



# DEUTERONOMY

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The Commands of a Covenant God

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Allan M. Harman

CHRISTIAN  
**FOCUS**



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ISBN 1-84550-268-X  
ISBN 978-184550-268-3

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

First published in 2001  
(ISBN 978-1-85792-665-1)  
Reprinted in 2007

in the  
Focus on the Bible Commentary series  
by  
Christian Focus Publications, Ltd.,  
Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire,  
IV20 1TW, Great Britain.

[www.christianfocus.com](http://www.christianfocus.com)

Cover design by Danie Van Straaten

Printed by CPD Wales

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## Abbreviations

KJV	King James (Authorised) Version
LXX	The Septuagint, the oldest and most important Greek translation of the OT made in Egypt about 250 BC
MT	Massoretic Text, the Hebrew text of the Old Testament that became recognised as authoritative after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.
ms(s)	manuscript(s)
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version



Note: When referring to passages in the Old Testament in which the covenant name of God occurs (*yhwh*), the form 'LORD' is used. This is in accordance with the practice of English versions, the form 'Lord' being reserved for the translation of words other than *yhwh*.



## Introduction

**1** **TITLE**  
In the Hebrew Bible no titles are attached to the various books. For centuries the Jewish custom has been to name each book by its opening words. Deuteronomy starts with the words *'elleh had<sup>e</sup>vârîm* 'these are the words', and hence it was called 'the words'. Our English title has come via Latin and Greek and means the second law. The expression is drawn from Deuteronomy 17:18. However, there it clearly refers to the king having a *copy* of the law for himself and not to a second law.

The contents of Deuteronomy show clearly that the book is not a second law, but a renewal of the covenant made on Mount Sinai (called Horeb throughout Deuteronomy except in 33:2). It is also linked expressly with the gracious promises God gave to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (see e.g. 6:10-11 and 7:7-9). The children of Israel have come through their years in the wilderness. Now, on the brink of entering into the land promised to Abraham their forefather, they again acknowledge the LORD's rule over them.

### 2. DEUTERONOMY AND THE PENTATEUCH

Like all biblical books Deuteronomy can be studied separately, yet it forms part of God's total revelation. While it has to be viewed in its particular setting in the Mosaic period of Israel's history, yet it has also to be seen as providing foundational material for so much of later biblical teaching.

The Pentateuch is the name given to the first five books of the Old Testament. It is derived from the Greek word *pentateuchos* which means 'the five-volumed [book]'. Deuteronomy comes as the last of these five, and forms a fitting climax to this

opening section of the Old Testament. The central ideas of Deuteronomy are not peculiar to it alone, but are common to all the books of the Pentateuch.

Genesis 1–11 is foundational for the rest of the Pentateuch and indeed for the rest of the Bible. *It details the nature of God's created world that overcomes the consequences of sin.* From Genesis 12 the covenant blessings become dominant. In the covenant with Abraham God promised three things:

- a large family (Gen. 12:2)
- a land (Gen. 12:1, 7)
- blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:3).

In each case the promise was confirmed by God to Isaac and to Jacob, but then jeopardised by human sin. At the time of Abraham's death only the promise of the large family was evidently being fulfilled.

The remaining four books of the Pentateuch reiterate the essential features of the Abrahamic covenant, and there is constant recall of the basic promises. The promise of a large family having been fulfilled, attention turns to the land. The emphasis in the last two books of the Pentateuch (Numbers and Deuteronomy) is on the aspect of the land. Israel is moving towards the land of promise, and on its border renews its allegiance to the God of the covenant. Even at this stage the promises are only partially realised, and the hope of the fullness of God's blessing has to lie in the future. Of all God's gifts to Israel, the land takes pre-eminence, and so Moses constantly reminds Israel that God was about to fulfil his word. It is solely because of his grace that the gift will become theirs (cf. 4:40; 5:16; 7:13; 11:9, 21; 21:1, 23; 25:15; 26:10, 15; 28:11, 63; 30:18, 20; 31:13, 20; 32:47). Deuteronomy ends with the death of Moses, but points ahead to the impending realisation of the possession of the land. While the opening of Deuteronomy is looking backward, the conclusion of the book is looking forward.

### 3. DEUTERONOMY AND THE REMAINDER OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The sequel in Joshua shows how the land came into Israel's possession, and the narrative indicates how the provisions

given in Deuteronomy were known and applied. Both in warfare and in worship adherence was given to the requirements of Deuteronomy. Thus, for example, the principle of the devoted objects was obeyed in the case of Jericho (Josh. 6:21, 24) in accordance with Deuteronomy 7:1-6 (cf. also Deut. 13:12-18). Similarly, the covenant ceremony between Ebal and Gerizim (Josh. 8:30-35) implemented the provisions of Deuteronomy 11:29 and 27:1-26.

Later Old Testament history shows how influential the covenant renewal in the plains of Moab was for Israel. Many detailed incidents recorded in the biblical record clearly relate back to Deuteronomic provisions, while drastic reforms initiated by Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1ff.) and especially by Josiah (2 Kings 22:1ff.) were to bring Israel back into conformity with the laws of Deuteronomy. So much of the prophetic teaching is couched in terms reminiscent of Deuteronomy's language and in accordance with the covenantal principles set out in it.

