

Deuteronomy: Preface, Themes, and Purpose - *Deut 1:1-8*

Introduction – We continue with some introductory thoughts on Deuteronomy even as we handle the first few verses which themselves are prefatory. Considered in context, we'll see they are saturated with the themes and purpose of this book for the people of God – then and now.

Who? (v1) – “*These are the words which Moses spoke...*” It is clear that Moses is the author of this book (29:1, 30:1, 31:1, 32:1, 33:1, etc...). The Lord says Moses wrote it (i.e. Matt 19:8) as does Paul (i.e. 1 Cor 9:9). This is a covenant document which also presents itself in a series of three sermons, a song, a blessing, and a post-script.

Where? (v1, 5) – “*...on this side of the Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain...in the land of Moab.*” They were on the east side of the Jordan River poised to cross over into the land of Canaan (vv6-7). A great physical transition was about to take place as well as a transition of leadership (31:1-8).

When? (v3) – “*...in the fortieth year...*” Deuteronomy is delivered at the end of the forty years of wandering in the wilderness as a new generation has risen up to follow Yahweh. To get a sense of this, if we were the generation listening to Moses, the Exodus would have taken place when Nixon was president and we would have been wandering without a home ever since. This despite the fact that it would have only been an eleven day journey from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea (v2) had we originally obeyed – but more on that later.

Considering the date, Joshua notes the crossing of the Jordan (Josh 4:19) and the 30 days of mourning following Moses' death (Deut 34:8), we are left with approximately forty days for the teachings of Deuteronomy to be given by Moses to the people. Like Jesus, these are his last forty days of teaching before Yahweh takes him.

What? (v5) – “*...Moses began to explain the law...*” Like a master teacher, Moses expounds and interprets the Law received at Sinai (Horeb) forty years prior. In the first sermon (1:5-4:43), Moses reviews the great historical deliverances of Israel by God, their disobedience, and the consequences which have brought them to the present. In the second (4:44-28:68) we have a long sermon where Moses expounds, explains and applies the Ten Commandments. The third sermon (29:1-30:20), Moses presses Israel to renew her covenant allegiance to Yahweh before entering into battle. Finally, the last section (Ch 31-34) shows us the transition to Joshua, a ceremony completing the covenant renewal, and the death of Moses.

And it is as a covenant document from ancient times that this book can be understood as well: preamble (1:1-5), historical prologue (1:6-4:43), general and then specific stipulations (4:44-26:14), divine witnesses invoked (26:15-19), blessings and curses (Ch 27-28).

Why? (vv6-8) – All of these other questions help answer this question. Moses delivers a series of sermons in a covenant-document format as a mediator for Yahweh who is renewing covenant with Israel (imperfect as she is) according to the promises He will always stand upon. Always before the covenant people is this: because God made promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He has made those promises to you. In covenant renewal, God is not re-thinking His commitment; He is urging ours. The prophetic role was not simply to announce (or reiterate) the word of God, but to persuade men of its living force, to call them to love and obedience, and also to warn them of the consequences of falling away from the intimacy of the covenant relationship (*Craigie*). This was and remains the purpose for the book of Deuteronomy.

“Turn and Take Your Journey” – God had told the previous generation and now He will tell this next generation. Jesus would say the same to His disciples (Matt 28:18-20). Based on the authority of God and His promises, we are to take the land in the name of Jesus. Even in Deuteronomy, eyes of faith see the trajectory.

“Teach Them to Observe All Things That I Have Commanded You” – Moses and Jesus are not interested in some truncated wooden application of the Law. As Moses expounds, and as Jesus would do the same, it is clear that God is interested in the spirit of the law and how it is to be pressed out into all the corners of life – in that spirit, or law, of love.

The Power and Glory of Obedience – Success is based on one thing: faithful obedience. The effect of such obedience, something God also promises will grow over history, is blessing from the hand of God in history. The effect is blessing in space and time. Likewise, the effect of unbelief and disobedience is chastisement and, finally, curse. Does it really matter if you obey or not? Yes and Amen.

Covenant Succession and not Presumption – It is false that every generation has to make a covenant with God from scratch. It is also false to have an arrogant presumption that says one does not have to renew that covenant with God.

God is Not Ashamed to Call You His People – God always returns to His promises and purposes for His people – and in calling us His people, His children, His nation, even His friends, He is not sorry or ashamed. In covenant with Him, He charges us to likewise be unashamed.