Studies in Deuteronomy

Introduction

At first glance, you might be wondering why we might study Deuteronomy as we are preparing for the celebration of the resurrection. After all, Deuteronomy is just a long book in the early part of the Bible. It doesn't even mention Jesus. How can it pertain to resurrection?

Historical Setting

Deuteronomy was a reiteration of the Law (*torah*) for the people of Judah in the time after the northern kingdom of Israel had been captured and carried away by the Assyrians. Hezekiah, who was king of Judah at the time, recognized that the issue in Israel was that they worshiped God as one of many. They gave him the position of primacy, but other gods were worshiped on multiple levels. For Hezekiah, it was vital that Judah strip away the vestiges of any kind of other worship and focus on God alone. Deuteronomy was written either during the reign of Hezekiah (r. 726-687 BC) or of the last true king of Judah, Josiah (r. 640-609 BC).

Deuteronomy represents a resurrection of sorts, with Judah being purified and revitalized. As a result of Hezekiah's efforts, the kingdom lasted for another century. Ultimately, it would succumb to the same sins that Israel did, and in 586 BC, Judah too was taken into captivity. Unlike their northern cousins, however, the Judahites thrived in exile and were allowed to return and rebuild Jerusalem. The resurrection of the kingdom was an important theme for the people. So, Deuteronomy and its reiteration of the Law also became important. The principles it contains were reflective of God giving his people HOPE that restoration was always possible. This foreshadows the resurrection of Jesus and the redemption of all who trust in him. So, Deuteronomy is a shadow (Heb 10:1) of Jesus, giving hints of God's agenda for salvation.

Structure of the Book

Modern books usually have a pretty much linear structure. They go from beginning to end in a fairly straight line, except for the occasional plot twist. Deuteronomy is not a modern book, so it employs a sort of cyclical structure. Often an idea is introduced in a brief mention in the middle of a completely different subject. There are also a number of "portable texts," lines or ideas which appear over and over. These serve to provide connections, but they also are probably the marks of the individual documents which were brought together to form Deuteronomy. It is possible that Deuteronomy emerged as a

composite of various "versions" of the Law being employed by judges and priests as guides for legal decisions. This may account for the moments when seemingly random lists of decisions are appended to unconnected materials.

When reading the book, watch for these because they will come out of seemingly nowhere. A good example is the word "hear" or "listen" (šema"). When it appears as a command (as in Deut 6:4), it marks a specific and important speech. It was a way of drawing attention to something. Other signals include "the statutes and the rules" (which occurs seventeen times in the book), "consuming fire," "sojourner," and "abomination." Identifying these portable texts will help make sense of the rhythms of the book.

How to Use This Study Guide

What you will find in this study guide is not a typical devotional. There are not a lot of pithy quotes or helpful hints. Instead, each day's reading has some clarifying notes on the text, showing literary connections within the book *and* with other texts of the Bible. This is called "intertextuality." The notes also offer insight for how to read the text as a living document, which it was for its original audience, speaking not just to history but to the present.

This guide is not a devotional. You won't get practical nuggets that will give you encouragement for the day. Instead, the notes are there to help you engage with the text and understand the perspective of the period when Deuteronomy was written *and* the original context when Moses was delivering the messages that make up the book. There are notes about society, about the language, and (hopefully) other insights that will make Deuteronomy come alive for you over these weeks.

Week 1

Deuteronomy is not a complex book, but it can feel repetitive. It is presented in a very straightforward narrative, with Moses recounting the reception of the Law at Sinai (called Mount Horeb). It begins with a brief examination of Israel's failure to take the land after leaving Sinai and then their eventual conquest of the Transjordan (eastern side of the Jordan River) forty years later. Folded into the narrative, however, are a number of allusions to the realities of the Judahite kingdom after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. Although the book records the words of Moses, which dated from centuries before, Deuteronomy was probably written during the reigns of either Hezekiah (r. 726-687 BC) or Josiah (r. 640-609 BC).

Monday, March 7

Deuteronomy 1:1-33

vv. 1-4

This first section provides the date for the entirety of the book, namely *after* the defeat of the Canaanites (Amorites) on the southeastern edge of what is today Israel. This was right before Moses died and the people entered the promised land. There is a lot of geography and unrecognizable names in this passage of Scripture. It can be off-putting to see that many unfamiliar things in one place, but don't be deterred. The geography and place names are not the thing you should be focused on.

First, notice that this *entire book* is presented to the people of Israel in the wilderness across the Jordan River, just *eleven days' journey* from Horeb, or Sinai. Why did God wait forty years to let them cross a space that should have taken less than two weeks? We tend to focus on God's judgment on Israel for their disobedience (Num 32:13), but there is something else at play. God had told Abraham that his people would not take Canaan until "the iniquity of the Amorites" was completed or filled (Gen 15:12-17). Who did Israel defeat? The Amorites. God orchestrated the end of Israel's wanderings with the moment when the Amorites were to be judged.

vv. 5-8

Deuteronomy comes from the Greek for "second law" because it is a reiteration of the Law for a later audience, probably the Kingdom of Judah during the reign of Hezekiah (726-697 BC) or Josiah (640-609 BC), centuries after Moses lived. Why did they need a "new version" of the Law? Hezekiah and Josiah both saw revivals of the Judahite kingdom.

These were both religious and national revivals. Under Josiah, they actually took control of much of the land lost when the northern kingdom of Israel fell in 722 BC. So, Deuteronomy explains their responsibility as the Judahites ruled over the land promised to them. In the entire history of the Israelite kingdoms, only David, Solomon, and Josiah ever ruled over all the land promised to Abraham.

vv. 9-18

The establishment of tribal leaders and judges was an important step for the people of Israel. The presence of leaders and judges shifted the attention from a single ruler (Moses or the later kings) to the people and their leaders. Judgment and fairness were not just a matter of the king's decisions, but of a standard of law for everyone. Everyone was under the same law, and every judge was supposed to rule from the same law. This was an essential step for a people who claimed to rule by the will of their God. If God is just, then his people must be just. This alone set them apart from their Canaanite neighbors who saw their gods as sometimes fickle and unjust. God revealed himself through the Law.

vv. 19-33

We now get to the moment when the readers (that's you and me!) discover that Israel had *originally* just traveled the eleven days to Canaan years before. They had the opportunity to take the land. They were made to wander the wilderness for forty years because of their disobedience. This passage reiterates Numbers 13:1-14:45. The idea of dread (v 29) will occur three more times in Deuteronomy (7:21, 20:3, 31:6) and it is the core of the message of the book. Throughout the history of the Israelites, they were intimidated by foreign powers. The theme runs not just through Deuteronomy but through all the historical books. Failure not to stand up in the face of fear and dread is disobedience.

Tuesday, March 8

Deuteronomy 1:34-46

vv. 34-40

Only Caleb and Joshua were faithful enough to believe God. The rest of Israel refused. God did not give up on Israel though. The next generation would receive the blessing of the land. The inheritance was delayed but not lost. God inverts the fears of the Israelites. In Numbers 14:3, the people are worried that "our wives and our little ones will become a prey." Here, those who they feared would be prey the predators. They would become the army that would conquer the people their parents feared.

vv. 41-46

The generation disobeyed, then they tried to "fix" the problem on their own, and as a result they wound up running away like a kid being chased by bees (v 44). (There is actually archaeological evidence of beekeeping in the Arabah, the region where this defeat happened!) There was no difference between disobedience and delayed obedience. God gave them an opportunity, one which they could not see for themselves.

