

Introduction to Deuteronomy

1. Content and Themes

- Within the narrative of the redacted form of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy follows from Numbers inasmuch as it takes place in the Transjordan (near the eastern shore of the Jordan River). Narrative time here slows to describe Moses' last days.
- Events described include covenant renewal (27-30), the authorization of Joshua as Moses' successor (31), Moses' blessing of the tribes (33), and finally his death on Mount Nebo (34).
- As in Leviticus, however, narratives are secondary to laws and teachings. These are framed in terms of Moses' three speeches to the people prior to his death (1:1-4:43; 4:44-26:19 + 28; 29-30). In the redacted form of the Pentateuch, this form finds precedent, quite significantly, in Jacob/Israel's deathbed speech to his sons at the end of Genesis (48-49). In comparison to Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, the use of this form is striking; whereas these books frame their laws and teachings as speeches of God to the people via Moses, Deuteronomy frames its teachings as Moses' own words.
- In content, the speeches look back to the experience of Exodus and Wandering and look forward to the people's entry into the Promised Land, as described in the book of Joshua. In its present setting in the Hebrew Bible, it thus serves as both the conclusion to the Pentateuch and the introduction to the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings).
- Deuteronomy has a consistent style, a single overarching theology, simple and coherent literary structure, and clear unifying themes. Like Leviticus, Deuteronomy is thus credited to a single source by the Documentary Hypothesis (see below).
- The unifying themes are as follows:
 1. the oneness of God, as articulated in practical terms with a stress on God's role in the history of Israel and with a stress on the need for covenantal fidelity on Israel's part (in contrast to the more abstract imagery of P and its concern for the sacrificial system).
 2. the singularity of Israel, with continuity of past and present, with no preferential distinction between tribes or Southern and Northern kingdoms (contrast J and E), and without any stress on priests as distinct from other Israelites (contrast P)
 3. the centralization of worship and its uniformity, with a single place set aside for worship (as with P) and the subordination of local variation to national religious unity.

2. Structure [see further http://www.hope.edu/academic/religion/bandstra/RTOT/CH5/CH5_3C.HTM]

Prologue (1-4)

Historical review (1-3)

Call to obedience (4)

Essence of Law (5-11)

Ten commandments (5)

The Shema (6)

Temptation and life in covenant (7-11)

Core Laws (12-26)

Centralization of worship (12)

False prophets and idolatry (13)

Food laws (14)

Sabbatical year and slavery (15)

Festivals (16)

Justice, the king (17)

Levite, priest, prophet (18)

Administration of justice (19)

Rules of holy war (20)

Miscellaneous laws (21-25)

Ancient creed and exhortation (26)

Curse and Blessing (27-28)

The Shechem ceremony: the covenant curses (27)

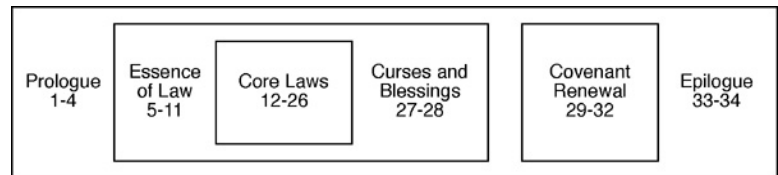
Covenant blessings and curses (28)

Covenant Renewal (29-32)

Moses's covenant exhortation (29-30)

Joshua's commission and covenant ceremony (31)

Song of Moses (32)



3. D in the Documentary Hypothesis

Relationship to other sources: Unlike the books of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy is a self-contained whole with a distinctive style. Scholars thus attribute it to the Deuteronomist (D). Some see this as a single author (Friedman posits Baruch, scribe of Jeremiah); others as a school. Like P, D seems to have known the combined form of JE and, also like P, seems to reflect a later time in the history of Israel and the development of its religion. D's worldview differs notably, however, from P (e.g., even though it recaps many of the events described in earlier books, D only mentions Aaron twice, both times negatively!)

Dating D: Deuteronomy and the reforms of King Josiah (621 BCE): Its theological focus and didactic style also make its concerns easy to identify and has helped scholars to pin down the date and setting of its redaction. Specifically, the concerns of Deuteronomy fit rather precisely with the description of Josiah's reform in 2 Kings (esp. centralization of worship, destruction of "high places"). Intriguingly, 2 Kings describes how in the time of Josiah, the high priest Hilkah found a book hidden in the Temple and stresses that it was this book that prompted Josiah to go about these reforms in the first place; scholars posit that this book was some form of Deuteronomy, which may have been redacted at the time of the reforms as a means of supporting them with appeal to the authority of Moses.

Deuteronomy and Jeremiah: The language, style, and interests of D are very close to the book of Jeremiah (even closer than the connections between P and Ezekiel). This further supports a date around the time of Josiah (see below). See Friedman, esp. table on p. 127.

D and the Deuteronomistic History: These books share the same style, same repeated phrases, same overarching concerns (esp. centralization of worship). Based on linguistic and stylistic as well as thematic and historical evidence, the Documentary Hypothesis posits that Deuteronomy's author/redactor (whether an individual or a school) is also responsible for the final forms of the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Sam, 1 & 2 Kings), which together formed part of a single history of Israel (from the death of Moses to the fall of the Southern Kingdom). Scholars often call this "the Deuteronomistic History" (abbreviated "DH").

The problem of Theodicy and the Deuteronomistic Principle: Deut and the Former Prophets also share the same way of interpreting history, often called the "Deuteronomistic Principle": history is interpreted in terms God's will in accordance with His covenant with Israel, such that bad events that befall Israel prompt a search for explanation for the sinful breaches of the covenant that caused them (esp. idolatry and straying from the worship in a single place), whereas good times are seen as sign of Israel's righteousness and covenantal fidelity. This concern for theodicy (= the question of the justice and fairness of God in a world in which the innocent seem wrongly to suffer) fits well with a time of great upheaval.

Chronology

United Monarchy

1030-1010 BCE – King Saul

1010-970 BCE – King David, ruling with Jerusalem as his capital

970-931 BCE – King Solomon; building of the Jerusalem Temple

Divided Monarchy

931 BCE – With death of Solomon, Northern Kingdom (Israel) secedes from Southern Kingdom (Judah), ending the period of the United Monarchy

722/721 BCE - Northern Kingdom (Israel) conquered by Assyrians, population dispersed

Continued history of Southern Kingdom (Judah)

715-687 BCE – Reign of King Hezekiah, who initiated a first set of reforms

627 BCE – Jeremiah begins ministry

622 BCE – King Josiah and "Deuteronomic Reforms"

609 BCE – Death of Josiah

587/586 BCE – Invasion of Judah and the destruction of the Temple by Babylonians; many Israelites exiled to Babylon at this point, others fled to Egypt.

562 BCE – Death of Jeremiah

539/538 BCE – Exiles allowed to return to the Land by Cyrus (Persian king), after his victories over Babylonians; soon after this, the Temple begins to be rebuilt ("Second Temple").