

Deuteronomy

Introduction

Can we formulate a basic impression of the whole book? What sets it apart from the other books of the law?

The title is revealing (two words: second law) and points to the fact that, as a re-iteration of Israel's history thus far, the book gives a re-iteration of the ten commandments, a second giving of the law.

1A. Structure

Deuteronomy is like a large sermon since it records final speeches of Moses in the 40th year on the East side of the Jordan (Deut. 1:3, 5; 4:44-49; 29:1, cf. IOT 99). The book has a sermonic and exhortative style.

The structure or shape of the book can be summarized around the three speeches:

Introduction 1.1-5

1. Looking back 1.6-3.29

2. Looking ahead 4-28

3. Covenant renewal 29-32

Conclusion 33-34

2A. Central point

A central point is to look back and recall the blessings of God as encouragement for the fight that will shortly ensue in the conquest of Canaan, the promised land; an inheritance from Yahweh, the Lord God (1:6-8).

There is a reaching back in order to ground a stepping forward. Note the perspective of overlooking the 40 years (2:7). It was roughly two years after Egypt to the spy incident and 38 years to the death of the old generation (Deut. 2:14-18).

3A. Responsibility

The special place of God's law as a covenant document is cited in 4:1-13. The Lord says, "Do not add or subtract from my law but be careful to keep the commandments of the Lord your God" (v. 2). "Watch and do not forget...teach your children" (v. 9). The ten commandments summarize the covenant (v. 13).

Note the "second giving" of the ten commandments, chapter 5. What is the difference between Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 on the weekly Sabbath?

4A. Holy War

Anticipating the conquest under Joshua, Deuteronomy contains laws governing holy war (Chapters 7, 20; IOT 92; cf. Ex. 17.16; Num. 21.2-3, 35; 24.19-20; 31.1-3; 33.51, 55). Total destruction of a city applies to even Israel's own cities when there is abominable sin (13.14-15).

Commit to obedience. There are blessings for obedience and cursings for disobedience (28). So carefully follow the terms of this covenant (29:9). But recall Job and the fact that Israel is very sinful, will receive cursings, and yet by sovereign grace will be ultimately blessed! The war for Canaan is at bottom a spiritual warfare which will be won by obedience to God (30:11-16).

Israel is God's chosen nation, a sinful nation chosen to be an instrument of judgment on the sinful nations of Canaan (Deut. 7:6, fact of election; 7:7; 9:6, what the reason is not; 7:8-9, what the reason is). Israel is chosen to this task by the loving purpose of the sovereign God who fights on their behalf because of His covenant keeping objectives arising from within Himself according to His will and good pleasure.

God will destroy the nations in Canaan because of their sin (9.5), even though Israel is likewise sinful. He will give these nations no mercy (7.1-2, 16) but He will have mercy on whom He chooses (i.e. Israel, cf. Exod. 33.19).

So, take heart Israel. Your conquest and possession of the land is rooted in the character and purpose of God and not in yourselves. The victory is yours because the battle is the Lord's (He will fight for you, 1.30; 31.3).

So, O man of God, draw your sword, they look down on you like dogs but they shall drop like flies!

Lesson

Because the warfare is essentially a spiritual warfare, be encouraged by God's past blessings and by His electing love to fight the good fight of faith.

The theme is encouragement by covenant re-iteration for conquest.

Consider God's law carefully in order to obey it. The word is high thee O Christian. Take up the difficult fight of faith with a spring in your step because your life is grounded in the purpose and character of God: Work and fight because God is at work in you (Phil. 2:12-13; verse 14 without complaining!).

5A. Looking to the NT

Deuteronomy is one of the OT books most frequently quoted in the NT.

1) IOT cites a syllogism that influence Jewish thinking (105):

a) God will rise up a prophet like Moses (chap. 18), b) There has not been a prophet like Moses (chap 34). c) Therefore, we must keep looking for such a prophet. Thus, John the Baptist was asked, "Are you the prophet" (Jn. 1.21). Because of the signs and wonders of Jesus, some of the people said, "This really is the prophet" (Jn. 7.40). Peter and Stephen declare that He is the prophet (Acts 3.22; 7.37).

2) Israel's sovereign election in contrast to Egypt and the Canaanites defines the nature of election and its necessary consequent of reprobation (cf. "I never knew you" in Mat 7.23).

3) Moses sermon (speeches that make up the book of Deuteronomy) anticipates the Prophet and His Sermon on the Mount (cf. "these words" 6.4) and it anticipates the prophetic teaching sermons of pastor-teachers in the church beyond the death and resurrection of Christ.

Study questions

1. What is the book of Deuteronomy as a whole and how does the name indicate its main contents?
2. Where does the action of the book of Deuteronomy take place and in what time frame?
3. What is the central point of the Deuteronomy sermon?
4. What is different about the Sabbath command in Deut. 5:12-15 from Exodus 20:8-11?
5. What is the relation of law to love in light of Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18 with I Jn. 2:3-11; 5:2-4? What is the relation of the Ten Words and the covenant (4.13)?
6. Why did God choose Israel (Deut 7:7-9; 9:6; 4.37)?
7. What are the benefits of obedience (cf. Deut. 10:12-13; 11:8-9)?
8. What importance is given to family nurture of children (6:4-6; 11:16-21)? cf. the implication of the 5th commandment as a requirement for parents.
9. What can we learn about "not making images" from 12.4 & 12.31?