

Deuteronomy

“Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God,
the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy
for . . . those who love Him and keep His commandments” (Deut 7:9)

Second generations out of the homeland will inevitably face certain identity crises as they forge new paths and become their own people, especially when great things are expected of them on the basis of their heritage. No greater expectation, and no greater crises, ever faced a second generation than what Israel faced in 1406 B.C. as they prepared to enter, en masse, a new homeland. Out of the failure of their parents, this second generation had been trained in dependence upon God and were now ready to take up their destiny. However, they would need great encouragement as to who they were and specific instruction as to how they were to behave. This is precisely what they received from the hand of Moses in Deuteronomy, a covenant renewal document tailored to their historical situation and national needs.

Authorship

The question of the authorship of Deuteronomy is inseparable from the issue of the origin and composition of the Pentateuch as a whole. Though these five books nowhere state that Moses was their author, Jewish and Christian tradition holds this to be so on the basis of numerous and specific textual references. Moses' writing activity is referred to both within and outside the Torah. He was to record certain events (Ex 17:14; Num 33:2) and laws (Ex 24:4; 34:27), and he wrote a song (Deut 31:22). Since Moses received God's revelation of the Law and it found its way onto a scroll it stands to reason that he was responsible for it. Joshua seems to associate the Book of the Law with that which was commanded by Moses (Josh 1:7-8). Later on the Israelites referred to the "Book of Moses" with reference to certain regulations and procedures (2 Chr 25:4; Ezra 6:18; Neh 13:1). In addition, Jesus and the early church attributed Torah to Moses (Matt 19:7; 22:24; Mark 7:10; 12:26; John 1:17; 5:45; 7:23). Though there are a number of insertions and additions which post-date Moses (e.g. the report of his death and certain explanatory remarks) these are not sufficient to deny the "essential authorship" of Moses.¹ The unity of the Pentateuch is another powerful argument for a single authorial hand,

¹ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 40.

not to discount the co-authorship of the Holy Spirit.² Issues with respect to modern theories will be discussed below.

Date

Since Moses died in 1406 B.C., exactly forty years after the Exodus from Egypt, Deuteronomy would have been substantially finished by then. The biblical narrative casts the material in Deuteronomy as a series of “farewell speeches” delivered by Moses just prior to Israel’s entering of the land of Canaan. If Moses really did live, and preach, and receive and deliver Torah then there is little problem with seeing him authoring this document so significant to Israel’s future by the time they were ready to proceed with Yahweh’s plan.

Historical Setting

Israel has wandered in the wilderness for thirty-eight years as divine retribution for their disobedience at Kadesh Barnea, refusing to enter the land as God had commanded them. Now that the first generation had died, Moses has brought their children to the plains and mountains of Moab in preparation for the conquest of Canaan. The major world powers are either unable or unwilling to enforce their rule on this area at this time leaving Israel free to deal with smaller individual nations and alliances.³

Original Readers / Occasion

Israel is marshaled in the plains of Moab in preparation to enter and conquer the land of Canaan. To this second generation out of Egypt Moses delivers an extended discourse, and then commits it to written form. He did this so that the children of those who had experienced Yahweh’s redemption out of Egypt might not feel as though they were any other than the chosen people and so that they might be equipped to avert their parents’ tragic unbelief. As a result of Moses’ composition of Deuteronomy they, and every subsequent generation, would have validation of their identity as Yahweh’s unique nation and firm guidance as to how to live like it.

² For a recent structural display of the unity of the Pentateuch see David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 47-102. See also John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992).

³ For a summary of the political climate of the ancient Near Eastern world about this time see Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987, 1996), 94-108; also idem. *Deuteronomy*, in *The New American Commentary* series (N.p.: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 23-26.

Special Issues

Relationship to Exodus. It is easily noticed that in reiterating certain laws and stipulations that were first set forth in Exodus Deuteronomy makes some rather significant changes. Rather than being a mark of different authors it should be remembered that the second generation was preparing to enter the land and develop a settled, agrarian culture. The various laws and stipulations that have undergone some change are those that required some slight tailoring to the circumstances that would be faced in the land as opposed to those which their nomadic parents required. At any rate the alterations do not change the essence or spirit of the Mosaic instruction.

Relationship of Deuteronomy to later writings. With the onslaught of historical-critical approaches to the Pentateuch Mosaic authorship was completely jettisoned in favor of source compilation theories and late composition. Deuteronomy came to be identified as the Book of the Law discovered by Josiah, not simply in terms of content but in terms of origin. Hence, the “D” source of the documentary hypothesis. As a late seventh-century creation it was held by scholars as being “possibly developed by Josiah and his partisans to legitimate his bid for authority and the extension of Jerusalem’s sway over the outlying areas.”⁴ This led to the hypothesis that Deuteronomy through 2 Kings was the product of a single author, the deuteronomist historian, thus further divorcing the book from membership in the Pentateuch. The fact that Deuteronomy is absolutely necessary to the completion of the saga begun in Genesis should be sufficient argument for accepting its authenticity as Moses’ concluding work. Furthermore, recent literary studies have tended to confirm Deuteronomy as part and parcel of a greater whole, stretching certainly back to Exodus and Numbers.

Literary Form. Traditionally Deuteronomy has been understood as a series of addresses, usually three in number, delivered by Moses to Israel just prior to their entering the land, with various other introductory and summary features. More recent study has tended to view the book as organized according to the pattern of international Hittite treaties from the second millennium B.C. Once this form is understood, the constituent treaty elements are fairly easily detectable in Deuteronomy, as will be set forth below. Understanding the book as a covenant renewal document argues for an early date, since it does not follow the treaty forms from the Assyrian period. It also throws light on the nature of Yahweh’s relationship with Israel,

⁴ Dillard and Longman, *Introduction*, 94. For a discussion of the theories of the composition of the Pentateuch in general see *ibid.*, 40-48 and 92-97 for Deuteronomy specifically.

especially with respect to understanding the conditional aspects of that relationship, much in view in Deuteronomy, against the unconditional election of Israel as rooted in God's covenant with the patriarch Abraham.

Theme Statement

Through covenant renewal Israel is assured of Yahweh's love for and unconditional commitment to them as His unique people and reminded that as each generation obeys Yahweh out of love they will experience His blessing and thus realize the purpose of their nationhood.