The influence of Deuteronomy is also apparent in the primary history of Israel, the so-called 'former prophets' (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings). The writers of these books were clearly influenced by Deuteronomy, because its teaching became the standard by which actions were judged (cf. the reasons given in 2 Kings 17:7-23 for the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel). The selection, use and commentary on historical incidents and personalities betray a prophetic background with a deep appreciation of the teaching in Deuteronomy. This history is 'deuteronomic' in the sense that it reflects the same standpoint in regard to the covenant relationship as does the book of Deuteronomy.

#### 4. STRUCTURE

The relationship between God and his people is expressed in both the Old and New Testaments as a covenant relationship. A covenant was a bond graciously entered into by God. It denoted his sovereign rule over his people and their acceptance of that rule, with its implications for the totality of their lives. In some parts of the Old Testament the actual word covenant does not occur, yet the presence of associated vocabulary points clearly to the presence of the covenant idea.

In recent years, much helpful light has been shed on Old Testament covenants in general by the study of extra-biblical treaties. It is clear that there was a formal pattern to these treaties, and various Old Testament covenants reflect it. This is particularly so with features of the covenant with Abraham, covenant at Sinai and its renewal in the plains of Moab.

Between fifty and sixty of these extra-biblical covenants are now known, many from around 1400 BC (with some earlier still), while others come from the later Assyrian period (around 800 BC). Not surprisingly, echoes of their structure are found in the Old Testament. This is because God's revelation came in a precise historical setting, and he couched that revelation in terms that the people could readily understand. In this way they could more easily grasp its significance and show obedience to its demands.

The pattern of the Hittite Treaties from the second millennium BC has greater similarity to the pattern in Exodus and Deuteronomy than the Assyrian texts from the first millennium BC. The pattern is as follows:

1. Preamble, identifying the King making the treaty.
2. Historical survey, outlining the events leading up to the treaty.
3. Stipulations required of those giving allegiance to the covenant.
4. Curses and blessings pronounced for either disobedience or obedience respectively.
5. Arrangements for seeing that the covenant was continued in succeeding generations.

There are also Near Eastern legal collections from the second millennium BC of which the laws of Hammurabi (from around 1750 BC) are the best known. They follow a standard pattern of history, laws, document clauses, curses and blessings, and differ markedly from later lists of laws.

When the covenant made at Sinai (see Exod. 20–24) is compared with these treaty and legal patterns the resemblance in order is remarkable. Even more striking is the way in which the structure of the book of Deuteronomy reflects this

whole pattern. The preamble and historical survey occupy chapters 1–4. Then the basic core of the covenant is given in chapter 5, followed by expansion of it in chapters 6–26. The curses and blessings come in chapters 27–30, while the final chapters (31–34) deal with the provisions for the on-going covenant life under Moses' successor, Joshua.

This structure helps to highlight the uniqueness of the relationship between God and his people Israel. God had chosen Israel in love (Deut. 7:9) and now, as the covenant is renewed after forty years and as the people are on the point of invading Canaan, he re-affirms his demands upon them. A holy God required his people to reflect his holiness and to respond in obedience to his love.

The style of the book is also important. It purports to be words that Moses addressed to the children of Israel, and only in the opening words of chapter 1 (vv. 1-5) and parts of chapters 29, 31–34 does narrative occur. The purpose of Moses' speeches is to encourage the people and to explain to them (see 1:5) the demands of their covenant God. Ultimately the speeches will bring the people, when confronted with God's demands, to take these demands that were already near them (30:11-14) and pledge themselves to obey them. Others, later in Israelite history (e.g. Joshua or the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel), also employed the same sermonic style in their appeal to their own generations.

The whole purpose of the book determines the contents. Thus, no attempt is made to repeat all the laws already given in the earlier books. There is no mention of circumcision, or the Day of the Atonement. Rarely does Moses give extensive treatment of the individual laws. Chapter 14, with its detailed laws about food, is an exception to the general method of stating the law briefly, sometimes with specific illustrative examples. In many cases the time and place of the covenant renewal governed the material included. Provision is therefore made for matters that will apply as soon as Canaan is entered (e.g. laws regarding warfare), or later, when a people, who had consolidated their position in the land, seek new institutions (e.g. kingship).

The book is entirely in keeping with its setting across the Jordan. The aged Moses looks back on all that happened since

the people left Mount Sinai. There are also recollections which go back further to their sojourn in Egypt (see e.g. 5:6; 7:15; 11:10; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18; 28:27, 60). Moses not only sets out the major requirements but repeatedly urges the people to listen to their dying 'father' and obey the LORD's requirements. He knows that the past cycle of apostasy, punishment and pardon will occur again. However, his aim is not to stimulate Israel to delve into God's secret purposes, but rather to obey his revealed will (29:29). The encouragements and warnings of Moses to his 'children' play an important role throughout the whole book. It ends fittingly with the account of his death and burial (ch. 34).

