

Notes on the Pentateuch – No. 5

The Book of Deuteronomy

Dub McClish

Deuteronomy means “second law,” not in the sense of an additional body of law besides the one revealed in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, but in the sense of a repetition of the original Law. Deuteronomy is a restatement of the Law of Moses to an entire generation that had grown up since the Law had been originally given at Mt. Sinai. This majestic book is basically a record of three great sermons delivered by Moses to the Israelites just before they were to cross the Jordan River and begin the conquest of Canaan.

Except for the last eight verses, Deuteronomy claims to be the work of Moses. It opens as follows: “These are the words which Moses spake unto all Israel.” In the New Testament, Jesus, Peter, Stephen, and Paul all quote from this great book and attribute the quotation to Moses. Those who question the inspired Mosaic authorship presume to know more about the Biblical records than the inspired writers themselves.

Deuteronomy is Moses’ farewell address. In it, he makes his final appeal to Israel to remain faithful to God’s covenant after they enter Canaan. Those portions of the law that were most practical were given great emphasis. Those events that best demonstrate God’s favor are given attention. Frequent warnings of God’s wrath upon the disobedient are stated. In fact, reduced to one word, the theme of the book is **obedience**. In Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, Moses served as God’s legislator, delivering and interpreting the law to His people. In Deuteronomy, Moses becomes God’s preacher and prophet, pouring out his heart in the grandest style of exhortation, typical of the greater preacher and prophet who was yet to come.

Few books are quoted more often by other inspired writers, indicating the appreciation and respect they had for this book of Moses. The historical books of Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 Samuel, and the prophetic books of Jeremiah, Hosea, and Amos all refer to various events and/or passages in it. As indicated above, it is often quoted in the New Testament, also.

To the Jews, Deuteronomy constitutes the “fifth/fifth of the Law,” the first four Old Testament books being the other four/fifths. It is a fitting conclusion to both the books of the Law and to the books of Moses. With it, an era ends: the man who has nursed the Hebrew people through the wilderness passes from the scene and Joshua inherits his mantle. They are ready to cross the Jordan and inherit their land. The message of Deuteronomy is ever current: **Men bring terrible calamity on themselves through disobedience.**

[**Note:** I wrote this article for, and it was published in the “Bible Thoughts” Column for the *Hood County News*, Granbury, Texas, October 28, 1979.]

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