Outline

- I. Preamble to the Covenant: Moses sets the context for Yahweh's renewal of the covenant with his vassal nation.1:1-5
 - A. These are the words of Moses to all Israel.....1:1
 - B. These are the delayed words of Yahweh.....1:2-4
 - C. These words are the explanation of Torah.1:5
- II. Historical Prologue of the Covenant: Moses recounts Israel's experience in the wilderness as Yahweh's chosen yet rebellious people.....1:6-4:40
 - A. Israel's purpose and destiny had been defined by Yahweh's promise to the patriarchs.1:6-8
 - B. Moses reminds the people that he alone had been unable to carry the nation in the past.1:9-18
 - C. Moses reminds the people that they had refused to enter the Promised Land.1:19-46
 1. The land proved to be a good place as Yahweh had said.1:19-25
 2. Israel had refused to enter because of unbelief in Yahweh's goodness.....1:26-33
 3. As a result the first generation had been irrevocably appointed to perish in the wilderness.....1:34-46
 - D. Moses reminds the people that Yahweh had demonstrated his sovereignty over the nations whom they had met along the way.2:1-3:29
 1. Yahweh had protected Esau's possession so that he might use them to bless Israel.2:1-7
 2. Yahweh had forbidden Israel from bothering Moab for the sake of their ancestor Lot.2:8-12
 3. Yahweh had demonstrated his sovereignty over Israel in replacing the first generation with the second.....2:13-15
 4. Yahweh had protected the possession of Ammon which had been gained by dispossession of its former inhabitants.2:16-23
 5. Moses recounted Israel's victory over the Amorite Sihon.2:24-37
 - a. It had been from Yahweh in order to cause the nations to fear Israel.....2:24-25
 - b. It had been from Yahweh who hardened Sihon's heart.....2:26-31
 - c. It had been from Yahweh in order to encourage Israel.2:32-37
 6. Moses recounted Israel's victory over the Amorite Og.3:1-11
 - a. It had been from Yahweh so that Israel might not fear.....3:1-2
 - b. It had been from Yahweh over fortified cities.....3:3-10

c.	It had been from Yahweh over the last giant.	3:11
7.	Moses had encouraged Israel to possess their Promised Land by recounting the taking of the land then possessed.	3:12-22
a.	Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh now possessed land.	3:12-17
b.	Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh had committed to seeing Israel take full possession of their Promised Land.....	3:18-22
8.	Moses recounted his own exclusion from the land as a warning to Israel of the constant danger of unbelief.	3:23-29
E.	Moses reminds the people of the nature of their covenant making Sovereign.	4:1-40
1.	Yahweh's commandments obeyed lead to life and testimony.	4:1-8
2.	Yahweh's covenant must be remembered and taught.	4:9-14
3.	Yahweh's character demands exclusive allegiance.	4:15-24
4.	Yahweh's commitment and compassion will restore Israel after failure.....	4:25-31
5.	Yahweh is the one supreme God who has chosen Israel as his special nation.	4:32-40
III.	Historical Interlude: Moses introduces the covenant text via historical precedent of the obedience of the nation.....	4:41-49
A.	Moses establishes cities of refuge east of the Jordan.....	4:41-43
B.	Moses introduces Torah in the context of victorious obedience.....	4:44-49
IV.	Basic Commandments: Moses instructs Israel in the general principles of the covenant.	5:1-11:32
A.	Introductory Exhortation: Moses reminds Israel of its prior covenant relationship with Yahweh.	5:1-5
B.	Moses reviews and renews the principal commandments.	5:6-21
1.	Commandments regarding Israel's relationship with Yahweh.	5:6-15
2.	Commandments regarding Israel's relationship with others.	5:16-21
C.	Moses narrates the essence of the original covenant relationship between the two parties.	5:22-33
1.	A rehearsal of the Yahweh's manifestation at Sinai reminds Israel of their Sovereign's awesome separateness.	5:22-27
2.	Moses charges the people to accept the covenant stipulations.	5:28-33
D.	Moses instructs in the content of the covenant principles.....	6:1-11:25
1.	Moses expounds on the nature of the covenant relationship.	6:1-9
a.	Moses exhorts divine respect through the keeping of the commandments.....	6:1-3
b.	Moses instructs Israel in the love of Yahweh as the essence of the covenant principles.	6:4-9
2.	Moses defines Israel's relationship to Yahweh as the giver of the Promised Land.....	6:10-25
a.	Israel is exhorted to respect and serve Yahweh exclusively once in the land.	6:10-15
b.	Israel is exhorted to obey Yahweh diligently in the land.....	6:16-19
c.	Israel is exhorted to fear Yahweh so that he might fulfill his covenant purpose for the nation in the land.	6:20-25
3.	Moses defines Israel's relationship to the current inhabitants of the Promised Land.....	7:1-26

- a. Moses commands destruction of and complete separation from Canaan's current inhabitants because of their uniqueness as Yahweh's covenant nation.7:1-11
- b. Moses assures Israel that their uniqueness will be evident because Yahweh will distinctly bless their obedience.....7:12-16
- c. Moses encourages Israel to remember Yahweh's victory over Pharaoh in the face of fearsome enemies in Canaan.7:17-26
- 4. Moses exhorts Israel to remember that Yahweh's fatherly love is the source of their material blessing.....8:1-20
 - a. Through Yahweh's chastening Israel was taught to obey so that they might experience his blessing.8:1-10
 - b. Israel is warned against forgetting the source of blessing.....8:11-20
- 5. Moses exhorts Israel to remember that Yahweh's elective grace is the reason for their possession of the land.9:1-10:11
 - a. Moses reminds Israel that Canaanite wickedness is the reason for disinheritance of the land not Israel's righteousness.....9:1-6
 - b. Moses reminds Israel that their good fortune was in spite of their stubborn rebellion.9:7-10:11
 - 1) Moses summarizes Israel's rebellion.9:7
 - 2) Moses reviews Israel's rebellion and his effectual intercession at Mt. Horeb.....9:8-21
 - 3) Moses reviews Israel's climactic rebellion at Kadesh Barnea and his intercession.9:22-29
 - a) Moses recalls Israel's unbelief.9:22-24
 - b) Moses invokes the Abrahamic Covenant in preemptive intercession.....9:25-29
 - c. Moses reminds Israel that Yahweh had renewed the covenant and instructed them to resume their journey.10:1-11
 - 1) Yahweh had rewritten the stone tablets.10:1-5
 - 2) Yahweh had provided for the tablets' care.....10:6-9
 - 3) Yahweh commanded resumption of the journey.....10:10-11
- 6. Moses identifies Israel's love for Yahweh as the essence of the covenant relationship.10:12-11:25
 - a. Love for Yahweh is at the heart of Israel's requirement.....10:12-13
 - b. The love of Yahweh motivated his choice of Israel.10:14-18
 - c. Love for the stranger is to mark Israel's devotion to Yahweh. .10:19-22
 - d. Love for Yahweh will be the key to Israel's obedience.....11:1-32
 - 1) Love for Yahweh is the proper response to his deliverance of Israel from Egypt.11:1-7
 - 2) Obeying Yahweh out of love guarantees possession of the land and blessing in it.11: 8-17
 - 3) Perpetuation of the obedience of love will prolong Israel's stay in the land in security.....11:18-25
- E. Concluding Exhortation: Moses charges Israel with responsibility for blessing and cursing with respect to Torah observance.....11:26-32
- V. Specific Stipulations: Moses provides a detailed amplification of the covenant principles.12:1-26:15
 - A. Moses provides specific direction for the worship of Yahweh.....12:1-13:18
 - 1. Worship must be centered at the place of Yahweh's choosing.12:1-28

