
Introduction

Deuteronomy has been aptly described as the heartbeat of the OT. Feel the pulse of Deuteronomy and you are in touch with the life and rhythm of the whole Hebrew Bible. Indeed, if we add the influence of the book on Jesus, Paul, and the early NT church, it is a profoundly significant book in the whole Christian canon of scripture. If another measure of the relative importance of any biblical book is the amount of secondary literature it has generated, then on that scale, Deuteronomy weighs very heavy indeed. Deuteronomic bibliography, though presumably as finite as Stephen Hawking's universe, seems without boundaries and ever expanding.¹

Title

The English name of the book comes from the Greek translation of 17:18, where the Hebrew speaks of "a copy of this law." The LXX used the term *deuteronomion*, meaning "second law." In a sense, this is misleading, since the book is certainly not a second law, but rather a renewal and reinforcement of the law given at Mt. Sinai. About half of the "Book of the Covenant" (Exod. 21–23) is reproduced in Deuteronomy, but usually with additional motivational and explanatory preaching. The title of the book in the Hebrew canon is its opening words, *ʿelleh hadd^abārîm*, "These are the words." This more aptly points to the prophetic character of the book as both words of Moses and word of God, to be heard, heeded, and obeyed in each generation. These opening words also point to the similarity between Deuteronomy and the ancient Near Eastern treaty documents that often began in the same way. The covenantal nature of Deuteronomy is thus already signaled in its title.

Structure

Deuteronomy is so rich in content and texture that, like a rich fruitcake, it can be sliced in various ways. No single view of

the structure of the book can be said to be the only possible or “right” approach. At least four approaches are valid and helpful.

Speeches of Moses. The most natural reading of the text as it presents itself to us is as a record of speeches made by Moses to the Israelites just before his death. Using the similar phrases, “These are the words” (1:1), “This is the law” (4:44), and “These are the terms [lit. words]” (29:1), as markers, we can isolate three major sections of Moses’ speeches:

1:1–4:43	A historical review followed by exhortation
4:44–28:68	Exhortation to covenant loyalty followed by the law, covenant renewal, blessings, and curses
29:1–30:20	Summary and concluding challenge

This is then followed by a kind of epilogue of the last acts of Moses: his commissioning of Joshua, his Song and Blessing, and finally his death.

Because these speeches are presented as immediately prior to Moses’ death, they give the whole book a testamentary character that thus enhances the seriousness of its challenge to Israel.² Von Rad regarded this as linked to the alleged use of Deuteronomy in ceremonies of covenant renewal at Shechem. Polzin’s more recent literary study of the speech form of the book exposes how the voice of the narrator, the voice of Moses, and the voice of God are intermingled, as are the two audiences of the book—Moses and his audience, and the narrator and his. The effect, according to Polzin, is to enhance the status of the voice of the narrator, in preparation for “his” authoritative interpretation of the following history of Israel from Joshua onward.³

Covenant form. Ever since the discovery of the texts of vassal treaties from the Hittite empire of the 2d millennium and the Assyrian empire of the 1st millennium, there has been a vast amount of work on the comparison between these treaties and the biblical covenant as a way of describing the relationship between Yahweh and Israel.⁴ It is clear that Deuteronomy is not in itself simply the text of a treaty. Nevertheless, it does speak of ongoing acts of covenant renewal, and its structure bears the marks of the regular form of ancient Near Eastern treaty texts.

This provides another way of dividing up the book. The italicized terms that follow are the key elements in the treaty form, with the matching section of Deuteronomy alongside:

- (a) *Preamble*, identifying the speaker and addressees (1:1–5)
- (b) *Historical prologue*, relating significant events in the relationship between the parties (1:6–4:49)
- (c) *General stipulations*, outlining the broad terms of the treaty (5–11)
- (d) *Detailed stipulations*, the specific requirements of the imperial state on its vassal (12–26)
- (e) *Blessings and curses*, as sanctions and motivation for observing the treaty (27–28)
- (f) *Witnesses* (cf. 30:19; 31:19; 32)

In addition, the treaties usually contained some instructions for the storage and public reading of the treaty document, such as those found in Deuteronomy 31:9–13, 24–26.

Deuteronomy has done more than simply apply the secular model of the vassal treaty to Israel's conceptualization of its relationship to Yahweh. Deuteronomy has transformed the political form into a vehicle for a very powerful theological message, in which the first three sections become the foundation for all the rest. That is, the detailed requirements of God on Israel are all founded upon the grace of God manifested in their history. This is not only a structural matter but is also reflected in the way the very vocabulary of Israel's response to Yahweh in chapters 12–26 mirrors that of Yahweh's actions toward Israel in chapters 1–11.⁵ This priority of grace and divine action within the covenant framework will become more and more apparent in the commentary below.