Wednesday, March 9

Deuteronomy 2:1-37

vv. 1-8

Mount Seir is difficult territory in the southwest corner of what is today Jordan. It was where Jacob's twin brother Esau settled and raised his own family (Gen 36:8). Deuteronomy never refers to the area by its common name, Edom. In Numbers 20:1-21, there is a detailed exchange where the Edomites refuse to allow the Israelites to pass through their lands, even raising a military force. There is even a curse on Edom (Num 24:18). Here, there is no reference to this. Some of this shift may be explained by the changed relationship between Judah and Edom. Edom was under Judahite rule for a while, but eventually they rebelled and became an independent kingdom (1 Kgs 22:47, 2 Kgs 8:22). The kingdom of Edom was viewed contemptuously but their claim to their land was not challenged. Judah had trade with them, hence the reference to buying food and water (v 6) but that was where the interest ended. The prophets took a very dim view of Edom because the people of Edom cheered the defeat of the Israelites (Amos 1:11-12; Obad 1-8; Mal 1:4).

vv. 9-15

Moab is next on the list of lands the Israelites were not allowed to attack. In this case, a prehistory is provided for both Moab and Edom. The Moabites drove the Emim out of their land. The Edomites drove the Horites out. Therefore, these two tribes, who were related to the Israelites, had displaced native populations, and taken lands promised to their fathers. This makes Israel's claim on their own promised land fit with a sort of divine sanction for the arrangement of these nations as they were in the times of Hezekiah and Josiah.

There is an inserted chronology presented in verse 13, with the people crossing the Zered brook *thirty-eight* years after the failure to enter the land. This brook marked the beginning of their conquest of the promised land (Num 21:12). Most interpreters identify it with wadi el-Hesa, at the southeast end of the Dead Sea.

vv. 16-23

Marching north from Moab, the Israelites would have then encountered the Ammonites, another related tribe. The Ammonites displaced another group called the Zamsummim. There is also a mention of another group, the Avvim, who were destroyed by the Philistines or Caphtorim. We know nothing about these groups that Deuteronomy describes as "Rephaim." In some Canaanite mythology, they are quasi-divine figures who were fierce warriors. (Some even view them as dead spirits, see Isaiah 14:9.)

There is a promise that *dread* will spread as the people of Israel march north. The mention of the Rephaim may have been to indicate the displacement of the spiritual powers of Canaan, things tied to the religious beliefs of those people. As the people of God conquered the land, they drove out the spiritual forces that held it captive. The Israelites became the new "dread" for the Canaanites. This was especially important during the time of Hezekiah and Josiah because both of them devoted significant energy to driving the worship of Baʿal and other Canaanite deities out of Israel.

vv. 24-37

Finally, there is a people that the Israelites are allowed to attack. Heshbon, apparently a Canaanite city somewhere in what is now southern Jordan, was pointed out as a target. The distinction is not unintentional. While the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites were considered relatives, the Canaanites (Amorites) were not. The people sent messages to Sihon, the king of Heshbon, asking for passage but it was never going to happen. The younger generation that had been spared after their parents' disobedience executed God's plan exactly as directed, and as a result were victorious.

Thursday, March 10

Deuteronomy 3:1-29

VV. 1-11

The second Amorite (Canaanite) kingdom the Israelites defeated was Bashan. While Heshbon is in the south, Bashan is in the north. The Ammonites lived between these two regions. That is why their victory is described as "from the Valley of Arnon to Mount Hermon" (v 8). Mount Hermon is today on the Syrian border with Israel and Lebanon. The king of Bashon was apparently the last of the Rephaim and his bed was enormous – about twice the size of a modern queen-size bed 0 – and made of iron (v 11). Remember that these victories were on the eastern side of the Jordan River and not in the promised land yet.

VV. 12-22

The geography is not incredibly important here, but these lands were essentially the entire eastern bank of the Jordan River. Chinnereth is the Sea of Galilee (v 17) and the Sea of Arabah is the Dead Sea. The Edomites and Moabites were to the south and the Ammonites to the east. The land was given to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh because they wanted to keep their herds on the plateaus (called "tablelands" or *mišor*, v 10). There is a further explanation of this in Numbers 32. Technically, these lands were *not* part of the promised land but since they were ruled by Canaanites, the people could take them as an inheritance.

vv. 23-29

The final piece of the conquest story is Moses not being permitted to travel across the Jordan. It sets the seen for the rest of the book, as Moses is giving the people the Law as they enter the land under Joshua. He will be allowed to climb Mount Pisgah (or Mount Nebo), about 10 miles east of the Dead Sea. Deuteronomy is the only book that records this particular detail. Pisgah is 2,300 ft above sea level, but the Dead Sea is 1,384 ft *below* sea level. It is almost directly east of Jerusalem, which is about 30 miles away and about the same altitude. Jerusalem would have been visible from Pisgah. This detail would have been important for the original audience. Jerusalem was the capital of Judah and the site of the temple.

Friday, March 11

Deuteronomy 4:1-40

vv. 1-8

Here is the first positive use of the verb "listen" (*šema*). Up to this point, Moses reminded the people that they "did not listen" (1:43, 3:26). The word has a sense of not just hearing but taking action in response. The reference to "statutes and rules" in verse 1 shows how the Law is worked out. Statutes (*huqqim*) are basic laws that establish principles. Rules, or more appropriately judgments (*mišpatim*), are precedents or situational laws. These are the two big divisions of the Law, and Deuteronomy includes both. Hearing the principles of the Law will mean enacting the principles. On the other hand, the judgments of the Law are particular applications which may not pertain to our current context. Remember that Deuteronomy is a restatement of the Law for a specific audience.

vv. 9-14

Just look at how the idea of hearing is reiterated over and over again. God had no visible form, but Israel heard his voice. He did not just mumble or thunder but gave them the ten commandments (literally, "ten words" here in Hebrew). What he said was supported by

written revelation. There was nothing nebulous or mysterious about God's message to the people.

vv. 15-30

The audible voice of God at Horeb and the presence of his revealed Law contrasts strongly with the idolatry of the Canaanites. There is an emphasis on the sin of creating an image of God because this was a common practice in the northern kingdom of Israel. This was called "the sin of Jeroboam" because the first king of the northern kingdom constructed two golden calves and called them by God's name (1 Kgs 12:25-33). Other nations worshiped images of other gods, but making an image of God was strictly forbidden.

Take note of the imagery that is employed here. Israel was "taken out of the iron furnace" of Egypt (v 20) and the LORD is "a consuming fire" (v 24). This explicitly points out that God formed Israel, and that he would completely justified in "melting them down" and started again. In other words, it is an assertion of his divine sovereignty.

In fact, the warning passage includes a declaration that if the people fall into idolatry, God will scatter them among the nations of the earth (v 27). Even there, however, if they seek for God, he will find them. This was an assurance for the Judahites that even though the northern kingdom had been scattered, God had not forgotten them and would bring them back. This was not just an idealization. Many of the faithful fled south and joined the southern kingdom.

vv. 31-40

This passage is largely a reiteration of the arguments made in the rest of the chapter, but emphasizing that God *chose* to reveal himself through the Law. He did not have to do this, but Israel was meant to be unique, to reveal God to the world. He is referred to as "God in heaven above and on the earth beneath," which does not refer to the earth as we know it but the land "beneath" – the underworld. In other words, he is God of all things – not just the world we live in today. God is sovereign over all aspects of life and death.

Application for this Week

So much of Israel's issues were their own making. They either disobeyed or tried to correct their disobedience in the worst ways possible. Have you ever tried to fix something after you went too far, only to make the thing worse? Have you had someone else attempt to "fix" things with you in that kind of a situation? How does it feel? Imagine how God must feel when we attempt to "fix" what is broken without his power? As you speak to Him in prayer, do not be afraid to own your failures and ask him how He would have you address those areas going forward.

