

Deuteronomy

Author

Jesus Christ taught that Moses was the author of the Book of Deuteronomy (see Matthew 19:7-8, Mark 10:3-4 and John 5:46-47). In Acts 3:22 and 7:37, Luke revealed that Moses wrote Deuteronomy, as did Paul in Romans 10:19 and 1 Corinthians 9:9. Also many verses in the Old Testament show Moses wrote Deuteronomy (see Joshua 1:7-8, 1 Kings 2:3, 8:53, 2 Kings 14:5-6, 18:6, 18:12, 2 Chronicles 34:14 and Daniel 9:11-13).

Partly because Deuteronomy Chapter 34 contains a recount of Moses' death, something Moses would not have written, liberal scholars have claimed Deuteronomy was written in the days of King Hezekiah, Manasseh or Josiah or in the times of the prophets Amos, Haggi, Zechariah, or later.¹

For example, the liberal Graf-Wellhausen Theory claims that Jewish religious leaders, possibly under the direction of the High Priest Hilkiah, composed Deuteronomy Chapters 12 to 26 in about 650 B.C.² Read Gleason Archer's critical analysis of such false theories.³

Deuteronomy Chapter 34 could not have been written by Joshua or one of the later prophets.

Name of the Book

The Hebrew name of the book is "elleh haddebarim" meaning "These are the words" or "Debarium" meaning "words".

The Greek name of the Book is Deuteronomy meaning "second law".

Date

Deuteronomy was written about the fifteenth century B.C.

Background

The Book of Deuteronomy was written at the end of the 40 year period the Israelite nation had been wandering the desert because of their refusal to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. As predicted by God in Numbers 14:26-35, all of the previous generation of Israelites, except Moses', Joshua and Caleb, had died by the end of these 40 years. So Deuteronomy was a new and fresh statement of *Yahweh's covenant purposes and commands* to a *new generation* in a *new place* with *new prospects*. Deuteronomy was addressed to this new generation who were

¹ Walter Elwell (editor) "Evangelical Dictionary of Theology", Baker, Grand Rapids, 1996, page 171 and William Lasor, David Hubbard and Frederic Bush, "Old Testament Survey", Second edition, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996, page 114.

² Gleason Archer, "A Survey of Old Testament Introduction", Moody, Chicago, 1994, page 97.

³ Ibid, pages 89-126.

ready to enter the Promised Land and who needed reassurance of God's Covenant promises and instructions in relation to the enormous challenge of conquering and settling in a land which had many armies and dangers.

Structure

The Book of Deuteronomy is written in the form of a sovereign-vassal treaty or covenant. Archaeological discoveries of Hittite and Akkadian sovereign-vassal treaties or covenants from around the same time have a similar structure to the Book of Deuteronomy.

There are different opinions about how the structure of the Book of Deuteronomy can be divided. But the below is a general outline:

1. The *Preamble* which provided the background in which the Great King presents the words of the Covenant to His subjects or vassals (Deuteronomy 1:1-5).
2. The *Historical Introduction* which recounts the past relations between the two covenant parties and the Great King's *faithfulness* to His subjects and His wonderful *saving* acts in relation to them (Deuteronomy 1:6-4:49). This section illustrates the effects of previous obedience or disobedience to the Covenant.
3. The *General Terms and Conditions* of the Covenant relationship between the parties. These general terms and conditions contain the general promises of the Great King and statement about the expected behaviour of both parties in relationship to each other (Deuteronomy 5:1-11:32).
The Ten Commandments are a part of this setting out of the general terms and conditions of the Mosaic Covenant (see Deuteronomy 5:6-21).
4. *The more specific terms and conditions*. These provide interpretation or amplification of the meaning of the general terms and conditions of the Covenant. These specific terms and conditions are usually in the form of actual cases or exact requirements (Deuteronomy 12:1-26:15).
5. *The blessings and curses*. The blessings and curses sections list the results of faithful adherence or unfaithful disobedience to the terms and conditions of their Covenant (Deuteronomy 27:1-28:68).
6. *The covenant oath and the call for acceptance or rejection of the covenant* (Deuteronomy 29:1-30:20).
7. *Tribute to the sovereign Lord*. In ancient times, sovereign kings required their vassals to pay them a tribute of *money* and *goods*. The Mosaic Covenant has these in the form of tithes and various offerings.
8. *The witnesses to the covenant*. The witnesses to the covenant are persons or heavenly beings who watch each party accept the terms and conditions of the Covenant (Deuteronomy 30:19, 31:19 and 32:1-43).
9. *Appendixes* (Deuteronomy 31:1-34:12). These were:
 - a. The New Leadership under Joshua.
 - b. The Song of Moses.
 - c. The Testament of Moses.
 - d. The Death of Moses.

Note that there were also differences between the Mosaic Covenant and the covenants ancient kings made with their subjects. For example, the Mosaic Covenant was based on *love* whereas ancient human covenants between supreme kings and subjects were not.

The main teachings of Deuteronomy

The main teachings of the Book of Deuteronomy are:

1. The *Mosaic Covenant* and the related *purposes, promises, terms and conditions of this covenantal relationship* between God, the nation of Israel and any non-Israelite who chose to turn to the one and only true God.