2.	Worship must not emulate the practices of pagan nations.	12:29-32
3.	Israel must guard against the enticement of false prophets.....	13:1-18
B.	Moses provides specific instruction for maintaining Israel's testimony as a distinctive people.....	14:1-17:13
1.	They must not mark the body as do other nations.	14:1-2
2.	They must eat only what Yahweh declares as clean.....	14:3-21
3.	They must tithe their produce to the place of worship.	14:22-26
4.	They must provide for the Levite and the indigent.....	14:27-29
5.	They must exercise compassion toward the poor.	15:1-11
6.	They must not prolong indentured servitude.	15:12-18
7.	They must offer the firstborn animal to Yahweh.	15:19-23
8.	They must appear tri-annually at the place of worship.	16:1-17
9.	They must not pervert justice.....	16:18-17:13
C.	Moses provides specific instruction for the kind of officials who would enhance and protect Israel's status among the nations.	17:14-18:22
1.	Requirements are given for the selection of a king.	17:14-20
2.	Provisions are mandated for the priests and Levites.....	18:1-8
3.	Regulations are set down for the recognition of prophets.....	18:9-22
a.	Prohibitions are given against pagan divination.	18:9-14
b.	Instruction is given for the recognition of a true prophet.	18:15-22
D.	Moses provides specific instruction for the ordering and regulation of Israelite society.	19:1-25:19
1.	Laws regarding the sanctity of life.....	19:1-22:8
2.	Laws regarding the sanctity of covenant relationship.	22:9-23:18
3.	Laws regarding the sanctity of personal possessions.	23:19-24:7
4.	Laws regarding the sanctity of personhood.	24:8-25:4
5.	Laws illustrating unselfish respect for other persons.	25:5-16
6.	Moses commands retribution on Amalek as the epitome of the violation of all that Israel's covenant relationship embodied.....	25:17-19
E.	Moses institutes ceremonies to celebrate Israel's initial possession and continued enjoyment of their Promised Land.	26:1-15
1.	The yearly offering of firstfruits was to honor Yahweh for his deliverance of Israel.....	26:1-11
2.	The third-year tithe was to be provided for needy members of the covenant community.	26:12-15
VI.	Historical Interlude: Moses concludes the covenant text by declaring Israel to be Yahweh's special people.	26:16-19
VII.	Moses rehearses the curses and blessings entailed in the covenant.	27:1-29:1
A.	Moses commands a covenant memorial altar to be built on Mt. Ebal.	27:1-10
B.	Moses appoints tribes to pronounce blessings and curses.	27:11-26
1.	Moses appoints tribes to pronounce blessing from Mt. Gerizim.....	27:11-12
2.	Moses appoints tribes to pronounce curses from Mt. Ebal.	27:13-26
a.	Tribes are appointed to curse.....	27:13
b.	The Levites are given the curses to pronounce.	27:14-26
C.	Moses amplifies the blessings and curses as a foundation for understanding Israel's subsequent history in the land.	28:1-68
1.	Moses announces Yahweh's intent to bless Israel for obedience.	28:1-14

2.	Moses announces Yahweh’s resolve to curse Israel for disobedience.	28:15-68
D.	Moses concludes the formalization of the covenant text.	29:1
VIII.	Epilogue: Moses summarizes Israel’s national experience and recasts their covenant mandate in terms of a personal challenge.	29:2–34:12
A.	Moses provides a historical overview of Israel’s experience.	29:2–30:20
1.	Moses summarizes Israel’s past under Yahweh’s care.	29:2-8
2.	Moses encapsulates Israel’s present under Yahweh’s covenant.	29:9-15
3.	Moses bemoans Israel’s future under the condition of covenant disobedience.	29:16-29
4.	Moses exults over Israel’s ultimate realization of the fullest experience of their covenant relationship with Yahweh.	30:1-10
5.	Moses exhorts Israel to the covenant obedience of love.	30:11-20
B.	Moses delivers the text of the covenant and provides for its implementation.	31:1–32:47
1.	Moses directs Israel to obey Joshua as their new leader.	31:1-8
2.	Moses provides for the regular reading of the law.	31:9-13
3.	Yahweh gives final instructions for the covenant’s deposit.	31:14-23
a.	Yahweh summons Moses and Joshua to transfer leadership. .	31:14-15
b.	Yahweh predicts Israel’s defection from the covenant and communicates to Moses a song of witness against the people.	31:16-22
c.	Yahweh inaugurates Joshua as Israel’s leader.	31:23
4.	Moses commands the Levites to deposit the covenant text.	31:24-29
5.	Moses spoke the song received from Yahweh to the people.	31:30–32:47
C.	The conclusion of Moses’ life and ministry.	32:48–34:12
1.	Yahweh arranges Moses’ death.	32:48-52
2.	Moses blesses the children of Israel.	33:1-29
3.	Moses dies on Mount Nebo and passes leadership to Joshua.	34:1-12

Theme Development

As a farewell address to the children of Israel Moses provides the nation with a covenant renewal document, following the basic form of the Hittite sovereign-vassal treaties of the second millennium B.C. This covenant document will serve as a working constitution of nationhood for subsequent generations in residence in their Promised Land.