Week 2

This week's readings get into somewhat familiar territory. They include the ten commandments, as well as the familiar *šema* — "the LORD, he is one." While last week's readings were mostly narrative, this week's readings are almost entirely warnings.

Monday, March 14

Deuteronomy 4:41-5:33

vv. 41-43

It might seem truly odd to have this passage about cities of refuge after the previous statements, but it concludes the granting of land to Reuben, Gad and Manasseh (3:12-17).

vv. 44-49

Much of this is a reiteration of previous texts. It seems likely that Deuteronomy includes these repeated introductions because it was transmitted in sections, and the introduction allowed for easy recognition of the text as being part of a single book. It was also common in ancient texts to have these repeated passages because they were recited, often from memory. These are called "portable texts," meaning they could be employed wherever they needed to be so the person doing the reciting could – for lack of a better term – remember the next section.

5:1-21

The recitation of the ten commandments opens with a second portable text. For the most part, the ten commandments follow the same pattern as Exodus 20. One particular difference is in the sabbath observance (Exo 20:8-11, Deut 5:12-15).

vv. 22-32

This passage might sound vaguely familiar. It is an expansion of a similar passage in the previous chapter. This is a common rhetorical technique in ancient texts. An idea is introduced and then reiterated in greater detail. This is the opposite of our modern works, which usually start with details and then summarize at the end.

Tuesday, March 15

Deuteronomy 6:1-25

vv. 1-3

Yet another reiteration here at a transition from narrative to actual command. Deuteronomy is clearly a composite work, meaning there are specific, pre-existing pieces brought together to form the whole. This is no surprise since Deuteronomy is a restatement of the already existing Law texts (Exo-Num).

vv. 4-9

The opening lines of this section are called the *šema*, the command to "hear/obey." It is the recited often in Jewish synagogues. Here it is meant as an introduction to the Law codes. The declaration of the unity of God is an affirmation that there are no other gods like Him. He is the *one God*. While we read this as monotheism, it is also a polemic against the ways which Canaanites viewed the divine. What we consider "gods," were facets of a confusing, mysterious divine essence. They were interchangeable and fluid, never stable in expression. The Judahites rejected this and affirmed the unity of God. The command to continual reminders of this were a response to the pervasive idolatry of the age.

vv. 10-25

Monuments were very important to the Judahites. These were not just physical monuments. The Law is a monument to their God, and their obedience of the Law was meant to be a devotion to God for the world to see. Remember that Israel was not a primarily literate society. Probably less than 10% of the population was able to read and write, so the Law was recited from father to child, and losing one generation meant a loss of comprehension. This actually happened a number of times over the centuries, and the Law had to be re-read, and the cycle restarted.

Wednesday, March 16

Deuteronomy 7:1-26

vv. 1-5

The prohibition against forming covenants with the inhabitants and Canaan was not a racial thing. It was based on the difference of religious beliefs. We know from archaeological evidence that culturally the Israelites and Canaanites are virtually indistinguishable. The primary evidence for an Israelite site is the presence of theophoric names—names that are derived from the name of God, YHWH. In a world where they spoke mutually intelligible languages and lived essentially the same way, the Israelites

were *only* distinct because of their faith in the one God. The presence of pillars (*mazebah*) and poles devoted to Asherah as well as "carved images" (*pasil*) was not tolerated because they were clearly devoted to other gods.

vv. 6-11

This is the first place in the Bible that Israel is called "holy" (qadoš) as a people. Sites and individuals could be holy. Sacrifices and certain groups like the Nazarenes were holy; but for the entire nation to be holy was something that does not appear in the earlier books of the Law. The covenant of God was something that was taken very seriously by the faithful. It separated Israel from the rest of the world, which is the true meaning of "holy" in the Hebrew mind.

vv. 12-26

The contrast between listening (šema again!) and fear (yer a) is one of belief. There is contrast made here between the people being "chased like bees" (1:44) and "the LORD God will send hornets among them" (7:20) is clearly intentional. Without the God of the covenant, there is nothing about the Israelites to fear. They were just nuisances to much stronger Canaanite groups; but with God on their side, they are terrors. (This is a gloss of Exo 23:28. The Hebrew word for hornet is zerah, which is often a metaphor for terror.)

Thursday, March 17

Deuteronomy 8:1-9:12

8: 1-20

The purpose of reciting the Law is not simply to know right and wrong. There is a narrative that accompanies it, one which gives the glory to God. There is no way to separate the commands of God from the provision of God. There is an aspect of *positive righteousness* that accompanies the Law. Action and memory go together. This is contrasted with the Pharisees of Jesus's day who believed in *negative righteousness*. They adhered to the Law for its own sake, forgetting the weight of the narrative and its covenantal meaning.

9:1-6

One of the distinctions between the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel was that Judah acknowledged that God had made a covenant with the House of David, and so there was *always* a ruler descended from that house. Israel, on the other hand, was ruled by mostly short-lived dynasties (except for the Omride-Jehuite family, which ruled for roughly a century). These dynasties claimed authority by "might" rather than "right." This passage is a reminder that the House of David did not rule because of

their own righteousness but God's covenant with David. Therefore, forgetting the *reason* they remained in power for four centuries was important.

VV.7-12

Deuteronomy almost completely ignores *most* of the narrative of Exodus-Numbers. The exodus is mentioned, of course, but most of the incidents are not mentioned because the focus is on God's commands and *listening*. Their idolatry was a matter of not being willing to *listen* to God and sending Moses up the mountain instead.

Friday, March 18

Deuteronomy 9:13-10:22

vv. 13-21

This is the second time the golden calf has come up, although the first was somewhat veiled (4:15-24). The other nations worshiped idols because they did not know any better. Israel chose to reject the one true God. The word translated "corrupt" (*šiḥet*) means "emptied" or "vacuous." The idea is not that another god is a substitute for the true God. It is that another god emptied the Israel's life of meaning and purpose. Graven images were empty, hollow. So, they had a physical appearance but no substance. God, on the other hand, has no physical form but has infinite substance.

vv. 22-29

Listing incidents rather than reiterating them is one of the reasons we know Deuteronomy is later. It is assumed that the reader is familiar with these incidents. They are all incidences where the people complained about God's directions and were punished. They tested (nesah) God at Massah, something Deuteronomy has already mentioned (6:16) but now is being expanded. God acknowledged the rebellious history of Israel, the tendency to defy him.

10:1-5

The remaking of the tablets of the law and the building of the ark of the covenant are dealt with here in just a couple verses. In Exodus, the construction of the ark is dealt with in great detail, but here the focus is entirely on the tablets. There is no mention of the Bezalel, the artisan who was specially chosen to craft the ark (Exo 31:1, 37:1-9)

10:6-11

While the other tribes all received allotments of land in Canaan, Levi was given cities throughout the other tribes as well as being entrusted with the priesthood. Some

commentators believe this passage is an *etiology*, a story set in the past that explains a current situation. Since the Levites were a class drawn from all the tribes, there had to be a justification for their existence as a tribe. Levi was the fourth son of Jacob/Israel (Gen 29:34) and Moses was descended from him (Exo 2:1). Elsewhere, they were the only tribe to stay loyal to God when Aaron made the golden calf (Exo 32:25-29). They were set apart and not even included in the tribal census (Num 1:47-54, 3:14-20).

VV. 12-22

This passage opens with a reiteration of that "portable text" from the *šema* again. You can see how this would help with reciting the text aloud. The apparent jumble of laws (circumcision, the law of the stranger, etc.) are meant to remind the people that not only are they holy, but they are holy for a purpose. They cannot forget their origins, and so they are commanded to love the "sojourner" (*ger*) because God loved them when they too were sojourners. This is yet another theme that runs through Deuteronomy. Israel is *among* the peoples of the world but not of them, so this law of the sojourner will be expanded later (Deut 26:5-11).