But note Deuteronomy is *not the initial* statement of the Mosaic Covenant. Instead it is a *renewal* of the same covenant God gave to the earlier generation of Israelites in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. Deuteronomy makes frequent references to the original Mt Sinai or Mt Hareb covenant setting (see Deuteronomy 1:6 and 4:1-2, 5, 10, 15, 23 and 33-40). Also note Deuteronomy uses *changed language* in some places when compared to Exodus because of the changed circumstance (see Deuteronomy 5:12-15 compared to Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 7:1-5 compared to Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 12:5 compared to Exodus 20:24; Deuteronomy 15:12-18 compared to Exodus 21:2-6)

Deuteronomy is a *greatly expanded and more detailed* account of the Mosaic Covenant than the earlier version. This is because the future living in the land of Canaan had various practical issues of life which were of little or no consequence in the earlier traveling of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan.

The Book of Deuteronomy uses God's Covenant Name with Israel – Yahweh – about 221 times. This is because of the very strong emphasis on covenant in the Book.

2. *God's character and nature*. There is much teaching on this in Deuteronomy. For example, Deuteronomy 5:10, 7:9, 7:12 and 13:17 emphasise God's mercy and lovingkindness. Deuteronomy 7:7 and 7:13 teach about God's love.
3. The *Mosaic Covenant was made with the nation of Israel*. This is even though non-Israelites were allowed to join the nation of Israel by converting to God (see Deuteronomy 23:8, Ruth 1:1-4:22, Joshua 2:1-24, 6:22-25 and James 2:25).
4. God wants to have a personal relationship with all His people (see Deuteronomy 4:7).
5. God required that the Israelites should base their relationship to Him on *loving Him* (see Deuteronomy 6: , 7:8, 10:12, 10:15, 11:1, 11:13, 11:22, 13:3, 19:9, 30:6, 30:16 and 30:20).
6. It is not only right to love God. Believers should also *fear or respect, reverence* and be in *awe* of Him (see Deuteronomy 6:2-5 and 10:12). Love and the fear of the Lord complement each other and are not opposing principles (see Deuteronomy 10:12).
7. The need for *exclusive love, loyalty, dependence, faithfulness and obedience* to one God – Yahweh. This is partly related to the insistence in Deuteronomy 12:5 and 11 that the Israelites *worship be centralised in one place*. This was in direct opposition to the common pagan notion of the time of multiple pagan gods and thousands of pagan shrines everywhere.

Deuteronomy also contains many other laws which would reveal the great difference between Israelites serving Yahweh under the Mosaic Covenant and pagan non-Israelites. These purity and separation laws are found in Deuteronomy 14:3-21 and 23:9-11.

8. The demand of the Mosaic Covenant that the vassal – the nation of Israel – must continually show thanks and appreciation to their Sovereign King for Him *freeing* them as a nation from being *slaves* to the *Egyptians*, for Him giving them the *Land of Canaan* as a *totally unmerited free gift* and for Him *showing other enormous kindnesses* or *acts of grace* and *mercy* towards them (see Deuteronomy 5:6, 8:7-18 and 9:4-6). This thanks and appreciation was to be of the *heart* and expressed in *action*. Deuteronomy 9:4-6 emphasises that God their Sovereign King gave them the promised Land not because they deserved it.
9. Because God by His undeserved grace has made the nation of Israel holy, they were to live holy lives (see Deuteronomy 7:6, 26:19 and 28:9). God did not command them to live holy lives in order to merit eternal life. God knew that fallen humans cannot live perfectly holy lives every moment of every day of their lives.
10. the Israelites must never engage in any form of idolatry (see Deuteronomy 6:14, 6:15, 7:4, 8:19, 8:20, 11:16-17, 11:20, 13:2-12 and 30:17-18). Mixing any form of idolatry with the worship of God was equal to abandoning God.
11. Being faithful to the Mosaic Covenant involves *all* areas of *practical* living.
12. God wants the Israelites to turn back to Him if they had previously turned from Him to sin (see Deuteronomy 30:1-10).
13. God is a God who *acts in history*. Most of the Book of Deuteronomy reveals this.
14. Deuteronomy 1:8 teaches that the Mosaic Covenant also has links to the totally grace-based Abrahamic Covenant and its promises (see Genesis 17:7).
15. God revealed His Word and truths *progressively* in the Old Testament era.
16. The preparation of the nation of Israel for entering God's unmerited gift of the Promised Land.
17. God sometimes allows prophets or dreamers in the church who give false revelations and encourage believers to make idols of various things (see Deuteronomy 13:1-3). God allows this in order to find out whether we really *love Him with all of our hearts*.
18. God knows all things (see 1 John 3:20 and Acts 2:23). Deuteronomy 17:4-20 and 28:36 reveal God's foreknowledge of their future sins of asking for a king. God does not here command that the Israelites have a king. But He later worked their sinful request for good by appointing David as King, making the Davidic Covenant and appointing Jesus Christ to sit eternally on David's throne (see 1 Samuel 16:1-13, 2 Samuel 7:1-17, Isaiah 9:6-7, Hosea 3:5, Revelation 3:7, 5:5 and 22:16).