



Deuteronomy

Chapters 12-34

The Bible Challenge

A daily guide to reading the Bible in a year

Succession

The fundamental purpose of the Book of Deuteronomy is to apply the Mosaic Covenant to the next generations of Israelites.

Moses ministry is drawing to a close. The overarching concern of Moses is that even though he will die in the wilderness, the covenant between YHWH and Israel will continue—only Israel must *remember*.

Structure:

Many scholars have observed that Deuteronomy contains similar elements of Ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties from the 2nd Millennium BC between Ancient Near-eastern kings and their subjects.

The elements of these treaties provide a structure for long term stability of relationship between the King and his subjects and communicate both blessings and consequences for the subjects based on how they relate to the King's commandments.

Deuteronomy applies the elements of a covenant treaty to the relationship between YHWH as King and his people Israel as a Royal Nation.

- I. Preamble (1:1-4)
- II. Historic Prologue (1:5-4:43)
- III. Commandments (4:44-26)
- IV. Blessings and curses (27-30)
- V. Succession (31-34)

Specific Covenant Stipulations (12:1-26:19)

- 1. Proper worship (12:1-32)
- 2. Threats of idolatry (13:1-18)
- 3. Clean and unclean foods (14:1-21)
- 4. Tithes (14:22-29)
- 5. The sabbatical year (15:1-18)
- 6. Firstborn animals (15:19-23)
- 7. Feasts (16:1-17)
- 8. Leaders (16:18-18:22)
- 9. Protecting life (19:1-21:14)
- 10. Protecting sexual morality (21:15-23:14)



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11. Various laws protecting property (23:15–24:22)
12. Laws on justice, marriage, and business (25:1–16)
13. Amalek (25:17–19)
14. Firstfruits and tithes (26:1–19)

And the LORD has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments, and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.”

--Deut. 26:18-19

Blessings and Curses (27:1–30:20)

The default posture of YHWH toward the Israelites is to bless them—his treasured possession. He purposes to give and bless, but in order for the blessings to be given in full Israel must remain faithful to **all** of the Covenant Stipulations. They are to “keep the **whole** commandment that I command today.”

The ratification of the treaty is to take place once the Israelites cross over. They are to memorialize the laws by writing them down “very plainly” on large uncut stones covered with plaster. Secondly they are to engage in a ratification ceremony led by the Levites where six tribes stand on Mount Ebal and six tribes on Mt. Gerzim.

The effect of the ceremony was an acknowledgement of the receipt of the law and the blessings for obedience and the serious consequences for disobedience.

The Levites role is to warn the tribes that curse will fall for 12 specific violations of the law...“Cursed be anyone who...” The people signal that they have heard the declaration by responding after each curse with an “Amen”. The blessings for Israel could be lost if taken for granted or despised, thus the emphasis is on warning.

Specific Blessings (28:1-14)

The specific blessings and curses assume that YHWH is sovereign over all things. “Increase” comes from the providential hand of God.

Whether that be in the form of crops and livestock or children and domestic wealth, YHWH is the provider of blessing and abundance.

Likewise, he provides national economic prosperity and shield of protection.

And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, being



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careful to do them,¹⁴ and if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them. –Deut. 28:13-14

If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it.

--Jeremiah 18:7-10

Israel has a glorious future ahead of it for faithfulness to the covenant.

Specific Curses (28:15-68)

In the same way that YHWH is sovereign over the blessings, he is also in complete control over the evils and that befall an unfaithful nation of Israel. The threat of curse is a very graphic account of the absence and reversal of God's blessing and provision.

Essentially, the list reveals what happens domestically and nationally to a people who reject YHWH and forsake his ways. The purpose of the curse is to stand as a prophetic warning. They are not an inevitable fate, but rather a stark warning. They are all completely avoidable and reversible with faithfulness and repentance. The warning is designed to turn people away from sin by enumerating the serious consequences of it.

Just as the default position of YHWH is to provide and bless, the default position of Israel is to sin and rebel. YHWH has brought this people out of Egypt and given them so much that they might become a holy nation which shows forth his glory. If they fail to do so, they can forfeit this glorious position and be "shipped" back to Egypt. (28:68)

Future Prophecy

The commandments, blessings and curses of the Mosaic covenant become the basis for understanding the entirety of the Old Testament. The historic books such as Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings and Chronicles will give the negative and positive history in relationship to this law.

The Prophetic Books (such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah etc.) prosecute the law and use the curses and blessings to motivate repentance. The threats and promises made by YHWH are never *fait accompli*. Israel



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can lose its blessings and it can roll back its curses—it is all contingent on taking care to keep the commands.

Repentance and Forgiveness

Moses holds out hope for restoration even in the midst of curse. The key is in “calling to mind” the covenant, “returning to the Lord” and “obeying his voice” (30:1-2). Exile is the ultimate curse for disobedience, restoration is a return of blessing.

The Choice is Clear (30:11-20)

Israel must make a choice between life and good and death and evil. The difference between the two hinges on the choice and decision to love YHWH or reject him for idols and false gods. It is a choice that is not “too hard” but accessible. (30:11) Israel is responsible for its future and it can make the right choice!

Heaven and Earth are the witnesses to the goodness, mercy and severity of YHWH and his covenant. The special relationship comes with awesome responsibility. YHWH’s desire and hope for his people is that they would always choose blessing and life:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live,²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

—Deut. 3:19-20



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Succession of Leadership (31:1–34:12)

Moses was told by YHWH that he would not be the one to lead the people into the promised land. He was told “You shall not go over this Jordan.” (31:2) The Israelites had only ever known his human leadership. With his impending death, new leadership would come from Joshua. Moses commissioned Joshua in the sight of all the people:

“Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it. ⁸ It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”—Deut. 31:7-8

The Death of Moses:

And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

—Deut. 34:10-12

The writing of the law (31:1–29)

While the transition to new human leadership was critical, the primary means of succession would come from writing down the law. Israel would always be able to remember the law because every 7 years the Levite priests would read the law in the “hearing” of all Israel. Torah would be their king.

The Songs of Moses (31:30–33:29)

YHWH has provided multiple means by which Israel would preserve the memory of their history, their law and their understanding of their responsibility and the consequences of response to the covenant. The final means of remembrance is a song to be a constant “witness” in their mouths—“it will live unforgotten in the mouths of their offspring.” (31:21)

*“See now that I, even I, am he,
and there is no god beside me;
I kill and I make alive;
I wound and I heal;
and there is none that can deliver out of my
hand. —Deut. 32:39*

The gift of song is that it dwells in the heart. (32:46)