## 5. SIGNIFICANT TEACHING OF DEUTERONOMY

### 5.1 *Its Exposition of the Decalogue*

Apart from the Book of the Covenant in Exodus 21–23, the book of Deuteronomy contains the fullest exposition of the Decalogue found in the Bible. Reference to the Decalogue and quotations of several of the commandments occur quite often, but without much exposition. Deuteronomy, from 6:1 through to the end of chapter 26, spells out the intent of the Decalogue and challenges the people of Israel to display, by their wholehearted obedience to his decrees and laws (Deut. 26:16–19), that they are his treasured possession and his holy people. Under the New Covenant the same pattern of obedient response to Christ's commands is expected (Matt. 28:20; John 14:23).

The Decalogue is set apart as the basic core of the covenant. It is not to be equated with statute law for Israel, for no human penalties are specified. Instead, divine curses and blessings are included. That the Decalogue cannot be equated with criminal law is also shown by the presence of the Tenth Commandment, which deals with the sin of covetousness, which could not come within the scope of a human court. The Decalogue was applicable to all Israelites and every member of the society had the responsibility of observing the law. In addition there was a national responsibility of adhering to the sovereign's demands (Deut. 29:18–29).

The contrast between the Decalogue and the exposition (Deut. 6–26) is not between divine and human laws. Rather, the contrast is between the basic core of the covenant in the Decalogue and the exposition which sets out various applications of the Decalogue and which also impresses it on the consciences of the listeners. While the Decalogue was written by the finger of God (Deut. 5:22 ‘he wrote them’; Deut. 9:10 ‘written by the finger of God’; Deut. 10:2 ‘I will write on the tablets’; Deut. 10:4 ‘The LORD wrote on these tablets’), yet it is expressly said that the decrees and statutes were given to Israel by a direction to Moses (Deut. 6:6), and Moses claimed that they were really the commands of the LORD (Deut. 11:26). The basic intent of the Decalogue is further maintained and illustrated in the exposition. The stipulations of the covenant are related to typical situations to which they will apply when Israel comes into the sworn land.

The order in which the exposition of the commandments takes place is striking. In the Book of the Covenant in Exodus 21–23 several of the commandments are covered, but not in the order in which they appear in Exodus 20. However, in Deuteronomy the commandments are dealt with in the same order. The prescriptive form of the commands comes in chapter 5 (the Decalogue), while the descriptive form occupies chapters 6 to 26. Since the middle of the nineteenth century various studies have shown that the Decalogue governs the ordering of the material in Deuteronomy 6–25 (or 6–26). While there is continuing discussion on this, yet it is clear that the stipulations section of the covenant document that makes up Deuteronomy is basically an unfolding of the significance of the Ten Commandments *in the order* in which they are set out in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. These chapters *expound* or *elaborate* the essential thrust of the Decalogue, but also show the *trajectory* for each commandment. That is to say, the implications of each commandment are set out, and these implications carry, for example, the sabbath principle much further than a first reading of the Fourth Commandment would suggest. So much of Israel’s life was structured around

this principle. Similarly with the Fifth Commandment, its trajectory included all the authority structures within Israel, not just the parent/child relationship.

Two further important points need to be made as well. First, the commandments are not as discrete in their meaning as we sometimes assume. There is overlap between them, and this is particularly clear with the final commandment, 'You shall not covet'. Hence it should not be surprising if the exposition of a particular commandment in Deuteronomy contains material that also relates to another of the commandments. Secondly, there is often a transitional passage between the exposition of individual commandments. These are the seams that bind together the various pieces that make up this sermonic elaboration and application of the Decalogue. They form a bridge between the discussion on individual commandments.

### *5.2 Its Teaching on Covenant*

Deuteronomy is concerned with the relationship between God and his people. This is expressed in terms of covenant. As with other biblical covenants, the essential feature of it was God's act of gracious condescension in entering into such a relationship with his people. There was nothing in them which moved God, but it was solely his own love which impelled his choice of them as his people and their redemption by his outstretched hand of power (see especially 7:7-9, 9:5-6 and 14:2). The incomparable God of the covenant had stooped to meet them in their need. At Sinai and in many of the wilderness experiences he had shown them his glory and majesty.

The corollary of this was the special position afforded to Israel. Not only were they chosen by God as his people, but as adopted children they were to bear the family likeness (14:1-2). Holiness of life was to characterise them, and as devoted servants of the LORD they were to yield loving obedience to his covenant demands. The redeemer God demanded allegiance to his commands. Blessings for obedience, curses for disobedience – the choice was plain for Israel (11:26-28; 30:15-20).

Constantly throughout the book the reader is reminded that the covenant was not new. It was clearly a renewal of the covenant made forty years earlier at Horeb. But the link is made with earlier covenants still, in that there is repeated reference to God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (see 1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27; 29:13; 30:20; 34:4). The earlier covenants were not annulled by the later ones, but supplemented and expanded. God's revelation was cumulative, and at each stage of revelation additional teaching was given. There is continuity in Deuteronomy with the message of the earlier covenants and anticipation of the later ones.

What is unique about Deuteronomy is that the book itself is structured according to the pattern used in second millennium BC treaty documents. While many other books of the Bible have sections that show affinity with extra-biblical covenant patterns, Deuteronomy is the only one that displays *in toto* such a pattern. Its content and its structure are thus tied together by the common theme of 'covenant'.