Concentric literary pattern. Whereas more traditional literary criticism has been absorbed with isolating sources and layers of the redactional history of Deuteronomy, newer literary interest in the book has explored its qualities as a work of amazing literary skill and artistry. D. L. Christensen has analyzed in great depth the poetic features of the composition of the text and has

observed in particular the feature of concentricity. Sometimes called chiasmus, this is the technique of arranging material in a balancing order in which a number of points are made and then, after a central point is established, the original points are repeated or balanced in reverse order. There is thus a movement “in” to the center and then back “out” to the frame again. The aesthetic appeal of balance and symmetry is very broad; it is often found in the visual arts, in music, and in poetry. Christensen argues that, although Deuteronomy is not strictly poetry in the same form as, say, the Hebrew Psalms, its rhythmic prose and repetitive phraseology point to a poetic, and possibly a musical, composition whose form facilitated its memorization and preservation.⁶

Concentric structures can be observed at all levels in the book, and the more obvious ones will be pointed out in the commentary. Christensen presents the whole book in the following structure, which can be supported by numerous textual links and echoes in the related sections.⁷

- A THE OUTER FRAME: A Look Backward (Deut. 1–3)
- B THE INNER FRAME: The Great Peroration (Deut. 4–11)
- C THE CENTRAL CORE: Covenant Stipulations (Deut. 12–26)
- B’ THE INNER FRAME: The Covenant Ceremony (Deut. 27–30)
- A’ THE OUTER FRAME: A Look Forward (Deut. 31–34)

The outer frame could be read continuously, its connecting figure being Joshua, commissioned to lead Israel on from the past victories (chs. 1–3) into the land ahead (31–34). Likewise the inner frame could be read continuously, similarly joined by the references to blessings and curses, and the ceremony on Mt. Ebal. The intricate patterning of the material in this form, with the many internal signs of literary art as well, would seem to militate against the common critical view of Deuteronomy (e.g., Mayes) as a book that has grown from a basic law code by a lengthy process of additions and redactions.

An expanded Decalogue. The clearest feature of Deuteronomy is its call for total loyalty to Yahweh as sole God. This, of course, is also the fundamental demand of the first and second commandments of the Decalogue. The great didactic section in chapters 4–11 is designed to inculcate by every means possible the importance of these opening commandments. Several scholars, however, have gone beyond this observation to suggest that the

arrangement of the laws in the central section, chapters 12–26, is also governed by the Decalogue.⁸ Those who have taken this general view have not agreed on the precise identification of particular sections with specific commandments, but the broad outline seems generally convincing. The links are clearer with some commandments than with others. Fuller discussion follows in the commentary, but the following correlations are worth noting.

12–13	The first, second and third commandments are reflected here in the demand for purity of worship and exclusion of all foreign gods.
14:28–16:17	The fourth commandment (sabbath) underlies this section with its emphasis on the “holy rhythms” of Israel’s life, and on care for the poor.
16:18–18:22	The fifth commandment (honoring parents) is the foundation for the respect for legitimate human authority that in this section is focused on judge, king, priest, and prophet.
19:1–21:9	The sixth commandment (prohibiting murder) underlies the opening and closing laws in this section. In between, the eighth and tenth (19:14) and ninth (19:15–21) are also alluded to.
22:13–30	The seventh commandment (prohibiting adultery) is the basis for regulating a number of related sexual offenses.
23–26	The laws become more miscellaneous in this final section, but the eighth and tenth commandments (against theft and covetousness) may be here translated into a community ethos of care and compassion, especially for the weak and poor.

Even if the analysis is not clear-cut, it seems broadly convincing that the Decalogue has influenced the ordering of the legal material in Deuteronomy. The effect is not merely to produce literary or structural balance, but to amplify the theological and ethical challenge of the commandments and thus draw out the spirit and “ethos” of the law.⁹

Date and Setting

The book presents itself to us as a record of some speeches of Moses shortly before his death, in the context of a renewal of the covenant on the plains of Moab before the people of Israel crossed the Jordan and settled in the land. However, since the work of de Wette in 1805, modern critical scholarship has tended to regard the book as the product of a much later period. The dominant view locates the book in the seventh century, in varying degrees of relationship to the great reforms of Josiah in the last quarter of that century. The primary reason for this link is that Josiah's reform centralized worship in Jerusalem, and centralization of worship is assumed to be the dominant thrust of Deuteronomy (esp. Deut. 12). Since de Wette it has been virtually universally accepted that the "Book of the Law" that was discovered in the temple in Josiah's reign (2 Kgs. 22) was all or part of the book now known as Deuteronomy. A common view is that what was found was a law book containing Deuteronomy 12–26 and the present book is the result of a long process of additions to that core by later Deuteronomists.

