

DEUTERONOMY

Introduction

*Even if this book was probably written as introduction to the **Historical Books** that follow, it is for us the end of the **Pentateuch**, the fifth of the Five Books.*

Its name means “Second Law” because it is a recompilation of the most important laws of Israel. All these laws are placed on the lips of Moses because of his prestige and to show that they follow in the same spirit, even though its writings take place several centuries later.

DECALOGUE AND EXHORTATION

⁴⁴⁴This is the Law which Moses gave to the children of Israel. ⁴⁵These are the precepts, decrees, and laws which Moses made known to the children of Israel after their departure from Egypt.

⁵¹Moses gathered the whole of Israel and said to them:

—Listen, Israel, to the laws and norms which I teach you this day. Learn them and be careful to put them into practice.

²Yahweh, our God, made a covenant with us in Horeb, and his covenant ³was not only with our fathers, but with us as well who are all alive here today. ⁴Yahweh spoke with us face to face from the midst of the fire in the mountain. ⁵And I stood between Yahweh and you to transmit his word to you, since you could not go up the mountain for fear of the great fire.

These were his words:

⁶I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of slavery.

⁷—‘Do not have other gods before me.

⁸‘Do not have idols, do not make any figure of things in the heaven or here below on the earth, or in the waters under the earth. ⁹Do not kneel before them or worship them, because I, Yahweh, am your God, a jealous God who punishes the children until the third and fourth generation for the wickedness of their parents who hate me. ¹⁰But I am merciful to the thousandth generation to those who love me and obey my commandments.

¹¹‘Do not take the name of Yahweh, your God, in vain because Yahweh will not leave unpunished him who takes his name in vain.

¹²‘Take care to keep holy the sabbath day, as Yahweh, your God, commands you. ¹³You have six days to work and do your tasks. ¹⁴But the seventh day is the Day of Rest in honor of Yahweh, your God. Do not do any work, you or your child, or your servant, or your ox, or your donkey, or any of your animals. Neither will the foreigner who lives in your land work. Your servant will rest just like you. ¹⁵Remember that you were once enslaved in the land of Egypt from where Yahweh, your God, brought you out with his powerful hand and outstretched arm. For that reason, Yahweh, your God, commands you to observe the sabbath.

¹⁶‘Honor your father and your mother as Yahweh, your God, has commanded, and you will live long and it will be well with you in the land which Yahweh, your God, gives you.

¹⁷‘Do not kill.

¹⁸‘Do not commit adultery.

¹⁹‘Do not steal.

²⁰‘Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.

²¹‘Do not desire the wife of your neighbor. Do not covet the house of your neighbor, or his field, or his servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is his.’

²²These are the words of Yahweh said to the whole assembly on the mountain when he spoke from the midst of the fire and the thick cloud. He said only this and he wrote these words on the two slabs of stone which he gave to me.

6¹—‘These are the commandments, the norms and the laws that Yahweh, your God, has commanded me to teach you so that you may observe them in the land which is going to be yours. ²Fear Yahweh, observe his commandments all the days of your life and his norms that I teach you today. So also for your children and your children’s children that they may live long.

³‘Listen, then, Israel, observe these commandments and put them into practice. If you do this, you will be well and you will multiply in this land flowing with milk and honey, as Yahweh, the God of your fathers, promised you.

⁴‘Listen, Israel: Yahweh, our God, is One Yahweh. ⁵And you shall love Yahweh, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶Engrave on your heart the commandments that I pass on to you today. ⁷Repeat them over and over to your children, speak of them when you are at home and when you travel, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸Brand them on your hand as a sign, and keep them always before your eyes. ⁹Engrave them on your doorposts and on your city gates.

¹³—‘Fear Yahweh, your God, serve him and call on his Name when you have to swear an oath.

¹⁶‘You shall not put Yahweh, your God, to the test, as you did in Massah.

¹⁷‘Observe the precepts, the commandments and the norms that Yahweh has commanded you.

¹⁸‘You shall do what is right and good in the eyes of Yahweh that you may be happy and may come to possess the splendid land which he swore to your fathers ¹⁹he would give you after having destroyed all your enemies before you.

²⁰‘And when your child asks you one day: What are these precepts, these commandments and these norms which Yahweh has commanded us? ²¹You shall answer your child: We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt, but Yahweh led us out of Egypt with prodigious deeds. ²²And we have seen the great and wonderful things, the awesome marvels he has done against Pharaoh and all his people. ²³And he took us out from there to lead us into the land which he promised to our fathers. ²⁴Yahweh has commanded us to put into practice all these precepts and to fear him, our God. Because of this, we are happy and alive today, ²⁵and we shall be perfect in his eyes if we observe and practice these commandments as he has told us to do.

Moses, forty years later, just before dying, before entering the promised land, asks the people to renew the covenant, so that they will not forget what God has done with its people, and so that they will transmit that to their descendants.

29¹Moses summoned all the people of Israel and said to them:

—You have seen all that Yahweh did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, to his servants and to all his land:

⁹—‘You are all here today in the presence of Yahweh, your God: your leaders, your elders, your secretaries, all the people of Israel, ¹⁰with your sons and daughters, and with your wives, together with the foreigner who lives in your field, who cuts the firewood or fetches water for you. ¹¹You are here in this place to celebrate a Covenant with Yahweh, your God. ¹²Through this oath he makes you his people and he becomes your God, as he said to you and promised to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

¹³‘And not only with you do I make this covenant and this oath today, ¹⁴but I make it both with those who are here with you today in the presence of Yahweh and with those who are not here.’

30¹¹‘These commandments that I give you today are neither too high nor too far for you.

¹²They are not in heaven that you should say:

‘Who will go up to heaven to get these commandments that we may hear them and put them into practice.’

¹³Neither are they at the other side of the sea for you to say: ‘Who will cross to the other side and bring them to us, that we may hear them and put them into practice.’

¹⁴On the contrary, my word is very near you;

it is already in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can put it into practice.

¹⁵‘See, I set before you on this day life and good, evil and death. ¹⁶I command you to love Yahweh, your God and follow his ways. Observe his commandments, his norms and his laws, and you will live and increase, and Yahweh will give you his blessing in the land you are going to possess.

¹⁹‘Let the heavens and the earth listen, that they may be witnesses against you. I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰loving Yahweh, listening to his voice, and being one with him. In this is life for you and length of days in the land which Yahweh swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’

34¹From the barren plain of Moab, Moses went up to Mount Nebo, to the summit of Pisgah, opposite Jericho. And Yahweh showed him all the Land: from Gilead to Dan, ⁴And Yahweh said to him:

—This is the land about which I swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, promising it to their descendants. I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not enter it.

⁵Moses, the servant of God, died there in the land of Moab, according to the will of Yahweh.

¹⁰No prophet like Moses has appeared again. Yahweh conversed with him face to face.

Centuries later Israel will come back to these events to repent and renew the covenant.

You can read:

Psalms 106:1–15, 19–22, 43–47. Historical meditation about the seven capital sins of the people of Israel in the desert.

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U.P. P.O. Box 4, diliman 1101 Quezon City, Philippines

TE: 921-3984 • FAX: 921-6502

Email [mailto: cci@claret.org](mailto:cci@claret.org) Website: <http://www.bible.claret.org/>

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