

## Chapter 8: Deuteronomy

### Key Terms

- covenant: the means by which God reveals himself to, initiates relationship with, and establishes his presence among humanity by entering into a mutually binding agreement with a person or people
- Torah: a Hebrew term meaning "instruction" in holiness, used by the Jewish community to refer to the first five books of the OT
- suzerain: a superior feudal ruler; an overlord
- vassal: a subordinate nation or people group (usually as a result of a treaty following conquest)
- monotheism: generally defined as the worship of one God, this term can also encompass preference for, or worship of, only one God (possibly accompanied by belief in the existence of other deities), or belief in the existence of only one deity
- Documentary Hypothesis: an approach to the authorship of the Pentateuch associated with source criticism that understands the five books as a patchwork composition of four (or more) literary documents
- Decalogue: the Ten Commandments

### Key Ideas

- The importance of a central worship place.
- The emphasis on the name of God.
- The organization of laws with reference to the Ten Commandments.
- The centrality of loving and obeying the covenant God.

### Chapter Summary

Deuteronomy is presented as Moses' final address to the Israelites before his death, reminding them of the experiences of the previous generation and providing them with the opportunity to renew the covenant. Both the Documentary Hypothesis and the Deuteronomistic History hypothesis date Deuteronomy late in the seventh century BC. The authors of this text argue for Mosaic authorship according to claims of the book itself. Scholars have debated whether the work more closely resembles the Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Hittite treaty form; the authors of this text argue that it is closer to the latter.

Deuteronomy formalizes and clarifies the covenant between Israel and Yahweh, giving the second generation opportunity to renew the covenant before they enter the land. The primary theme of the book is summarized in the Shema, which exhorts the people to follow and serve the Lord with their hearts.

The book is organized according to the ANE treaty formula. Though scholars long struggled to understand the logic of chapters 6–26, these chapters are now recognized as correlating to the Ten Commandments. The first four commands concern man's relationship with God, while commands 5–10 address man's relationship with man. The prohibition of other gods before Yahweh (Deut. 6–11) relates to God's authority over Israel and their responsibility to follow him. The command forbidding images (Deut. 12), concerns proper worship of Yahweh—God does not want Israel to adopt the cultic customs of the nations around them in constructing images to mediate his presence. Proper treatment of God's name (Deut. 13:1–14:21) exemplifies that true commitment to God will be reflected in one's conduct. The exhortation to respect the Sabbath (Deut. 14:22–16:17) concerns God's claims over his people, and the implications of this in their care for what God has given them and in their treatment of others.

The command to honor parents (Deut. 16:18–18:22) carries implications for the proper response to human authority, for it was primarily through authority structures—particularly parents to children—that the covenant was preserved and passed on. The prohibitions against murder, adultery, and theft (Deut. 19–21; 22:1–23:14; 23:15–24:7) safeguard human dignity. The command against false testimony (Deut 24:8–16) concerns truthful dealings between neighbors; the command against coveting (Deut 24:17–26:15) protects the rights of individuals. The law as a whole is primarily concerned with proper approach to God and proper relationship with one's neighbor.

In context of the ANE, the gods gave their worshipers no guidelines for proper worship; people were left to guess whether they were in proper relationship with the gods, based on their fortunes. The Israelites, however, received clear instructions from God for how he desired to be worshiped and how he expected the people to act in relation to each other. The Israelites thus viewed the law with gratitude and delight.