While some would associate the original Deuteronomy closely with the reform itself, and therefore envisage it as having been written shortly before that event in the late seventh century, others would see it as the product of a reforming tradition in Israel that goes back to the early seventh and eighth centuries. If the book is seen as the work of a group, or movement, or party, the identity of this circle is still a matter of considerable disagreement. How one identifies the authors depends on one's view of the content of the book and its purpose in relation to the historical conflicts, trends, and achievements of the late monarchy period. Some see Deuteronomy as the end product of the eighth-century prophetic movement and would associate it particularly with the prophetic circles of northern Israel.¹⁰ Others have linked it with Levites from the north, who came to Judah after the fall of Israel and preserved their traditions there.¹¹ Some have noted the similarities with the Wisdom tradition and associated Deuteronomy with the royal court circle in Jerusalem, as a book produced by the scribes for the support and education of the king.¹² Others, in contrast, have argued that the book, because of its allegedly northern, covenantal, ethos was radically critical of the Judean style monarchy, and aimed to reform its cultic tradition,¹³ or included the "centralization law" as a concession to buy accep-

tance in Jerusalem,¹⁴ or that the “centralization law” was a later addition to the original core of the book.¹⁵

This sample of the great variety of views on the identity and motives of the Deuteronomists shows the difficulty of tying the book down to one particular group with one particular aim. Furthermore, the link between the book as we have it and the actual reforms of Josiah is not as clear as was once alleged.¹⁶ Once the direct link with Josiah’s reform is recognized as decidedly tenuous, the original prime reason for confidently dating Deuteronomy in the seventh century as a “fixed point” of historical criticism is correspondingly diminished and the date of origin becomes a much more open question.¹⁷ Some of the supporting arguments for a seventh-century production are less convincing by themselves if the Josianic assumption is questioned. “The tendency to date Deuteronomy in the seventh century owes much to habit; the data themselves are capable of quite other constructions.”¹⁸ When some scholars see Deuteronomy as the product of a prophetic group, others as the work of priests, and yet others attribute it to scribal wisdom sources, such diversity causes one to wonder if the reverse direction of influence is not more probable, and certainly simpler as an explanation: namely, that Deuteronomy precedes the development of these movements and it is *it* which has influenced *them*. The strongest connections are, of course, with the prophets. In that regard, it is significant that one of the most marked features of prophetic rhetoric (the covenantal lawsuit) and one of the most dominant themes in their theology of history (God’s judgment on Israel at the hands of the nations, but an eventual reversal in which it falls on the nations and Israel is vindicated), are both expressed very powerfully in the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, which is regarded by many scholars as very early poetry, probably the oldest material in the book, and very likely premonarchic.

The position adopted in this commentary is that, first, historically, the arguments for a seventh-century *origin* of Deuteronomy are outweighed by those that see a much more ancient tradition enshrined in the book. Many scholars who regard the book itself as a product of the seventh century acknowledge that it contains much earlier material. The historical figure of Moses is clearly so central to the book and, without denying the very obvious likelihood of editorial updating of the material for subsequent generations, there seem to be no compelling reasons

why a substantially Mosaic legacy should not underlie the book, i.e., material that owes its origin to his creative and spiritual genius and that was profoundly formative in emergent Israel. Second, hermeneutically, it seems best to interpret and comment upon the text from the standpoint assumed in the book itself. There is no doubt that the abiding relevance of Deuteronomy was powerfully at work in different generations of Israel's history in the land (e.g., in the reforms of Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah), and indeed could speak a vital word to the generation of the exile and return.¹⁹ The constantly future orientation of the book virtually guarantees that ongoing relevance and address to later generations and centuries. But the book presents itself to us as the exhortations of Moses to Israel on the verge of the original settlement in Canaan, and it seems best, when expounding the text, to respect the integrity of that explicit context rather than to find explanations and meanings that depend upon the assumption that particular texts were actually pursuing a subliminal agenda related to issues of much later eras.

Missiological Significance

Deuteronomy is a book for a people on the move, literally at first, spiritually and morally thereafter. It sets Israel on the boundary of the land and looks beyond that boundary to what lies in store for Israel as it moves into the future with God. Furthermore, it is a book addressed in the name of a God on the move—Yahweh, the God who has been dramatically involved in Israel's own past movements, and indeed also in the movements of other nations on the great chessboard of history. It presents, therefore, a God of sovereign worldwide purpose and a people with a sharp spiritual mandate and moral agenda. The combination forges a dynamic factor in the biblical concept of the mission of those who claim to be the people of the biblical God. To explore the thrust of the book from this angle rescues the exercise from the rather static "list of themes" approach. Deuteronomy bends every rhetorical, literary, emotional, and moral skill to the task of equipping and motivating God's people to live for the purposes of God in each generation. This missiological edge can be felt in the following areas. Fuller discussion of each point will be found in the commentary on relevant texts.