I. Preamble to the Covenant: Moses sets the context for Yahweh’s renewal of the covenant with his vassal nation (1:1-5).

The preamble sets the context for covenant renewal by reminding the participants of the ordeal of affliction which had brought them to this point, highlighting the fact that an eleven day journey had taken forty years. And yet Yahweh’s faithfulness is also implied.

II. Historical Prologue of the Covenant: Moses recounts Israel’s experience in the wilderness as Yahweh’s chosen yet rebellious people (1:6–4:40).

This selective recounting of Israel's wilderness sojourn is designed to apply that experience to the specific task before them, namely initiation of the conquest of Canaan.

A. Israel's purpose and destiny had been defined by Yahweh's promise to the patriarchs (1:6-8).

As always the basis for all that Yahweh had done and was doing was anchored in the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; 15:12-21). The specific aspect of patriarchal promise that had been before the nation for the past forty years was the promise of possessing the land of Canaan.

B. Moses reminds the people that he alone had been unable to carry the nation in the past (1:9-18).

As a prelude to instructing the nation in the provisions of the Sinaitic covenant Moses reminds the nation that not even he had been able to bear the nation by himself in their infancy due to their great numbers (a testimony to the certainty of fulfillment of Yahweh's promises to Abraham) (1:9-10). Moses' recollection of the provision of judges from each tribe served to remind the nation that their ultimate welfare was a shared responsibility from a human standpoint (1:11-18).

C. Moses reminds the people that they had refused to enter the Promised Land (1:19-46).

Moses next reminded the people that even though the Promised Land had evidenced abundance (1:19-25) they had doubted Yahweh's love and concern for them and refused to face the fearsome inhabitants (1:26-33) resulting in that generation's irrevocable judgment of perishing in the wilderness (1:34-46).

D. Moses reminds the people that Yahweh had demonstrated his sovereignty over the nations whom they had met along the way (2:1-3:29).

This interesting section serves to elicit confidence in Yahweh's sovereignty over and superintendence of the nations of the earth, something that the first generation had failed to appreciate and appropriate. All of the examples had taken place at the end of the wilderness sojourn which meant that the second generation, to whom Moses was speaking, would have had first hand knowledge of these events.

Yahweh had planted and protected Esau's descendants and blessed them in their inheritance so that they might be able to lend aid to Israel in their need (2:1-7). The fact that they refused to render aid does not discredit Yahweh's sovereignty over all nations. Yahweh's

grant of the territory of the Anakim to Lot's descendents illustrates his ability to aid any nation in overcoming human opposition (2:8-12) as the editorial comment of 2:12 makes clear.

In the midst of reference to Yahweh's sovereignty over the neighboring nations, Moses notes that the second generation had replaced the first and were now ready to take possession of their inheritance (2:13-15). This notation leads directly to a reference to another "protected" peoples, the Ammonites (2:16-23) and finally to the divinely directed action against Sihon and Og (2:24-3:12). These two successful military campaigns had demonstrated how Yahweh would act on behalf of his special people in their efforts to possess their Promised Land (cf. 2:24-25). Having recounted how two and one-half tribes had already received their land possession (3:13-17) and having secured those tribes' commitment to completion of the conquest, Yahweh encourages Israel to proceed without fear (3:18-22). As a warning against the constant danger of unbelief, Moses recounts his own failure and resultant exclusion from entering the land (3:23-29). However, historical precedent was insufficient by itself to secure complete obedience. Thus, Moses highlights the character of the sovereign, covenant-making God.

E. Moses reminds the people of the nature of their covenant making Sovereign (4:1-40).

The historical prologue, which was designed to show that the sovereign had a rightful claim on his vassal people, is fittingly concluded in Deuteronomy with a section which underscored certain characteristics of Israel's sovereign king, Yahweh. He is the God who gives commands leading to wisdom, success, and life so that other nations may be moved to put themselves under his rule (4:1-8). He is the God who is present to perform his word and who must not be forgotten by subsequent generations (4:9-14). He is the God who will remain loyal to the covenant even when Israel will fail and who will bring them back to repentance and restoration out of his compassion (4:25-31). He is the supreme God who has acted uniquely in selecting Israel as his special people (4:32-40).

III. Historical Interlude: Moses introduces the covenant text via historical precedent of the obedience of the nation (4:41-49).

As a sort of double introduction⁵ Moses introduces the second part of his address, the covenant text itself, by referring to two recent examples of obedience. In the first Moses establishes three cities of refuge in the Transjordan (4:41-43) thus setting a pattern of obedience

⁵ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy* in the New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 136.

for the subsequent conquest. The formal introduction (4:44-49) ties the giving of Torah to the recent possession of lands thus reminding the nation of its ability to complete the conquest.

IV. Basic Commandments: Moses instructs Israel in the general principles of the covenant (5:1-11:32).

After the pattern of ancient sovereign-vassal treaties, Moses sets forth the basic stipulations of the covenant document in the form of general principles for observing the covenant relationship. These principles reflect the essence of the Exodus covenant with added incentive and illustration from Israel's recent wilderness experience.

A. Introductory Exhortation: Moses reminds Israel of its prior covenant relationship with Yahweh (5:1-5).

Moses stresses the solidarity of Israel's covenant nationhood by identifying the second generation as actual participants of the original covenant at Sinai (5:2-5). This means that every generation that renews the covenant would be viewed in this way.

B. Moses reviews and renews the principal commandments (5:6-21).

The same ten commandments from Exodus 20 are set forth with minor variations, most notably the reason for Sabbath observance being release from Egyptian bondage rather than the finished work of creation. The commandments divide into those governing mankind's relationship with God (5:6-15) and those pertaining to a person's relationship with others (5:16-21). These two groups effectively summarize humanity's two great concerns as well as Yahweh's strategy of using Israel as a mediatorial priest nation to bring others into relationship with himself.

C. Moses narrates the essence of the original covenant relationship between the two parties (5:22-33).

Israel had been brought into relationship with a God who was unapproachably holy but who none the less desired to dwell among his people (5:22-26). As a result Moses had been commissioned as a covenant mediator who would bridge the gulf so that the nation might learn to obey Yahweh and thus fulfill his purpose for them in the land of promise (5:27). The second generation stood in exactly the same position as the first in this regard and was, therefore, under obligation to the same covenant stipulations (5:28-33).

