

DEUTERONOMY

(All comments by Ronald Clements unless otherwise noted)

- 1) Means “Second Law,” derives from 17:18. Written as if given to Moses in Plains of Moab immediately prior to the Israelites crossing the Jordan. But actually written at many times by many writers over many years, mostly **after** the exile, at least 1500 years after Moses. Much more than law -- more a national polity, a form of government. Combines decrees, statutes, ordinances, religious regulations, ethical directions, behavior in home and society, directions for setting up governmental organizations. Though the fifth book of the Pentateuch, it is “a kind of center...for the literary composition of the Pentateuch for the development of Israel’s religious life.” But it also shows in many places that the authors had a detailed knowledge of the ways political treaties were written and imposed on conquered and/or vassal states. They also used a common technique of the times – they didn’t name themselves but attributed their writing to the greatest figure of the time – Moses! The authors are fully aware that they are writing of a time in the very distant past, so that the fiction of that time and place is very thinly maintained. Exact date of writing very unclear. A “book of law” -- probably Deuteronomy -- was found in the temple during Josiah’s reign (639-609 BCE – probably 622). (See note # 21 below.) Ronald Clements thinks that the Babylonian siege, destruction of the Temple, and the end of the Davidic line of kings, all formed a background to the composition of Deuteronomy. /// The negative side of the book: “the assumption that Israel could be the beneficiary of a divinely given entitlement to conquer, repress, and exterminate an entire population...” (See NIB pp. 285-287 for a partial moderation of this accusation.) “The early history of the many tribes and where they settled is far from clear. What we are left with is a single coordinated theological interpretation of a series of past events.”
- 2) Chaps 1-3 form a bridge between the four previous books and the next six (Joshua through 2 Kings), showing that Israel had a history before entering Canaan.
- 3) 1:1-7 – None of the places named in v 1 can be identified with certainty. /// v. 7 -- The Amorites were the hill people in the western part of Transjordan, between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. The Canaanites occupied the coastal areas. See map between pp. 6-7.
- 4) 1:46 – The Israelites have spent 38 years in the desert after refusing to go into Canaan from Kadesh-Barnea, the Lord waiting for an entire generation -- except for Moses and Joshua -- to die off.
- 5) 2:11 – “Rephaim” is not an ethnic term, but were the “spirits of the dead.” Used in Psalm 88:11(10 in some Bibles) and Isaiah 14:9 for “shades.” Emim, Anakim, and Avvim are the original occupants of southwest Palestine, but many population shifts took place before, during, and after the intrusion of the Israelites.
- 6) 2:14-15. Inconsistency: God has made special provision for these people for forty years. Now he allows none of them except Caleb and Joshua to enter the Promised Land. Ronald Clements: two theological points: faithfulness and care are exemplified, divine punishment of disobedience is revealed.
- 7) 2:34 – Clements: the authors and editors in the 6th century BCE felt deeply the weakness of their people -- the century of subjugation by the Assyrians and loss of most of the people in the ten Northern tribes contributed to the present weakness. Deuteronomy responded

to such a threat by reasserting that the Lord God was greater than all the powers ranged against them. “This book idealized the past in order to compensate for the inadequacies of the present.” But the modern reader can only salvage from the deuteronomists’ encouragement of warfare some elements of psychological and spiritual relevance: appeal to courage, faith, resistance to evil.

