

An Attempt To Listen To God
A Survey of The Book of
Deuteronomy

By

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The Name

The Hebrew name for Deuteronomy is "Debarim" (Words), from the opening phrase "Eleh ha-debarim". It is also known as "Mishneh Torah." The English name comes from an erroneous rendering of "mishneh ha-torah ha-zot", which grammatically can mean "a repetition of this law" or the "second law" which comes from "deuteros" which means "second", and "nomos" which means "law". This name, while not the Hebrew equivalent, is very suitable for in many respects it is a repetition of the "words of the law".

This leads to the question, "Why was there this repetition of the Law since it had just been given in Exodus?" It must be realised that there had been thirty-eight years since the giving of the law, and those to whom it had been given had died. This was a new generation and there was a need for them not just to know what the law said, but be orally taught it! Furthermore, they were not only taught, but written (ch. 1:3; 31:24-26). God knows how quickly truths can be changed because of the frailties of man, in which he will either embellish or delete parts of the law. God tells them to have it written so that it can be reviewed again, and their thoughts can be brought into parallel with the mind of God. This is one reason why God had the scriptures written and not just verbally passed on. However, there is among the saints a generation which is, I suggest, greatly impoverished because a previous generation when questioned about what and how things were done were told: "We have always done it this way". That never was, and never will be an answer, but manifests that the responder himself is untaught. Saints need to know what they believe, and most importantly, why they believe certain truths. Those truths must be in accord with the scriptures **IN CONTEXT**, for a text without a context is a pretext!

Key Verse

It is my opinion that there is no key verse in Deuteronomy but rather key verses:

- a) "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!" (ch. 5:29)
- b) "He brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which He swore unto our fathers" (ch. 6:23). It is interesting that the reason God took them out of Egypt here is different from why He did it in Genesis and Exodus. In Exodus it was a demonstration of His supremacy over the gods of Egypt (Ex. 12:12), the greatness of His redemption (Ex. 6:6). In Genesis it is a manifestation of His patient endurance (Gen. 15:16) and His sovereignty over the nations (Gen. 15:14, 16).
- c) "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul. To keep the commandments of the Lord, and His statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good" (ch. 10:12-13)

Key Clause

There are some books which hang on a single word being repeated, i.e. Titus hangs on the word "For". Deuteronomy hangs on the clause "And now" (ch. 10: 12). One can feel the parental voice speaking having told all that had been done for them, they had been delivered as God used "signs and the wonders" (ch. 7:19); He had tolerated their many rebellions (ch. 1:22, 26, 32, 41, 43); He had provided them with daily food and the ability to buy meat and water (ch. 2:6; 28). He had done all this for them "And now"! The theme passes from what He had done for them to what they are obligated to do for Him and in so doing for their own blessing.

Author

Amongst modern critics there is the erroneous acceptance that Deuteronomy was NOT written by Moses nor was it written before he died! It is argued that it was written by an unknown author either during the reign of Manasseh, or Josiah (but before his eighteenth year, the Book of the Law found in that year in the Temple (2 Kgs. 22-23). It must be accepted that Deuteronomy does leave us with some major questions such as how did he write chs. 34:8-12 before his death! While one cannot answer such enigmas, I am quite content that Moses spoke the book from ch. 1:1- 34; and a scholar, possibly Joshua, wrote the latter verses. In this way it would be the same as

Paul's epistles. Romans was not literally hand written by Paul for he used Tertius to do the actual writing (Rom. 16:22). However, foolish would be the individual who would argue that Paul did not write Romans. It may have been that Paul used a penman and his signature was his own salutation (Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17) which he says was done in every epistle (1 Cor. 16:21). This may have been because of his apparent poor eyesight (Gal. 4:15).

Notes:

It would appear that this was a book the Lord was very well acquainted with, especially how He used it in the temptations. In this book He would have read that which God expects of His people, and their motivations. When the Lord worked as the carpenter, did He think of God's laws for true weights? (Deut. 25:13) Of course He did! When considering the Lord as a servant, then Deuteronomy needs to be read to see the excellencies of the Lord.

