

# Deuteronomy

## Introduction

Deuteronomy is a collection of Moses' farewell speeches, interspersed with additional notes and historical information (some of which were added after Moses' death, such as ch. 34).

This book was written at the end of Israel's stay in the wilderness (approximately 40 years), in the last few weeks before Moses' death. The generation that had left Egypt had died because of their sin - they refused to trust God to lead them into Canaan. At the end of this time, Moses is about to die, the leadership will be transferred to Joshua, and Joshua will lead a new generation of Israelites into the land of Canaan.

To prepare them for this, Moses reviews the terms of the covenant made between them and God - the 10 Commandments and some of the applications of those commands to life. He would not cover all the regulations found in the Law, but would focus on aspects that were most needed as they prepared to enter the land. Following this review, the people would reaffirm their commitment to the covenant. The book also contains God's warning that their commitment would not be long-lasting: they would rebel and (because of this) face a terrifying judgment. But God also leaves them with hope: if they later turn back to him, he will change their hearts and restore his blessings to them.

Throughout Deuteronomy, there is a strong emphasis on God's love for Israel (quite undeserved - ch. 10) and their need to love, honor and obey God. God warns them that they need to be faithful and obedient *from the heart*; for when a nation becomes exceedingly wicked, God *must* destroy it. (This is why God used Israel to destroy the Canaanites - nations who were much stronger than Israel - 7:1.) If Israel chose to turn to wickedness, they too would be punished; but they would not be *totally* destroyed. Because of promises made to their ancestors, they would be given the opportunity to repent and turn back to God.

## Interesting Features

This book is structured in the form of a typical Middle Eastern treaty of that era (called a "suzerain-vassal" treaty). The supreme king would promise protection and blessing. In return, the people must be faithful to the king and obedient to the terms of the treaty. There would be blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. The general structure of this treaty (as found in Deuteronomy) is: Introduction (1:1-4); Historical Basis (ch. 1-4, Israel in the wilderness); Main Provisions (ch. 5-11, the 10 Commandments, and the need to love and obey God); Specific Details (ch. 12-26, application of the 10 Commandments to life); Consequences of Obedience and Disobedience (ch. 27-28, blessings and curses); Witnesses and Ratification of the Treaty (ch. 29-30). After this is an account of the transfer of leadership to Joshua, a final warning, and Moses' death (ch. 31-34).

The laws given in this book are described as the most righteous of *any* nation (4:5-8). They are all applications of the 10 Commandments, given within the nation's context. Most of the laws are applicable to all people at all times. But even those that *aren't* applicable at all times (such as the ceremonial regulations) were intended to teach us moral and spiritual principles, and to provide visual illustrations or reminders of the commands' significance.

At first glance, the specific details of the treaty (ch. 12-26) appear to randomly given. But a closer inspection reveals that they are arranged in groups, based on the order of the 10 Commandments. This may be easier to see, when we realize that each of the 10 Commandments represents a *category* of obligations and prohibitions, affecting both external (visible) actions and internal (heart) attitudes, and is intended to guide both individual and society (including government).

A few comments regarding the 10 Commandments and the various regulations found in Deuteronomy:

- A specific regulation may be related to more than one commandment. In Deuteronomy, this is one of the reasons that some regulations may be linked to commands in ways we might not normally expect.
- There are often parallels between the commands focusing on our relationship to *God* and those focusing on our relationship to *people*. For example, the First Commandment about "no other gods" directly parallels the Seventh Commandment about "no adultery"; so Scripture often describes the worship of false gods with terms such as "adultery" or "prostitution." (For an example, see 31:16.)
- Some blessings and curses may be applicable to people as a *group* (such as a nation), rather than as *individuals*. It is possible for a wicked individual to experience the blessings received by the group, or for a righteous individual to experience the curses received by the group. The final Day of Judgment will take care of these injustices.
- Instructions given to civil authorities are not always applicable to individuals. In such cases, it is *not* the duty of individuals to "take the law into their own hands," if the government fails to fulfill its duties (something a wicked government often does).
- Since we are now under the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:8-12), we have no obligation to obey the ceremonial regulations that were part of the Old Covenant. Yet understanding these regulations is valuable; for they reflect moral principles that still (and will *always*) apply to the human race.

