



The Bible Challenge

A daily guide to reading the Bible in a year

Deuteronomy

Chapters 1-11

The name comes from two Greek words found in the LXX, Deut. 17:18:

deuteros “second” and *nomos* “law”.

In Hebrew, the book is traditionally called (*Sefer Devarim*)

(The Book of) “These are the Words” which is the opening of the book.

Succession

The fundamental purpose of the Book of Deuteronomy is to apply the Mosaic Covenant to the next generations of Israelites.

The generation rescued from Egypt had largely died in the wilderness—Moses’ ministry is drawing to a close. It was important for the law to be repeated and applied to the new generation before they entered the Promised Land. The overarching concern of Moses is that even though he will die in the wilderness, the covenant between YHWH and Israel will continue—only Israel must *remember*.

Structure:

Many scholars have observed that Deuteronomy contains similar elements of Ancient Near Eastern treaties from the 2nd Millennium BC between Hittite kings and their subjects. The elements of these treaties provide a structure for long term stability of relationship between the King and his subjects and communicate both blessings and consequences for the subjects based on how they relate to the King’s commandments.

- I. Preamble (1:1-4)
- II. Historic Prologue (1:5-4:43)
- III. Commandments (4:44-26)
- IV. Blessings and curses (27-30)
- V. Succession (31-34)

As the nation moved forward into the Land of Canaan, they were to face many difficulties and temptations. They were to always remember the faithful history of Yahweh as their king—in spite of their ancestor’s unfaithfulness. By following YHWH’s covenant into the future, they will experience blessing and security in the land. But, if they forget YHWH their God and fail to keep his commandments, they would not be blessed, but cursed.

Just as God rescued them from Egypt under Moses, he now would deliver Canaan to them, but they need to remember YHWH, keep his covenant, and follow their new leader Joshua.



“Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him in commandment to them.”

--Deuteronomy 1:3

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Preamble (1:1-4)

The book begins: “These are the words that Moses spoke to all of Israel” (1:1). Clearly, the book’s central concern is to record a final discourse of Moses as YHWH’s prophetic ambassador of the Covenant to Israel. The covenant is between YHWH and Israel with Moses as its mediator.

History Remembered (1:5-4:43)

In the first four chapters of Deuteronomy, Moses recounts in summary form the history of rebellion by the 1st wilderness generation in entering and taking possession of the land of Promise.

See, I have set the land before you. Go in and take possession of the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their offspring after them. –Deut. 1:8

God had set before them a great land and yet they rebelled against his provision and received the sentence that they would die in the wilderness. (1:19-46) In spite of this rebellion, YHWH proved faithful to provide leaders (1:9-18) and other provisions for forty long years: “You have lacked nothing!” (2:7)

Once “the entire generation” had perished from the camp (2:14), the new generation of Israelites was ready to cross over the threshold and take possession of the Land of Promise. (2:18) God gave them several preliminary victories on the border of the promised land in order to strengthen the courage of the Israelites to enter. Likewise the enemies of God would quake with fear of YHWH and his people:

This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you on the peoples who are under the whole heaven, who shall hear the report of you and shall tremble and be in anguish because of you. –Deuteronomy 2:25

The Israelites must always remember the context of YHWH’s covenant was in a dramatic redemption and provision. The power



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and strength in battle is because “the Lord our God gave all into our hands.” (2:33, 2:36, 3:3)

And I commanded Joshua at that time, ‘Your eyes have seen all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings. So will the LORD do to all the kingdoms into which you are crossing. You shall not fear them, for it is the LORD your God who fights for you. —Deuteronomy 3:21-22

Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

—Deuteronomy 4:6-8

The key purpose of this section is twofold, to remind the Israelites of the historic context of rebellion and faithfulness to YHWH, and prepare them to trust and obey the covenant with YHWH under the new leadership of Joshua. Israel prevailed because of YHWH; YHWH is the King.