The challenge to loyalty in the midst of culture change. Mission is sometimes defined (from the human angle) as the crossing of boundaries (cultural, geographical, linguistic, religious, etc.). On this definition, since Israelites were not “sent” anywhere, the OT (with the exception of Jonah) is often regarded as decidedly nonmissionary, in comparison with the centrifugal missionary expansion of the NT church.²⁰ Yet the OT is actually full of boundaries that God’s people were challenged to cross, whether in faith and obedience or in times of judgment and restoration: Abraham leaving Ur for the land of promise; Jacob and his family going down to Egypt; the exodus generation crossing the Sea of Reeds from slavery to freedom; the Deuteronomic generation, about to cross the Jordan into the land; the generation that went to Babylon; and the generation that faced the challenge of returning. Each “crossing” involved the facing of risks and dangers and questions from the new cultural context in which the people of God found themselves. For Abraham, the land of promise was also the land of Sodom, and his own nephew succumbed. Egypt became the place of bondage. The wilderness was an awesome time of testing in which a whole generation failed. The promised land was full, not only of giants in the eyes of the Israelites, but of idolatry and wickedness in the eyes of God. Babylonian imperialism threatened the very survival of the nation. The post-exilic generations faced prolonged frustration of their hopes. In each case, the primary challenge was to faith and loyalty in the midst of change.

Deuteronomy is a book on the boundary.²¹ The people of Israel faced the challenge of an idolatrous and polytheistic culture that, in spite of initial hostility, would prove enormously enticing and seductive. Would they remain loyal to the knowledge and love of the living God that had been entrusted to them through exodus and Sinai, or would they succumb to the pressures of syncretism by treating Yahweh as one among the gods of Canaan? Would they live as a distinctive (“holy”) community by the standards of justice and compassion that characterized Yahweh, or would they sink to the inequalities, corruptions, and perversions that were sanctioned by Baalism? Inasmuch as the relationship between the gospel and human cultures is a central missiological issue, the story of Israel’s engagement with Canaanite culture is a rich vein for cross-cultural missiological reflection, though not as yet greatly exploited for that purpose.²² It is significant, though not surprising, that when Jesus crossed his

personal Jordan from the obscurity of village craftsman to the temptations and hostilities of public ministry, he turned to Deuteronomy for the resources to confirm his own loyalty and obedience, as he wrestled with the implications of the mission he had embarked upon (Matt. 4:1–11).²³

The challenge of monotheism. Deuteronomy is uncompromisingly, ruthlessly monotheistic. It affirms that Yahweh alone is God and there is no other.²⁴ As will be discussed in the commentary (especially on chs. 4 and 6), this is no mere philosophical principle. The purpose of Deuteronomy is not to posit the singularity of deity, but to define the character of deity. God is God as revealed in Yahweh. It is crucial to insist on the specificity of biblical monotheism. The first commandment was not, “You shall believe in only one God,” but “I am Yahweh, the God of redemptive power and action demonstrated in the exodus liberation; you shall have no other gods to rival me.” But alongside this exclusiveness of Yahweh in relation to Israel there was also a definite universality regarding Yahweh’s dealings with the nations. Their movements are under his control (2:9–12, 19–23). By identifying Yahweh with El Elyon, the Most High God, the Israelites accept his disposition of the boundaries and destinies of the nation also (32:8f.).

From a missiological perspective, there is first of all a clear contrast between such historico-redemptively defined monotheism and all forms of polytheism and idolatry, whether fertility cults (7:5), astral deities (4:19), or gods of national pride (32:31). A primary feature of Israel’s mission (i.e., a major reason for their election) was to be the stewards of the knowledge of this unique God. “You were shown these things so that you might know . . .” (4:35, cf. the importance of the theme of “witness,” in Isa. 43:10–13, echoed in Luke 24:45–49 and Acts 1:8). The reason, therefore, for the totally uncompromising attitude to all forms of idolatry was not a racist hatred of foreign religions, but a total commitment to the saving truth. The tragedy of polytheism and idolatry is not the arithmetic (many gods instead of one), but that they exchange the only true source of salvation for lifeless and powerless substitutes, and in doing so, introduce injustice, bondage, and cruelty into human life (cf. Rom. 1:21–32). Baalism is an example, but it has many modern counterparts in western and other cultures. The category of the idolatrous in every culture

(including especially one's own, where it is most invisible) is one that needs far more careful attention and exposure than most biblical and theological scholarship currently affords it. For it is surely still as much the responsibility of the people of God to confront human idolatries with the reality of the living and saving God as it was for those addressed by Deuteronomy. Methods may change radically, but the mission is the same in principle.

