

Old Testament Core Seminar

Introduction

Welcome back. Today we will finish what is commonly called “the Five Books of Moses,” or “the Pentateuch.” Sometimes, summarily speaking, these books are simply called “the Torah,” or “the Law.” Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy were all written by Moses, Israel’s first prophet. These books hold a special place in the Bible because they lay the foundation and set the stage for the rest of the Bible. Every author of every book (no exaggeration) will refer back to these books of Moses in one way or another.¹ They are crucial for understanding the rest of the Bible. That’s why we’re taking so much time to look at them.

And today we will wrap up our study of “the Pentateuch.” Deuteronomy was Moses’ last writing before handing over the leadership of Israel to another.

[PRAY]

Context

The last we left the encampment of Israel, a week ago, they were on the plains of Moab, just east over the Jordan River, across from the Promise Land. The first generation that came out of Egypt had died, and the second generation was poised to enter and occupy the Promise Land, Canaan. It was around 1400 BC. The book of Deuteronomy picks up right where Numbers left off. They are still on the plains of Moab, just outside of Canaan, and it’s still roughly 1400 BC.

Before they up and take the land, though, Moses gives three speeches which are recorded here in Deuteronomy. Besides comprising these three speeches of Moses, Deuteronomy also serves as the covenant document for the people of God, with its laws, blessings, curses, witnesses and so forth. In some ways, I guess you could compare it to a marriage license today, only *a lot* more involved. It will be the document that future generations in Israel will again and again return to in order to understand who they are and what it means for them to be in covenant with Yahweh.

So Moses gave these speeches, and gave the people this covenant document just before they are to enter and occupy the land promised to their forefathers long ago. The feeling in the air is electric. Israel has grown to be as numerous as the stars, has been redeemed from slavery, constituted as a nation, brought into covenant with Yahweh, given good laws and a tabernacle where the glory of Yahweh dwelt. In short, nearly all the promises made to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, have come to fruition. Only one promise remains: possession of the land of Canaan. So here they are, receiving this marriage license of sorts, wed to the one and only God of the universe, ready to occupy a land that is described as “flowing with milk and honey.” The feeling in the book is one of anticipation and hope. But the threat of consequence also looms, should Israel break the covenant after they take the land. So it’s really a book that

¹ Even books like Esther don’t make any sense unless it is first understood who “the Jews” are. Job, as well, has roots in Genesis with all of its language about creation. The Wisdom literature of Solomon, too, should be seen in light of the Torah in that Solomon was the king in the line of, not only David, but also Abraham, and ultimately the seed of the woman from Genesis 3:15.

looks back at all the good things Yahweh has done for His people in the past, and also looks forward to the rest of God's plan of redemption still to come.

Theme

A theme sentence for the book of Deuteronomy might sound like this:

The covenant LORD loves and is faithful to His covenant people; they should love and be faithful to Him as well.

What we'll see in Deuteronomy is an emphasis on the covenant and how each party is to be faithful to their respective ends of the covenant. The covenant laws, the 10 commandments will be laid out again, and then each command will be explained and applied to the nation so that they can better know how to live out the 10 commandments. In it all, there is the reoccurring theme that Yahweh loves His people and is faithful to His promises to their forefathers. The people, in turn, are called to love Yahweh their God with all their heart, soul, and strength; and charged to give heed to the word of God and be quick to obey it, if they are to keep the Land of Promise.

[This outline does not need to be gone over. The class only needs to be told that it is printed in their handouts so that they could have a little guide for their own study.]

Outline w/ Pivotal Texts

- I. Deuteronomy 1:1-4:43 – Moses' first speech
- II. Deuteronomy 4:44-28:68 – Moses' second speech
- III. Deuteronomy 29:1-34:12 – Moses' third speech

Besides comprising these three speeches of Moses, Deuteronomy is also structured according to the pattern of other 2nd millennium BC ancient Near-Eastern covenant documents:

- I. Preamble 1:1-5
- II. Historical Prologue 1:6 – 4:43
- III. Stipulations 4:44 – ch. 26
 - A. Prescriptive Law ch. 5
 - B. Descriptive Law ch. 6-26
 - 1. 1st commandment ch. 6-11
 - 2. 2nd commandment ch. 12
 - 3. 3rd commandment 13:1-14:21
 - 4. 4th commandment 14:22-16:17
 - 5. 5th commandment 16:18-18:22
 - 6. 6th commandment ch 19-21
 - 7. 7th commandment 22:13-23:14
 - 8. 8th commandment 23:15-24:7
 - 9. 9th commandment 24:8-16
 - 10. 10th commandment 24:17-26:15
- IV. Document Clauses ch. 27
- V. Blessings & Curses ch. 28
- VI. Oaths & Ratification ch. 29 – 30

Before we look specifically at the text of Deuteronomy, it might be helpful to remind ourselves **what a covenant is**, and where we've seen the covenant before in the Pentateuch. Does anyone remember how we defined a covenant? [WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO ANSWER] A covenant, in biblical terms, is a divinely ratified solemn bond and agreement between two parties, with terms and conditions, that can only be broken upon the penalty of death.