This Week's Application

Throughout this week's readings, the theme of covenant and being a "holy people" appears several times, as does the first directive to remove any abomination from among the people. On the level of community and even nations, a little corruption goes a long way. The temptations engendered by the presence of a competing authority are simply not worth it.

When you think about the Bible and its meaning to you, how seriously do you take its authority? Are there areas that you see as grey areas where you can take advantage of "things the Bible doesn't say"? What kind of disciplines do you need to develop in your life to be able to meet the challenge of submitting fully to the sovereignty of God and authority of his revealed word?

Week 3

It is important to remember as we get deeper into the book that Deuteronomy relies heavily upon repetition of certain "portable texts" but as well as specific ideas and motifs. You should keep your eyes open for familiar words. This week's readings get into some of the specifics of the holiness mentioned in last week's readings.

Monday, March 21

Deuteronomy 11:1-32

vv. 1-7

The text picks up the themes from the *šema* (6:4-5). Chapters 7-10 were about listening. Now comes the call to love the LORD God. A recounting not just of God's blessings but of God's chastening is an important foundation. This passage is the foundation of the idea that God chastens, or disciplines, those he loves.

vv. 8-17

This portion of the text is focused on the agricultural production of the land. It offers not only the prosperity of the land but also the temptations of the land – namely idolatry. Many of the Canaanite gods were tied to agriculture. Famine and drought were very real dangers because of the unique season structure. In the Judean highlands, there are often two periods of rain in the year. The early rains prepare the land for the spring crops. You planted your spring crops in anticipation of these rains. Then, when they were done, you both planted your summer and autumn crops before the latter rains began. If one of these rains did not come, you starved for part of the year.

vv. 18-25

Again, there is a "portable text" to open the section (compare 6:7-8 to 11:18-20).

vv. 27-32

This passage introduces a much later contrast of blessing and curse. These are to be placed on monuments on Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal (Deut 27-28; Josh 8:30-35). These two mountains stand across from each other over a valley about twenty-five miles northwest of Jericho. In the valley was the ancient city of Shechem At first glance, it might be an odd place to put these texts, but the valley was an important east-west travel route. The city of

Shechem was apparently the center of the northern tribes, and when they broke off from Judah, it was their kingdom's first capital (1 Kgs 12:25).

Tuesday, March 22

Deuteronomy 12:1-28

vv. 1-7

Up to this point, the focus of the text has been obedience and rejection of idolatry. Here the shift is to the *mode* and *location* of true worship. There would have been many reasons for this, but chief among them was the centralization of worship at Jerusalem. The tendency among the Canaanites and early Israelites was to worship primarily at local shrines devoted to local variants of deities. Remember that there was no formal religion, and so there was not one god Baal, but rather many Baalim, versions of the deity that suited particular needs.

vv. 8-14

While Jerusalem is not specifically mentioned here, it is pretty obvious that the text is pointing to Jerusalem, which was the center of worship after David had the tabernacle and ark moved there (2 Sam 6:17) and Solomon constructed "the house of the LORD" or the temple (1 Kgs 6).

VV. 15-22

Today, consuming meat is a regular thing. Most people eat meat daily. In the ancient world, meat was for special occasions. When you slaughtered an animal, you devoted it to your deity because he/she had allowed the animal to live long enough to provide you with sustenance. In one sense, this provision was about God being *present* throughout the world even though his temple was in Jerusalem.

The emphasis on *not eating the blood* is a key facet of Israelite religion, and it seems to have been unique to them. The theme runs throughout the Hebrew Scriptures from Abel onward (Gen 4:10, 9:4; Lev 17:10-13). Unjustly shed blood corrupts (Num 35:33-34), and consuming blood would be consuming the life of whatever you eat. Life belongs to God, and so the blood was to be poured out on the ground to return to God.

vv. 23-28

The "holy things" and "vow offerings" were specific animals which had to be brought to Jerusalem. Chief among these were the offerings of the firstborn (Exo 34:19-20; Num 3:13; Deut 15:19-23). There is a certain irony in the emphasis on the firstborn, because if you read the Hebrew Scriptures carefully, you will see that the firstborn almost never is the one

God chooses. Abraham's firstborn was Esau, but Isaac was the chosen one. Jacob was the second son, and his own firstborn was Reuben, but Judah and Joseph received the blessing. David was the youngest of his family. Solomon was not even close to the firstborn. Even Moses was younger than Aaron!

Wednesday, March 23

Deuteronomy 12:29-14:21

vv. 29-32

Hebrew texts often use a literary form called *inclusio*. If you see the same phrase repeated at the beginning and end of the text, it generally means this passage is self-contained. This passage opened with a call to "dispossess" (*la-rešet*, literally "uninherit") the inhabitants and a reminder not to adopt their worship practices (12:2-4). This was, as we've mentioned before, *exactly* what the people of the northern kingdom did. They incorporated the worship of God into the worship of the Canaanite deities.

13:1-6

Prophets were very important in Canaanite and Mesopotamian religion, *but* the Hebrew word translated as "prophet" (*nebi*) is a later word (1 Sam 9:9). The act of prophecy, however, goes back to the Bronze Age at least. Their primary job was to provide divine sanction for the actions of a king or ruler. The way the prophet is described here is a clear allusion to Moses performing "signs and wonders" (Exo 7:3; Deut 6:22). We have here a warning against those who offer authority which contradicts the revelation of God. The topic of prophecy will come up again.

vv. 7-11

There are few things in Scripture that call for such drastic action as the call to "let us go and serve other gods" in this chapter. Israel is warned first against prophets who invite people to follow other gods, now the same warning is issued for relatives. Remember, however, that the Judahites are looking back over their history to Moses and restating the Law for their current context. The idolatry of the northern kingdom led to its complete destruction. Which is worse? The swift removal of the cancerous idolatry as described here, or an entire kingdom with its many innocent people besieged and then taken into captivity?

vv. 12-18

What is the meaning of "worthless" in this passage? Hebrew authors love word play, and in the case, the author is making a pun on the name of the Canaanite god Baal by referring to those who draw people into idolatry as *beniy-beliyal*, "useless sons." *Baʿal* sounds a lot

like *beliy'al*, especially since they both have a particular guttural called *ayin* in the middle (It is tough for English speakers to pronounce it, but *ayin* sounds sort of like if you start to pronounce the letter *i* but then swallow it while still breathing out. Try it!)

The extreme reaction to the abomination (to ebah) is meant as a deterrent, but it also helps us understand an aspect of ancient religion we don't get to see. The only real difference between Canaanites and Israelites was their religious affinity. They spoke very similar languages and lived very similar lives. The city that was committed to a false god was therefore **not** and Israelite city anymore and was therefore to be destroyed lest it corrupt the neighboring cities. It was not something to be done lightly.

14:1-2

These prohibitions sound odd to us, but the cutting was a sign for priests and prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:28). It appears that they also did something to their foreheads, possibly pulling hair out or shaving specific patches (Lev 21:5). Shaving one's head was a sign of mourning in Israel, so this is clearly something else. It is a case of a practice being well known to the Israelites but obscure to us. It is worth noting that there is some reliance upon shaving the head as the mark of temple prostitutes, of both genders. This might be what is referenced here, but there is no way of knowing.

vv. 3-21

These dietary restrictions certainly draw on the kosher laws of Leviticus 11, but the reference to eating animals you find dead and boiling a goat in its mother's milk are aggregated from elsewhere (Lev 7:24, Ex 23:19). Isn't it a bit odd to see this in the midst of the rest of these chapters? Remember that eating the meat of domesticated animals was rare. These are all wild animals which could be hunted. This wild game was not subject to the laws related to domesticated animals, and while there was freedom to consume what was clean, most of the prohibitions here make good sense. Many of these animals carry disease.