D. Moses instructs in the content of the covenant principles (6:1-11:25).

Following the pattern of Hittite treaty texts, the general stipulations section "spells out the principles of the relationship between the parties to the covenant. It clarifies who the Great

King is, what he has done for those whom he has chosen for covenant fellowship, what he will do for the years to come, and how they are to respond.”⁶

1. Moses expounds on the nature of Israel’s covenant relationship (6:1-9). The fear of the Lord is set forth as the underlying goal of the commandment, that is Torah taken as a whole, which will guarantee Israel’s blessed longevity in the land of promise (6:1-3). The essence of Israel’s covenant responsibility is a whole-hearted, total response to the uniqueness and exclusivity of the one true God, which is summarily characterized by the word “love” (6:4-5), another way of speaking of genuine obedience (cf. 5:10). This, the so-called Shema, is to be thoroughly learned, meditated upon and passed from generation to generation as the all encompassing summary of the whole corpus of Torah (6:4-9). This is the essence of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his vassal nation.

2. Moses defines Israel’s relationship to Yahweh as the giver of the Promised Land (6:10-25). Since the land of promise is crucial to Israel’s purpose as Yahweh’s unique priest-nation (cf. Ex. 19:4-6), Moses warns the people against ever forgetting that the land was an undeserved gift with the result that they serve some other god (6:10-15). They must be diligent in keeping Torah in order to fully enjoy the land’s goodness (6:11-19) and remind themselves continually that their original condition was slavery in a foreign land (6:20-25).

3. Moses defines Israel’s relationship to the current inhabitants of the Promised Land (7:1-26).

Because of their uniqueness as a nation (7:6) Israel is commanded to destroy Canaan’s current inhabitants and to avoid intermixing with them as a protection against religious apostasy (7:1-6). Israel must remember that their privileged position was undeserved, being the result of Yahweh’s covenant faithfulness alone (7:7-11). Israel’s uniqueness will become evident as Yahweh blesses them in the land for their obedience (7:12-16). Fear of Canaan’s inhabitants need not be a deterrent to possession of the land since Israel has the recollection of Yahweh’s victory over the Egyptians as part of their corporate experience (7:17-26).

4. Moses exhorts Israel to remember that Yahweh’s fatherly love is the source of their material blessing (8:1-20).

The positive experience of deliverance from Egyptian slavery might have been overshadowed by the harsh realities of the last forty years in the wilderness were it not for the

⁶ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 30.

fact that Yahweh had used it to teach Israel that he could be trusted for everything needed in life (8:1-10). The challenge for Israel, once they became established in the land, would be to always remember that Yahweh alone is the one who gives power to get wealth and that to forget that would lead to apostasy, disobedience, and destruction (8:11-20).

5. Moses exhorts Israel to remember that Yahweh's elective grace is the reason for their possession of the land (9:1-10:11).

Continuing in the vein of warning about the dangers of national pride, Moses highlights Yahweh's elective grace as the reason for their land inheritance. First, it was Canaanite wickedness that was responsible for them being driven from the land, not Israelite righteousness (9:1-6). Secondly, it was actually in spite of Israel's stubborn rebellion that they were receiving the land (9:7-10:11). Moses gives two supreme examples of such rebellion: the making of the molded image at Mt. Sinai (9:8-21) and the refusal to enter the land at Kadesh Barnea (9:22-29). In fact it was only the intercessory work of Moses (9:13-21; 25-29) coupled with the mercy of Yahweh in renewing the covenant (10:1-11) that kept Israel from loss of their promised inheritance.

6. Moses identifies Israel's love for Yahweh as the essence of the covenant relationship (10:12-11:25).

This section forms an *inclusio* which began with the Shema (6:5). As such it underscores whole-hearted devotion and obedience to Yahweh ("love") as the essence of Israel's covenant responsibility.

In answer to the rhetorical question of Israel's duty before God, love seems to have the center position rhythmically as the requirements decrease and then once again increase in length around "to love him" (10:12-13). The rest of the book bears out the fact that Israel's covenant responsibility can well be summed up in the command to love Yahweh. It is only proper that Israel return Yahweh's love (instead of being obstinate) since this is what had prompted his choice of them as his special people (10:14-18). Since Yahweh characteristically cares for the oppressed and outcast, Israel must love the stranger as a mark of their covenant privilege (10:19-22).

Moses concludes the instruction about covenant principles by tracing out the relationship between love and obedience (11:1-32). Love for Yahweh, characterized by keeping Torah (11:1), is the proper response to Israel's deliverance from Egypt (11:1-7). Looking forward, love for Yahweh will secure blessing and continuance in the land (11:8-17). If this instruction

becomes part of the nation's daily meditation (11:18-21) and they give careful attention to obeying its precepts (11:22), then Israel will be successful in acquiring its inheritance (11:23-25).

E. Concluding Exhortation: Moses charges Israel with responsibility for blessing and cursing with respect to Torah observance (11:26-32).

This section forms a conclusion to the general stipulations and parallels the extended blessings and curses section which concludes instruction on the specific stipulations (cf. 28:1–29:1). This very general statement of the principle of blessing and cursing contains instruction for a future rehearsal of Israel's responsibility for their own welfare in the land, which will take place on the mountains Gerizim and Ebal. As such it also serves as encouragement in that it includes a kind of "guarantee" statement that the nation will actually enter the land (11:30-31).

V. Specific Stipulations: Moses provides a detailed amplification of the covenant principles (12:1–26:15).

As in Hittite treaties, Moses next expands upon the general stipulations by detailing specific actions and observances which Israel must be careful to do. Every area of the general stipulations is developed to a greater or lesser degree though it is not always easy determining the correlation between the two sets of instructions.⁷

A. Moses provides specific direction for the worship of Yahweh (12:1–13:18).

Since the first commandments have to do with the worship of Yahweh exclusively (5:6-11), Moses begins the specific stipulations section by setting out Israel's responsibility to worship at a central site of Yahweh's choosing (12:1-28). To guarantee this, every pagan place of worship would have to be destroyed (12:29-32). Israel must also guard against any prophet or dreamer who would entice the people to the worship of anyone other than Yahweh (13:1-18). Having reemphasized the importance of Israel's monotheistic faith, Moses next details the way in which the nation would maintain its covenant mandate as Yahweh's special nation.