In the ancient Near East it was a common event for covenants to be made between rulers of nations. What would happen is that a great and powerful suzerain lord, or king, would set the terms of the covenant for the weaker, smaller vassal lord, who reigned over a smaller area, a smaller nation. The vassal would get protection and military aid and the such, and the suzerain would receive tribute, taxes, and an oath of fidelity. The terms were usually laid down in some document, and there would be witnesses and some sort of sign or omen to remember the covenant. And there would be a covenant making ceremony, where oaths were taken and some kind of symbolic gesture was performed to symbolize the death of anyone who might break the covenant.

I compared this to a marriage covenant. There are oaths and promises made, a ceremony, witnesses, documents, symbols of the marriage (the rings), and the covenant is insoluble until one of the married couple dies. The major difference between a marriage covenant and the type of covenant we see between Yahweh and His people, is that this covenant carries with it a curse that if anyone breaks the covenant they must be put to death. Of course we frown upon adultery and divorce, but they do not result in the execution of the unfaithful party. The covenants in the Bible do.

Where have we seen these things before? [WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO ANSWER] There was a covenant in the Garden of Eden, then another one was inaugurated as soon as Adam and Eve fell. Then that same covenant was further extended to Noah after the flood. However, we really didn't see the covenant develop in earnest until we got to **Abraham**. With Abraham we saw that Yahweh made covenant promises to Abraham and took upon Himself the oath and curse should he break His word. We read about that in **Genesis 12, and 15** (and you can read more about it in Genesis 17). In it, Abraham was promised that his descendents would be a great nation and occupy the land of Canaan, with Yahweh reigning and ruling over them.

Where did we next see the covenant come up again? [WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO ANSWER] In Exodus we saw the obligations that **Abraham's descendents** then had as far as their end of the covenant is concerned. We saw that was basically the 10 commandments and a number of other laws in Exodus 20-23.² (We didn't look at this, but you can read it on your own time.) In **Exodus 24** the people of Israel took upon themselves the oath when they had blood sprinkled on them, to symbolize the curse of death that would be visited upon them should they violate the covenant.

² I realize that in Genesis 17 Abraham and his descendants are given the command to be circumcised. This, indeed, is part of their covenant responsibility, even as circumcision serves as the covenant sign. That certainly deserves attention, but we also need to remember the introductory level of this course and the time restraints. It might be helpful to look at the Old Testament like a jigsaw puzzle: the goal of this course is to put together enough of the pieces so that we can see the overall big picture. Of course, there are still a lot of holes, but a picture just well enough assembled is all we are aiming at here. Further study is certainly encouraged. This class may just be the introductory help to get people started on that further study.

Now, as we come to **Deuteronomy**, we get all these covenant obligations and laws and blessings and curses and so on, all in one document.³

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

Theme texts

Let's now examine Deuteronomy itself.

Chapters 1-5

Chapters 1 through 4 are mostly a historical review of the Israel's relationship with Yahweh to date. The main focus is on Yahweh's faithfulness to the promises He made to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He had promised that they'd become a great nation. Look at **1:10-11**. [READ] Why does Moses say, in verse 10, that they are as numerous as the stars in heaven? [WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO ANSWER] Yeah, that is what Yahweh promised to Abraham in Genesis 15. Yahweh had also promised to give them the land of Canaan. Look at **1:21**. [READ] In keeping His word, Yahweh rescued Abraham's descendants, the nation of Israel, and gave them good laws all because of Yahweh's great love. Look at **4:35-38**. [READ] As we saw in Exodus, this was all accomplished for Yahweh's own glory, and His own people should know that best. Look at **4:39-40**. [READ]

Chapter 5, then, is a listing of the 10 commandments again. What is interesting about chapters 6 through 26 is that they seem to be an explanation of the 10 commandments. Chapters 6 through 26 show the nation of Israel how they are to apply, and live out, the 10 commandments in their place in history, and in redemptive-history. We'll come to this explanation of the law again in a moment.

