

DEUTERONOMY: *God's Book of Remembrance*

"These are the WORDS"

Deuteronomy is one of the most majestic, fascinating and significant books in the Old Testament. It is cited or quoted 195 times in the New Testament. It is exceeded only by references to Psalms, Isaiah, Genesis and Exodus in that order. Indeed, Jesus quoted from it on three occasions at the temptations (Matthew 4:1-14; cf. Deut. 8:3; 6:13, 16). He even quoted Deut. 6:5 when asked what was the greatest commandment.

TITLE: Deuteronomy means "second law," or "Repetition of the Law." It is based on an erroneous Greek translation of the three Hebrew words in 17:18, which is correctly rendered "a copy of this law." The Hebrew title is *'allah had devarim*, "These are the words," from the first two words in the original. Deuteronomy is more than a repetition of the law found in the preceding books of Moses. In this book the law is further expanded, interpreted, explained and applied to daily life of the Jewish people. Perhaps simply "Words" is the best title for the book.

AUTHOR: The book claims to consist almost entirely of the farewell speeches of Moses as he addressed the people of Israel just before they would cross over into the Promised Land. Internal and external evidence is strong for Moses as the author of this book along with all the first five books of the Old Testament (Deut. 1:1; 31:9, 22, 24ff; Exodus 17:14; 24:4, 7; Numbers 33:2). The author has a firsthand knowledge of the geographical details and history of the Exodus. Only Moses could tell of the details of the events in chapter three. Someone writing hundreds of years later would not be familiar with such details. Moses was a literate well-educated man and would have been familiar with the Near Eastern treaties and their form of writing. The Egyptian elements also favor Moses as the author. No Egyptologist has ever detected an anachronism or any trace of age or circumstances not confined to Moses' day. The very ancient Jewish conviction that Moses was the author is expressed in the alternative title for Deuteronomy, "The Fifth Book of Moses." Moses is stated as the speaker of nearly the entire book (1:1; 5:1; 27:11; 29:2; 31:1; 31:30; 33:1). He is definitely the responsible author of the book. He directed, controlled and was responsible for all that was in the original text. There is remarkable unity and consistency in this writing. The binding theme is the worship of Yahweh. Other than Christ, Moses is the greatest interpreter of that worship. Christ not only quoted the book, but attributed it to Moses (Matt. 19:7-9; John 5:45-47; cf. Deut 18:18). So do Luke, Peter, Paul and James in the New Testament. Probably Joshua wrote the obituary of Moses in Deuteronomy 34. Moreover, archaeology has proven that Moses could have been the author. There is nothing in the book that could not have come from the time of Moses. In fact, it contains what we would expect to come from the pen of Moses.

Much has been written about the documentary hypothesis or theory of the Pentateuch, which holds the view that some unknown editor, or editors went through the ancient books and abstracted various parts. Proponents add that Moses' name was given as the author to give status to the books. It is highly imaginative but lacks credibility because literature is not produced this way. It is unnatural and leads to absurdities and the false principle of evolution of religion for formulas in the formation of the Pentateuch. The documentary hypothesis contradicts the plain statements of both the Old and New Testaments that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch. One wag said: "If the five books of Moses were not written by Moses, they must have been written by somebody else named Moses." One of the best arguments for Moses authorship is the internal evidence that presents archaic words and obsolete constructions as an exhibit for Moses as author. Moses had helpers like Eleazar the priest and this would account of slight variations in style. Even though it has gone through wars, calamities, efforts of the enemies to destroy it, laid aside and lost for centuries, it still has the sense of the original and a trustworthy text. The authorship of Moses has had the unanimous unbroken tradition of both Jewish and Christian scholarship until recent years. Frankly, no one has proven that Moses did not write these five books. The documentary hypothesis as originally presented has almost completely deteriorated among scholarly students of the Pentateuch.

Chapters 28-30 are one of the most amazing prophecies in the Bible because it predicts the entire history of the Jewish people. It even points to the time when they cease to be a nation and are scattered over the face of the earth (28:64; 30:1-6). With graphically vivid word pictures Moses describes for them what would result if they turned from Yahweh to serve the idols of their neighbors. Consequently, Israel wandered for many centuries as a people without a land. Moses looked far into the future and saw the people dispersed in lands of captivity, and

then he saw God gathering them again to a final restoration.

It is significant that Moses is never praised until after his death in keeping with his humility (34:10). It is very reasonable to conclude that this work is the result of a true historical connection between the man and the book that bears his name as author. It clearly reflects the personality of Moses, the geographical data of Egypt, the wilderness of Sinai and historical setting we would expect in its contents. It is a great book by a great author.

PLACE: The people of Israel are located at the last camp ground in the wilderness on the plains of Moab during the interval of forty days before crossing the Jordan to begin the conquest of Canaan. The physical setting is the same as the opening of Joshua in the wilderness. The entire book takes place on the plains of Moab. Those who left Egypt have wandered in the wilderness for nearly 38 years (Numbers 16:1 17:13; 20:1; Deut. 1:19 46). They are now in the same spot they were 38 years before. At the beginning of the fortieth year they are at Kadesh barnea a second time (Num. 20:1 21:35), and now we have before us the last month in the life of Moses. What will the great leader have to say to his people? What will be his last will and testament?