Because of cultural differences between then and now, we can expect some regulations to be difficult to understand; and we may misinterpret them, or fail to see the connection between the regulation and the commandment. For instance:

- People today - especially those living in cities - may fail to see the connection between property issues (such as the moving of boundary markers) and the commandment that promotes the preservation of life and prohibits murder (Commandment 6). Yet in their culture, the land was the source of life. A person's land (the source of his food) was closely tied to his ability to maintain and preserve the life of his family.
- On a community level, the maintenance of sexual distinctions was necessary for the society to function properly - i.e., in a way that would promote the well-being (or life) of the whole community. Most people in modern society have completely abandoned this concept, and can no longer understand the purpose for such a command.
- At that time, the concept of "property" was much broader than it is today, and could include *people*, in addition to material objects. This did not allow for abuse or misuse of those people or things; for *everything* is ultimately God's "property."
- The views of modern society may influence (wrongly) one's perception of some issues. For instance, the "slavery" permitted in Israel was radically different from the slavery found in some of the nearby nations. So, whereas one passage mentions the protection of foreign slaves who flee to Israel from their masters (23:15-16), another passage makes provisions for Israelite slaves (or "servants") who *want* to maintain that relationship to their master, even after being granted freedom (15:16-17).

## Outline

### 1. Introduction; review of the past (1:1-4:43).

- ☐ 1. Introduction; preparation to enter Canaan; they refused to trust God; that whole generation (and Moses) would die.
- ☐ 2. The wilderness journey (38 years); God gave certain lands to other nations; defeat of Sihon, king of Heshbon.
- ☐ 3. Defeat of Og, king of Bashan; 2½ tribes will live east of the Jordan River; Moses cannot enter the land of Canaan.
- ☐ 4. (4:1-43) Pay attention to God's decrees; they are the most righteous in the world; you and your children must carefully obey them; he is the only God over all; no images; no false gods; cities of refuge (to help maintain justice).

### 2. Main provisions: The ten commandments; the necessity of fear of God, love and obedience (4:44-11:32).

- ☐ 4. (4:44-49) Introduction to the covenant treaty.
- ☐ 5. The 10 commandments (the basis of the treaty), spoken directly by God; after that, Moses will speak for God.
- ☐ 6. Love God and fear him; obey these commands and you will live; teach them to your children.
- ☐ 7. God will use you to destroy the evil nations and their gods (details about why and how); otherwise they will bring about your downfall; God will bless you if you remain faithful.
- ☐ 8. God is faithful; be faithful and do not forget God (or you will be destroyed, just like the evil nations around you).
- ☐ 9. God destroys the Canaanites because they are wicked, not because you are good. Remember the golden calf, etc.
- ☐ 10. After your sin with the golden calf, God renewed the covenant, because of Moses' intercession. God loves you, so follow him whole-heartedly ("circumcised hearts," not just the performance of rituals).
- ☐ 11. You have seen God's love and protection. Therefore, love him and carefully obey his commands (and teach your children to do so). You must reject other gods. Your response will result in either blessings or curses.

### 3. Specific obligations: Applications of the ten commandments; also some one-time obligations (12:1-26:19). (Suggested section divisions are based on the 10 Commandments.)

Command 1 → *Choosing the one true God over all else; worship only the one true God.*

- ☐ 12. (12:1-12) Destroy the worship places of false gods. Worship the true God in the way he requires, and at the location he chooses.

Command 2 → *Expressing devotion to God; worship in the way he requires (including ceremonial matters), rejecting false ways.*

- ☐ 12. (12:13-32) Eat meat anywhere (no blood), but sacrifices offered to God must be eaten at the location he chooses (and when you do so, provide food for others); reject the religious practices of those who worship false gods.

Command 3 → *Acknowledging God's value and worth; having the highest esteem for God (shown by what we say and do).*

- ☐ 13. Put to death those who value false gods (whether a prophet, a friend or family member, or even an entire city).
- ☐ 14. (14:1-21) Valuing God's worth by the way we live (including practices that symbolize this loyalty); avoid practices pertaining to false gods; the issue of clean vs. unclean foods (illustrating the contrast between sacred and common).

Command 4 → *Setting aside time for God - a time of freedom, joy, celebration, release, resting in God, sharing and generosity.*

- ☐ 14. (14:22-29) Tithes for God and for sharing with others; annually celebrate and share in God's presence.
- ☐ 15. Cancelling debts; giving freedom to fellow-citizens who have become slaves/servants (if they want freedom); helping the poor at all times; offering firstborn male animals to God.