6:4-9

First, let's look at one of the most well known passages, not only in Deuteronomy, but in the entire Bible. Notice that in **chapter 7, verse 8** Israel is told of Yahweh's love for them. [READ] The theme of Yahweh's love for His people is repeated often in Deuteronomy (4:37; 7:6-8; 23:5; 33:3). Therefore, in response to Yahweh's initiating and faithful love, we read this in Deuteronomy **6:4-5**. [READ] This is the famous "*Shema*," which is the Hebrew word for "hear." And this word "hear" is not just to casually listen to something. It means to hear with the readiness to *obey*. And what are they to hear and obey? They are to hear and obey that Yahweh is one God; He is the only God.

Then they are told to love Yahweh. They are to love Him with all their heart. The heart, to the Hebrews, means the mind, the will, the emotions, the thought life, everything that makes up the "inside" and the character of a man. It is his feelings and his thoughts and his desires. With all that he is in the inner man, he is to love Yahweh. The word for "soul" is also the word for "breath" or "passion" in Hebrew. With every ounce of oxygen that the Israelite takes in, he is to love Yahweh. This means every moment of every day, and in everything he sets his hand to, he is to love Yahweh in it. And the word for "strength" is literally "muchness" or "force" or

³ For more on the covenants, people can be directed to O. Palmer Robertson's *The Christ of the Covenants*, which is on the CHBC bookstall. They should also be directed toward the 5th class in this course on Exodus 19-40 (if they missed it), in order to understand that this is still a covenant of grace, even though Israel has obligations now.

“very.” Can you hear the emphasis on the whole of everything that the Israelite is, loving Yahweh? “Love Yahweh your God with all your inner man, and with all your passion, and with all your ‘muchness,’ all your ‘force,’ all your ‘very everything.’”

That’s what Deuteronomy is about. It’s about Yahweh’s love for His people, and that, in turn, drawing their love out towards Him, because He is so worthy of their love.

Now, what does it look like when someone loves the LORD like this? Moses tells us in the next verses. Look at **verses 6 through 9**. [READ] Love for the LORD looks like a life where the word of the LORD is central to everything. To the man who loves the LORD, the word of the LORD is in his “heart,” verse 6. Do you remember what I said the “heart” is? The word of God is to dwell deep in the very fiber of the man. From there, the word can spring forth and affect his life. Verse 7 literally says “you must carve/sharpen them into your sons.” The word of God is to be the topic of discussion all the time, when the lover of God sits, walks, lies down, or rises up. The word of God is to guide the lover of God in what he does, and all he sees, verse 8. And verse 9 says the word of God will govern the home and the city of those who love Yahweh. To love God means to be saturated with His word: in the heart, in the mind, on the tongue, guiding the hands and the eyes, ruling the house and the city. The word of God is to be pervasive in the life of His people. That’s what it looks like to love the LORD your God with all of your heart, and all of your soul, and all of your vigor.

The list of texts in Deuteronomy where this love is called for is long (6:4; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 23:5; 30:6, 16, 20).

The **application** should be obvious here. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he turned to Deuteronomy 6:4. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27)." And when Jesus said that, He wasn’t just grabbing for some sentimental line, or trying to escape His questioners trap. Rather, by grabbing for that key text in Deuteronomy, He was referencing all of what I just said about *how* to love the LORD.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

Chapters 6-26

I mentioned earlier that chapter 6 started an exposition of the 10 commandments that runs through chapter 26. It seems as though Moses is taking the 10 commandments and showing the nation of Israel how to live them out in the land they are about to possess. In these chapters there are a number of laws that we would still recognize: like the prohibitions to murder and to steal. However, there are a number of laws that would seem strange to us to apply today: laws like how to mourn, how to build cities, what to do with disobedient children, or those who carry sticks on the Sabbath day.