Secondly, there is the relevance of OT monotheism to the uniqueness of Christ—the key missiological issue today as it has always been. In the dialogue between Christians and those of other faiths, there is a temptation to regard Jesus as simply the founder of Christianity in a way that cuts him loose from his deep roots in the Hebrew scriptures. Both in his own understanding of his mission, and in the interpretation of his identity and significance by his immediate followers in the NT church, Jesus shared in the uniqueness of Israel and in the uniqueness of Yahweh, the God of Israel. The historical particularity and redemptive character of OT monotheism coincide in the person of Jesus. It is not enough to acclaim merely the unique power of Jesus' life, or insights, or teaching, or example. The NT witness is that in Jesus the mission of Israel was accomplished (as the gospel went to the nations in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham) and that in Jesus Yahweh himself had been encountered in human life. God is God as revealed in Jesus of Nazareth.²⁵ Reflection, therefore, on such heartbeat texts as Deuteronomy 4:32–40 and 6:4f. must go on to detect their monotheistic but now Christocentric pulse in texts like 1 Corinthians 8:5f.²⁶

Israel as a model for the nations. God's call of Abraham was explicitly for the ultimate purpose of blessing the nations (Gen. 12:1–3). This fundamentally missionary intention of the election of Israel echoes through the OT at almost every level.²⁷ There was a universal goal to the very existence of Israel. What God did in, for, and through Israel was understood to be ultimately for the benefit of the nations.

More to the point as regards Deuteronomy, what God ethically required of Israel served the same universal, missionary purpose. Genesis 18:19 makes this connection very explicitly. Having repeated the divine agenda in verse 18, "all nations on earth will be blessed through him," God goes on,

For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just [lit. "doing righteousness and justice"], so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.

Syntactically and theologically, the verse binds together election, ethics, and mission, with ethics as the middle term. It will be the moral nature of the people of Abraham, who keep the way of Yahweh in righteousness and justice and bless the nations, that will enable God to fulfill the point of choosing Abraham. The text has a programmatic nature, all the more powerful by being in the form of direct divine speech. The very election of Israel (which is of great importance in Deuteronomy), in all its particularity, not only has a universal "missionary" goal but also leads to a clear and distinctive ethical agenda for God's people in the world as part of the condition of that goal being accomplished. Exodus 19:4–6 is a similarly definitive text that links Israel's obedience to the covenant law to their identity and role as God's priesthood in the midst of the nations. The idea of Israel as "a light to the nations" is another way of expressing the idea (cf. Isa. 42:6; 49:6b), and it is clear that the imagery of "light" is strongly moral (not just religious) in content (cf. Isa. 58:6–8; 60:3).

Deuteronomy is sometimes accused of being narrowly focused on Israel alone with no regard for this wider vision of Israel's role in God's purpose for the nations. Certainly its primary focus is on Israel as a society, but it would be unfair to take this as either an unawareness or an exclusion of the tradition of the blessing of the nations through Israel. The emphasis on the Abrahamic covenant alone would make such an oversight unlikely. Furthermore, the broader issue of Yahweh and the nations is to be found quite explicitly in the theology of the Deuteronomistic History (cf. Josh. 4:23f.; 1 Sam. 17:46; 2 Sam. 7:22–26; 1 Kgs. 8:41–43, 60f.; 2 Kgs. 5:15; 19:15–19). In Deuteronomy itself, the nations are treated in a broadly dual role: on the one hand, as a problem and snare to be resisted, and on the other hand, as the observers of Israel. In the latter role, the nations appear as witnesses to the quality of Israel's life or the blessing of God on them (4:6–8; 28:10), as well as to the judgment that Yahweh would pour out on Israel for their sin (28:37; 29:22–25).

The most significant of these texts for the case being made here is Deuteronomy 4:6–8 (see commentary). Its point is that if Israel would be shaped and characterized by the laws and insti-

tutions of the Sinai covenant, then they would be a highly visible exemplar to the nations both as to the nature of the God they worshipped and as to the quality of social justice embodied in their community.²⁸ This seems to be a deliberate linking of Israel's role among the nations to the socio-ethical structure of their corporate life: mission and ethics combined. The mission of Israel was to be a model to the nations. Mission was not a matter of going but of being; to be what they were, to live as the people of the God Yahweh in the sight of the nations.