- 8) 4:10 – Actually, this is the second generation who did **not** stand before Mt. Horeb. It was their parents. This then is the deuteronomists’ backward projection into the past.
- 9) 4:19 – This detailed definition of the Second commandment was the deuteronomists’ reaction to the idolatry extant in the Israel of the exilic period, a polemic for the Sixth Century Jews as well as a reminder of the history of Moses and his contemporary Israelites.
- 10) 4:27 – Strongly points to a late origin of this speech, almost certainly after the disasters of 598 and 587 BCE.
- 11) 4:32-43 – Was “couched in heavy rhetorical form,” indicating clearly that the Law Code was spoken long before it was written down. The entire passage bears the marks of skilled preachers and persuaders.
- 12) 4:41-43 – List of cities corresponds to Joshua 20:8, which the deuteronomists probably used as a source. Listing these cities was a sign of “proof” of Israel’s claim to territory by divine law. For that law to be applicable, authority for its administration had to be in place.
- 13) 5:6-21 – The repetition of the 10 commandments and the use of Moses’ name by the deuteronomists was vital for the claim that the law was binding for all Israel, combining the miscellaneous traditions of the SCATTERED tribes. However, they probably existed first as verbal commandments (since the tablets they were written on were destroyed), then as written commandments as an independent document, until the deuteronomists inserted them into the Pentateuch’s final form in the 6th century BCE. /// It is clear that the 10 commandments were not intended to be **law**, but rather the teaching of moral precepts in an era and place where law was LIMITED in its execution. On the other hand, they have proved to be a primary contribution to the shaping of civilization. /// I, the Lord (Jahweh), your God (Elohim), am a jealous God (El). Elohim is plural of El, conveys that the one supreme being is in some sense plural. El was the highest Canaanite god; his son was Baal. Jehovah/Jahweh derives from the root “to be,” and means “He is.” Usually translated, “LORD.” (Adonai means LORD.) /// V. 3 – See 2:14-15 – Says that the entire generation that heard this before had died off. V. 9 – Punishment extends across three generations. See Jer 31:29-30. And adds that “steadfast love will show to thousands of generations.” V. 12 – “Observe” rather than “remember.”
- 14) 5:22-33. – All the traditional elements of the theophany on Mt. Horeb 38 years earlier are repeated. So the terrified people turn again to Moses as mediator.
- 15) 5:32-33. – Moses and the Israelites were looking to a future that the post-exilic deuteronomists and their contemporaries knew had already eluded them. If only that earlier generation had heeded God’s words, the people would not now be faced with the prospect of beginning again.
- 16) 6:10-19. – These vss are a parenthesis, interrupting the instructions as to the requisite attitude of mind necessary to maintain the commandments’ authority. These vss reinforce the First commandment and introduce the custom of wearing phylacteries. (See Exod 13:1-10, 11-16; Deut 6:4-9, 11:13-20.) They sharply rebuke any complacency that God’s gifts once received could never be taken away. It is in the **Shema** that the concept

of **love of God** is introduced, making God the supreme expression of **love**. (Deut. 6:4-5, with Leviticus 19:18.)