Emphasis on the covenant structure should not divert attention away from the fact that the covenant was a *relationship* between God and his people. The covenant was an intensely personal matter, in which God drew near to people and promised, 'I will be your God and you shall be my people'. Hence a covenant was a bond between God and man, sovereignly imposed by God in his grace, whereby he and his people gave expression to their relationship in formal terms. Placing stress on the fact that God unilaterally imposed his covenant should not cause us to lose sight of the obligations on those in that relationship. Deuteronomy shows that it was a mutual relationship, and that the covenant people were expected to respond in obedience to all that their sovereign God had done for them. Redeemed people, in covenant with God, had to act in the pattern he established for them, and no aspect of their lives was exempt from his ethical demands.

### 5.3 The Concept of the Land

The word 'land' (Heb. *'erets*) is the fourth most frequent noun in the Old Testament, occurring 2,504 times. It occurs quite often in Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus, but it becomes even more

frequent in Numbers and Deuteronomy. While Exodus and Leviticus are more concerned with the aspect of relationship between God and his people, Numbers and Deuteronomy concentrate on the aspect of the land. In Numbers the idea of movement towards Canaan appears at the outset as the census is taken. Israel at that stage was being prepared for military conquest. The real movement of the people actually begins in Numbers 10:11-12 as Israel sets off from the wilderness of Sinai to the place that the LORD had promised (10:29). In Numbers 31-35 nothing is embodied in the narrative that does not relate to the land.

In Deuteronomy everything is focussed on this theme, and therefore special attention has to be given to it. By its end the point is reached where the people are on the edge of possessing the land, but it is still not reached. It is over-stating the case to suggest that Deuteronomy only refers to 'the land' as *the* patriarchal promise, as references to the promise of a large family occur in 1:10; 10:22; and 28:62. However, it remains true that Deuteronomy is replete with references to the land, and the most characteristic phrases used of it are 'the land you are to possess' (22x) and 'the land which the LORD your God gives to you' (or, 'us') (34x).

#### THE LAND AS PROMISE

The fact that the LORD swore an oath regarding the land is referred to in 1:8, 35; 4:31; 6:18, 23; 7:8, 12, 13; 8:1, 18; 10:11; 11:9, 21; 13:18; 19:8; 26:3, 15; 28:11; 29:12; 30:20; 31:7, 20, 21, 23. It is notable that most of these occur in the introductory section up to the end of the exposition of the First Commandment, and then in the concluding section from chapter 26 onwards. The reference is to the oaths made to the patriarchs, and some further comment on them is needed. The promise regarding a large family and a land are inter-connected. The large family needs living space, just as a land needs not only vegetation but occupants.

The story of Abraham opens with the promise of the land (Gen. 12:1ff.). He was told that he was to go out from his own land to a country which he would be shown. This promise is made more specific when it was indicated to him in 12:7 that

this country was to be the land of Canaan. It was repeatedly confirmed to him that God was going to give his descendants that land (13:14-17; 15:7, 13, 16-18 [with geographical indications]; 17:8). The promise of the land is embedded in the covenant formulations in chapters 15 and 17. It is probably better to speak of the 'sworn land' rather than 'the promised land' as Hebrew has no specific word for promise. In English translations 'promise' can be a rendering of the verbs 'to say' (Heb. *'amar*) or 'to speak' (Heb. *dibbêr*), but the Old Testament's most frequent expression in this connection is of the land which the LORD swore (*nishba'*) to give to Israel. The stress falls on the fact that the gift of the land is a free and sovereign one by God, but also on the connection between obedience and the fulfilment of God's promise (cf. Gen. 22:16, 'because you have done this'; Gen. 26:5, 'because Abraham obeyed me').

The promise was repeated to Abraham's descendants, with specific reference back to the promise to Abraham. At a time of famine Isaac was told not to go down to Egypt but to stay in the land and enjoy the blessing of the LORD. The assurance was given to him: 'For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham' (Gen. 26:3b). These words simply re-echo what was promised in the earlier passages already cited. Later in the same chapter there is the account of the dispute between Isaac's servants and the herdsmen of Gerar over wells. Finally they dug a well which was called Rehoboth, of which Isaac said: 'Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land' (Gen. 26:22).

The promised blessings flow to Jacob, not to Esau. At Bethel the promise of the land is repeated to him, and again it occurs with reference back to Abraham. The LORD identified himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac before going on to assure him: 'I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying ... I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you' (Gen. 28:13-15). Later, when Jacob returned to Bethel from Paddan Aram, God again confirmed the same promise,

saying: 'The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you' (Gen. 35:12).

Once Moses was called to be God's agent in delivering his people from Egypt, the LORD reaffirmed his promise regarding the land. He spoke of delivering his people from their bondage and bringing them into the land flowing with milk and honey (Exod. 3:8, 17). The covenantal character of the oath regarding the land is re-affirmed in Exodus 6:4. As the people of Israel celebrated the first Passover, they were reminded of the need for their obedience when they entered the land the LORD had sworn to them (Exod. 12:24-25). The presence of Israel in Egypt was one aspect of the testing in regard to this promise.