B. Moses provides specific instruction for maintaining Israel's testimony as a distinctive people (14:1–17:13).

Whether this refers to the third or fourth commandment, it is clear that the distinctiveness of Israel as Yahweh's special treasure is in view here (cf. Exod 19:5-6). The following instructions are designed to set Israel apart as a unique people in purpose and practice. The prohibition of marks on the body (14:1) is a graphic opening illustration of the fact

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 218 and S. A. Kaufman, "The Structure of the Deuteronomic Law," *Maarav* 1/2 (1978-79):105-58.

that they are not to “look” like the nations around them. However, as the covenant text unfolds it becomes apparent that the ultimate difference is spiritual, not physical.

Israel’s dietary regulations will mark them out as distinctive (14:3-21) as will the way in which they provide for the dependent of the land, the Levites as Yahweh’s special servants, and those who are without normal means of support (14:22-29). The forgiving of debts every seven years and compassion toward the poor (15:1-11) will also set Israel apart from surrounding nations. Indentured servitude, though envisioned, will not be allowed to become permanent for any one person (15:12-18). The gift of the firstborn of animals as a sacrifice to Yahweh will be a reminder that they, as the firstborn nation, had been redeemed and therefore belonged entirely to the Lord (15:19-23). The requirement of a tri-annual appearance at the central sanctuary would help keep Yahweh at the center of national life and would also direct the surrounding nation’s attention toward the center of Israel’s existence, the Lord himself (16:1-17). Though without an earthly king or governor, Israel would not experience rampant injustice because judges and officers would be appointed to adjudicate interpersonal grievances according to the Law of Yahweh (16:18–17:13). This would be a remarkable phenomenon in the cultural and political milieu of Middle Bronze Canaan.

C. Moses provides specific instruction for the kind of officials who would enhance and protect Israel’s status among the nations (17:14–18:22).

The regulation of Israelite society by judges and officers leads naturally to a discussion about other ruling officials in general and a king in particular. Ultimately an earthly king will rule over Israel but not one like the rest of the nations (17:14-20). The ideal king, whom Yahweh himself will choose, will not rely on the normal devices of royalty (horses, wives, and wealth) but rather on Yahweh and his power and resources. This clearly continues the testimony of a distinctive people motif. The advent of monarchy would not, however, lessen the need for the priesthood since it would still be a nation under the rule of God. Therefore, the maintenance of the priests and Levites is reiterated in the present context (18:1-8).

What is envisioned when Israel comes into the land is the need for continued direction from Yahweh. The surrounding nations had their various means of divining the future but Israel was to have nothing to do with these “abominations” (18:9-14). Instead, Yahweh would send a succession of prophets who, like Moses, would speak authoritatively on behalf of the Lord (18:15-22). As time would pass without producing a prophet equaling Moses, the expectation of

a greater than Moses would naturally arise, paving the way for the advent of Yahweh's ultimate revelation of himself in his Prophet-Son.

D. Moses provides specific instruction for the ordering and regulation of Israelite society (19:1-25:19).

Deuteronomy 19:1 seems to introduce a new section in the development of the specific stipulations. Entering the land (cf. 17:14; 18:9) is now coupled with dwelling in cities. This urbanization will carry with it new challenges with respect to living on a day to day basis. The later part of the Decalogue, beginning with the command to honor parents, contains the seedbed for life in society.⁸ While it is difficult to draw direct correlation between the two stipulation sections, it is clear that the specific stipulations from this point forward have everything to do with the interpersonal issues dealt with in commandments six through ten (Deut 5:16-21).

1. Laws regarding the sanctity of life (19:1–22:8). The prohibition of murder recognized the sanctity of human life as given by Yahweh. The controlling idea of this section of laws seems to be the depriving of a human being of various things having to do with the sustaining of life.

Designation of cities of refuge in the case of manslaughter, protected the person from wrongfully experiencing blood-vengeance as well as protecting the avenger from wrongfully taking another's life (19:1-13). Removal of boundary markers (19:14) could result in loss of land and therefore of the means of raising crops as the stuff of life. A false witness could also result in loss of life or some element of its support (19:15-21).

Even though Yahweh would direct his nation into battle, warfare was regulated so as to reduce unnecessary loss of life (20:1-9, note v. 8). Even Israel's enemies were to be offered life if they would peaceably submit (20:10-15). The exception are those nations whose continuance would be a positive threat to Israel's life in the land (20:16-18). Care for human life extended to the preservation of fruit trees during the siege of a city (20:19:20).

The sanctity of life is underscored by the need for a city to make atonement in the case of unsolved murder (21:1-9) and in the compassionate treatment of female war captives (21:10-14). The rights of inheritance of the firstborn and the rebellious son both pertain to the sanctity of life, the first with respect to a prohibition of withholding a person's rightful portion of inheritance, the second by illustrating that a life may be forfeited when it grievously violates the

⁸ Note the emphasis in the fifth commandment, enjoining honor of parents, on life in the land: ". . . that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you" (Deut 5:16).

heart and spirit of the covenant relationship (21:15-21). The miscellaneous laws which conclude this section all have to do with the preciousness of life in one way or another. The specific protection of certain animals in certain situations was to give Israel object lessons so that they would always be reminded of the sanctity of human life (21:22-22:8).

2. Laws regarding the sanctity of covenant relationship (22:9–23:18). The division at 22:9 may appear arbitrary. However, it seems that Moses has moved to things that should not be mixed, or “adulterated.”⁹ The seventh commandment of the Decalogue is against adultery, not only as a protection of the family and society but also as a reflection of the sacredness of covenant relationships in general and Yahweh’s covenant relationship with Israel in particular. The three prohibitions against admixture (22:9-11) and the requirement of the tassels reminding Israel of their separateness as the covenant people (22:12) are object lessons designed to introduce the main points concerning sanctity of the covenant relationship. Particularly appropriate in this regard are laws of sexual morality since this is at the heart of the marriage covenant (22:13-30). Those who may and may not join the congregation of the covenant people are noted in 23:1-8, the requirement of cleanliness in general is set forth in 23:9-14, and certain other relationship situations are covered in 23:15-18.

3. Laws regarding the sanctity of personal possessions (23:19–24:7). The commandment against stealing (5:19) may admit a wide variety of applications. If this is indeed the organizing structural principle of the specific stipulations, then this section relates to such personal possessions as money and food (23:19-20), things vowed to God (vv. 21-23), a neighbor’s produce (vv. 34-25), and even rights within marriage (24:1-4). There are many ways to commit theft within the marital relationship. The ultimate theft is of a person himself through kidnapping, which concludes this section (24:7).

