

## Deuteronomy

1. Name – The Hebrew name means “The Words,” from the opening phrase “These are the words.” The name “Deuteronomy” comes from the Septuagint title, which is a Greek compound meaning “second law.” Deuteronomy contains a second statement and publication of the law delivered on Mt. Sinai.
2. Setting and Character – The book is primarily a series of three addresses given by Moses to the people of Israel, delivered on the plains of Moab just before the people are to enter the land of promise. Some of the details of the law are modified slightly from the version given in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Liberal scholars have seen this as evidence that Deuteronomy was put together at a late date, possibly after the exile, to suit the political and religious agenda of the times. However, these variations are best understood according to the stated context of Deuteronomy. Some changes in emphasis and application are needed as the people of God transition from being a nomadic people with a tent for a sanctuary to a nation with their own land and permanent place of worship.

An example of this is the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20 compared to Deuteronomy 5. In Exodus, the reason given for observance is God’s pattern in creation. In Deuteronomy, the reason given is God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. The latter emphasizes the redemptive relationship, which is a significant theme in Deuteronomy (6:5; 7:9, 12-13; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 33:3). Another example is the centralization of worship (12:5, 14:23-25, 15:20, 16:2, 17:8, 18:6, 26:2) and the expanded role of Levites in the priesthood (Deut. 18:1-8). The Lord anticipates the need for some changes in how the worship of God will be regulated as the people move into a more stable, permanent living situation as a nation.

3. Author and date – Moses wrote the essential content of Deuteronomy (27:3, 8; 28:58; 29:21; 30:10; 31:24), and he died around 1400 BC. See handout on Pentateuch for details. However, some sections are most naturally understood to be post-Mosaic additions made by a later editor under divine inspiration. These include comments here and there that clarify geographical and historical information from a post-Mosaic perspective (2:10-11, 20-23; 3:9, 11, 13b-14; 10:6-9).
4. Viewpoints on Deuteronomy:
  - a. As a treaty – Meredith Kline has shown how Deuteronomy follows the structure of a Hittite suzerainty treaty (a treaty between a lord and his vassals in the Ancient Near East), which provides confirmation for an early, conservative dating of Deuteronomy.
  - b. As polity – Deuteronomy serves as something of a constitution for ancient Israel.
  - c. As speech – The book is largely composed of three speeches by Moses. The character of the book as speech is reflected in the fact that the content is more focused on exhortation than legislation. This helps explain why Deuteronomy does not focus on all the details of the previously published law. The focus of the three speeches:
    - i. recounts Israel’s journey through the wilderness (ch. 1-4).
    - ii. looks to the future and the life of the nation under the law and covenant of God (ch. 5-28).
    - iii. leads the nation to renew the covenant with God (ch. 29-32).
5. Major themes and importance:
  - a. Israel is depicted as what they should be ideally. They are a unified people in covenant with Yahweh. It is no mere legal contract but a living relationship that obligates both parties in loving obligation. Israel is the chosen nation, with a king chosen by God. The people of God relate to one another as brothers (1:16, 3:18, 10:9, 15:3, 17:20, 18:15).
  - b. God promises to raise up a prophet like Moses (18:14-22). Joshua is provided as the successor to Moses, but he is not presented as this prophet (34:9-11). The Jews looked for another prophet (Jn. 1:21). Jesus provided bread in the wilderness and gave life-giving water (Jn. 6:14; 7:40). Peter and Stephen claim explicitly that Jesus is the prophet like Moses (Acts 3:22; 7:37).

Reference: *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.