How are we to make sense of these laws, some of which would make very little sense in our world and our culture today? Can we just disregard all the commands in the Old Testament, by saying “That was for the nation of Israel then, and we are the Church today?” Would that also mean that the 10 commandments don’t apply to us? Well, we need to understand the difference between two different types of law in the Old Testament. There was **prescriptive law** and **descriptive law**. Prescriptive law was the bed-rock foundational law rooted in the very character of who God is. What that means is things like “Be holy *because* the LORD your God

is holy” is a principle that never changes because God never changes. The same is true of the 10 commandments, because the 10 commandments are the expression of God’s perfect character. (1) He is committed to His own glory, so He never puts other gods before Himself, (2) nor ever worships idols. (3) He never takes His own name in vain; His name and His glory are never a light and inconsequential matter to Him. (4) He always honors the Sabbath. (5) He is the one who placed authorities in the universe, Himself at the top. (6) He honors life, He doesn’t murder. (7) He is faithful, never breaking covenant vows. (8) He owns all things and in His sovereignty gives them to whoever He pleases. (9) He always tells the truth; His word is inviolable. (10) His heart is always pure. Thus the 10 commandments are written into the very fabric of God’s universe and cannot be overturned or abrogated.

What changes is **the cultural context** in which these prescriptive laws are lived out. And this is where we come to descriptive law. Descriptive law is the way the *prescriptive* law is to be applied in a certain time and place. Deuteronomy 6-26 (and parts of Leviticus) is full of descriptive law: the way the nation-state of Israel, called to be a geo-political entity, thousands of years ago, on the other side of the world before the birth of Christ, was to put the prescriptive law into practice.

Today, we **the Church**, living together in this local church in the 21st century AD, here in Washington DC, are going to apply the prescriptive law differently. In other words, our *descriptive* law looks different. And the main reason is this: Jesus Christ has fulfilled all that the nation-state of Israel was supposed to point towards. He is the fulfillment of Israel. He *is* the true Israel. Hence, there has been a shift in the application of the prescriptive law. It’s still the same prescriptive law. The outworking of it just looks different.

So for **example**, the people of Israel were told not to mix different colors of yarn in order to remind them that they are holy and set apart from the other nations. Well, we aren’t concerned with mixing different types of threads in our clothing, even though we *are* still concerned with being holy. We have other ways to remind us of our distinction from unbelievers around us: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Yet, a lot of the sexual prohibitions of the Old Testament still apply because adultery is still forbidden in the *prescriptive* law.

Or another example: we are still called to love the LORD our God with all of our hearts, and with all of our souls, and with all of our strength (even as Jesus Himself said), because that is an expression of the first commandment that should always be applied. But we aren’t to drive people out of the county if they don’t want to love the LORD. Instead, they just don’t join our community, the local church.

One last example: Are we to not harvest the very edges of our fields to help strangers and aliens such that they can have something to glean? Maybe not, but God still cares for foreigners, like He cares for all who are otherwise forgotten about by society, and sometimes can’t help themselves (like widows and orphans). Thus, Christians should have compassion on those away from their home, and be quick to help in some way, even if it’s not leaving them a few rows of corn in the field.

Saint Augustine said it this way: “[The truly equitable law of Almighty God] is the law by which each age and place forms rules of conduct best suited to itself, although the law itself is always and everywhere the same and does not differ from place to place or from age to age.”⁴

⁴ *The Confessions*. Book III, sect. 7, par. 2.

And he goes on to say that, “Surely it is never wrong at any time or in any place for a man to love God with his whole heart and his whole soul and his whole mind and to love his neighbour [sic] as himself.”⁵

The value, then, of still reading these chapters in Deuteronomy is in learning more about the essence of the law that we seek to apply this many years later, this far away, after the cross and resurrection of Christ. If we see how they applied it, then we’ll be able to think a little more accurately about how *we* are to apply it.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

10:12-11:1

Well, let’s look a little bit at that essence of the law. Turn to **chapter 10**. Look at **verse 12**. [READ THROUGH VERSE 13] Did you hear that? The law is not intended to be burdensome, but good. God is not interested in being anyone’s killjoy. Rather, the law is given to us because we are like children. Children don’t know what is right or wrong, what is safe and what is dangerous. They have to be taught by parents. It is a loving thing for God to condescend to us and enlighten us with His *good* law.

Let’s keep reading. Look at **verses 14-16**. [READ] With the electing love of God comes responsibility. But notice, in verse 16, that the LORD is concerned with *the heart*. God wants the heart and affection and love of His people. It brings Him no glory nor pleasure when someone keeps the law externally, but their hearts are far from him (cf Mk. 7:6-15; Mt. 23). Yahweh wants the whole of the man. And if He can get the heart, He knows the right actions will follow. Thus the essence of the law is to love God and to love others, and then to let that love overflow into action.

And **verses 17** tell us how this can happen. [READ] If you perceive God as He really is, the God of gods, Lord of lords, great, mighty, awesome, upright, and compassionate, then how can your heart *not* fall more and more in love with Him?

