

Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy consists of a series of farewell messages by Israel's 120-year-old leader, Moses. It is addressed to the new generation who are destined to possess the Land of Promise. Deuteronomy, like Leviticus, contains a vast amount of legal detail, but its emphasis is on the laymen rather than the priests and sacrifices. Moses reminds the new generation of the importance of obedience if they are to learn from the sad example of their predecessors. Moving from the past (Israel's history) to the present (Israel's holiness and homeland) to the future (Israel's new leader), Moses stresses the faithfulness of Israel's God, who "brought us out...to give us the land" (6:23).

INTRODUCTION

Deuteronomy is a supplementary book to the rest of the Pentateuch and fills a role similar to that of the Gospel of John compared to the synoptic Gospels. It fills in missing elements and gives the spiritual significance of the history found in the other books of Moses. Genesis to Numbers portray God's ways, Deuteronomy reveals God's love. The emphasis on God's love in this book (4:37; 7:7-8; 10:15; 23:5) was a crucial step for Israel's understanding. Deuteronomy was perhaps Christ's favorite book. He quoted from it often (see Matthew. 4:4,7,10; 22:37-38; Mark 7:10; 10:19, 29-30).

The Hebrew title of Deuteronomy is *Haddebharim*, "The Words." It is taken from the opening phrase in 1:1, "These are the words." The parting words of Moses to the new generation are given in oral and written form so that they will endure to all generations. Deuteronomy has been called "five-fifths of the Law" since it completes the five books of Moses. The English title comes from the Greek title Deuteronomion, "Second Law." Deuteronomy, however, is not a second law but an adaptation and expansion of much of the original law given on Mount Sinai. Deuteronomy has also been appropriately called the "Book of Remembrance."

AUTHOR

The Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy has been vigorously attacked by critics who claim that Moses is only the originator of the tradition on which these laws are based. There are many reasons why these arguments are not valid.

The evidence that points to Moses as the author of Deuteronomy is similar to that for the previous books of the Pentateuch. These five books form such a literary unit that they rise or fall together on the matter of authorship.

DATE & SETTING

Like Leviticus, Deuteronomy does not progress historically. It takes place entirely on the plains of Moab due east of Jericho and the Jordan River (see 1:1; 29:1; Josh. 1:2). It covers about one month (Deuteronomy 1:3 and 34:8 and Joshua 5:6-1)2. The book was written at the end of the forty-year period in the wilderness (c. 1405 b.c.) when the new generation was on the verge of entering Canaan. Moses wrote it to encourage the people to believe and obey God in order to receive God's blessings.