- 17) 7:2 – **A question!!!(JB)** – If the Lord wanted to exterminate these seven tribes, why didn't he do it himself rather than make the Israelites do it? /// Contrast with 7:6a and with vs 22. /// This entire chapter “has left a dangerous legacy of intolerance that has in turn set in motion further tragedies” (Ronald Clements). /// Chapter 7 reflects theologically on the problem posed by the inhabitants of the land. The response to this realization is two fold: 1) a theology of warfare: victory entirely a gift of God, 2) a religious apologetic: the relics of these people posed a danger which is seen by the deuteronomists as the cause of their present loss of faith. /// There is a great deal of variation throughout the OT as to just what happened when the Israelites entered Canaan. Here, total annihilation is ordered but there are many places where this obviously didn't occur. For a partial list of these, see the NRSV notes of 7:1-26, p. 263 in the 4th edition.
- 18) 9:4ff **JB:** If Palestine was truly a land of milk and honey, blessed with rain, etc., and Baal and his consort Anat were **not** responsible for this because **God was**, then God has been succoring the Palestinians all along. **Why, then,** is God driving them out and excusing the action with the rationalization that they were wicked for not worshiping him?
- 19) 10:1-5 – Entire history of the ark is obscure. Introduced as a mobile sanctuary in Numbers 10:34-35. Brought to Jerusalem in David's time (2Sam 6:12-19) and is last mentioned in 1 Kings 8:6. Now for the deuteronomists this belief needs reinterpretation. These five vss were among the latest to be introduced into the book, changing the emphasis from “God's throne to a container for the 10 commandments and a reminder of the Covenant.” Then when in 587 Jerusalem was destroyed, the significance of the ark persisted with it. In fact, in Jer 3:15-16 (see note 18 in Jer.), the role is totally negated.
- 20) 11:6 – A reference to Numbers 16. The significance here is that in the deuteronomists' time the people still faced internal enemies as well as external, as did the people of Moses' time.
- 21) **Chapters 12-26** are probably the earliest and original “Deuteronomy” -- although there may be some post-587 material added, especially 12:1-28 (laws of centralization) and 17:14-20 (regulation of the monarchy). In any event, all these laws in Deuteronomy were promulgated after the “Book of the Covenant” in Ex 20:22-23:19. They are structured on the basis of the 10 commandments (see NIB p 380 for Dennis Olson's work on this), though many rulings do not fit because they were inserted or redacted or serve as link passages.
- 22) 13:6-12 – Probably the intention was to deter and not expected to be invoked very often, nor did the lawmakers have any effective authority to implement their policies. Even Nehemiah was unable to take direct action, Neh 13:15-22. Clements denies that there is any way to “rescue some spiritual meaning and integrity for these deuteronomic demands.” The dangers that the legislation they were supposed to counter **cannot** be viewed as “hidden spiritual enemies who are to be defeated solely by faith and continued allegiance to the one Lord God,” as some apologists suggest.
- 23) 14:1 – In ancient times holiness was given a physical connotation requiring the marking of boundaries between “clean” and “unclean.” So dietary rules were only one part of the distinction between “profane” and “sacred.” Some rules were hygienic (e.g. carrion-eaters), but most just tried to establish an orderly **system** avoiding “mixed” forms of life.
- 24) 14:22-15:23 – “Represent an amplification of the law of the sabbath, a law that reflects a

consciousness of the divine order of time. Time is a gift of God...”

- 25) 15:1 – In Ex 23:14-17 these three observances are called “Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of the Grain Harvest, and Feast of the Fruit Harvest.” In Ex 34:18-26, these are same for #1 and #3, Feast of Weeks for #2. The union of Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread joined the sheep farmers and cereal farmers in a common religious celebration. The Feast of Weeks was originally celebrated seven weeks after the first grain was cut, then amplified in Lev 23:15-16 and called Pentecost. The Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles) originally required simple shelters because it occurred in late summer; then was later reinterpreted as imitations of the temporary shelters made by the Israelites when they fled Egypt. All three probably had their origin in the earliest stages of organized agriculture in the Near East. In post-exilic times, this legislation unified the now dispersing Israelites.
- 26) 16:18-18:22 – Outlines the four areas of authority: judiciary, levitical priesthood, monarchy, and prophets. The provisions outlined **endorse** the institutional life of ancient Israel and point to a trend rather than sudden reformation. They were related to the major changes by Josiah (639-609 BCE, 2 Kings 22-23), again indicating that the deuteronomists were at work **after** that time. All four areas are ultimately dependent on God’s will, making this a theocracy.
- 27) 17:14-20 – Were aimed at preventing another ruler like Solomon who effectively caused the breakup of the United Kingdom. Though divinely chosen, the king was clearly not divinely born, had limits set upon him as to what he could do. The roots of this limited monarchy go back to Josiah (see Note #26). /// The statute referring to horses was promulgated to prevent the Israelites from returning to Egypt.
- 28) 18:1-14 – The origins of the Levites as priests is not as clear as it seems here and elsewhere (i.e. a separate tribe). And not all priests were Levites (see 2 Sam 8:18). They may have simply been men who had no land holdings but were unwaveringly committed to a sole Lord. At the post-exilic time they were second-rank sanctuary ministers, offering prayers, singing psalms, and preaching. Deuteronomy defined this position and encouraged all Levites to participate more fully.
- 29) 19:1 ff – This ruling was not to free the killer of responsibility for an accidental death, but to ensure that he got an impartial judgment from authorities unrelated to the dead man. Cities: Ramoth in Gad (Gilead), Golan in Manasseh (Bashan), Bezer in Reuben.
- 30) 20:12 – These deuteronomistic demands were not meant to be taken literally, only to reinforce that faith, courage, and loyalty to God is sufficient to win the battle. (See also note # 17, Chap. 7.)
- 31) 21:18-21 – In the Mishnah, this ruling is evaluated and found to have so many qualifications that it is unlikely that the punishment was ever carried out.
- 32) 22:10 – In the context, this seems to be an injunction against mixing things, in this case possible miscegenation. The verb translated as “plow” may also be translated “mate.”
- 33) 23:18-25:4 – Laws to protect the community as a whole, not just the successful members, necessary in post-exilic times because of the increasingly sophisticated and diverse forms of urban living.
- 34) 25:5ff – This practice is specifically prohibited in Num 20:21. It may have been written later and reflects the fact that the levirate marriage was never popular, nor enforceable, and rarely done.
- 35) 26:1-10a. – Confessional recital that has attracted much attention because of its history-