4. Laws regarding the sanctity of personhood (24:8–25:4). Bearing false testimony (cf. 5:20) is more than just telling untruths about someone, it is deceit calculated to deprive of basic rights and privileges by marking that person out as unacceptable for fellowship and unworthy of inclusion in covenant privilege. Leprosy marks out a person as such and must be evaluated correctly in order to exclude only for the right reasons (24:8-9). Improperly holding a pledge violates personhood (24:10-13) as does oppressive slavery (24:14-22). Public justice must not be carried out in a cruel and excessive way (25:1-3). To refuse a creature the wherewithal to carry

⁹ Cf. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 299.

out assigned tasks is to treat as less than human and a cruel denial of his or her dignity as a person (25:4).

5. Laws illustrating unselfish respect for other persons (25:5-16). The tenth commandment prohibits covetousness which involves an eye to the improper acquisition of another's property (cf. 5:21). Refusal of a brother to raise up a descendent for his departed sibling illustrates the violation of this principle since they have been "dwelling together" and the surviving brother would stand to continue with the whole inheritance himself (25:5-10). The other examples, likewise, revolve around calculated unfairness in taking what belongs to another (25:11-16).

6. Moses commands retribution on Amalek as the epitome of the violation of all that Israel's covenant relationship embodied (25:17-19). In commanding Israel to wipe out Amalek when they had become secure in the land, Moses concludes the laws for ordering and regulating Israelite society. This action illustrates how Yahweh must eventually deal with those who so grievously violate his standards for community.

E. Moses institutes ceremonies to celebrate Israel's initial possession and continued enjoyment of their Promised Land (26:1-15).

The phrase "when you come into the land . . ." (26:1, cf. 17:14; 18:9) marks the conclusion to the specific stipulations section. In this context of covenant responsibility, Moses establishes two permanent ceremonies by which Israel could remember and rehearse the significance of dwelling in the Promised Land. The first, an offering of firstfruits, was to be a personal act of worship, directed to Yahweh for his redemption from Egypt and deliverance into the good land (26:1-11). The second took place every third year involving a tithe for the Levites and other dependent members of the covenant community (26:12-15). Likewise, this was a celebration of Yahweh's provisions for living in the land, not least of which was people themselves. These two acts were intended to become another poignant reminder of the two major thrusts of the covenant stipulations; love for Yahweh and love for one's neighbor.

VI. Historical Interlude: Moses concludes the covenant text by declaring Israel to be Yahweh's special people (26:16-19).

In this "I now pronounce you . . ." section, Moses interjects a summary statement recapping the result and implications of the covenant just set forth in the two stipulations sections. The second generation of Israel is commanded to be fastidiously observant of these stipulations since they had now become full participants in the original covenant purpose (cf.

Exod 19:5, 6). In a very few words, Moses summarizes Israel's *raison d'être* and unique position among the nations. This brief interlude underscores the fact that Yahweh's purposes are inviolable and that his program is proceeding despite the past failures of his chosen people.

VII. Moses rehearses the curses and blessings entailed in the covenant (27:1–29:1).

In accordance with the pattern of Near Eastern treaty documents, the consequences of obedience and disobedience to the covenant stipulations are spelled out for the vassal nation. While the curses for disobedience receive the most emphasis, the blessings which Yahweh promises for Israel's faithful observance of the covenant are not insignificant. In just a few words Israel has placed before it the most glorious future imaginable (cf. 28:9-13). The length of the curses section, along with the fact that curses are pronounced twice, underscore the seriousness of Israel's responsibility and the necessity of having a way to clearly determine just how well or poorly the nation was doing at carrying out their covenant obligations.

A. Moses commands a covenant memorial altar to be built on Mount Ebal (27:1-10).

As though to provide for all the inhabitants of the land a testimony that Israel was a special people who belonged to Yahweh alone, Moses commands a memorial altar to be built on a prominent mountain in the very heart of the country (27:1-10). All the words of the law would be written on the stones of the altar as testimony to the Israel's purpose in the land (27:3, 8).

B. Moses appoints tribes to pronounce blessings and curses (27:11-26).

The tribes are divided into two groups in order to perform a public ceremony avowing allegiance to the stipulations of the covenant and accepting responsibility for their performance thereafter. Standing on two neighboring mountains, the one group pronouncing the blessings and the other the curses, Israel gives credence to the exclusivity of Yahweh's purpose and program. There could be no middle ground of compromise.

C. Moses amplifies the blessings and curses as a foundation for understanding Israel's subsequent history in the land (28:1-68).

Presumably the first blessings and curses section would have been sufficient for spelling out treaty sanctions. However, Moses elaborates further in light of the fact that Israel was going to have a long history and would need more explicit instruction on the rewards and penalties for covenant performance so that the nation might know for sure, at any given time, why it was experiencing what it was in terms of external circumstances.

1. Moses announces Yahweh's intent to bless Israel for obedience (28:1-14). This blessing section is bracketed by Yahweh's intent to set Israel above all the other nations (28:1,

13). The means of demonstrating that position would be the total blessing that Yahweh would grant to his people agriculturally, militarily, politically, geographically, and financially. Israel's total enrichment would not be for their own selfish gain but ultimately for the benefit of the whole earth (cf. v. 10). Tragically, this would not to be the norm of Israel's experience.

2. Moses announces Yahweh's resolve to curse Israel for disobedience (28:15-68).

In a much longer section Moses outlines and details the negative disciplinary measures which Yahweh would bring upon his people for their failure to live up to the principles of the covenant relationship. The penalty for covenant unfaithfulness would be the inverse of all that they could expect for obedience (cf. 28:15-19). Their fate at the hands of the nations is traced out in ever increasing severity until they actually experience expulsion from the land and come to live in fear of complete annihilation (28:33-68). The explicitness of the curses is doubtless designed to be a resource for covenant evaluation for later generations as they increasingly fail in their covenant responsibilities (cf., e.g., Jer 11:1-13).

D. Moses concludes the formalization of the covenant text (29:1).

This brief statement summarizes the formalization of the covenant for the second generation, making them as equally a part of the original covenant agreement as were their parents.

VIII. Epilogue: Moses summarizes Israel's national experience and recasts their covenant mandate in terms of a personal challenge (29:2-34:12).

