

Deuteronomy II

As previously noted, Deuteronomy served as the charter document for Israel's covenant relationship with God. Since the original generation that came out of Egypt died in the wilderness, Moses formalized the covenant with the younger generation that would now be entering the Promised Land.



The book, in many ways, serves as the “hinge” book of the Old Testament (like Acts in the New Testament). Genesis through Numbers finds a culmination of thought and expression in Deuteronomy. It also serves as a foundation to the rest of the books in the Old Testament, especially the books that immediately follow. Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings show very strong connections to Deuteronomy as it sets a stage for the unfolding history of Israel in the Land.

There are multiple themes that have been recognized as interwoven throughout.* Here we wish to overview a few of these.

1. Israel is Yahweh's covenant people. God is their God; they are His people, and they are defined by this covenant relationship (chapters 5-6). This is God's chosen nation, and He is their King. They existed because of God's grace, and their only reasonable response was to lovingly obey Him.

“For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” (7:6).

2. History as God's History.

This was not just a series of events written down for its own sake. This was Yahweh in action. This was the outworking of God's presence with His people, protecting them, and bringing them into the Land to fulfill His promises. The repetition of their history was significant for their knowing who they were, but even more for knowing God and His mighty power. The first few chapters rehearses not just what the people did and where they went, but emphasizes more what God did with and through them.

3. The Importance of Yahweh's name.

“Yahweh,” God's personal name, is used multiple times and emphasizes His authority, power, presence, and lordship of His people. At the beginning, we read, “Moses spoke to the children of Israel, according to all that the LORD (Yahweh) had commanded him” (1:3). This helps set the tone in recognition of God's authority. He was in charge. The people belonged to Him. The Land was His. They needed a deep sense of honor and reverence for Yahweh.

4. The Importance of Law. The Law is authoritative because it is Yahweh's Law,

Yahweh's Word. Because of this, the people needed to learn how to listen and obey. They also needed to be able to distinguish between true prophets and false prophets (chapters 13 and 18). God's Word in the mouth of Moses and His prophets would never fail. Having it written down was important for preserving God's Law for future generations. By God's grace, He told them exactly what they needed to do to please Him and how to avoid disaster. Sadly, Moses knew they would quit listening:

"For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands." (31:29)

Because of this, they would lose the land and be driven into captivity, just as chapters 28-29 show.

5. God's Sanctuary. "But you shall seek the Lord at the place which the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come ... then it shall come about that the place in which the Lord your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you" (12:5, 11). They had the tabernacle in the wilderness, but there would come a time, once established in the Land, that God would choose the place where a permanent sanctuary could be built. That place would be Jerusalem. It would be a centralized place where God's name was established and the people could gather. His presence would continue among them once in the Land.

Think, though, of how egregious a sin it was when Jeroboam the king later put golden

calves at Dan and Bethel, then changed the nature of their worship and priesthood (1 Kings 12:25-33).

6. Blessings and Curses. The basic point is that conforming to God's covenant would result in great blessings, while ignoring or forgetting the covenant would bring great curses. This was God's Land, and He had every right to tell His occupants how to live in it. If they didn't, they would lose it (chapters 27-28). With this, the people who called upon to choose life over death and receive God's blessings (ch. 30).

In the New Testament, Deuteronomy is one of the most cited books. It pointed to Jesus, who would be the Prophet like Moses (Deut. 18). We, still, are to learn to love God with all our hearts.

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*Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000. (See pp. 140-142).