- ☐ 16. (16:1-17) Festivals and celebrations - Passover, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Tabernacles.

Command 5 → *Authority structures; maintaining justice and righteousness; obligations related to judges, priests, kings, prophets.*

- ☐ 16. (16:18-22) Requirements for judges; dealing with false worship practices.
- ☐ 17. Righteous worship of God; judging those who worship false gods; dealing with difficult judicial cases; punishment for contempt of authority; requirements for kings.
- ☐ 18. Provide for the priests and Levites; reject occult practices; pay attention to God's prophets; punish false prophets.

Command 6 → *Protection of life and livelihood (including property); opposing the wrongful destruction of life and livelihood: restrictions related to murder and war (the destruction of life).*

- ☐ 19. Cities of refuge: protect the innocent; death to the murderer; property boundaries; the need for sufficient witnesses against a person; punishment for false testimony.
- ☐ 20. Warfare regulations; rely on God to fight for you; terms for peace (not applicable to wicked Canaan); avoid wanton destruction of the environment (during war).
- ☐ 21. Unsolved murder cases; dealing with war captives; the rights of the firstborn; punishment of persistently rebellious offspring; treatment of those put to death.
- ☐ 22. (22:1-8) Protecting another's animals; maintaining sexual distinctions; preserving species; safety issues.

Command 7 → *Purity and cleanness in all aspects of life, including sexual purity; symbolism that teaches principles about purity.*

- ☐ 22. (22:8-30) Matters that symbolize purity; dealing with marriage violations (and false accusations), and sexual sin.
- ☐ 23. (23:1-14) Being unblemished in body and in family background (for certain group assemblies); physical cleanliness.

Command 8 → *The right to have wealth and property (with limits, and if rightly obtained); the correct use of property (including "human property"); sharing; giving to others what is rightfully theirs.*

- ☐ 23. (23:15-25) Protecting slaves who seek refuge from oppression; rejecting ill-gotten income; not profiting from a neighbor who needs to borrow; fulfilling one's vows to God; limited rights to another person's property.
- ☐ 24. (24:1-7) Rights for the divorced and the married; some additional economic and social matters.

Command 9 → *Honesty, integrity, fairness.*

- ☐ 24. (24:8-22) Openness about matters that affect others (example: communicable diseases); integrity and fairness in economics (loans and wages); justice for all; giving to the poor the things they have a right to receive.
- ☐ 25. (25:1-4) Integrity in justice and punishment; fair treatment of animals (their "pay" for work).

Command 10 → *Righteous desires and motives; placing the well-being of others above the gratifying of one own desires.*

- ☐ 25. (25:5-16) Do not refuse to provide for a dead brother's widow and family line (the Old Testament concept of "levirate marriage"). Do not destroy an adversary's ability to have a family line (for the sake of winning a fight). Do not develop ways to cheat others in financial matters.

One-time obligations (upon entering the land) and Concluding remarks.

- ☐ 25. (25:17-19) The sins of the Amalekites must be punished.
- ☐ 26. Give to God the first produce of the land; offerings to be given to God and to the needy. Obey God; he will bless you.

#### 4. Blessings and curses; the covenant ratified; witnesses (27:1-30:20).

- ☐ 27. (When in the land:) Affirm your commitment to the covenant and its blessings, with a monument (having the covenant inscribed on it) and an altar. Curses for those who disobey the covenant.
- ☐ 28. A warning: Those who obey will be blessed; those who disobey will be cursed. (This proved to be prophetic.)
- ☐ 29. God has led and protected you; obey from the heart and be blessed; reject the ways of the nations around you. If you abandon the covenant, these curses will come upon you; and other nations will know why it happened.
- ☐ 30. When you return to God (after abandoning the covenant), he will change your hearts and will bless you. You must choose which way you will go; heaven and earth are witnesses of what you choose.

#### 5. Looking to the future: Joshua will be the leader; additional witnesses; the death of Moses (31:1-34:12).

- ☐ 31. Joshua will replace Moses; the Law must be read to the people every 7 years. God warns them of their future rebellion and judgment. The copy of the Law and the song God gives them (chapter 32) will witness against them.
- ☐ 32. A song God gives Moses (which will be a witness against the people); a final warning; preparation for Moses' death.
- ☐ 33. Moses' final blessing on the tribes.
- ☐ 34. Moses dies; Joshua becomes the new leader.