Hermeneutically, this perspective also offers a potentially more fruitful way of handling the law as regards contemporary ethical relevance. The issue of the status and applicability of OT law in the Christian context has been a major point of debate and division in the church since the NT itself. Part of the problem seems to be that the law is discussed as an entity in itself, whereas it needs to be set explicitly in the context of the mission of Israel. The purpose of the law must be set in the light of the universal significance of Israel for the nations as a presupposition of any extended application. In order to answer the question, "Why the law?" we need to ask "Why Israel?"

The law was designed to mold and shape Israel in certain clearly defined directions, within their own historico-cultural context. That overall shape . . . thus becomes the model or paradigm intended to have a relevance and application beyond the geographical, historical and cultural borders of Israel itself. . . . The point is that this paradigmatic nature of Israel is not just a hermeneutical tool devised by us retrospectively, but theologically speaking, was part of God's design in creating and shaping Israel as he did in the first place.²⁹

Adopting such a paradigmatic assumption in interpreting OT law (which I have developed more fully elsewhere³⁰ and which is the stance adopted in this commentary) leads to several further steps as a hermeneutical strategy.

(a) One must ascertain in as much depth as possible *the function* of particular laws within the overall Israelite social system and use all appropriate critical tools in doing so. This requires historical and sociological understanding of Israel and its sense of community identity, worldview, and social objectives. There is an increasing body of research in this field.³¹ This will help us to discern what kind of law any particular legislation represents

and whether it is central or more peripheral in relation to Israel's major ideals.

(b) One should then articulate as precisely as possible *the objective*, within the ancient Israelite context, of any particular law or institution. What was it there for? This can best be done by asking further questions. What kind of situation was this law designed to promote, or to prevent? Whose interests did it protect—i.e., who would have benefited from it? Whose power was restricted or controlled by it? What social ideals are expressed or implicit in it? What effect would the functioning of this law have had on the social shape and ethos of Israel?

(c) Finally, one steps out of the ancient Israelite world into one's own modern socio-cultural context and seeks to *preserve the objective while changing the context*. If the answers to the questions above express something of God's intentions and ideals for Israel, then, assuming Israel's paradigmatic nature and God's moral consistency, what should we be aiming at in our own society? What policies, laws, structures do we need in order to achieve comparable or equivalent objectives? What critique can we bring to bear on existing social realities in the light of the biblical paradigm? Clearly we will not all come up with the same answers or identical proposals. But we will have released the power and authority of the OT law to affect and shape our ethical responses.

In all this it is assumed that, since Deuteronomy was addressed initially to the covenant people of God, it must be allowed to challenge the church today at a primary level, as regards its faithfulness or failure in embodying in its own community life the paradigm of justice, compassion, and neighborly love. But if Israel were to be a "light to the nations," then the paradigm must be applied beyond the church in our witness and challenge to wider secular society. Thus the missiological significance of Israel and its law will be given practical and context-specific ethical expression in a way that seems faithful to the dynamic pattern of the OT law and prophets themselves. In Deuteronomy then, we shall look for a substantial part of that social shape of Israel as an ethical model that can dynamically inform our ethical and missional objectives as those who are committed to the same God in the same world.

Deuteronomy's theology of history. While Deuteronomy is firmly grounded in the past events of election and redemption, it is predominantly a future-orientated book. It looks not only

to the immediate future—the crossing over to the promised land—but also to the long-term future of Israel in relation to God and of both Israel and God in relation to the nations. In this respect it is immediately relevant to a biblical understanding of mission, since nothing is more central to that than a vision of God’s ultimate purpose, which draws each generation of God’s people toward the future. And in its prophetic anticipation of the broad shape of Israel’s history as it unfolds in the OT, Deuteronomy also gave shape to the historical-eschatological theology of mission that is central to the NT.

At its simplest, Deuteronomy’s anticipation of history was that Israel, although called and given every possible incentive to live in loyalty to its covenant Lord, would in fact fail to do so. The Israelites’ “stiff-necked” nature would lead to rebellion and disobedience. As a result, the curses of the covenant would fall, including the terrible threat of scattering among the nations. However, beyond that judgment there lay the expectation of restoration and new life, if the people would return and seek God once more. This is the scenario that flows through the great concluding section of the book, chapters 27–32 especially. While the dominant issue is undoubtedly the fate of Israel, the nations are woven into the picture in several ways. They witness Israel’s failure and judgment and are shocked by it (28:37; 29:22–28). They are also the human agents through which that judgment is carried out (28:49–52; 32:21–26). And yet finally, in the amazing inversion and paradox of chapter 32, God vindicates his people in the midst of the nations (as enemies) in such a way that the nations are called upon to praise Yahweh and rejoice *with* his people (32:27–43). Thus, the history that will see the judgment and restoration of Israel will also see the judgment and blessing of the nations, each pair interwoven with the other.