#### THE CONTENT OF THE LAND

The geographical boundaries are specified in various ways in the Old Testament.

<b>Genesis 15:18</b>	From the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.
<b>Exodus 23:31</b>	From the Red Sea (Heb. <i>Yam Suf</i> ) to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River.
<b>Numbers 34:1-10</b>	A detailed description including the southern boundary (the wilderness of Zin), the western (the Great Sea), the eastern (the slopes east of the Sea of Kinnereth = Galilee), and the northern (a line from the Great Sea eastwards to Lebo Hamath).
<b>Deuteronomy 11:24</b>	From the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates to the western sea.
<b>Joshua 1:4</b>	From the desert (south) and from Lebanon (north) to the great river, the Euphrates (east) and to the Great Sea on the west.
<b>Psalms 80:8-11</b>	The vine out of Egypt (Israel) covered the mountains and the mighty cedars, its boughs went to the Sea (the Mediterranean), and its shoots as far as the River [Euphrates].

In Deuteronomy there are various descriptions of the land. While in Exodus 3:17 and Numbers 34:2 it is called the land of the Canaanites and Canaan respectively, in Deuteronomy 1:6 it is described as the land of the Amorites. In 7:1 it is described by reference to seven nations then dwelling within its borders. The only occasion in Deuteronomy in which the territorial boundaries are given is in 11:24 where its boundaries are described as being from the desert to Lebanon, from the Euphrates to the western sea. While the territory was never defined with geographical precision, yet its location and general borders were given with sufficient clarity.

It is referred to variously as 'the good land' (1:25, 35; 3:25; 4:21, 22; 6:18; 8:7, 10; 9:6; 11:17), and 'the land flowing with milk and honey' (6:3; 11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20). The summary report of Moses concerning the mission of the spies reported in 1:22-25 also includes the reference to the bringing back of produce to show how good a land it was. It is extolled as a land rich in natural products. The reference to 'milk and honey' parallels a similar expression on a tablet (written in another Semitic language, Ugaritic) found on the Mediterranean coast to the north of Israel. In one document (KTTU 1.6) Baal is said to send fertility and abundance in the form of fat/oil and honey.

- 13 The heavens rain fat/oil
- 14 the wadis flow with honey.

The use of the phrase in the biblical texts may well be a polemic against Canaanite concepts and thus a reminder to Israel that the real source of blessing is the true and living God.

Fuller descriptions are given of the possessions they will have in the land (see especially 6:10-12; 8:7-9; 11:10-15). Clearly Canaan was regarded as fertile, not just in comparison with the wilderness through which they had wandered, but also in comparison with Egypt (see especially 11:10, 11).

Another way in which the blessings of the land are described is to speak of 'rest' in the land (Heb. *m<sup>e</sup>nûchâh* 12:9; Heb. *nûach* 3:20; 12:10; 25:19). The reference in 25:19 is important because it links together the gifts of rest and of the land. In

the section dealing with covenant curses expulsion from the land is described as lack of rest (28:65). This 'rest' meant the end to life as refugees, so that Israel could look forward to enjoying a sedentary pattern of life. It also meant security from their enemies. It was to be life in the full enjoyment of God's blessings, along with the absence of war and conflict.

In Psalm 95 God encourages his people not to be like the wilderness generation, and the closing verse of the Psalm (v. 11) speaks of his oath that his people would not enter into his rest (Heb. *m<sup>e</sup>nûchâtî*). The reference appears to be to Numbers 14:23, 30 or to Deuteronomy 1:34, 35, except that instead of 'land' the psalm uses 'rest'. Clearly rest and the promised land were equated. The epistle to the Hebrews draws upon this psalm in a unit dealing with believers entering into the eschatological rest (Heb. 3:7–4:13). Just as rest awaited the church in the wilderness, so rest yet awaits New Testament believers. In this section of Hebrews 'rest' is identical with 'the heavenly country' sought by believers, 'the lasting city which is to come' (Heb. 13:14; cf. Heb. 11:16).

#### ISRAEL HAD NO CLAIM ON THE LAND

Eighteen times Deuteronomy mentions God's promise of the land to Israel, and in fifteen of these reference is made to God giving it. These references are important for two reasons. First, they emphasise the fact that it was not by sheer historical coincidences that Israel came into possession of Canaan. Long before Israel was constituted as a nation God had sworn an oath concerning the land. Israel's occupation of Canaan was, therefore, part of God's action in history. Secondly, the terminology used points emphatically to Canaan as God's provision. It was a gift of pure and undeserved grace. There is a clear connection between the idea of the land as a gift and the stress on God's free grace to his people. The initiative was God's, and his actions, including provision of Canaan, were an expression of his love for his people.

There was no natural right of Israel to the land. In entering the land Israel had to remember that it was not because of her righteousness that this was happening, but because of the wickedness of the nations previously in possession of it. When

the sin of the Amorites reached full measure (Gen. 15:16), they would be driven out. Even before God permitted them to enter, the Israelites had to learn the Song of Moses (Deut. 32) which was to be a testimony against them. In telling Moses to write down and teach the children of Israel the song, the LORD indicated that even before he brought them into the sworn land he knew what they were disposed to do (Deut. 31:29). Israel had no claim of herself to rights over the land.

