* 8 (1987): 213-225.

<sup>41</sup>Meredith Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); G.E. Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” *BA* 17,3 (1954): 50-76; idem., *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955); Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 20-29.

G. Disposition of the treaty, which was usually to be stored and brought out on special occasions for public reading (Deut 31:9-13,24-26)

The vassal treaties were employed in the ancient Near East by a great power, usually a conquering nation, to impose conditions on a smaller state, the vassal. The treaty rehearsed the relations between the two countries and explained the duties of the smaller state in maintaining the relationship.<sup>42</sup> Ancient Israel could have adapted the treaty form, for God was conceptualized as the Great King and Israel as the vassal. But Deuteronomy was not merely a treaty between God and Israel, as this structure would suggest. It contains much more than requirements for the vassal. Moses adapted the form of the treaty to make a powerful statement about loyalty and covenant obedience.

The treaty pattern observable in Deuteronomy bears directly on the debate about the date of the book. The first ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties found were Hittite treaties from the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C. They provided the basis for comparison with Deuteronomy.<sup>43</sup> This comparison seemed to provide strong grounds for an early date for the book.<sup>44</sup>

Deuteronomy has also been compared to ancient Mesopotamian law codes that have a structure similar to the treaty form. The Code of Hammurabi, for example, consists of a preamble, historical prologue, laws, and blessings and curses. The law section especially seems to fit Deuteronomy better than the stipulation section of the treaties.<sup>45</sup> This would seem to add further evidence for an early date for Deuteronomy.

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<sup>42</sup>See D.J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, rev. ed. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978), p. 23, for a list of ancient treaties.

<sup>43</sup>Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms."

<sup>44</sup>Kline, *Treaty*, pp. 42-43; K.A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Chicago: InterVarsity, 1966), pp. 91-92; idem, "The Patriarchal Age: Myth or History," *BAR* 21,2 (1995): 54-55.

<sup>45</sup>Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 146-150. See Wenham, "Linch-pin," 10,3:19 for simple charts comparing the form of vassal treaties and law codes with Deuteronomy.

Vassal treaties from the first millennium have also been discovered.<sup>46</sup> Their structure is different in several respects from the earlier ones. Most conspicuous is the absence of an historical prologue, the detailed curse section with no corresponding blessing section, and no instructions for the preservation of the treaty. Nevertheless, several scholars, including Moshe Weinfeld, insist that Deuteronomy best resembles the seventh century Assyrian treaties. Weinfeld stresses the close parallel between some of the curses in Deuteronomy and the Assyrian treaties.<sup>47</sup> According to Weinfeld, the apparent parallels between Deuteronomy and the earlier treaties and law codes are based on the conservative persistence of treaty and legal traditions in the ancient Near East. The apparent changes of form merely reflect the accidents of discovery. However, his argument can cut both ways. Could not the parallels he has discovered between curses in Deuteronomy and the seventh century Assyrian treaties be due to the persistence of curse traditions in the ancient world? Could it not be that Deuteronomy, an old text, preserves the tradition that resurfaced in later Assyrian treaties?<sup>48</sup> It sometimes seems like the late seventh century date for Deuteronomy is assumed and any evidence for an earlier date is minimized or explained away.<sup>49</sup>

## CONTENTS

The book of Deuteronomy is a repository of theological reflection that has deeply influenced the rest of the OT. The major themes will become apparent as one reads the book. But it will be useful to summarize some of the key thoughts.

1) The God of Israel is the only God and Lord of the covenant. There is no God beside him (4:35; 32:39). Compared to him the other gods are mere idols, made of wood and stone and utterly help-

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<sup>46</sup>Specifically the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon from the seventh century are often referred to in the discussions.

<sup>47</sup>Weinfeld, *The Deuteronomistic School*, pp. 116-146.

<sup>48</sup>Weinfeld does admit that Deuteronomy is influenced by the Hittite model, but it was an old tradition that Deuteronomy used at a later time (*Deuteronomy 1-11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [New York: Doubleday, 1991], p. 9).

<sup>49</sup>Wenham, "Linch-pin."

less (4:28; 32:37-38). He is God of gods and LORD of lords (10:17). The LORD is one and worthy of Israel's total allegiance (6:4-5). Because he is the only God and Israel is his people, he is zealous for their loyalty and obedience (5:9). He is sovereign over the whole world and over all nations.

2) God binds himself to his people by the covenant. This is an act of God's grace and love. He chooses Israel because he loves them (7:8). The covenant is an expression of his character, for through it he demonstrates his faithfulness, love, uprightness, and holiness. God's election of Israel is not based on their righteousness but on God's faithfulness to his promise to Abraham (9:5-6). The covenant is grounded in the past, it gave meaning to the present, and it promises hope for the future.

3) The covenant requires obedience from Israel (6:6,24,25; 11:13, 27; 13; 28:1,2; and often). Through obedience she would reap all the blessings of the covenant which included long life in the land (chapters 8 and 11). The simplicity of the demand is easily overlooked. Everything that God intends for his people is theirs if they would just obey the law. Every law is for their benefit. Obedience would protect Israel from pagan influence, provide her with good leadership, assure that justice was done in the land, and produce a wide range of other benefits. These benefits are concrete proof of God's love for Israel and his concern for her welfare.