TIME: c. 1406 B. C. and covers about forty days.

THEME: The theme of Deuteronomy is set forth in the words "possess" and "possession." These are exhortations and instructions concerning the possession of the Promised Land. We are on the verge of going across the Jordan River and taking possession of the land. The emphasis of the covenant in Deuteronomy is on the settlement in the Promised Land. This is a covenant of possession of the land. In this expanded covenant, there is also the provision for exile if the people reject Yahweh to serve idols.

KEY WORDS: "Remember," "possess," "obey"

PURPOSE: Deuteronomy is a restating of the instructions and laws to a second generation of Israelites who grew up in the wilderness journey. All of the first generation is now dead, except for Joshua, Caleb and Moses. Moses will die before Israel crosses over the Jordan. It is basically a review of the law before crossing into the Promised Land. This pivotal book helps the people adjust to a new leader and a new life in the covenant in a new land. The audience that heard these messages preached is described as "all Israel." However, the readers would be the people after they have settled in the land. The book serves as a reminder of God's purpose for Israel and how they should live as His people in the new land.

KEY VERSES: 10:12 13

"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the LORD's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?"

STYLE: This is primarily a book of horatory consisting of sermons or speeches containing the law and redemptive history. It contains farewell messages given by Moses as he reviews the history of the chosen people. The three main speeches are preceded by a brief introduction (1:1 5) and followed by an epilogue (34) which gives the eulogy of Moses. It serves as a "bridge" between the first and second generation of Israelites. Deuteronomy is written in a style consistent with exposition of the civil, moral and religious Law, and is didactic. It has the tone of an elderly father speaking to his children reminding them of the importance of obedience. It conveys the impression of an old man rebuking his children for disobedience. He is anxious that they remember the covenant and be faithful to the LORD God when he will no longer be around to remind them. There is also the strength of being acknowledged as a responsible and respected leader with his integrity intact.

GOD'S CHOICE OF ISRAEL: Yahweh chose Israel to be His own possession (Deu. 7:6 8). The concept of "election" of Israel in the Old Testament is most often communicated by the verb "to choose." The LORD God expressed His choice by creating a new people, i.e., His own peculiar people. When we think of divine election, we should not think of God choosing from an already existing nation while rejecting all the others. Through the work of redemption, God created a new people. He started from scratch with a new family, Abraham, and created a new nation, Israel, based on a new covenant. Genesis 3 through 11 demonstrates that all the nations of the earth had become corrupt beyond the imagination (Gen. 6:5ff, 11). With Abraham and his descendents, God was doing something entirely new. He was creating His own special people whom he chose to love rather than completely destroying the earth. Here is a family that has now grown into a nation who did not speculate about God. They

knew Him from their experiences with Him. They had experienced His deliverance from Egypt and He demanded their obedience and worship. That great act of faith and obedience is expressed in the great *Shema* in 6:4-5.

Why did the LORD choose Israel? The covenant begins with love, "because the LORD loves you" (7:8). It was an act of grace (7:6-14).

This is why the command in Joshua to completely destroy her enemies is so critical. It is strange to us in the 20th century. However, it would have been the death of a new nation if Israel had not obeyed God. Their very survival was at stake. Yahweh chose Israel, and He is the God of Israel. He has not entered into a covenant with any other nation. However, the stress of Deuteronomy is that Israel keeps in mind the dangers of contaminating their faith with the idolatry of the Canaanites. The worst sin Israel could commit against God was to turn to other gods. The penalties for idolatry were terribly severe. God would not tolerate idolatry because of the special relationship with His people. The failure of Israel to obey God's law led to gross idolatry and ultimately the destruction of the kingdom and exile from the Promised Land.

It is taken for granted in Deuteronomy and Joshua that the Canaanites are reprobate people. The utter destruction of Canaanites is necessary to prevent corruption of Israel. The purity of Israel's loyalty and worship could not be preserved unless these perverted characters were annihilated. Numbers 25:1 is a good reminder of what happened when Israel played with the idolatry of Moab. They can not afford to repeat the same mistake (Deut. 7:1-5). Polytheism is absolutely unthinkable.

Moreover, let us not forget the purpose of this covenant. Israel was to be a missionary nation. God would bless all the families of the earth through Israel (Gen. 12:3). "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for His own possession (or special treasure) out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deu. 14:2). Israel belonged to the LORD in a peculiar way, with personal rights to them as His personal possession. Through Israel the Messiah would come. Israel was the depository of divine revelation and she would carry God's message to all the nations. The Jewish people were no better, no wiser, no stronger than any other nation. By the time Christ came they were the best-prepared people to carry the Good News to the gentile (non-Jewish) nations. The whole nation was to be witness to the nations (Exodus 19:5, 6; Amos 3:2).

All God asked of Israel was that she love Him and serve Him with all the heart and soul. The keeping of His commandments was simply the expression of love. If we love Him, we will do what He says to do. If we love Him, we will keep His commandments.