This point is underscored in another way in Deuteronomy for there is stress on the fact that Israel can never own the land. It belongs to the LORD, not to Israel. He had proclaimed his ownership of the land in the words, 'the land is mine' (Lev. 25:23). Now in Deuteronomy the people are reminded that they can only enter into an allotment by inheritance (Heb. *nach<sup>a</sup>lâh*, 4:21; 19:10; 21:23; 24:4; 26:1) or by entering the land to possess it (Heb. *yârash*, 5:31; 19:2, 14; 21:1). At times these two expressions are combined when Israel is told that she is entering the land as an inheritance to possess it (Heb. *nach<sup>a</sup>lâh l<sup>e</sup>rishtâh*, 15:4; 25:19). The references to inheritance have to be understood in light of the fact that Israel was God's son. Since God's gift of the land is so prominent in Deuteronomy, this means that the idea of sonship is much more central to the book than might at first sight appear.

Three important consequences followed from this general concept. The first was that the Israelites were not tenants to an earthly landlord. Just as Israel protected the alien or sojourner in the land, so Israel was a sojourner under the protection of the LORD (Lev. 25:23), and to him the land belonged. Secondly, Israel was different from Canaan and other neighbouring countries in that no provision appears in the Old Testament for sale of land. That explains Naboth's refusal to sell his land to king Ahab (1 Kings 21). It could only come to others by inheritance. Pointing to a piece of land, along with the stated intention, was equivalent to a formal transfer. This was what the LORD did for Abraham (Gen. 13:14) and also for Israel through the covenant mediator Moses (Deut. 34:1-4). In one sense all the land was allotted to Israel, but God also arranged the individual allotment of territory to the specific tribes. Thirdly, because the inheritance belonged to the whole nation

no one was to be denied access to the privileges bestowed by life in the land. The benefits of the good land had to be shared with the Levites (Deut. 14:27) and also with the sojourners, the widows and the orphans (Deut. 26:12-13). Provision is also made for some of the harvest to be left behind for the needy (Deut. 24:19-21) and for a tithe of the crops for them every third year (Deut. 14:28-29).

There are difficulties in knowing how far these principles were observed throughout the Old Testament period. Clearly kings did accumulate property for themselves, just as Samuel warned would happen (1 Sam. 8:14), and kings such as Uzziah had vast estates (see 2 Chron. 26:6-10). It may well be that kings altered the legal system to make such aggrandisement possible (see Isa. 10:1-4). Perhaps kings and other wealthy people obtained land by taking it as a pledge, and then retained it when the loan could not be repaid. They could not sell the land but they could use it for their own advantage. This in effect was a way of getting around the provision that the land belonged to the Lord and that it could not be sold (Lev. 25:23). Redemption of the land was possible under some conditions (Lev. 25:25-28), and the law of the jubilee provided another means of ensuring return of the property to its original owner.

Loss of land may well have had wider social consequences. For example, participation in the local assembly may well have depended upon possession of property. If deprived of property a person would be excluded from the assembly. This would explain why the widow and the orphan were in such a disadvantaged position. The widow had no right of inheritance of property, and also had no place in the assembly, and was therefore unable to plead her own cause in that legal forum.

**THE GIFT OF THE LAND THREW EMPHASIS BACK ON THE GIVER**  
Time and again expressions are used that refer back to the one making the oath, the covenant God. The focus of attention is on the God who made the oath to the patriarchs, and who was the giver of the land. The ceremony described in Deuteronomy 26:15 highlights this fact. This ceremony consisted of various facets.

- a) It was to take place when Israel had come into possession of her inheritance of the land (vv. 1, 2, 3, 9).
- b) The individual Israelite was to take some of the produce of the land and bring them in a basket to the sanctuary (v. 2).
- c) To the priest he was to make the declaration: 'I have come to the land that the Lord your God swore to our forefathers to give us' (v. 3). The priest was then to take the basket and place it in front of the altar (v. 4).
- d) The Israelite was then to make a fuller declaration concerning his 'father' Jacob, and concerning the way God had fulfilled his word and redeemed his people from their bondage in Egypt.
- e) Along with the Levites and aliens the Israelite was to rejoice in the bounty of God's provision.

At the time of bringing in the first-fruits Israel would recall how God had fulfilled his promise of a land, and this recollection would take place every year on this occasion.

#### **GIFT OF THE LAND MEANT POSSESSION AND CARE OF IT**

The book of Deuteronomy recognises the rights of Israel to use the land and its products, but only in the context of the Israelites being the covenant people of the LORD. When enjoying the good things of the land the people had to remember that their own power had not achieved possession of the land for them. 'But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today' (Deut. 8:18). This was the controlling motive to govern their use of the land, and for many aspects of social and religious behaviour. They had to share their land with those like the Levites who were not given an allotment (Deut. 14:28-29), or with the aliens who had no right to land (Deut. 24:19-22). Their experience as slaves in Egypt should have given them a sense of compassion for the strangers in their midst. The land could be desecrated by certain actions as well, and they had to take care to fulfil all their obligations lest this happen (cf. Deut. 21:22-23 in reference to not leaving the body of an executed criminal on the tree overnight).