Thursday, March 24

Deuteronomy 14:22-15:23

vv. 22-27

This is an extraordinary passage. When we think of a tithe, we think of something we give to the church. Here the tithe is the first tenth of produce which is brought with you to the holy place for you to eat as part of the celebration! If you lived too far away, you could convert the offering to money, carry it to Jerusalem and then buy whatever you wanted to eat. On top of that, you could even buy wine and "strong drink" (šekar, beer). The reason you purchased these was not for intoxication but because water was often not safe to

drink when you traveled to cities, especially in the spring. The rains washed *everything* out of the streets, which meant that during this season, the cisterns and streams might be polluted. So, you bought wine and beer because they had been prepared the previous autumn and the process of making them (as well as the alcohol in them) killed off any contaminants.

vv. 28-29

Every third year, you would forego the festival and instead give the tithe to the Levites, sojourners (*ger*), widows and orphans who lived in your area. In other words, the tithe provided for the less fortunate. There were measures in place to provide for the people through the year (Exo 22:22-24; Lev 19:9-10) but this was a special offering to God through them.

15:1-6

The sabbath year is another thing unique to Israelite culture, and one which plays into the Chronicler's interpretation of one of Jeremiah's prophecies about the fall of Judah (Jer 25:11-12; 2 Chr 36:21). Here, it describes the forgiving of debts among the Israelites. They were not allowed to charge interest because their assets were blessings from God and therefore, if possible, they could loan it to each other. They could charge interest from foreigners (*nakariy*), which were those who did not live in the land.

vv. 7-18

This passage deals not with slavery (which is the common way of viewing it) but of the *choice* to become a part of a household. Abusive slavery is pretty directly condemned. In this context, a Hebrew (*ib-riy*) does not mean an Israelite. This is counterintuitive to us, but the term comes from Egyptian (Gen 40:15, 41:12) and means something like "wandering shepherds" or "Asiatic nomads." These are people, both within the Israelite society and on its outskirts, who choose to join with an Israelite household. This particular law is older than the people of Israel and is found in the practices of the Arameans. Jacob invokes this when he serves his cousin Laban (Gen 29:15-20).

VV. 19-23

Again, we have the *inclusio*. This passage began with discussion of the firstborn and the blood (look back to Deut 12:15). It is interwoven with another *inclusio* (12:2-32), which is one of the more interesting literary techniques in Deuteronomy. The texts weaves in and out of each other. Some interpreters think that indicates multiple redactions or additions to the text, but it could just as easily represent masterful composition. The author connects the profane and the sacred, the priestly and the common to emphasize that the worship of the LORD is holistic. It embraces all facets of life.

Friday, March 25

Deuteronomy 16:1-17:7

vv. 1-8

This chapter deals with the three pilgrimage festivals in the Hebrew calendar, which is lunar. The first month (Abib in the liturgical calendar and Nisan in the civil calendar) begins the day after the new moon closest to the spring equinox. The Passover meal is eaten after sunset on the night of the full moon, 14 Abib. It is followed by week-long festival called "Unleavened Bread" (*matzah*) which commemorates the Exodus.

VV. 9-12

The Hebrew week is seven days. Seven weeks after Passover is *Šavuot* (literally "the sevens," get it?). This is also called Weeks, Firstfruits, First Harvest and later Pentecost (Exo 23:16, 34:22). The Israelites would work in the weeks between Unleavened Bread and Weeks, harvesting the first crops of the year – chiefly barley and winter wheat. Then they would journey to Jerusalem to fulfill their obligation of offering the firstborn/firstfruits already discussed. This was considered a "free will" offering, showing the deliverance from slavery.

VV. 13-17

The third pilgrimage festival is *Sukkot*, or "booths." The new moon closest to the vernal equinox marks the beginning of the month of Tishrei, which is the beginning of the civil calendar. So, 1 Tishrei is called *roš ha-šanah*, (beginning of the year), followed by *yom kippur* (day of atonement) on 7 Tishrei. Both these holidays were observed by the priests, while the regular people had the day off but stayed home. They worked on the harvest before the full moon, 15 Tishrei, which begins the feast of booths.

These three feasts (unleavened bread, weeks, booths) are all agricultural and are built around the spring/summer rhythm of planting and harvesting. The pilgrimages were for men, because as heads of the household, they had a responsibility to participate in the life of the nation.

vv. 18-20

Why insert a statement about justice (*mišpat*, the same root as "rules" in 4:1) here? The connection between people submitting to God's authority over the harvest flows into his authority in judgment. These judgments could be anything from the declaration of a new moon to a murder trial. The Israelites received the land as an inheritance (*yeraš*) because the Canaanites lost the land through injustice.

16:21-17:7

While other passages dealt with sacrifices to other gods throughout the land, this passage specifically addresses abominable or blemished offerings at the altar of the LORD. This mattered specifically to the Judahites because Hezekiah's father Ahaz (r. 742-735 BC) set up an altar to Assyrian gods in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 16:10-20), which Hezekiah had destroyed as part of his reforms.

This Week's Application

There is a lot in this section about holiness, setting apart weeks for festivals and tithes for the sojourners. It also includes the mention of the monuments on Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. How do you think that monuments and regular festivals/observances help us maintain holiness? Can you remember times in your own faith journey when you lost sight of the monuments, or wandered away from God's word? How did you get back? What monuments could you erect in your life as helps for others who might sometimes get distracted?

Week 4

While most of the previous few chapters dealt with local decisions, this section deals with matters that get too big for household or tribal decisions. First, it deals with what could be called an appeals process for higher law cases. It then deals with those you would appeal to — the king and the priests. Most of the texts are procedural but they also deal very much with understanding the weight and significance of justice and truth in society.

Monday, March 28

Deuteronomy 17:8-18:22

vv. 8-13

The Hebrew underlying "homicide" here is the word "blood versus blood" (ben-dam ledam), which stands in for murder (Gen 4:10-11, 9:5-6). The entire passage is quite poetic in Hebrew: dabar la-mišpat beyn-dam le-dam, beyn diyn le-diyn wu-beyn nega le-nega dibrey ribot. The phrase begins with compounds of word (dabar) and has three pairs of the same words for emphasis. It is meant to add emphasis and the necessity of a clear decision. Priests form the first court of appeal, and they provide instruction (torah).

vv. 14-20

This is the "Law of the King," and it is one of the reasons we know Deuteronomy dates to the time of the monarchy, probably the reign of Hezekiah or Josiah. While the earlier books of Exodus-Numbers do not *forbid* having a king, when the people of Israel asked Samuel to give them a king, he believed it to come from an unhealthy failure and warned them of the dangers of having a king (1 Sam 8:4-22). Deuteronomy frames the king in a good way, but offers warnings against the bad behavior of the kings, chiefly appointing foreigners, allowing the king to accumulate wealth, and marrying many wives (forming treaties with many nations). Additionally, it was required that the king make a copy of Deuteronomy for himself. This may indicate that Deuteronomy was *specifically written* for this use.