Deuteronomy contains some unique truths:

- a) In Deuteronomy, for the first time we read:
 - i) "The children of Belial" (ch. 13:13)
 - ii) "Being cursed by hanging on a tree" (ch. 21:23)
 - iii) Why they were not to distress or meddle with the children of Esau (ch. 2:5), the Moabites (ch. 2:9), and the children of Ammon (ch. 2:19).
 - iv) Of the brook Zered (ch. 2:13)
 - v) "Not one city too strong" (ch. 2:36)
 - vi) The Lord hardening the heart of Sihon (ch. 2:30)
 - vii) The size of Og and his bed (ch. 3:11)
 - viii) The only reference in the balance of the Old Testament which tells of Moses and the Burning Bush (ch. 33:16; Ex. 3:2-4)
- b) The only O.T. reference to:
 - i) The great prophecy about the coming of Christ the Prophet (ch. 18:15, 19)

Deuteronomy does not begin with the Exodus, but rather at Horeb, thus there are three beginnings:

- a) The Exodus which was their liberation (Ex. 12). God took them out of Egypt to:
 - i) Show His superiority over the gods of Egypt (Ex. 12:12)
 - ii) For Israel's appreciated enlargement of the God they had come to know (Deut. 4:35)
- b) Horeb, where they learnt sanctification (Ex. 19-20)
- c) At the edge of the land (Deut. 1-34) where they heard again the declaration of God's law and their responsibilities.

The giving of the Law was not the cold commands of an unemotional heartless God, but rather the words of the heart of love communing with His own. Indeed, when speaking of it the Lord says: "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals" (Jer. 2:2). Despite their multiple failures and rebelliousness, His loves flows toward them in the reiteration of His laws and judgments (ch. 8:19-20).

These were for:

- a) To be our schoolmaster (Gal. 3:24)
- b) For man to behold his natural self (Jam. 1:25)
- c) For their good (ch. 6:24)
- d) For their enrichment (ch. 8:1)

It is impossible to read Deuteronomy without recognizing that it is the last book of Moses. The others being Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. It is not without purpose that there are five and only five, for in the scriptures the numeral "five" carries the significance of grace. For instance:

- a) As David crossed over no man's land to face Goliath, he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook.
- b) When Joseph wanted to show his favor towards his brother Benjamin, he gave him five servings of food, whereas the other brothers all received one serving. Also Gen 45:22.
- c) There were five sacrificial offerings that Israel was to present to God, to maintain a right relationship with

Him, and to receive His mercy and grace.

Book	Characteristic of God	Aspect of Salvation	Man
Genesis	Divine sovereignty	Man is ruined because of sin	Man goes down
Exodus	Divine supremacy	Man can be redeemed by blood and power	God comes down and brings man up and out
Leviticus	Divine holiness	Man can have fellowship with God	Man invited in to fellowship
Numbers	Divine goodness	Man can be given direction by God	Redeemed man going through the wilderness
Deuteronomy	Divine love and faithfulness	Man is given further opportunity to enter his promised inheritance	Man about to go over into his inheritance

The Prospect For Obedience

If they would obey the Lord would bless them, and part of that blessing was to “possess” their inheritance. The word “possess” is found in fifty one verses from ch. 1:8-33:23. While they entered their inheritance by faith, they could only possess and enjoy its fulness by being obedient (ch. 11:1; 19:9; 30:16, 20). It is the same with the redeemed of this age.

The Obligations Because Of Their Redemption and God’s Faithfulness

Neither the redemption of Israel nor ourselves was not to let us live life as we want. Because of belonging to the Lord there is placed upon the redeemed obligations such as:

- a) They were to love the Lord and the practical manifestation of this was obedience to His commands (ch. 6:5; 7:9) and to serve Him (ch. 10:12; 11:13). If the commands were obeyed in sincerity, God would bless, but if they disobeyed God would judge (ch. 6:14-15, 7:12-16, 8:19; 28:1-68).
- b) The holiness of God had been stressed in Leviticus (Lev. 20:7) and Israel must ever remember that this was their standing before God (ch. 7:6; 14:3). As such, all aspects of paganism must be put away; all disobedience to the words of the priest must be judged and put to death (ch. 17:12); the individual who hates his neighbour and kills him must be judged and put to death (19:11-12) Only at the place of divine choice were they to worship God (ch. 12:5-7; 26:2).
- c) Practical holiness is not to be confined to religious duties. They had to learn a lesson many saints have never learnt, every aspect of life has a spiritual dimension. The Holy Spirit caused Paul to write the words of 1 Cor. 10:23-33 and with particular note of verses:
 - i) “Whitherefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (v. 31)
 - ii) “Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God” (v. 32). Being under law Israel were given laws, etc., to regulate every aspect of daily life (ch. 12-26). They were not asked if they understood why God determined these laws, nor if they deemed them necessary or relevant. Their responsibility was to obey. What a lesson for many today.
- d) All acts of judicial adjudication are to be done with complete impartiality (ch. 16:18-20), a function which could be difficult because the judges were inhabitants of the city in which they were to judge. Fathers are not to be condemned judicially for the crimes of their children, nor children for the crimes of their fathers (ch. 24:16).