Israel's relationship with the land was quite different from the surrounding peoples and from the Canaanites. With those other nations there was often a mythical explanation of their connection with the land. Thus Babylon was Marduk's city, while Thebes was 'the honourable hill of the Primeval beginning'. Israel did not regard the land as divine, but rather saw it as a provision of God through historical events which he controlled. The connection with the land came through history, not mythology.

#### **CONTINUED POSSESSION OF THE LAND DEPENDENT ON OBEDIENCE**

The land was granted to Israel on condition she remained true to the requirements that God had placed on her. The threat of exile from the land is first stated in Leviticus 26:27-35, and then repeated in Deuteronomy 4:26-27. See also Deuteronomy 6:18; 8:1; 11:8, 21; 16:20; 28:11 ('if you fully obey ... the LORD will grant'); 28:58-63 ('if you do not faithfully follow all the words of this law ... you will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess'); 30:17-20.

This same point is made clear too by the fact that the earlier generation did not go into the land because of unbelief and disobedience, and that included Moses! Later, when the prophets were threatening the disobedient people with exile, they often seem to echo the very language of the covenant curses of Deuteronomy (see especially a passage such as Isa. 5:26-30 in comparison with Deut. 28:49-68).

#### **6. THE PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE OF DEUTERONOMY**

Like all of the Old Testament revelation Deuteronomy points beyond itself. It marks off another stage in God's dealings with Israel and preparation for fuller disclosures of his grace. Not only was revelation progressive in the Old Testament but it was prospective as well. That is to say, at each stage there were elements present pointing to revelation yet to come. In this way expectation was quickened, and believers were encouraged to look for God's future activity and disclosures.

In Deuteronomy two offices were designated that were to become central for later Old Testament history. These were kingship (17:14-20) and prophecy (18:9-22). The basic functioning of these institutions was set out by Moses, but yet considerable time was to elapse before they became operative. Kingship became firmly established under David, while the prophetic role came simultaneously to bear on every aspect of life. In addition, the priestly office continued to be related both to the worship of Israel and the ministry of instruction in God's law. The prophets were to take up all three offices and speak of the coming of the Messiah in terms of prophet, priest and king. Given the inherent imperfection of all the Old Testament institutions and the partial nature of the revelation it contains, Deuteronomy forms part of the older covenant scriptures that point to new covenant days. Prophet after prophet reminded Israel of what God had done through Moses at the time of the Exodus and of the law he had given. That law was a schoolmaster to lead to Christ (Gal. 3:24).

Christians cannot read the book of Deuteronomy (or any other part of the Old Testament) as if they were standing in the shoes of the original recipients of its message. It has to be read from the standpoint of the fuller revelation in the New Testament. The proclamation of Jesus and his disciples drew directly on Deuteronomy. Jesus quoted it in his temptations (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10 and parallels) and reaffirmed its emphasis on an all-embracing love to God (Matt. 22:37-38 and parallels). The apostolic preaching recorded in Acts draws upon it, especially to point to the fulfilment of the word concerning the prophetic office in the person of Jesus (Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22). In at least seven New Testament epistles there are quotations from Deuteronomy, with application made of its teaching to varied aspects of Christian doctrine and conduct. Perhaps the most significant of these is the quotation in Galatians 3:10-14. No one could perfectly keep the law, and so God's curse was universal in extent. It is only through God's redemptive work that the curse can be removed and blessing bestowed. Deuteronomy cannot be understood without an appreciation of the sequel set forth in the New Testament. By itself it is part of an overture that requires the finale provided in the

fuller New Testament revelation. The institutions and general teaching set out in Deuteronomy only find their fulfilment in Christ.

## 7. OUTLINE

The text of Deuteronomy can be divided in the following way:

### A. Historical Review (1:1–4:49)

1. God's Word to Israel (1:1-8)
2. Horeb to Hormah (1:9-46)
3. Progress towards Canaan (2:1–3:11)
4. Division of Territory (3:12-20)
5. The Line of Succession (3:21-29)
6. The Covenant in Miniature (4:1-40)
7. The Cities of Refuge (4:41-43)
8. Introduction to the Law (4:44-49)

### B. The Foundation of the Covenant Relationship (5:1–31)

1. The Ten Words (5:1-21)
2. Historical Review (5:22-31)

### C. Exposition of the Ten Commandments (6:1–26:15)

1. The First Commandment (6:1–11:32)  
(‘You shall have no other god besides me’)  
  - (i) Introduction (6:1-3)
  - (ii) The Shema (6:4-9)
  - (iii) Warnings (6:10-18)
  - (iv) Instruction for the Future (6:20-25)
  - (v) Privilege and Responsibility (7:1-26)
  - (vi) A Call to Remember (8:1-20)
  - (vii) God's Grace and Israel's Response (9:1–10:22)
  - (viii) Obedience and Service (11:1-32)
2. The Second Commandment (12:1–13:18)  
(‘You shall not make for yourself an idol’)  
  - (i) Pure Worship (12:1-28)
  - (ii) Dangers to the Faith (13:1-18)
3. The Third Commandment (14:1-29)  
(‘You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God’)  
  - (i) Mourning rites (14:1-2)