A warning against Idolatry: Listen and Do (4:1-49)

The conclusion of the Historic prologue section is a charge to listen and keep the commandments of the LORD. Moses reminds the people of the sad history of idolatry among the Israelites at Baal-peor (4:3). This was a generation that saw the glory of God at Mount Horeb (Sinai). They were warned how seriously YHWH guards his worship. Yet, they rebelled. Moses reminds the Israelites that they are a redeemed people who belong to YHWH:

Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? ³⁴ Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? ³⁵ To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him. —Deuteronomy 4:33-35



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Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today.

--Deuteronomy 5:3

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

--Deuteronomy 6:4-5

The Commandments: Hear, O Israel (5-11)

The Ten Commandments

Moses recalls the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mt. Horeb. The main purpose is to convey to the present generation that these commandments were not just for their parents but for all generations of Israelites. One of the issues that future generations may face is in questioning the authority of Moses in giving the law. The story of Horeb also serves to memorialize the need for the covenant with YHWH to be mediated through Moses.

Go near and hear all that the LORD our God will say, and speak to us all that the LORD our God will speak to you, and we will hear and do it.
—Deut. 5:27

Future generations of Israelites must always remember that the Commandments given through Moses were not of human origin but came from God. Moses was merely the messenger—YHWH is the source and authority behind the commandments statutes and rules. If future generations of Israelites would always remember this key fact, “it would go well with them and their descendants forever!” (5:29)

The Great Commandment and Succession

The Lord’s posture toward Israel is to bless. He desires to multiply them in a rich land and give them abundance. The Lord is gracious and faithful to his promise. There is one Command that summarizes all the other commands. If Israel will prioritize their commitment to YHWH above all else, everything else will fall into place.

The Great Commandment which begins with the call to attention or the Shema (Hear O Israel) is to love the Lord with every aspect of human personhood. All of the commandments of God are set properly within a loving relationship between God and his people.



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Again with the issue of succession on Moses mind, he encourages the Israelites to make instruction of their children in this command the most important priority of their lives. They are to write it *everywhere*, get it into their heads, keep it in their hearts, allow it to govern their actions, make it the center of their home, and talk about *all the time* in everyday life.

The biggest concern that Moses has for future generations is that they will forget. Memory fades as the generations progress. Only in writing down of the commandments and in the constant discussion will the Israelites preserve the memory of the Law.

When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. —Deuteronomy 6:20-21

Future generations must always be reminded of their history of redemption.

A Holy Nation is a Healthy Nation (7)

The Israelites were called to remain distinct from the surrounding nations and peoples. They are idolaters and receive the corruption and penalties for their lack of faith in YHWH. The Israelites must always stay separate and distinct from them and their forms of worship. If they do so “he will love you, bless you, and multiply you” (7:13).

In holiness and dedication to YHWH is found health and vitality. It will be tempting to fear them. But God is more powerful than them and their false gods are devoted for destruction. (7:26)



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Remember the Lord your God (8-11)

The biggest concern in succession is fading memory. Moses warns the Israelites that once they are in the Land of Promise and enjoying its fruits and blessings that it will be easy and tempting for them to forget their history and their relationship with YHWH.

It is easy to take blessing for granted. YHWH is the source of all of the abundance they enjoy. However, if they forget YHWH and begin to take credit for the abundance he will discipline them in order to bring them back to reality:

Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.... And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. –Deut. 8:17, 19

Humility is the Key (9)

Moses reminds the Israelites that it is not because of their righteousness that they are going to drive out the other nations, but because of the other nation's wickedness.

He calls Israel a "stubborn people" (9:6) and reminds them of their history of rebellion with the golden calf episode. Were it not for Moses prevailing on the mercy of God there would be no Israel.

God has been gracious to Israel and they should always remain humbled by that mercy. As soon as they begin to become self righteous, they will fail and perish as their forefathers.

The Expectation is Simple (10-11)

"And now Israel, What does the Lord your God require of you?"

Essentially, he expects covenanted love from his people. So long as Israel stays true to YHWH, forsaking all other gods, he will continue to bless them.

²⁶“See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: ²⁷the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, ²⁸and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known. –Deut. 11:26-28