The only element of the ancient Near Eastern treaty form not yet included is the invocation of witnesses. In the case of the Hittites this would mean the gods, an expedient entirely inappropriate for Israel. The closest that Moses comes to such an invocation is calling Yahweh's creation to act as witnesses (30:19; 32:1-14). In addition Moses' song will stand as a witness (31:19).¹⁰ The fact that Moses was conscious of such a practice is thereby evident. His strategy however is to conclude with a very personal word of encouragement as the positive motivation for Israel to perform the covenant stipulations.

A. Moses provides a historical overview of Israel's experience (29:2-30:20).

This overview of Israel's history is unique in that it looks not only at the past and present but even sees into the future. Through divine enablement Moses is able to speak prophetically

¹⁰ Cf. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 32.

on what Israel will experience in the distant future as well as on how Yahweh will respond and how it will eventually turn out.

1. Moses summarizes Israel's past under Yahweh's care (29:2-8). In spite of all that Yahweh had done for the nation, beginning with their liberation from Egypt and continuing right up to that very moment, Moses concludes that Israel is still without the spiritual perception that only Yahweh can give (cf. 29:4). This anticipates the negative elements of what Moses will predict for the nation in the future.

2. Moses encapsulates Israel's present under Yahweh's covenant (29:9-15). Israel's sole duty is to observe the covenant (29:9-12). If they do this then they will be established as the unique people of Yahweh according to his promise to the patriarchs (v. 13). This covenant is being made with every Israelite from this point forward (vv. 14-15).

3. Moses bemoans Israel's future under the condition of covenant disobedience (29:16-29).

What Moses fears, and seems to foresee as happening, is that Israelites will neglect the words of the curse and ultimately come under the most severe provisions of Yahweh's discipline (29:16-21). This will result in disrepute to Yahweh when later generations and other people marvel over Israel's misfortune (29:22-24). However, they will come to understand that it is for disobedience that Israel was treated in this way (29:25-28). The fact that Israel has so often failed to perceive the reason for their misfortune lies in the fact of the fact that such a connection between their fortunes in the world and their observance of the covenant had been so clearly set forth (29:29).

4. Moses exults over Israel's ultimate realization of the fullest experience of their covenant relationship with Yahweh (30:1-10).

Yet Moses is allowed to peer to the end of the corridor of history to see that even though Israel will experience all the threatened curses for their disobedience they will one day be returned from captivity and restored to the land in great blessing (30:1-5). At that time Israel would have a converted heart which would be able to love Yahweh their God though now incapable of it (30:6; cf. 29:4). This will result in the blessing intended all along (29:7-10).

5. Moses exhorts Israel to the covenant obedience of love (30:11-20).

Though he is realistic about the nation's dismal prospects, Moses nonetheless exhorts Israel to keep Yahweh's covenant. He avows that it is not too difficult because Yahweh himself is present to enable the obedience of faith (30:11-14). In a climactic statement of covenant

relationship, Moses affirms that it is only as Israel comes to love Yahweh out of gratitude and in utter dependence will they be able to perform their covenant obligations because he alone is their life (30:15-20).

B. Moses delivers the text of the covenant and provides for its implementation (31:1–32:47).

In his last official act as covenant mediator, Moses hands over the reins of leadership and provides for continuance in the provisions of the covenant.

1. Moses directs Israel to obey Joshua as their new leader (31:1-8).

The nation will not be left leaderless since Yahweh himself has prepared Joshua to assume that role (31:1-8). On that basis Moses can encourage Israel to be courageous in the coming conquest because Yahweh will go before them as well (31:6). Likewise, Joshua is encouraged in his new role (31:7-8).

2. Moses provides for the regular reading of the law (31:9-13).

Moses will soon die and Joshua would not always be with them. Therefore the great mediator writes a copy of the law and entrusts it to the priests who were to read it every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles. Thus the final authority of the covenant relationship lies not in the memory of a past leader nor in the experience of a people but in the objective codification of the sovereign's mind, character and purpose.

3. Yahweh gives final instructions for the covenant's deposit (31:14-23).

At this point Yahweh takes over the final direction for the covenant's deposit. He summons Moses and Joshua to effect the transfer of leadership (31:14-15) and then informs Moses that Israel will fail in their covenant relationship (31:16-18). Therefore Moses is to write down a song of witness (v. 19) and deliver it to the nation so that they will have a ready reminder of the outworking of the consequences for disobeying the covenant stipulations (31:19-22). With that, Joshua is inaugurated and promised success by Yahweh himself (31:23).

4. Moses commands the Levites to deposit the covenant text (31:24-29). Moses gives the book of the law to the Levites and commands that they deposit it beside the ark of the covenant in view of the fact that the nation will surely forget and disobey it.

5. Moses spoke the song received from Yahweh to the people (31:30–32:47). As the final act of depositing the Book of the Covenant, Moses spoke the song which Yahweh had given to him. It is a song of a stubborn and rebellious people who forget the One who had begotten and redeemed them. And yet it is not a song of despair but hope. Yahweh's faithfulness is contrasted

with the unfaithfulness of his children and ends with the very positive anticipation “He will provide atonement for His land and His people” (32:43). The ascriptions of Israel in this poem include child, young eaglet, sons and daughters, nation, Yahweh’s people, and servants. Yahweh is described as a Rock, a Father, an eagle, and a warrior in relation variously to his people and his enemies.

C. The conclusion of Moses’ life and ministry (32:48–34:12).

Bracketed between Moses’ two death notices is a much more positive poem, namely Moses’ blessing of the children of Israel. This bracketing, along with Yahweh’s words to his servant, summarize the ultimate importance of Moses’ life and ministry. Moses, the man of God (33:1), the servant of Yahweh (34:5), derived meaning in life from his relationship to the Lord and his service to Israel. Despite his disqualifying failure at the waters of Meribah Kadesh (32:51) he continued to possess a passion for the successful deployment of the covenant nation in the land of promise for the blessing of the earth. Hence, the blessing of the tribes of Israel, capped by the confident pronouncement “Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by Yahweh . . .” (33:29). This evaluation of his life is given final expression by some anonymous editor: “But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (34:10).

Deuteronomy thus serves as the final constituting of Israel as the covenant people of Yahweh in preparation for entrance into the Promised Land in fulfillment of the Lord’s oath to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Book of the Law was now on deposit as the covenant document for each succeeding generation, whether or not each would take up its call. It was also the document by which each generation would be evaluated and then either rewarded or disciplined according to the standards of the covenant stipulations. As such, Deuteronomy becomes the backdrop for reading the rest of the Old Testament and for understanding the events which gave rise to the New Testament.

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