- (ii) Clean and Unclean Animals (14:3-21)
- 4. The Fourth Commandment (15:1–16:17)  
(‘Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy’)
  - (i) Compassion to Needy Brethren (15:1-11)
  - (ii) The Freeing of Slaves (15:12-18)
  - (iii) The Law of the Firstborn (15:19-23)
  - (iv) The Pilgrimage Feasts (16:1-17)
- 5. The Fifth Commandment (16:18–18:22)  
(‘Honour your father and your mother’)
  - (i) Righteous Judges (16:18-20)
  - (ii) The Lord the Sole Authority (16:21–17:1)
  - (iii) Rules Affecting Judgment (17:2-7)
  - (iv) The Supreme Tribunal (17:8-13)
  - (v) The Law of the King (17:14-20)
  - (vi) Priests and Levites (18:1-8)
  - (vii) The Voice of Prophecy (18:9-22)
- 6. The Sixth Commandment (19:1–22:8)  
(‘You shall not murder’)
  - (i) Cities of Refuge and Legal Procedures (19:1-13)
  - (ii) Tampering with Evidence (19:14)
  - (iii) False Witnesses (19:15-21)
  - (iv) The Wars of the Lord (20:1-20)
  - (v) God’s Law in Life and Death (21:1-23)
  - (vi) Humanitarian Acts (22:1-8)
- 7. The Seventh Commandment (22:9–23:14)  
(‘You shall not commit adultery’)
  - (i) Prohibitions for Farming and Clothing (22:9-12)
  - (ii) Laws Relating to Marriage (22:13-30)
  - (iii) The Lord’s Assemblies (23:1-8)
  - (iv) Hygienic Toilet Requirements (23:9-14)
- 8. The Eighth Commandment (23:15–24:7)  
(‘You shall not steal’)
  - (i) Various regulations (23:15-25)
  - (ii) Divorce and Re-Marriage (24:1-4)
  - (iii) Various Social Laws (24:5-15)
- 9. The Ninth Commandment (24:8–25:4)  
(‘You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour’)
  - (i) Remember Miriam (24:8-9)

- (ii) Just Treatment of the Debtor (24:10-13)
  - (iii) Just Treatment of a Hired Worker (24:14-15)
  - (iv) The Principle of Individual Responsibility (24:16)
  - (v) Justice for the Oppressed (24:17-22)
  - (vi) Justice in Corporal Punishment (25:1-3)
  - (vii) Justice for Workers (25:4)
10. The Tenth Commandment 25:5–26:15  
(‘You shall not covet ... anything that belongs to your neighbour’)
- (i) Levirate Marriage (25:5-10)
  - (ii) A Threat to Progeny (25:11-12)
  - (iii) Dishonest Weights (25:13-16)
  - (iv) Remember Amalek (25:17-19)
  - (v) Thanksgiving for the Land (26:1-15)
11. Covenant Commitment (26:16-19)

#### **D. Re-Affirmation of the Covenant (27:1–30:20)**

1. Future Covenant Renewal in Canaan (27:1-26)
  - (i) The altar on Mt. Ebal (27:1-8)
  - (ii) Proclamation of the Curses (27:9-26)
2. Blessings and Curses (28:1-68)
  - (i) The Blessings (28:1-14)
  - (ii) The Curses (28:15-68)
3. Covenant Renewal in Moab (29:1–30:20)
  - (i) Introductory Words (29:1)
  - (ii) Historical Reminder (29:2-8)
  - (iii) Appeal to Israel (29:9-15)
  - (iv) Warning Against Apostasy (29:16-29)
  - (v) Future Return to the Lord (30:1-10)
  - (vi) The Moment of Decision – Life or Death (30:11-20)

#### **E. Covenant Continuation (31:1–34:12)**

1. A New Leader and Divine Witnesses (31:1–31:29)
  - (i) Joshua as Successor (31:1-8)
  - (ii) Regular Reading of the Law (31:9-13)
  - (iii) Instructions from the LORD (31:14-29)
2. The Song of Witness (31:30–32:52)
  - (i) Introduction (31:30)
  - (ii) Appeal to Witnesses 32:1-4

- (iii) Israel's Rebellion 32:5-6
- (iv) Recital of Past Blessings 32:7-14
- (v) The Sin of Israel 32:15-22
- (vi) The Curses of the Covenant 32:23-35
- (vii) The Curses of the Covenant 32:23-35
- (viii) The Compassion of God 32:36-43
- 3. Moses' Appeal to Israel 32:44-47
- 4. Proclamation of Moses' Death 32:48-52
- 5. The Blessing of the Tribes 33:1-19
  - (i) Introduction 33:1
  - (ii) A Majestic Appearance 33:2-5
  - (iii) The Blessing of Moses 33:6-24
  - (iv) The Uniqueness of Israel's God 33:26-29
- 6. The Death of Moses 34:1-12
  - (i) A Glimpse into the Promised Land 34:1-4
  - (ii) Moses' Death and Burial 34:5-8
  - (iii) Joshua as Successor 34:9
  - (iv) The Uniqueness of Moses 34:10-12