It would exceed the scope of this introduction to trace the pervasive presence of these connected ideas through the OT itself. What is more important is to point out their influence on the NT. It is clear that Jesus linked his own mission to the hope of the restoration of Israel and that the Gospel writers had the same interpretation of the significance of his ministry. N. T. Wright, for example, suggests that Matthew has shaped his Gospel not merely in terms of the five books of the Torah (a common scholarly view), but specifically in terms of the sequence of thought in the great final section of Deuteronomy 27–34. In doing so, Matthew brings out the significance of the

story of Jesus “as the continuation and climax of the story of Israel, with the implicit understanding that this story is the clue to the story of the whole world.”³² Although Jesus limited his own ministry to the primary objective of the restoration of Israel, he left in his actions and words many hints of an expected ingathering of the nations, and he made that ingathering the explicit mission of his disciples after his resurrection.³³

It was, however, the Apostle Paul who made the most use of Deuteronomy in his theological and missiological reflection. Not only did he see in the continued suffering of Israel a kind of prolongation of the exile (a view shared by many first-century Jews) but he also saw in the death and resurrection of Jesus as the Messiah the climax of the judgment and the restoration of Israel respectively. Linking this with his central understanding of the significance of Israel for the nations (as the purpose of the Abrahamic covenant), Paul recognized that the fulfillment of God’s purpose for Israel could never be complete without the ingathering of the nations as well. At the heart of Paul’s whole theological system was his redefinition of the meaning of Israel’s election in relation to the nations for whose sake Israel was elect and for whose sake the Messiah had come in fulfillment of Israel’s election and mission.³⁴ Hence the apparent paradox of his personal calling as the “apostle to the nations,” and his actual missionary strategy of “to the Jew first.” The failure of many Jews to respond led to the extension of the Good News to the Gentiles (e.g., Acts 13:44–48; Rom. 11). But never, in Paul’s thinking, did this mean a rejection or replacement of the Jews. Rather, Paul picks up a rhetorical pun in Deuteronomy 32:21, on God making Israel “jealous,” and develops it into a theology of history and mission: the ingathering of the Gentiles will arouse jealousy among the Jews, so that ultimately “all Israel,” extended and inclusive of believing Jews and Gentiles, will share in salvation (Rom. 10:19–11:26). Clearly Paul reflected deeply on Deuteronomy 32 especially (it has been called “Romans in a nutshell”) and quotes its final doxology (32:43) in his exposition of the multinational nature of the gospel and its implications for the need for cross-cultural acceptance and sensitivity between Jewish and Gentile Christians (Rom. 15:7–10).³⁵

It can be seen, therefore, that although it is true to say that Deuteronomy is primarily absorbed with God’s dealings with, and requirements of, Israel, it contains perspectives on Israel and the nations that ultimately led “over the horizon” of its own

context and that influenced and shaped the mission of Jesus and Paul in theory and in practice. Such perspectives, with their overall canonical significance, need to be the broader framework for our understanding and application of the relevance of the content of the book, both in its urgent rhetoric and in its earthy legislation.

Notes

1. See Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, pp. xxii–xxxix, for the most comprehensive recent bibliography.
2. Disseminating teaching by means of farewell speeches was apparently an Egyptian didactic technique; cf. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 4f.
3. See Polzin, “Deuteronomy,” and *Moses and the Deuteronomist*.
4. Cf. Mendenhall’s seminal study, “Ancient Oriental” (1954), which generated a flood of treaty-covenant studies in the following two decades. For a comprehensive survey, see McCarthy, *Covenant*. Although exaggerated claims have been made, it remains the case that there is a clear relationship between Deut. and the tradition of ancient Near Eastern treaty texts which stretches back to the late second millennium.
5. This point is established in great detail by McConville, *Law and Theology*.
6. Christensen’s theory that the text had an original musical dimension, designed to be sung or chanted as a form of memorization and dissemination, would help to explain some of the features of the text, especially its rhythmic and metrically balanced nature, recurring phraseology, and carefully interwoven patterns. For further detail on the stylistic distinctives of Deut., cf. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, pp. lxxviii–lxxxviii, and Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 21–26, 30–35.
7. See Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, p. xli.
8. The most detailed work on the Decalogue structure of Deut. 12–26 has been done by Braulik. See especially “The Sequence.”
9. Cf. Walton, “Spirit of the Law.”
10. E.g., Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition*; Phillips, “Prophecy and Law.”
11. Cf. von Rad, *Studies*.
12. Cf. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomistic School; Deuteronomy*, pp. 55ff., 62ff.
13. Cf. Clements, “Jerusalem Cult Tradition.”
14. Cf. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition*, pp. 94–101.
15. Cf. von Rad, *Studies*, p. 67.