Moses then concludes this little summary of the essence of the law by challenging God’s people to *be like the God* they love and worship. Look at **verses 18-19**. [READ]

Now you see, we all need to be students of theology, mediating deeply on God’s word, reading good books. We need to make use of what people call the *means of grace*. God reveals Himself to His people through certain *means*: the preaching of the word, prayer, Bible study, fellowship, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, etc. To know God better make use of those means. If you do, you will see God. And you will love Him more, and you will thereby keep the law.

Chapters 27-28

If Israel does devote their entire heart to Yahweh, the covenant provides for great blessings. The blessings mainly involve a bountiful land as confirmation that Yahweh is pleased with them. But, if Israel will not keep their hearts pure, and if they don’t stay devoted to

⁵ *The Confessions*. Book III, sect. 8, par. 1.

Yahweh, the covenant has some serious curses in it. If the people break the covenant they will be cast off from Yahweh. What that will entail in the future will be an agricultural failure of the land, and eventually removal from the land. You can read about these blessings and curses in chapter 28.

Nevertheless, Yahweh even says, in Deuteronomy 30:1-10, that even if Israel is kicked out of the land, He will still bring them back afterwards. Even in His wrath, Yahweh is gracious, and He will carry to completion His plan of redemption.

In fact, such expulsion from the land of God's blessing was the same thing Adam and Eve experienced when they sinned. God's whole plan of redemption, then, is His effort to bring His people back to a place where they can again worship Him with sincere hearts. What will be great about living in the New Heavens and the New Earth is that all temptation toward sin will be removed, and we'll never again have to fear being exiled from God's presence and fellowship!

I should give a word of warning here. If we see someone poor today it does not mean that they are under the curse of God. And if we see someone with the world's goods in abundance, it does not mean that that person is necessarily in right standing with God. Remember, the Old Testament land and its blessings were a foreshadowing of greater blessings in Christ. In Romans 4 and Galatians 3 (and elsewhere in the New Testament) we are told that the greater blessing, which the Old Testament blessing was always pointing to, is to be *justified* before God. Today, blessing from the LORD is experienced in a clear conscience and a right relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ.

I call this a warning because there are many who say that to be blessed by God is to have health, wealth, and prosperity. Well this is a misreading of the Old Testament and a flat distortion of the New Testament. For to be in a right relationship with God is a far greater blessing than any material goods or fit body hear on earth. For now, we are pilgrims through this life, and we know that our bodies are wasting away, and that we will someday die. Until then, we need not fear if we are in relationship with God, as we wait patiently for Jesus to return. And *then* it will be health, wealth, and prosperity.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

18:15-22

Before we conclude our time together, I should direct you to Deuteronomy 18. This is the last of the books of Moses, and as the first prophet of Israel, he makes a prophecy about the last and greatest prophet of Israel. Look at **verse 15**. [READ] And look at **verses 18-19**. [READ] These are prophecies about the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 3). When He came, He delivered God's final and conclusive revelation to mankind: He delivered the gospel. The gospel is what all this in the Old Testament is meant to prepare the way for, and it is all that the New Testament is about. In the Great High Prophet, in Christ, God has told us of His holiness, our sin and need of redemption, and His provision to save us through faith in Christ. That's the good news, and that is what we are told here in Deuteronomy 18 we *must* listen to.⁶

Conclusion

⁶ Time, again, prohibits a longer discussion here. The class can be directed to the 3rd class in the Guidance Core Seminar for more on how Jesus Christ is the climactic and final word from God to sinners.

Well, we've come a long way with Moses. It's going to be sad to leave him behind. But Moses was just an instrument in the greater plan of Yahweh. We will continue on with Yahweh's story. We'll continue on with the seed of the woman in battle with the seed of the serpent. We'll continue on with Yahweh's post-fall re-creation of His universe. We'll continue on with Yahweh's covenant faithfulness. We'll continue on with more typology and more foreshadowing of Christ. We'll continue on in understanding the gospel better through the Old Testament.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

To close, let me just read for you part of Moses' last sermon to the people. I'm sure you'll find it shot through with meaningful application if you are today, millennia later, part of Yahweh's covenant people through faith in Jesus Christ.

This is **Deuteronomy 30, verses 11 through 20**. [READ] And this is **chapter 32, verses 45 through 47**. [READ] The word of God is good. And faithfulness to it brings *life*! Now, choose life! Hear and obey God's word, and live: live life indeed.

[PRAY]