

“Choose Life” — Week 5: Deuteronomy 27–34

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Structure of Deuteronomy

The concluding section of Deuteronomy includes the command to ratify the Deuteronomistic Code (27–28), the third discourse of Moses (29–30), and the great conclusion of Moses' life (31–34), consisting of two poetic discourses (32–33) bracketed by short narratives involving the transfer of authority to Joshua (31, 34). These chapters underscore the covenantal imperatives that Israel has received, the blessings for obedience, and the curses for [probable] disobedience. The story of Moses' career (Exodus–Deuteronomy) ends with great expectation, if not great optimism, about Israel's imminent conquest of Canaan.

1:1–4:40 First Discourse of Moses

4:44–28:68 Second discourse of Moses

- Decalogue and Exposition (5–11)
- Deuteronomistic 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

Ratification of the Covenant (27–28)

27 — 27:1–8 Command for Israel after they have crossed the Jordan: write the law on plaster-covered, unhewn stones, and use them for an altar (fulfilled in Josh 8:30–35). 27:9–10 The people have “today” become the people of YHWH their God. 27:11–26 Command for Israel after they have crossed the Jordan: ratify the treaty orally at a ceremony

28:1–14 — Blessings for obedience. 28:2 Blessings will “overtake you” if you “obey.” Blessings of productivity (echoes of Deut 7; Deut Code). Blessings of prominence among the nations (echoes of Deut 4).

28:15–46 — Curses for disobedience. Framed by “not obey”/ “overtake you” (v. 15), “overtake you”/ “not obey” (v. 45). **28:16–19** – direct parallel to 3–6. **28:20–24** Plague and famine; echoes with Leviticus 26:14–20: Pestilence; consumption; Deut 28:23 bronze sky, iron earth; Lev 26:19 iron sky, bronze earth. **28:25–37** Parallel to 7–14: Enemies scatter vs. Israel scatters (7, 25); Instead of being a master/lender, Israel will be slaves and experience the plagues of Egypt; Instead of enjoying the productivity of the land, others will enjoy it; Instead of serving the wise commandments of YHWH, they will stumble in darkness and “become a proverb.” **28:38–44** Futility of labor. **28:45–46** Conclusion.

28:47–57 Foreign invasion – predicted as if it were a certainty! Echoes of Lamentations? **28:48** Nakedness – Lam 1:8. **28:48** Yoke on the neck – Lam 1:14. **28:49** Nation whose language they don't understand – Lam 1:10; Isa 28:11–13. **28:49** Will swoop in – Isa 5:26–30. **28:50** Young and old suffer – Lam 1:18–19; 2:21; 5:13–14. **28:52** Siege in walled cities and towns – Lam 3:5–7. **28:53–57** Parents eat their children; women eat the “afterbirth” and don't share with their kids – Lam 4:3–4, 10.

28:58–68 Undoing the exodus; plagues of Egypt, return to Egypt. **28:60** Sicknesses of Egypt. **28:61** Even if it's not listed here, I will still punish you with it! **28:62** Even though you were as numerous as the stars of heaven, you will be few in number (Gen 15; 26:4; Deut 1:10; 10:22). **28:64–65** You will serve other gods of wood and stone in exile. **28:68** I will bring you back in ships to Egypt, even though I promised it would never happen again; you will be sold into slavery. Reversal of the Red Sea: instead of taking them through the waters to safety, the ships will take them via waters back to captivity.

Third Discourse of Moses (29–30)

29:2–9 — Historical prologue. Rescue from Egypt. Preservation in the wilderness without clothes or sandals wearing out; Food and drink. Partial defeat of the Canaanites already; Partial inheritance already: Reuben, Gad, Gilead.

29:10–15 — Parties to the covenant. Blurring of generations: *This* generation remembers Egypt; and the covenant is not just with *this* generation, but Israel past and future.

29:16–19 — Basic stipulation. You can see that the gods of the nations are not real gods, and their worship is awful!

29:20–28 — Curse/sanctions. Foreigners will see! **29:24** Further explanation of 28:37 “You will become a proverb.” **29:23** Israel will be like Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim (compare to Jdg 19). **29:27** Five times in Deut 28–29, “written” curses in this book are mentioned. Writing had a mystical quality to it; cf. Numbers 5 and the written curse for the test of unfaithfulness.

29:29–30:10 — Preaching of repentance and restoration! **29:29–30:5** Repentance = restoration. **30:6–10** Circumcision of the heart so Israel can actually please God. Cf. 10:12, 16; Jer 4:4 “Circumcise your own heart” (conversely, Jer 9:25).

30:11–20 — Covenantal decision. **30:11–14** Not unattainable. Really? Why did they fail to attain it? (See Paul’s interpretation in Romans 10:5–13). **30:15–20** A good law! **30:19** Heaven and earth as witnesses (4:26; 32:1). Choose life!

Conclusion (31–34)

31:1–15 Moses prepares for his own death. **31:16–30** Lead up to Song of Moses: the song will confront/condemn Israel when they go into the land and break the covenant. [**32:44–47** Moses teaches the people the Song.]

32:1–43 “Song of Moses”: a covenant lawsuit (*riv*; like *Meribah*). A carefully structured poem that “popularizes” various elements of Deuteronomic theology for public, liturgical and prophetic use. Serves as a poetic interpretation of the narrative events that occur before and after it in the Primary Narrative. Its poetic quality made it an intellectual and theological battleground for interpretation. Serves as the theological basis and to some extent the literary basis for the prophetic tradition by combining themes of covenant, wisdom and salvation. **32:1–3** witnesses. **32:4–6** accusation. **32:7–14** recitation of YHWH’s loving actions. **32:15–18** indictment. **32:19–25** declaration of punishment. **32:26–27** INTERRUPTION: possible slander of YHWH among the nations. **32:28–35** the nations successful against Israel have not acknowledged YHWH’s sovereignty (devoid of wisdom!). **32:36–38** YHWH vindicates his people. **32:39–43** YHWH saves his people and his reputation!

32:48–52 Moses sees the Promised Land

33 Blessing of Moses on the tribes. Begins (1–5) and ends (26–29) with blessings on Israel as a whole. Longest blessings: Levi and Joseph.

34 Death of Moses

Why Study Deuteronomy?

1. The Law and its place in our relationship with God
2. Emphasizes teaching and preaching, to our neighbors and to the next generation (Deut 4: wise among the nations; Deut 6: teach this to your children)
3. It contains the central tenets of our faith: the Shema and the Decalogue
4. Concern for purity in God’s people and God’s worship
5. Centrality of the gift of the Promised Land as a fulfillment of God’s promise
6. Extensive use of Deuteronomy in the NT (third-most-quoted book of OT in NT)
7. The prominence of moral and ethical matters, establishing it as foundational, alongside the Prophets, in its concern for a just social order
8. The gospel, particularly in 4:25–32 and 30:1–10. God does for His people what we cannot do for ourselves