18:1-8

This is the appointment of local Levitical priests, not the priest in Jerusalem. Only the last part (6-8) deals with those who served in Jerusalem. The offerings to the Levites are described by a different Hebrew word (inheritance, *na-ha-lah*) than the inheritance of the land (*yeraš*) for the other tribes. It is what they are entitled to as dependent upon the other

tribes. There is no description of Levites' qualifications or the requirements, since those things appear to have been common knowledge – a testament to the antiquity of their role in Israel, as opposed to prophets, who have an elaborate qualification criteria later.

vv. 9-14

The warning against diviners of all kinds as abominations (*to-a-bot*) deals not with sacrifices but with the practitioners themselves. The Canaanites relied upon this kind of divination for practically everything, something that is well-attested in the manuscripts found in many sites (Ugarit, Ebla, Emer) and appears to be present in some recent finds (the Zakkur Stela, the Lachish Letters, the Deir 'Allā Plaster). Divination uses the present world – the stars, auguries using the innards of dead animals and things like that - to determine "divine" messages. Necromancy involves asking the dead for direction.

vv. 15-22

This is the first mention of a "prophet like Moses," which will be the concluding thought of the book (Deut 34:10). A prophet speaks directly from God to the present situation. The prophets were responsible for the production of most of the Old Testament, and the point here is that Moses's prophecy supersedes all prophets. If a prophet disagrees with Moses, he is to be rejected. It is likely that this call for another prophet (v. 18) is referring to Elijah, who was largely responsible for the development of the prophetic office during the monarchy period of Israel's history.

Tuesday, March 29

Deuteronomy 19:1-20:20

VV. 1-13

One of the key components of justice is a proper trial, and the cities of refuge protected those who claimed someone's death was an accident (Num 35:11-24). There were three on the eastern bank of the Jordan (Deut 4:41-43), three established here, and three more were allowed if the borders expanded. The idea was that the shedding of blood was too important to always leave to local justice. Just as there was an appeal to the priests (17:8-13), there was also this option. People judged innocent in the city of refuge could live there and have protection from vengeance. If the person was judged guilty, then he was handed over to the victim's family. Justice was therefore separated from vengeance, an important distinction required for a civilized existence.

ν. 14

This one seems pretty obvious, but personal property was protected under the law. The landmark (*gevul*) was a stone marker delineating the edge of a field. Israelite property

rights were protection of the produce, not the land itself. Generally speaking, people could hunt and even camp on each other's property. Sheep and goats grazed across the whole land, often in large, combined herds. The farms and orchards, however, were protected. You couldn't let sheep graze in a wheat field. The purpose of this law was to protect the fields from grazing.

VV. 15-21

The requirement for two witnesses is another protection against vengeance. Justice was not simply balance (an eye for an eye). It required an additional witness to demonstrate a valid reason for executing a murderer. These passages demonstrate a focus on justice as a communal, tempered act rather than family versus family or tribe versus tribe. The book of Judges is filled with vengeance killings and the actions of individuals that result in unintended consequences. The Deuteronomy code minimizes these kinds of things by requiring a thorough approach.

20:1-9

The "war code" in Deuteronomy is curious. It assumes that the primary purpose of warfare is to protect the land given to the people of Israel. That is why those with familial obligations were excused. Care for the land was a higher priority than warfare since God would guide the warfare, and in victory or defeat, the land needed to be cared for. It sounds weird to modern ears. Embedded in the text are very low-level connections to the narrative of Samuel-Kings, like a vague suggestion of David's sin with Bathsheba (v. 7, see 2 Sam 11).

VV. 10-20

There are two different kinds of siege warfare in this text. The first is for war against other nations, a primary concern for Judah in the 8th century BC. The second glosses earlier instructions about the Canaanites with th reminder that they were to be destroyed so they did not corrupt Israel. (Another reminder that Deuteronomy looks *back* at the Israelite conquest of Canaan rather than reporting it as a present event.) Here is something interesting. The reference to *not* cutting down fruit trees (vv 19-20) draws from experience with the Assyrians who had taken Samaria in 722 BC and unsuccessfully laid siege to Jerusalem in 702 BC. Their common practice was to cut down fruit trees so that even if they lost, the people suffered. It was a malicious practice that Deuteronomy condemns as unjust.

Wednesday, March 30

Deuteronomy 21:1-23

vv. 1-9

In a society where divination was important, the Israelites eschew it. Most of the Canaanite peoples would have used a diviner or mystic to determine who committed the murder. The Israelites, on the other hand, offered a sacrifice and had the elders of the cities declare their own innocence. Innocent blood requires justice, and the elders had an obligation to investigate and determine guilt; but if they could not, they did this to prove they had done their best and were not protecting a guilty man.

vv. 10-14

THIS passage is one of the most troubling in the Bible. It is a vestige of a much older warlike society in the Ancient Near East, and this kind of "taking" a wife was very common when there were not enough women in your own society (see Judges 21). The practice was common enough that it needed to be regulated. Read the text carefully, and you will see that there was good reason for the directives. The woman mourned her family for a month, during which she was freed of the vestiges of her former life. The requirement specifically prohibits the practice of raping captive women.

vv. 15-17

It should be obvious that this and the passage before it are regulating behaviors that were common. They preserve people's dignity, protecting them from destitution. The former protected captive women, and this passage protects the rights of the firstborn son when a man had more than one wife. The parallels to Jacob and his two wives are hard to miss (Gen 29-30). Jacob's first three sons (Reuben, Simeon and Levi) forfeited their right to the firstborn, so the rightful inheritor was Judah, but Jacob preferred Joseph. Ephraim, the tribe that ruled the northern kingdom, were descendants of Joseph. David was a descendant of Judah.

vv. 18-21

This is another troubling passage, since it calls for the stoning of rebellious son. What do we make of this? Remember these are not young children. Families lived in household compounds. This passage deals with an adult son who has been negligent and reckless, causing substantial losses. The last line, however, clues us in to the real intent of the passage. "All Israel shall hear and fear" (v 21). The family situation points to a larger issue, the rebellion of God's "sons" – the people of Israel. If God opposes rebellion in the household, why would he not oppose it on the national level?

vv. 22-23

Although most people are familiar with this passage because Paul references it in Galatians (Gal 3:13), the real emphasis is that dead bodies should not be exposed to the elements and scavengers. The Romans knew this prohibition well, which was why their preferred method of execution for rebellious Jews was crucifixion.

Thursday, March 31

Deuteronomy 22:1-30

VV. 1-12

What do we do with this random collection of rules addressing things like crossdressing and bird's nests? There is even a rule for putting a fence on your roof, so people don't roll off while sleeping. The key lesson seems to be "stay in your lane." These are a good example of judgments or rules, interpretations of the law in specific situations.

vv. 13-21

One of the longest legal passages in the entire book deals with accusations of sexual immortality, which should tell us a lot about how much of an issue this was. Marriage was the legal foundation of Israelite society, since the household was so important. In most Ancient Near East societies, women were treated as property and although some of the societal norms are found in the text. This is reflected in the use of the word "hate" in verse 17, a translation of a very old word (śena') that predates Hebrew. The evidence of virginity was a sheet laid on the marriage bed and then given to the father of the bride. The bride's blood was the evidence in this case. If the groom is shown to be lying he was required to pay her father and was financially responsible for her the rest of her life. On the other hand, if the woman lied about her virginity, she was stoned. (It is worth noting that there is no biblical evidence of any woman being stoned for this offense.)

vv. 22-29

The various legislations about encounters with women and the pursuit of marriage show how casual the process of marriage really was. The sexual act between two unattached people was sufficient basis for marriage. Even if the man chooses to never be with her again, he was obligated to provide for her. If she is betrothed, it was considered rape and was punishable by stoning. The severity of the previous passage is highlighted and explained. Rape was equal to murder, but willing sexual activity was equal to marriage.

vv. 30

Is a rule like this really necessary? Yes, because incest was not only tolerated in Canaanite and Egyptian cultures but sometimes actively encouraged. (Note it is not his mother described, but his father's wife. See Gen 35:22.)

