



## UNIT 1 - INTRODUCING THE OLD TESTAMENT

### LESSON 7

#### THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

The name "Deuteronomy" means, "a second Law", but this does not really explain the contents of this book. The English title was based on an incorrect understanding of Deuteronomy 17:18. The book should be regarded as preaching about the Law.

Three important problems are associated with Deuteronomy.

1. When was it written?

The book is traditionally ascribed to Moses, but many critics have assigned it to the time of Samuel, or to priestly circles in Judah during the 7th century B.C. The book appears to have a solid Mosaic basis, but this does not mean that Moses must have written it. It may represent the preaching of Moses, reported and passed through Israel for centuries until it was collected and edited into Deuteronomy, with additions such as the account of Moses' death (chapter 34).

2. What was its purpose?

Various theories are held about this, and most are dependent on one's view of authorship. For some, it is the first book of a great history of Israel, which continues through the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. For others, it is a treaty between God and Israel, based on the pattern of other near Eastern treaties. There may be truth in both these theories. We can also see as an important purpose the call of Israel to observe the utmost purity in their worship of God, and a warning of what would befall them if they committed the idolatrous practices of the surrounding nations. Obedience brings blessing; disobedience brings cursing.

3. What is its connection with the reform of King Josiah?

In II Kings 22-23 there is an account of the discovery and reading of "The book of the law". It is generally accepted that this was Deuteronomy. Some have seen this discovery as the cause of Josiah's reform, but it is clear that the reform had begun before the book was found. The reading of the book gave a new impetus to the reform movement. If the book is seen as being basically Mosaic, it helped the reform move towards purity of worship in accordance with God's direction to Israel, and as the prophets had been preaching during the 8th and 7th centuries.

### STRUCTURE

The book is in four sections:

- |    |                             |                |
|----|-----------------------------|----------------|
| 1. | The first address of Moses  | (1:1 - 4:43)   |
| 2. | The second address of Moses | (4:44 - 28:68) |
| 3. | The third address of Moses  | (29:1 - 30:20) |
| 4. | Appendices                  | (31:1 - 34:12) |

**1. The First Address (1:1 - 4:43)**

- 1:1-5            An introduction to the book.
- 1:6-3:29        A summary of the journey from Horeb to Jordan.
- 1:34-40        First illustration of the idea that obedience to God's will results in blessing, but disobedience results in punishment.
- 2:34            Speaks of the Holy War. The Israelites were to destroy the population as an act of dedication and obedience to God. This seems strange to modern thinking, but more of the reason for this can be seen in 20:16-18.
- 4:1-43         An exhortation to obey the Law concludes this address. Again, there is emphasis on the different results of obedience and disobedience (e.g., verses 3 & 4).

**2. The Second Address (4:44 - 28:68)**

After a short introduction, the Ten Commandments are repeated, followed by an exposition of them (5:1 - 11:32). The people are warned against idolatry (chapter 7) and self-righteousness (chapter 9). They are exhorted to obey the Law (chapters 10 & 11).

Chapters 12-26 are an exposition of the main Laws. This is a reminder to the people of what Yahweh requires of them as His people. The command to observe the three feasts is of interest (16:1-17), particularly as we find reference to these in the New Testament. Notice the significance of each. Of interest also is the standard required for a king (17:14-20).

The conclusion of the address (chapters 27 & 28) is the provision for ratification of the Law by building an altar and sacrificing. Blessings for obeying and curses for disobeying conclude this section.

Some commentators prefer an analysis with chapters 27-30 together, as an act of renewing the Covenant, with Moses' second address concluding at chapter 26.

**3. The Third Address (29:1-3):20)**

The subject of this address is the Covenant as delivered in Moab. After a reminder of God's faithfulness in the past, Israel is reminded that the Covenant will also benefit future generations (29:1-15). However, it also requires strict obedience (29:16-20). God's grace and mercy are seen in the possibility of forgiveness, even after they have broken the covenant, provided that there is genuine repentance (30:1-10). Finally, Israel is called to choose the way of life by willingness to be faithful to the Covenant (30:11-20).

**4. Appendices (31:1 - 34:12)**

- 1) Arrangements by Moses for Israel (chapter 31). Joshua is commissioned as his successor.
- 2) The song of Moses (chapter 32). This contrasts Yahweh's faithfulness to Israel's faithlessness. Yahweh's faithfulness will be shown in His mercy to Israel and vengeance on Israel's enemies.
- 3) The blessing of Moses (chapter 33). This is a reflection of the prophetic power of a dying man (cf Isaac, Genesis 27:27-29; 39-40; Jacob, Genesis 49:1-27).
- 4) Moses' death and burial. He sees the Promised Land, but does not reach it. Joshua succeeds to the leadership of Israel.

**QUESTIONS****Question 1:**

What was "Holy War" and why did God allow it? (Deuteronomy 2:34; 20:16-18)

**Question 2:**

What 3 feasts are the people to celebrate (16:1-17)? What is the purpose of the first feast? Describe it briefly.

**Question 3:**

What is the significance of the second feast in Deuteronomy 16 and what does it involve?

**Question 4:**

What is the third feast and who is to be involved in it? What is its purpose?

**Question 5:**

How old was Moses when he died (31:2)? Who was his successor and what was his successor promised, and also warned about (31:7, 8, 16-18)?

**QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:**

What are some teachings in Deuteronomy which you think are relevant to the Christian life?