NEAR EASTERN TREATY COVENANTS AND DEUTERONOMY

Recent scholarship has emphasized the consistency of the covenant in Deuteronomy and the Near Eastern treaties during the 13 and 14th centuries B.C. Hebrew uses the same word for an international treaty and a covenant between Yahweh and His people. Most of these treaties discovered date between 1500 and 600 B.C. We are dealing with this same time frame in Deuteronomy. The ideas and terms show a remarkable relationship between parties in treaties and the covenant between God and His people. The new relationship with God was called a covenant. This covenant was a decisive step in the creation of the nation of Israel.

Ancient covenants resemble treaties in respect to their rhetorical language, structure and ideology. The purpose of a treaty was to secure the entire allegiance of the vassal king or city state to the other partner in the treaty. Rhetorical style is a characteristic of Deuteronomy. Terminology is replete with words like "fear," "love," "hearken to the voice of," "go after." In deed, a rebellious vassal "sins" as do the people of the covenant.

The most striking similarity is the structure of the treaties and covenants in the Old Testament. There were six parts to a treaty: A preamble naming the author of the treaty, a historical prologue defining the relationship between parties, the stipulations describing mutual responsibilities, the treaty document which was to be read at regular intervals, a list of the gods who witnessed the treaty, and its resultant curses, blessings and threats if the treaty is broken. Of course, the Old Testament omitted the list of gods because Yahweh was cutting the covenant with His chosen people. At least four of these elements are found in Deuteronomy: the prologue, the stipulations, the treaty document and blessings and curses.

Moreover, both begin with history and insistence on grace and mercy of the author of the covenant. Kindness is often shown to the vassal state. Here we see Yahweh reminding Israel often of His mercy. The stipulations come after the LORD has reminded His people of what He has done for them. Of course, blessings are promised for obedience and curses if the treaty is broken. God has entered into a covenant with Israel and He expects them to be obedient and loyal to Him. Exile from the Promised Land is the curse if they are disobedient and go after idols. The prophets were sent of God to bring prophetic judgments when the people disobeyed. God kept reaching out to His people with grace and mercy. Other examples of the treaty motif are suggested in Exodus 19 – 24; Joshua 24 and I Samuel 12.

It is worthy of note that these treaties were transmitted to subsequent generations as inviolable documents. They were sealed and placed in secure locations such as in temples. This is probably the strongest evidence against an evolutionary process of writing and developing the first five books of the Bible, and especially Deuteronomy.

A PROPHET LIKE UNTO MOSES: Deuteronomy 18:15 – 19 gives Israel assurance that God will not forsake them, but will guide and lead them. Jesus is the prophet par excellence. He understood this prophecy as referring to Himself in John 5:46, and the Apostle Peter also understood it as referring to Jesus (Acts 3:22 – 26). The language unmistakably points to the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

ABIDING PRINCIPLES:

1. The general principles in Deuteronomy are timeless. Just as Jesus found strength in God's Word to face the Tempter, so we can find spiritual power in the face of opposition as we apply God's Word to our lives. The people were commanded to write certain portions of Scripture on their doorposts and memorize them. We can write them on cards, inscribe on posters, plaques, listen to them on cassettes as constant reminders to read and heed to God's Word. The important thing is to get it before us and into our hearts so we can abide in it.
2. Jesus said the two great commandments of the law were to love the LORD God and to love one's neighbor. This is the heart of Deuteronomy. Love is the key to life with God. We owe Him our hearts because He first loved us.
3. God has revealed Himself in the facts of history. He is concerned about human situations, yours and mine.
4. Yahweh chose Israel out of grace. Grace is the only explanation for the nation of Israel. It is the only explanation for God choosing us as well.
5. The emphasis of Deuteronomy is on the relationship between true faith and a holy life. Christianity is not about a life insurance policy that gets you into heaven. It is about God's eternal purpose for us in conforming us to the likeness of His Son. Getting us saved is just the first phase, important as it is. Much of our shallow Christianity is the result of our fire insurance preaching. The LORD has redeemed us and He demands our loyalty to Him.
6. "The LORD our God is one LORD." The unity of the Godhead is presented. He is "one" as a unity with distinctions with the persons of the Godhead.
7. What are some Canaanites in our lives that we need to remove? Do you have some spiritual "marriages" with the modern culture that violate God's values?
8. The worst sin is still idolatry. The penalty was terribly severe for Israel. It was the failure of Israel to obey Yahweh's command to destroy the Canaanites that led to gross idolatry, and ultimately to the destruction of the kingdom and exile from the Promised Land.

This great book ends with the pathos of Moses' death. The gifted writer F. B. Meyer has expressed it thus:

At 120, his eye not dimmed, nor his natural force abated, the aged man climbed Mt. Pisgah, and, as he viewed the Promised Land, into which he longed to go, God gently lifted him into the Better Land. In a moment, his soul had passed within the veil, and he was at home with God. God buried his body. Of his sepulchre, no man knows. His remains were removed from all reach of idolatry.

The last glimpse we have of Moses in the Scriptures is on the Mount of Transfiguration, along with Elijah, talking to Jesus about His coming exodus. Because of His death and resurrection, He promised us, "I go to prepare a place for you."

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