16. See commentary and additional notes on ch. 12. Clements, as part of a very thorough survey of all the positions on Deuteronomy's background and purpose, calls for

considerable caution in asserting a precise identification between the book found in the temple in Josiah's time and the present book of Deuteronomy. . . . In the minds of many recent scholars, the more the character and assumptions of Josiah's reform are examined, the more oblique would appear to be the link with the book of Deuteronomy. (*Deuteronomy*, p. 72)

17. Apart from those who maintain a substantially Mosaic heritage in Deut., the book has been attributed to the premonarchic era, perhaps associated with Samuel, to the time of the united monarchy, to the reforming reign of Hezekiah in the eighth century, and to the exilic and postexilic periods. For a helpful survey of scholarship on the question of dating, see Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 47–68.

18. McConville, *Grace in the End*, p. 56. McConville also provides a thorough survey of the scholarly positions on the date, authorship, and purpose of Deut. (op. cit., pp. 15–64). See also Clements, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 69–83.

19. Cf. Hoppe, "The Meaning of Deuteronomy."

20. This understanding of the nonmissionary nature of the OT accounts for a mere four pages being devoted to it in the magisterial theology of mission by Bosch, *Transforming Mission*.

21. This aspect of the book is emphasized especially by Miller, *Deuteronomy*, and shapes the interpretative framework for his exposition.

22. Senior and Stuhlmüller see Israel's relationship with pagan culture as a recurring pattern of "violence—indigenization—challenge," which is reflected in the whole history of mission; *Foundations*, pp. 36–81. For other stimulating reflection on the theme, cf. Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, chs. 1–3; Goldingay, *Theological Diversity*, pp. 59–96; C. J. H. Wright, "People of God," and *Eye/Living*, pp. 174–96.

23. Cf. C. J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus*, pp. 181–91.

24. There is an unsatisfactorily a priori character about the tendency among commentators to diminish the force of such statements by saying that they "cannot" have implied full monotheism, but only mono-Yahwism for Israel. The latter is obviously intended, but if an Israelite had wanted to make an explicitly monotheistic declaration in absolute terms, what more could he (or she, cf. 1 Sam. 2:2) have said than Deut. 4:39 or 32:39?

25. This contrasts starkly with monistic pluralism, which asserts that "ultimate divine reality" is one, but refuses to allow that any of the world's religions embodies final truth or revelation about it, or has access to that ultimate as it is in itself. Jesus is thus relativized as one among many "points of contact." But for the religious pluralist, Jesus is no more a definitive revelation of the ultimate divine than Yahweh

himself ever was (Yahweh being merely another human construct for expressing something about the transcendent).

26. Cf. C. J. H. Wright, *Unique*, pp. 65–82. N. T. Wright argues strongly for the Deuteronomic basis (Deut. 6:4f., the *shema*) of Paul's Christological monotheism in 1 Cor. 8, in *Climax*, pp. 120–36. Cf. also B. Rosner, "No Other God."

27. Cf. C. J. H. Wright, *Knowing*, pp. 34–54; Scobie, "Israel and the Nations;" Senior and StuhlmueLLer, *Foundations*, pp. 83–109.

28. McBride, "Polity," portrays Deut. as a kind of "constitution" for Israel, in line with what is being suggested here. The balance of idealism and harsh realities is characteristic of the attempt to provide a model or pattern. Cf. also the stimulating ethical study of Deut. by Goldingay, *Theological Diversity*, pp. 134–66. Even at an individual level, the figure of Moses in Deut. is a "model within a model," portraying many of the features that should be found in a godly people and certainly in godly leadership. Cf. Miller, "Moses, My Servant."

29. C. J. H. Wright, "Ethical Authority," pp. 227f.

30. See C. J. H. Wright, *Eye/Living, God's Land*, and "The Authority of Scripture."

31. The classic work of de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, is still a helpful resource for such broad understanding of Israel as a society. More recent work is well surveyed in Clements, ed., *The World of Ancient Israel*.

32. N. T. Wright, *People of God*, pp. 387–90. Cf. also Grassi, "Matthew."

33. Cf. C. J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus*, pp. 136–80 and bibliography.

34. This crucial theme is very thoroughly expounded in N. T. Wright, *Climax*.

35. On the full extent of Deuteronomy's influence on Paul's mis-
siology, cf. Scott, "Restoration of Israel."