- centered emphasis. A bridge is built between past and present, between generations. This is followed up with another confession in vss. 13ff to accompany the triennial tithe.
- 36) 27:14-36 – This dodecalogue probably existed independently as ten curses (2-11), all dealing with secret doings and therefore not subject to ordinary law. Curses 1 and 12 were probably added by the deuteronomists to correspond to the 12 tribes. The six tribes pronouncing blessings were the more favored ones, sons of Jacob's wives Rachel and Leah. The six pronouncing curses are descendants of Jacob's concubines Bilhah and Zilpah.
- 37) **Chapter 28** -- draws on recent memory of what actually happened to Israel, confirming the point that catastrophe would plague the Israelites if they strayed from the Laws of Moses. /// Vss 1-46: "All aspects of human life are covered by the comprehensive sweep of God's law since they relate to family life, agriculture, and military success."
- 38) 28:36 – This was probably Jehoiachin, taken to Babylon in 598 (2 Kings 20), not Zedekiah, who was taken in 587 and killed in Babylon. So this indicates that this section was written between those years.
- 39) 28:47-62.– Probably specific recollections of horrors that took place during the Babylonian siege of 588-587. (See also Lamentations 2:20.)
- 40) **Chapters 29-30** – The great farewell speech of Moses. But it was composed while the Israelites were in Babylon and added to the original law book of Deut 4:44-16:19. Its central message is the "insistence on the possibility of repentance and the return of Israel to nationhood as part of a great purpose that God would bring about." The present situation is identical to that which faced Moses and the Israelites on the Plains of Moab waiting to cross the Jordan. The speech aims to give hope to the **present day** Israelites. Expressed especially in 30:6, which is almost identical to Jer 31:33-34, and Ezek 36:25-27.
- 41) 32:1-44 – The Song of Moses. 1-28: Basic imagery and form are that of a lawsuit bringing an indictment against Israel. 29-42: The narrator assumes divine authority and accuses the nations of misunderstanding. 43-44: The verdict against the unnamed nations. /// Probably written after the exile, perhaps even when the Pentateuch was formed.
- 42) 32:8-9.– New translations based on Qumran fragments read: "...he fixed the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the gods," reflecting the belief that there were many gods for other nations, the Lord being the chief one.
- 43) 32:33-38 – A moral inconsistency. God has used these cruel enemies to punish Israel, now He exacts vengeance by ridiculing their gods.
- 44) 33:2-5, 26-29.. This is one hymn of praise, split to form a framework for the blessing of the tribes, probably pre-exilic. The storm-theophany is also found in Ps. 29:3-9. Vs. 5 may refer to Moses as king, or to the Lord as divine king. /// Vss 6-25. The Song is a final farewell by Moses to a nation he has led and nurtured for a generation. The author -- probably post-exilic -- goes to great pains to include all the tribes except Simeon even though the fortunes of several tribes had long been almost totally lost.