Friday, April 1

Deuteronomy 23:1-25

VV. 1-2

The prohibition on eunuchs and the "child of a forbidden union" (*mamzer*, literally "disorderly" or "unbalanced") are admittedly odd, but the intention seems to have been a requirement for those who performed the liturgy of the assembly, but it is not entirely clear.

vv. 3-8

Remember that national identity was defined by the gods one worshiped. Those who worshiped the Ammonite god Milcom were Ammonites, and those who worshiped Chemosh were Moabites. Those who worshiped the LORD were Israelites. Other than that, they were indistinguishable, so for an Israelite to attempt to worship the LORD and the gods of other people was to have divided loyalty. This means that an Ammonite or Moabite could *become* an Israelite by disavowing his or her gods and accepting the LORD as the one true God (Ruth 1:16-18). Apparently, they were forbidden from service in the assembly until the tenth generation, while the children of Edomites and Egyptians were only restricted until the third generation.

vv. 9-14

Hopefully we don't need an explanation on why the stuff in these verses is in the Bible. The call to cleanliness because God was *present* in the camp emphasized the unity of God with his people.

vv. 15-25

This collection of various rulings reminds the people not only to honor God but to honor their neighbor. Indeed, one could argue that all the laws radiate from the great commandments (Deut 6:4-5). God establishes boundaries, which make for good relationships. Not only can you divide your loyalties between gods but also between your own desires and what is best for all members of the community. They appear to be precedent law, but the entire message is, "Don't take what isn't yours."

This Week's Application

So much emphasis on the household and family, especially sexual purity, makes it plain that the covenant is something bigger than the individual and his behavior. Relationships are crucial. Looking at our own world, we can see a lot of divided loyalties. People want to serve God, but also serve their own idols. They want to have marriage and a family, but they want to reserve the best of themselves for themselves. It is not hard to see the danger inherent in this kind of thinking.

Week 5

Continuing the household laws of the previous chapters, this section also has a smattering of other rules, such as the treatment of the Amalekites (a historical enemy), a special dedication for the festival of Šavuot, and the plans for the monuments on Ebal and Gerizim. From there, the book begins to wind to a close – slowly – with a set of curses and blessings.

Monday, April 4

Deuteronomy 24:1-25:19

vv. 1-5

The text has addresses the law concerning virgins, prostitution, and adultery. Here are the issues of divorce (*ka-riytut*), remarriage, and the "honeymoon stage." Some people focus on the stringent rules on remarriage, but the law really places stringent requirements upon the husband who divorces the woman. He has to live with the consequences of his actions.

24:6-25:4

These kinds of miscellaneous rulings keep appearing, and they generally are not connected to their context. Our modern version of Deuteronomy appears in a single section of printed books, but it would have originally have been on scrolls. It is possible that what we are reading is an anthology of various versions of parts of Deuteronomy which were being employed by judges with their rulings appended on the last page or part of page of these scrolls, which is why they tend to be all together. The editors of Deuteronomy would have left them as evidence of the legal process.

vv. 5-10

It is likely that this approach to redemption of a wife (called Levirate marriage) was apparently very old. There was actually a specific Hebrew word used *only* for this type of marriage (*yibema*), indicating that it was both highly formalized and fairly common. In a world with a lot of natural dangers (predators, disease) as well as persistent low-level warfare

vv. 11-16

How could vv. 11-12 be anything but a *very specific* ruling in a particular situation. Could this have possibly been a common occurrence? Verses 13-16 were far more common situations since merchants would sometimes attempt to cheat people (and continue to do so in the modern world).

vv. 17-19

The prohibition on Amalek again seems to come out of nowhere. According to Genesis, Amalek was distantly related to the Edomites (Gen 36:12), but they had fought the Israelites and disqualified themselves (Exo 17:8-16). They were therefore on the same prohibition as the Canaanites, but since they lived outside the promised land, Israel was not required to destroy them.

Tuesday, April 5

Deuteronomy 26:1-27:8

VV. 1-11

A speech is attached to the Śavuot or "festival of weeks" (Deut 16:9-12), but includes a reiteration of the history of Israel, even referring to Jacob as an "Aramean." There is a common misconception that Abraham and his family were from the city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia, near modern Kuwait. Abraham's home is often translated as "Ur of the Chaldees" ('ûr-kas-dîm) although that is an assumed derivation. Genesis does not point to southern Mesopotamia, but rather northern Mesopotamia, today's Kurdistan region in Iraq. The association with southern Mesopotamia comes from early modern excavations in the area, but there were many "Ur" sites in Mesopotamia and it may just mean "town."

VV. 12-19

This is the end of Moses's first sermon. It concludes all of the arguments made in the first part of the book and prepared for the second section with consists largely of blessings and cursings.

27:1-8

As always, a theme from earlier is picked up and expanded (Deut 11:27-32). Sadly, these monuments do not exist today. Languages written in cuneiform were impressed on clay or carved into stone, but the alphabet appears to brought about a new way of creating memorials using plaster. The Deir 'Allā Plaster is one of the very few examples of this. Hebrew was also written in ink on pieces of pottery (known as *ostraca*), a medium almost never used for cuneiform or Egyptian hieroglyphics. The directive to inscribe the

monuments "very plainly" (baer-heteb) indicates that the monument was to be inscribed in Hebrew, not Akkadian or Aramaic, which were the dominant international languages of the day.

Wednesday, April 6

Deuteronomy 27:9-28:14

vv. 9-26

There are eleven curses (*arûr*), all concerning the acts of the people of Israel toward others in Israel. There is no mention of foreigners. The monument on Mt. Ebal would have provided the briefest of summaries of the first part of the book. The word "Amen" means "it is true." The people consenting to the curses is a way of acknowledging everything in the book.

28:1-14

The counterparts to the curses are this series of blessings, which include victory over Israel's enemies. It is a relatively brief passage, including the familiar "do not turn aside to the right or to the left" (Deut 5:32; 17:11, 20). It is employed a few times in the stories of the kings of Judah (2 Sam 22:23; 1 Kgs 15:5, 22:43; 2 Kgs 22:2).

Thursday, April 7

Deuteronomy 28:15-68

vv. 15-19

The curses upon Israel for failing to honor God are dire. The way they are described is progressive. "All these curses shall...overtake you." They will catch up with you. This is not a description of immediate consequences.

vv. 20-57

It is hard to read this list of consequences and not see the northern kingdom of Israel. First, there is an overt reference to the withholding of rain (Deut 28:24). There is only one point in Israel's history in which this was used as a chastisement, namely the ministry of Elijah (1 Kgs 17). Second, there is a clear statement on the domination of a kingdom by an outside power (v. 33). This power will be both unknown and speak an unintelligible language (v. 49). It would seem that this may be a reference to the Assyrians (2 Kgs 18:26; Jer 27:3). The third reference may be the most damning. The curse discusses cannibalism (Deut 28:53), which again appears solely in the narrative about the northern kingdom (2

Kgs 6:29-31). The final reference is to the scattering of the Israelite people "among all peoples from one end of the earth to the other" (Deut 28:64). Two prophets foretold this situation in Kings (1 Kgs 14:25; 22:17).

vv. 58-68

The result of rebellion, if the people did not change course due to the curses, would be their return to captivity and slavery. They would force God's hand and make him return them to exile. This was exactly what happened, but it was inevitable if they did not repent. Since this was what happened to the northern kingdom, the writer of Deuteronomy saw these curses fulfilled.

