

OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

DEUTERONOMY

The name Deuteronomy means *second law*. It suggests or may suggest that the book contains a second code of laws, or a recapitulation of laws already given. It is rather a summary of what it most concerned the people to keep in mind, both of the Lord's doings on their behalf, and of what they should do when settled in Canaan. The key word is *obedience*; key verse, chapter 4:1.

The contents of the book are distributed into four parts:

(1) *The discourses of Moses*, chapters 1-30. In the discourses Moses:

- Gives a brief summary of the events that had taken place during the past forty years chapters 1-4;
- Next he recapitulates the law of Sinai, with modifications, and more specific directions as to various ordinances, chapters 5-26;
- Then he shows the advantage of obedience, and the awful punishment for the neglect of the law, chapters 27-30.

(2) *Committal of the book to the custody of the Levites, and a charge to the people to hear it read once every seven years*, chapter 31.

(3) *The song of Moses, and the blessing of the twelve tribes*, chapters 32, 33.

(4) *Moses' death and burial*, chapter 34.

From chapter 1:3 we learn that it was at the end of the forty years' wandering, and just one month and seven days before the passage of the Jordan, that Moses pronounced the discourses contained in this book. It is believed that it took seven days to deliver the discourses and farewell. The old generation that came out of Egypt, with very few exceptions, was sleeping in the wilderness. Another generation had arisen during the forty years, and trained to hardness by the wilderness discipline, it was to make the conquest of Canaan. They were now stationed in the plains of Moab.

The good land of which they had heard so much was parted from them only by the Jordan. They seemed to have been eager, hopeful, resolute; and just such counsel, warning, and promises as Moses gives them were what they needed. How solemnly did the accents of the well-known voice fall on their ears—how impressive was the majestic presence of that extraordinary man, whose age was now one hundred and twenty years, and yet without a trace of physical decline or mental decay—for they knew it was for the last time they should see and hear him.

The circumstances under which the discourses of the book were delivered, explain largely its peculiarities. A certain “school” of interpreters is quite sure that Deuteronomy was not written by Moses, that it is of much later date. Various considerations are put forward in support of this view. Now it is immensely significant that this book is quoted often in the New Testament, and its authority recognized as fully as that of any other. Ninety times it is quoted and alluded to by the Saviour and the apostles.

The threefold use of the word by our Lord to repel the assault of the tempter, exhibits His confidence in the Scriptures; but the texts He uses are all from Deuteronomy. Is it credible that the Son of God would quote from a spurious document?

Besides, the writing of this book is directly ascribed to Moses, Deuteronomy 31:24, 25; and if it was not, then it is forgery, which none but an infidel would dare allege. If we keep in mind that Moses here addresses a new generation of his people, that the time is at the close of his own life, and just as the people were about to cross the Jordan and enter upon their inheritance, that they required such instruction and warning as is here given them, we shall find the key to all the difficulties that have been raised against its genuineness.

1. *Deuteronomy is in great part prophetic.* It has Canaan in immediate prospect. Modifications of laws and ordinances are made to suit the changed conditions of the Israelites. Moses is fully conscious of his own prophetic standing. He designates himself as the representative of that other Prophet in due time to be raised up for Israel, chapter 18:15-19. The hope of Israel as to the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah, rested mainly on this prediction of Moses, John 1:45; 6:14; Acts 3:22, 23.

The intimations of Israel’s future, with which Leviticus closes, are drawn out more at length in this book, chapters 27-33. It is evident to the seer (chapter 28) that the warnings and awful curses pronounced against disobedience would prove ineffectual, and the result would be followed by a dispersion of his people among the nations of the earth. And yet their continued existence is prophetically secured. They were not to become extinct, in spite of their frightful trials and age-long persecutions and tribulations; they were to abide, until God’s purpose in their sufferings should be accomplished, and then restoration, blessing, and peace, never again to be taken away, were to be their portion, chapters 30, 32.

2. *Blessings and curses of the two Mounts,* chapter 27.

When the land had become theirs, the people were to set up great stones and plaster them with plaster. Upon this smooth surface they were then to inscribe the law. The law contained the conditions on which the land was to be enjoyed.

Strict observance of it alone guaranteed continued possession. Then the people were to divide into two companies. Six tribes were to stand on Mt. Gerizim to bless, and six on Mt. Ebal to curse. The blessings are not here recorded, although from Joshua 8:34 it may be inferred what they were. The curses are written out in full, and are twelve, to correspond with the twelve tribes, it is thought.

It is noteworthy that both the law and the curses are found together on the same mount, viz., Ebal. Law and the curse going together! Most suggestive. **“As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them,”** Galatians 3:10; Deuteronomy 27:26.

The dreadful list closes with this sweeping imprecation. No blessing here; only appalling maledictions on the disobedient! Hopeless is the case of him who is under law for righteousness for it is written, **“By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin,”** Romans 3:20.

3. *A gracious promise*, chapter 33:2 5.

“And as thy days, so shall thy strength be.” There are many **“great and precious promises”** in the book, and even in this chapter, but this exceeds.

- What a general promise it is. Our days, all our days, till life shall end.
- What a particular promise it is; for it takes up our days, each day, and day by day to the end.
- What a varying promise it is; for it adapts itself to each day, and every kind of day, black or bright, prosperous or adverse, happy or miserable.

Surely it is a glorious promise!

But there is more in it. These are good words, but it is all important to know who says them.

- One who knows our days, Psalm 139:1-6.
- One who orders all our days, Psalm 37:23.
- One who measures our days, Psalm 31:15.
- One who loves His people through all the days, Jeremiah 31:3.
- One who will be with His people through all the days, Matthew 28:20.

“And, lo, I am with you alway (all the days), even unto the end of the world.”

4. *Moses' death and burial*, chapter 34.

It was the belief of the ancient Jews that Joshua wrote the account of Moses' death, contained in this chapter. However that may be, evidently it was long ago added to the book. The end of the great leader and law-giver was at length come. It might still have seemed a triumphant close was in store for the aged prophet.

“His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.”

No look of a dying man had he, as he climbed to the top of Pisgah. It was a deliberate march to death and burial. From the summit he saw the goodly land—he **“saw it with his eyes, but he was not to go over thither.”**

It was his last view. From that height he came down no more. Josephus’ pathetic description of Moses’ end may be here inserted:

“Amidst the tears of the people, the women beating their breasts and the children giving way to uncontrolled wailing, Moses withdrew. At a certain point in the ascent he made a sign to the weeping multitude to advance no further, taking with him only the elders, the high priest Eleazer, and the general Joshua. At the top of the mountain he dismissed the elders, and then, as he was embracing Eleazer and Joshua, and still speaking to them, a cloud suddenly stood over him, and he vanished in a deep valley.”

In that strange land, the land of Moab, Moses, the servant of the Lord, died, **“And he buried him in a valley,” “And no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.”**

On the grave of the lawgiver in the mountains of Moab, on the grave of an infinitely greater than Moses, the Lord Christ, the darkness settled. No one knows of either with any certainty.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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