4) God is the lord of history. Human history is the arena in which God chose to work out his will. Deuteronomy's constant references to the promise to the Patriarchs (1:8; 8:3; 9:5, etc.) and the Exodus (1:29; 4:37; 11:3, etc.) demonstrate that the reality of history is crucial to a relationship with God. Israel could trust God's promises and rely on his strength and power because he had proven himself over and over. Therefore, all of history (especially Israel's) is full of purpose and meaning. Under God's direction history is working out his will and plan (7:17-24).

5) The relationship between God and Israel could be described as one of love. God loves her (7:8) and he requires that she love him (6:5). Love could be commanded because it is based on decision not emotion. Love is often paralleled with obey (5:10), serve, and fear (10:12-13). God is portrayed as the father who loved the son enough to carry him (1:31) or discipline him (8:5). This love relationship is an important part of the covenant idea in the OT. It protects the

covenant from being viewed as merely a legal contract. Love is grounded in a relationship. Other OT writers, like the prophet Hosea, picked up on the theme. The command to love God is at the root of the New Testament call to love God. In fact any time the New Testament commands love for God it does so by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5.

6) The land is an important focus in Deuteronomy. Israel was situated on the East bank of the Jordan River, ready to move into Canaan. This is the land promised to the forefathers (Gen 12:7). It is therefore a gift of God's grace (9:4-6). It is a good land (8:7-10) in which Israel could live a good life (28:3-6). It stands in sharp contrast to the wilderness through which the nation had come. The prospects for the future are bright, for God intended Israel to live a long and full life in the land. However, the promise of the land is conditional. If Israel disobeyed God, the land would become a place of sickness, famine, and disease. The blessings would turn into curses. Foreigners would come into the land, destroying and plundering. Israel would eventually be taken out of the land and suffer under the dominance of evil nations (28:15-68).

7) Christopher J.H. Wright has argued that Deuteronomy has missiological significance.<sup>50</sup> It calls for loyalty in the midst of change and in the midst of the challenges of syncretism. The call to mission presents a paradigm for how the people of God should conduct themselves in similar circumstances. God's people frequently find themselves in boundary situations and in the middle of temptations from idols. Faithfulness to God and his uniqueness are crucial at these times. Further, Israel is to be a model to the nations and a witness to the character of God (4:6-8). Obedience to the covenant would witness to the character of the God Israel worshiped and exhibit the quality of life and justice possible under the sovereign God of the universe.

## DEUTERONOMY AND THE PSALMS

The Psalms have been called the theological center of the Old Testament. The major themes found in them cover all the basic concepts that inform the rest of the Old Testament. The same could be

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<sup>50</sup>Christopher J.H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, New International Bible Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), pp. 8-13.

said for the book of Deuteronomy. Recently, the close relationship between the two biblical books has begun to receive attention.<sup>51</sup>

Psalm 1 begins the Psalter by advocating meditation on the *torah* (v. 2). This meditation marks the righteous man and stands in contrast to the naïve man who gets trapped in the way of the wicked (v. 1).<sup>52</sup> Psalm 1 sets the stage for the entire collection of Psalms. The Psalms are reflections of the life of the righteous person who meditates on the law, a life in relationship to God characterized by lament and praise.

Several of the Psalms' themes are similar to Deuteronomy's.<sup>53</sup>

- 1) Israel's relationship to God is grounded in the covenant. Although only a few Psalms directly address the theme of covenant (25, 89, 132), the larger context for all the Psalms is covenant. The only reason Israel can speak to God and about him is because of the covenant relationship with him.
- 2) Israel can worship God and be assured that when they come to the temple they are in his presence. The hymns and laments both count on his response to the psalmist.
- 3) God's actions on behalf of his people were done in human history. Israel's history is a basis for both warning and praise (78, 136).
- 4) God was the true King who ruled over Israel and the whole earth (93, 96). Israel's king was under his rule and protection (2).<sup>54</sup>
- 5) God's law was central to his covenant relationship with Israel (1, 19, 119).
- 6) God's blessings were available to the righteous, but the wicked would fail (1).
- 7) The weak and oppressed were under the special care of God, and they could count on his help (9, 22, 72).

These themes in Deuteronomy will be uncovered as the book is studied. The close relationship between these two important biblical books attests to the theological integrity of the Old Testament.

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<sup>51</sup>Patrick D. Miller, "Deuteronomy and Psalms: Evoking a Biblical Conversation," *JBL* 118 (1999): 3-18.

<sup>52</sup>Psalm 1:1 seems to be a direct contrast to Deut 6:7. Deuteronomy admonishes the Israelites to discuss the law at all times, including when they sit, walk, lie down, and get up. Psalm 1 warns against walking, standing, and sitting with the wicked. Two of the three verbs in Psalm 1 are the same words as in Deuteronomy, and "stand" is equivalent to "get up."

<sup>53</sup>For a brief summary of the major themes in the Psalms see Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), pp. 51-62.

<sup>54</sup>James Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994).