- e) When it came to business dealings there were not to be two sets of weights, one being for the loss of the consumer and one to be true. Just weights and measures are to be used in all commercial transactions (ch. 25:13-16)
- f) There had to be generosity shown to the needy such as:
 - i) The stranger, the fatherless, or widow” (ch. 14:29)
 - ii) An individual in need of a loan (ch. 15:7-11)
 - iii) A slave at the time of his redemption (ch. 15:13)
 - iv) A slave who had escaped from apparently a heathen master and was seeking “refugee status” (ch. 23:15-16)
 - v) A hired servant (ch 24:14-15)

When there comes a need they must remember their own past, for there was a time when: "Ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (ch. 10:19); "and thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt" (ch. 15:15; 24:18)

The Character Of The Book

Deuteronomy is a book which deals with transition. They had moved to the very edge of the promised inheritance and had tasted something of the victories that could be won through the defeat of Sihon and Og and all their cities (Deut. 29:7). Just across the river was the land God had promised to the family of Abraham and what excitement there must have been as they stood almost on its banks. What changes there would be, these were their first steps in the new possession and lifestyle. Up to this point it had been:

- a) Largely a peaceful lifestyle, now there was to be conflict.
- b) A transient lifestyle, now they were to have settled dwelling places.
- c) A diet of manna and that which they could purchase from those whose countries they went through, now they were to have their own lands with milk and honey.
- d) Moses as their leader, now it was to be Joshua.
- e) All had been the moral character of God. Now for the first time in the Pentateuch there is the manifestation of the love of God for them. Eight times over God stresses His love for them (ch. 4:37; 7:7, 8, 13; 10:15, 18; 23:5; 33:3).

Key Words And Expressions:

Word or expression	No. of verses	Associated with	Associated words	References
Keep	39	Man	The commandments Thy soul His statutes The Sabbath Day His charge The Passover The Feast of weeks A solemn feast All the words of this law From every wicked thing	ch. 4:2 ch. 4:9 ch. 4:40 ch. 5:12 ch. 11:1 ch. 16:1 ch. 16:10 ch. 16:15 ch. 17:19 ch. 23:9
		God	He would <u>keep</u> His oath <u>Keep</u> unto thee the covenant	ch. 7:8 ch. 7:12
Heed	10	Themselves	Good <u>heed</u> Take <u>heed</u>	ch. 2:4 ch. 4:9

Word or expression	No. of verses	Associated with	Associated words	References
Love	16	Toward God From God Toward man	<u>Love</u> me <u>Love</u> the Lord thy God Did not set His <u>love</u> upon thee He will <u>love</u> thee <u>Love</u> ye the stranger	ch. 5:10 ch. 6:5 ch. 7:7 ch. 7:13 ch. 10:19
The Lord thy God	196	Multiple aspects of life	Hath set the land before thee Hath blessed thee Hath forbidden thee Redeemed thee	ch. 1:21 ch. 2:7 ch. 4:23 ch. 15:15
Rebelled/ rebellious	8	Against God Against man	<u>Rebelled</u> against the commandment <u>Rebellious</u> against the Lord A stubborn and <u>rebellious</u> son	ch. 1:26 ch. 9:7 ch. 21:18

Suggested Structure:

As with any book, there are a variety of ways to view a structure. The following are two ways:

No. 1

Reference	Sub Themes		
ch. 1:1-4:43	Remembering that which the LORD had done for His people	Backward look	Retrospective
ch. 4:44-26:19	Recounting that which God expects from His people	Inward look	Introspective
ch. 27:1-34:12	Reflecting on that which God will do for His people.	Forward look	Prospective

No. 2

Introduction (ch. 1: 1-5)

- a) First message (ch. 1:6-4:40)
 - i) First narrative (ch. 4:41-49)
- b) Second message (ch. 5:1-26:19)
- c) Third message (ch. 27:1-28:68)
- d) Fourth message (ch. 29:1-30:20)
- e) Fifth message (ch. 31:1-18)
 - i) The song (ch. 31:19-21) (ch. 32:1-43)
 - ii) Narrative (ch. 31:22-30)
 - iii) Narrative (ch. 32:44-51)
 - iv) The blessing of Moses (ch. 33:1-28)
 - v) The death of Moses (ch. 34:12)

Thought Flow Of Deuteronomy

The book contains discourses separated by parenthetical portions which Moses spoke before his death (ch. 1:3) on the other side of Jordan. Thus, as Peter did many years later, before he died he had written down and left for the saints material relevant to daily living (2 Pet. 1:15). Moses also wrote, not only the letter of the law, but the spirit in which they were to be outlived.

