

The Place of Deuteronomy in the Bible

I. *Deuteronomy as Capstone of the Pentateuch*

- A. **The end of the beginning.** Deuteronomy is the end of the books of Moses. What began with the creation of the world and the whole of human race and was undone by the fall, now winds down in this book. God has begun the process of restoring the rift created by Adam's sin.
1. In Genesis, He established a chosen line through whom the Messiah will come, and a chosen people to be redeemed by that Messiah.
 2. In Exodus, He delivers and enters into covenant with that people.
 3. In Leviticus, He condescends to dwell with those people and draw them near to Himself.
 4. At the beginning of Numbers, He established the people to be an earthly reflection of His heavenly host and to direct them to the Promised Land.
- B. **Unfinished business.** However, despite all that God has accomplished for His people up to this point, we need always to keep in mind how provisional all of these things are. These blessings still pale in comparison to the estate of Adam in the garden and to the promise of the Sabbath rest held out by God in the beginning. As Numbers and Deuteronomy wind down, we find that the people have not received the culmination and fulfillment of these blessings. The Messiah must yet still come, and He will accomplish all of God's purposes.
- C. **Enduring message.** The ending of Deuteronomy illustrates this need for God's people to continue looking forward in a stark way. Deuteronomy ends with the death of the mediator and leader of the people and with the people still outside of the Promised Land. Simply entering the Promised Land and living in the covenant would not bring about the promised Sabbath rest (**Heb. 4:8**). The Pentateuch pictures the people of God as those to whom God has made many precious promises, but as a people still on the way, who must be ever looking forward to the culmination in Christ.

II. *Deuteronomy as Foundation for Historical Books and the Prophets*

- A. **Transition to the rest of Scripture.** Deuteronomy not only serves as the end of the Pentateuch but as the foundation for the books to come after. Deuteronomy is a transition book that at one and the same time teaches the people to look back to what God has done and promised and to live in the tension of the time until the Messiah comes.
- B. **Interpretive key to Israel's history.** Deuteronomy lays out the stipulations of the covenant as related to the Promised Land. Since the rest of the Old Testament will deal with the people and their state in relation to the land, Deuteronomy is essential to understanding God's dealings with the people in the books of history and the prophets. The blessings, trials, and curses that come upon the people in these books are grounded in the terms of the covenant that God has given in Deuteronomy. For this reason, scholars often call the historical books the Deuteronomistic history.
- C. **The role of the prophets.** The prophets are also described by many Bible commentators as covenant lawyers who come to Israel to prosecute God's case against them according to the law. However, we need to exercise great care if we are going to use those terms. It is true that the prophets cite the law against the people of Israel and sometimes speak of calling the people to account before God's judgment seat. But this does not mean that God sent the prophets to be prosecutors. God does not send the prophets so that He may get a guilty verdict against His people. Rather, following the pattern of Moses, they are mediators. They are representatives of God as an aggrieved husband, who is calling His adulterous wife back to live by the terms of the marriage covenant (**Eze. 16; 23; Hos. 1-3; Isa. 54:4-10; 62:4-5; Jer. 3:1-14**).