

Introduction to Deuteronomy

Title

The word "Deuteronomy" (meaning "repetition of the law"), as the name of the last book of the Pentateuch, arose from a mistranslation in the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate of a phrase in [Dt 17:18](#), which in Hebrew means "copy of this law." The error is not serious, however, since Deuteronomy is, in a certain sense, a "repetition of the law" (see Structure and Outline). The Hebrew name of the book is *`elleh haddebarim* ("These are the words") or, more simply, *debarim* ("words"; see [1:1](#)).

Author

The book itself testifies that, for the most part, Moses wrote it ([1:5](#); [31:9](#), [22](#), [24](#)), and other OT books agree ([1Ki 2:3](#); [8:53](#); [2Ki 14:6](#); [18:12](#))--though, of course, the preamble ([1:1-5](#)) and the report of Moses' death (ch. [34](#)) were written by someone else. Jesus also bears testimony to Mosaic authorship ([Mt 19:7-8](#); [Mk 10:3-5](#); [Jn 5:46-47](#)), and so do other NT writers ([Ac 3:22-23](#); [7:37-38](#); [Ro 10:19](#)). Moreover, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy as authoritative ([Mt 4:4](#), [7](#), [10](#)). In the NT there are almost 100 quotations of and allusions to Deuteronomy. Tradition uniformly testifies to the Mosaic authorship of the book (see, e.g., [Mk 12:19](#)). See Introduction to [Genesis](#): Author and Date of Writing.

Date

The book is probably to be dated c. 1406 B.C. (see Introduction to [Genesis](#): Author and Date of Writing).

Historical Setting

Deuteronomy locates Moses and the Israelites in the territory of Moab in the area where the Jordan flows into the Dead Sea ([1:5](#)). As his final act at this important time of transferring leadership to Joshua, Moses delivered his farewell addresses to prepare the people for their entrance into Canaan. These addresses were actually a covenant renewal (see Structure and Outline). In them, Moses emphasized the laws that were especially needed at such a time, and he presented them in a way appropriate to the situation. In contrast to the matter-of-fact narratives of Leviticus and Numbers, the book of Deuteronomy comes to us from Moses' heart in a warm, personal, sermonic form of expression.

Theological Teaching

The love relationship of the Lord to his people and that of the people to the Lord as their sovereign God pervade the whole book. Deuteronomy's spiritual emphasis and its call to total commitment to the Lord in worship and obedience inspired references to its message throughout the rest of Scripture.

Structure and Outline

Deuteronomy's literary structure supports its historical setting. By its interpretive, repetitious, reminiscent and somewhat irregular style it shows that it is a series of more or less extemporaneous addresses, sometimes describing events in nonchronological order (see, e.g., [10:3](#)). But it also bears in its structure clear reflections of the suzerain-vassal treaties (see chart on "Major Covenants in the OT," [Genesis 9:9](#)) of the preceding and then-current Near Eastern states, a structure that lends itself to the Biblical emphasis on the covenant between the Lord and his people. In this sense Deuteronomy is a covenant renewal document, as the following outline shows:

I. The Preamble ([1:1-5](#))

¹ <https://sites.google.com/a/indubiblia.org/inductive-bible-study/deuteronomy-1>

II. The Historical Prologue (1:6-4:43)

III. The Stipulations of the Covenant (4:44-26:19)

A. The Great Commandment: The Demand for Absolute Allegiance (4:44-11:32)

B. Supplementary Requirements (chs. 12-26)

1. Ceremonial consecration (12:1-16:17)
2. Governmental leaders and a righteous nation (16:18-21:21)
3. Sanctity of God's kingdom (21:22-25:19)
4. Confession of God as Redeemer-King (ch. 26)

IV. Ratification; Curses and Blessings (chs. 27-30)

V. Leadership Succession under the Covenant (chs. 31-34)

A. Change of Leadership (31:1-29)

B. Song of Moses (31:30-32:47)

C. Moses' Testamental Blessing on the Tribes (32:48-33:29)

D. Death of Moses and Succession of Joshua (ch. 34)

The book is sometimes divided into three addresses:

I. First Address (1:1-4:43)

II. Second Address (4:44-28:68)

III. Third Address (chs. 29-33)

IV. Moses' Death (ch. 34)