- a) **Discourse No. 1.** Moses' first discourse (1:6-4:40) contains a review of God's gracious guidance over the Israelites as they journeyed through the wilderness to the border of the Promised Land. It concludes with an appeal not to forget the glorious truths, especially the awesomeness of God by which they were so impressed at Horeb.

- b) **Discourse No. 2.** This discourse is an exposition of the law taken up in two avenues of thought. The first is exhortative which is based on the first great command: "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart", and which, in the light of Israel, is to be governed (ch. 5-11). The second part is the rehearsal of the blessings and curses as they apply to the obedience or disobedience of the children of Israel to the laws. (ch. 28:1-29:1)
 - i) **Parenthesis No. 1.** This is a series of instructions regarding a ceremony which Israel was to fulfil after entering their promised inheritance. Its purpose was to symbolise the ratification of the laws of behaviour in the previous discourses (ch. 27:1 - Josh. 8:30-35).

- c) **Discourse No. 3.** This discourse is in four sections:
 - i) Moses reiterates and re-emphasises the vital duty of devotion to God and the dangers of apostasy. (ch. 29:2-30:20)
 - ii) His last words to the nation and Joshua (ch. 31:1-30)
 - iii) His song (ch. 32:1-43)
 - iv) His blessing (ch. 33)
 - 1. His death (ch. 34)

The Unveiling Of God

The Descriptive Terms and Names of God

Descriptive Term or Name	Reference
Consuming Fire	ch. 4:24
Jealous God	ch. 4:24
Merciful God	ch. 4:31
Faithful God	ch. 7:9
Mighty God and terrible	ch. 7:21
God of gods and Lord of lords	ch. 10:17

God's Exclusiveness

- a) "The Lord He is God in Heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else." (ch. 4:39)
- b) Because God is Spirit there can be no representation made of Him (ch. 4:12, 15-19). An idol is a profound insult to God, not only by its manifestation of man's thoughts, but also because it is a blasphemous manifestation of Him.
- c) Deuteronomy presents God as the God of faithfulness despite their many failures. One has only to read the first chapter and there they determine:
 - i) They can make their own decisions without the guidance of God (ch. 1:22)
 - ii) They rebelled against the command to go up into their inheritance (ch. 1:26)
 - iii) They murmured against God (ch. 1:27)
 - iv) They are marked by unbelief (ch. 1:32; 43)
 - v) They acted presumptuously (ch. 1:41)
 - vi) They rebelled (ch. 1:43)
 1. Despite all this and many more, He remained faithful. How this illustrates: "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful" (2 Tim. 2:13).

Furthermore, in Deuteronomy God will stay faithful to His word irrespective of how His people behave. He had made promises to Abraham to bring his family out of the house of bondage, and give them an inheritance in a bountiful land. (ch. 6:10-11; 8:7-10)

- a) In His omniscience He was aware of the dangers awaiting them therefore, His laws were for their good in guarding them against idolatry. Every vestige of places of idolatrous worship or religion must be utterly removed (ch. 7:2-5; 12:2-3). There could be no intermarriage, Canaanitish divination not to be tolerated; the information and counsel for which other nations resorted to augurs and soothsayers (ch. 18:9-19).

Song and Blessing of Moses.

The Song of Moses (ch. 32:1-34) recounts the faithfulness of the Lord in His dealings with an ungrateful people. Looking back upon the past Moses describes:

- a) The kindness of God in bringing them safely through the wilderness, caring for their every need, and bringing them to the land He had promised. (ch. 32:7-14)
- b) Israel's fall into idolatry (ch. 32:15-18), because of which the Lord had threatened to bring them to the verge of ruin (ch. 32:19-30).
- c) The Lord's determination not to allow an opportunity for the enemy to triumph over His people, but by His gracious dealings with them. (ch. 32:27)
- d) To make it possible to save them. (ch. 32:31-43).

Blessing of Moses

Chapter 33 contains the "Blessing of Moses," consisting of a series of benedictions pronounced upon all the tribes except Simeon. There are a number of contrasts between the blessings of Moses and Jacob (Gen. 49:1-17). Some of the contrasts are:

- a) The isolation of Judah set in contrast to the warmth of Gen. 49:8-12.
- b) The honour of Levi (verses. 8-11) set in contrast to the unfavourable comments of Gen. 49:5-7.
- c) One intimates blessedness (Gen. 49), the other disaster (Duet. 33).

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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