Friday, April 8

Deuteronomy 29:1-29

vv. 1-9

It is clear that this passage opens a new section of the book, a second iteration of the covenant. It is an expansion of the covenant made at Horeb (Sinai). While Sinai was the covenant before the wilderness wanderings, Deuteronomy represents the covenant of the land.

vv. 10-15

Did you catch who the covenant was with? It is not limited to the children of Israel. It includes the sojourner and the slave ("the one who chops your wood" is a metaphor for a slave, see Joshua 9:27). By the time Deuteronomy was being written, the prophets had been ministering to the Gentiles for a century. It was clear that there was more to this than just Israel.

vv. 16-28

These verses are a summary of the entire book of Deuteronomy, both blessings and curses. It includes yet another reference to the corruptive influences of Canaanite religion and affirms the just character of God, as well as the promise to the children of those who went out of Egypt. The idea of abandoning ($\hat{a}zeb\hat{u}$) the covenant is moving to a distance from it.

v. 29

This single verse reflects the attitude of God toward diviners and soothsayers. God reveals what he wants his people to know, what they need.

This Week's Application

It is tough to come up with an application for a text that spans as many topics as this week's readings. Still, we did get the summary of the entire book and numerous warnings about rebellion. The biggest takeaway should be that this second covenant was not limited to Israel, but included slaves and strangers. God's arms open a lot wider than ours, and while he takes obedience seriously, he does not deny the opportunity to receive grace to anyone who is willing to come to him and him alone.

Week 6

As the book winds down, there is a beautifully lyrical summary of the message in chapter 32. The appointment of Joshua as Moses's successor and Moses's death signal the end of the period of Law received directly from God and the beginning of chosen representatives, Joshua, the priests, the prophets, and the kings.

Monday, April 11

Deuteronomy 30:1-20

VV. 1-10

Because it was written in the shadow of the destruction of the northern kingdom, Deuteronomy emphasizes the possibility of restoration. (Note the reiteration of the Great Commandment, Deut 6:4-5.) Even if the least of the people were scattered to the edges of heaven, God can restore them. This is perhaps the greatest expression of grace in the book. The condition of obedience and submission is made clear, however. God does not restore the capricious.

VV. 11-20

Paul later quotes this passage (Rom 10:8) to explain the grace of God in Christ. God's revelation to Israel was not hidden or mysterious. Salvation and covenant are not a secret. This was in contrast to many of the religions of the day which adhered to the idea that the "true" mysteries of the divine had to be kept to the priestly casts.

Tuesday, April 12

Deuteronomy 31:1-29

vv. 1-8

The appointment of Joshua as Moses's successor was an important act, more important than we might think. It was not just that Israel needed to have someone to lead them when Moses was gone. The command to be "strong and courageous" is a stark contrast to the "fear and dread" which characterized Israel's first attempt to enter the promised land (Deut 1:29)

vv. 9-13

It is often forgotten that the biblical books were read publicly. The book of Nehemiah features an observance of the Feast of Booths (Neh 8:13-18). It had special meaning for the Jews after they returned from the exile (Ezra 3:3) because they saw themselves as a renewal of the Deuteronomy covenant. This command to read Deuteronomy at the Feast of Booths every seventh year must have had special resonances for them.

vv. 14-23

The divine blessing of the transition to Joshua is included here, but this really serves as an introduce to the Song of Moses, which will be looked at tomorrow.

vv. 24-29

Again, we are reminded that Deuteronomy is quite different from Exodus-Numbers, which comprise a truly enormous work. In English, these three books represent 90,000 words. Deuteronomy is around 30,000. A substantial papyrus scroll was 50-70 sheets in length, but most were around 20 sheets. The Great Isaiah Scroll, found at Qumran is 17 sheets with 54 columns of text. It is around 10-10.5" high. The text of Isaiah is 37,000 words, so slightly longer than Deuteronomy. It is easy to see that a scroll of Deuteronomy could have been stored in the ark of the covenant, which was about 3.75 feet long, 2.25 feet high and wide.

Wednesday, April 13

Deuteronomy 31:30-32:47

31:30-32:43

The text is more than just a worship song. It is a developed argument with seven parts: introduction (vv. 1-6), appeal (vv. 7-14), indictment (vv. 15-18), sentence (vv. 19-29), assurances (vv. 30-38), the word of the LORD (vv. 39-42), and praise (vv. 43). It is a case against the unrighteous and a confirmation for the righteous. Of course, this is delivered through a complex Hebrew poetry pattern which draws in elements from every day life as well as the extraordinary. In the text, God is referred to often as "the Rock" (*zûr*, vv. 4, 15, 18, 30-31, 37,), an idea that Paul relied upon when describing the work of God (1 Cor 10:1-4). This hints at Moses's failure at Meribah when he struck the rock instead of speaking to it (Num 20:10-13), but it also relies upon the two monuments, which were large rocks, that were to be set up on Ebal and Gerizim with this text on them.

As a side note, JESHURUN is another name for Israel. It means "upright one."

vv. 44-47

It is pretty extraordinary to imagine Moses and Joshua singing this elaborate song for the people of Israel. The song was meant to accompany the laws and rules in the book, to sum up what it meant to be God's people.

Thursday, April 14

Deuteronomy 32:48-33:29

vv. 48-52

Moses was gathered to his people. This was a common figure of speech in Ancient Israel, probably because burials involved placing the bodies in communal sites until the flesh decomposed and then placing the bones together in a communal grave. These kinds of burials have been found all over Israel, and it is the reason that Jacob asked that his body not be buried in Egypt and be carried to the family burial site at Machpelah (Gen 50:12-14). There is something beautiful about the image that when Moses died although his body would be buried alone, *he* would still be with his people. Although the land was given to Israel, they were not tied to the land. It emphasizes the way that the worship of the LORD transcended the expectations of their culture.

33:1-29

Here, the LORD is heralded as king of Israel (Jeshurun is another name for Israel). The gathering of the people is shorthand for a coronation. Ceremonies that crowned a god as king were common among the Canaanites, and although we cannot be sure, this may preserve that idea. This song may be a coronation song for the LORD.

When Jacob died, he blessed his sons (Gen 49:1-27). Moses is the second person to bless each tribe, but his sequence is odd. Levi and Judah are swapped in order. There is no mention of Simeon, but Jacob combined Simeon with Levi, and Moses may do as well. Benjamin is presented before his older brother Joseph, who is listed as a stand-in for the tribes descended from his sons Manasseh and Ephraim. Issachar is omitted entirely. It would appear that this list represents what is left of the tribes after the Assyrian conquest.

Friday, April 15

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

vv. 1-8

All great stories have an ending. Moses was no exception. That he died in the land of Moab, looking out to Jerusalem was no surprise. From the top of Pisgah, Moses could have indeed seen everything that is described here. One has to read the reference to the Mediterranean ("the western sea") and wonder, but it is only 60 miles from Pisgah, and although the land between is hilly, Pisgah is high enough that it would have been possible to see at least a thin line of blue of the sea at the very edge of the horizon. The sense is that Moses was able to look out over what would eventually become the kingdom of Judah and know that God would give the Israelites a home there.

The text includes a reminder that the book was not written at the time, since the author points out that people *still* didn't know where Moses was buried when it was written. Sometimes people say Moses couldn't have written Deuteronomy, but the book does not claim he wrote it, only that it records his words. These are two different things, and little differences matter.

vv. 9-12

Moses is here called a prophet again. It is common for people to forget that Moses was viewed as a prophet because he spoke for God. The only other prophet in Scripture who does the kinds of signs and wonders Moses did is Elijah, and the two of them represent the testimony of Scripture.

This Week's Application

All things come to an end, even the ministry and work of someone as great and significant as Moses. The writers of Deuteronomy challenged their readers to think of Moses not as someone long ago in history but someone who was speaking to them even centuries later. God used him to speak in a way that resonated to every age. One of the great challenges of the Christian walk is to realize that it is not a faith of "I once believed." Our faith is a matter of "I am living in the power of God today." The Scriptures are alive and real if we are willing to read them as such and engage them as we should.