

“Choose Life” — Week 4: Deuteronomy 19–26

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Structure of Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy: Three discourses (1–30) — “These are the words” (1:1) — [cities of refuge (4:41–43)] — “This is the torah/instruction” (4:44) — “These are the statutes and rules” (12:1) — “These are the words of the covenant” (29:1) — Conclusion 31–34

1:1–4:40 First Discourse of Moses

4:44–28:68 Second discourse of Moses

- Decalogue and Exposition (5–11)
- Deuteronomic Code (12–26)
- Covenant Blessings and Curses (27–28)
 - 27 Ceremony at Shechem
 - 28 Consequences of obedience and disobedience

29–30 Third Discourse of Moses

31–34 Conclusion

Deuteronomy 16–18 (cont.): Authority

16:18–17:13 — Judges, priests, and judicial matters. Impartiality; “two or three witnesses” (17:6). Levitical priests in the central shrine are the supreme court (17:10–13).

17:14–20 — The king subject to the law. King cannot be a foreigner; no taxation power; essentially glorified judge. Cf. to Solomon, 1 Kgs 4:26 (horses from Egypt); 10 (gold); 11:3–4 (too many wives). 1 Sam 8: was Israelite kingship a mistake?

18 — 18:1–14 Levites are mediators to YHWH, not any other kind of magic, medium or soothsayer. Levites have no inheritance; their sacrifice portion is the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach (18:3–4), different from Lev 7:29–34: the breast and right thigh. See also 1 Sam 2:12–17, trident random-draw method.¹ 18:15–22: Prophet like Moses; how to know a true prophet. Cf. Jer 28:9.

Deuteronomy 19–26: Rules for Harmony in the Community

(19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 22, 24; 24:7 — “Thus you shall purge the evil from among your midst” refrain)

19 — Cities of refuge, false witness, court justice. How are we to understand this eye-for-eye/tooth-for-tooth/life-for-life business from Deut 19:21 from a Christian perspective of ‘turning the other cheek’?

20 — Rules for holy war: different for war against Canaanites than against others. 20:5–9; 24:5: Being productive at home before being destructive in battle. 20:10–18: Distinction between conquests in general and Canaanites in particular (*herem*). 20:19–20; 22:6–7: productivity in natural world.

21 — 21:1–9: Atonement for unsolved murder. Why is this necessary? Land is part of the covenant relationship. 21:10–14: Protection for captive wife. Hardest passage in Deuteronomy for me. Why such fig-leaf protections for captive woman? 21:15–17: Protection for unloved wife and her son. 21:18–21: Disobedient son. In what scenario would this be used? How does this relate to what comes before and after? 21:22–23: “cursed is the one who is hanged on a tree”—cf. Gal 3:13.

¹ Benjamin D. Giffone, “According to Which ‘Law of Moses’? Cult Centralization in Samuel, Kings and Chronicles,” *Vetus Testamentum* 67:3 (2017): 432–447.

22 — Responsibility to neighbors, environment, social roles; violations of marriage law (fornication, rape, adultery). 22:13–30: Sexual misconduct; priority is productive sexuality according to proper ownership. A woman should only have sex with her husband, and they cannot be related (unproductive).

23 — Unclean people; uncleanness in the battle camp; moral responsibilities. Deut 23:2–3 and Gen 19:30–38: Ammon and Moab are product of “illicit unions” (*mamzerim*). Deut 23:12–14 bury your poo, because YHWH is with you. 23:15–25 Egalitarian laws. 23:15–16: don’t give up runaway slaves. Cf Obad 1:14; Amos 1:6, 9. If oppression elsewhere leads to an ‘exodus,’ support it.

24 — Laws for harmony in the community: divorce, productive marriage, productive work, care for the poor (orphan, widow, sojourner)

25 — More laws for harmony in the community: judgment, Levirate marriage, fair weights. Deut 25:5–10 and Gen 38 (Ruth 3–4) levirate marriage. Deut 25:11–12 Cut off the hand of a woman who grabs a man’s genitals in a fight with her husband. Is this cruel? Why is this so serious? (It’s not just a fair-fight issue.) 25:17–19: blot out Amaleq’s memory from under heaven BUT also, don’t forget. Cf. Agag, 1 Sam 15; Haman the Agagite, Est 3:1.

26 — Conclusion: thanksgiving in the land for YHWH’s provision, final adjuration to keep the law. 26:3–11: Creedal recitation. 26:12–15: Swear that you have made the proper tithes of thanksgiving. Verbal affirmation that YHWH has kept his promises. Compare to Isaiah: After each cycle of judgment and restoration, the text provides songs to sing in the day of redemption (Isa 12; 26–27; 38:9–20)