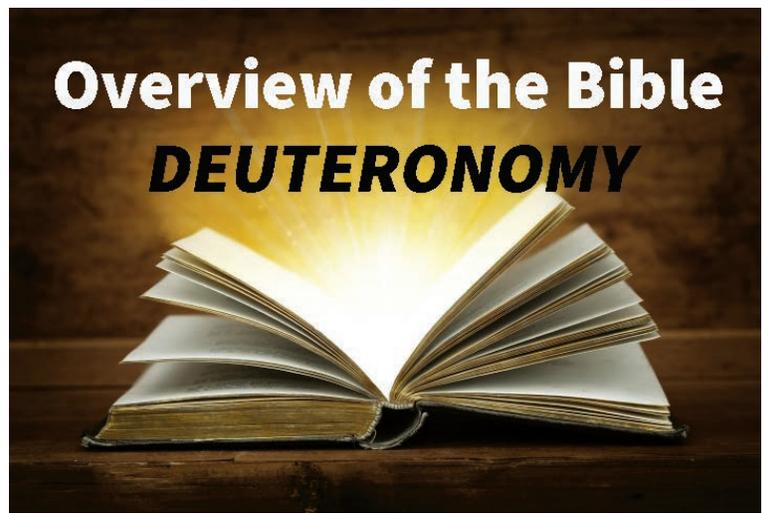


DEUTERONOMY:
Moses' Second Address:
Explaining the Grace of Yahweh
Deuteronomy 4:45-11:32

Lesson 37

Wednesday, March 24, 2021



THE THEME OF ONENESS (Deut. 5-6)

Moses' second address starts with 5:1, a summons to *"all Israel"* to listen, not to the advice or reflections of a sage, but to the recitation of God's standards. This second speech of Moses begins and ends with the importance of *"today"*: *"Hear, O Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today"* (5:1); *"Be sure that you obey all the decrees and laws I am setting before you today"* (11:32). The two verses are nearly identical.

Two things are of interest here. First is Moses' reminder to his audience that at Horeb (i.e., Sinai) the Lord made a covenant *"with us ... not with our ancestors"* (5:2-3). Moses is addressing people who either were infants at that time or were born after the event. Also, he clearly refers in 4:31 to *"the covenant with your ancestors that he swore to them."*

Thus, we are confronted with a paradox: *"covenant with your ancestors"* (4:31) and *"not with our ancestors"* (5:3). Precisely, here is a clue to how this material in Deuteronomy functions. To be sure, God did make a covenant with that first generation. He is not about to make another covenant with the next generation. In fact, the word *"covenant"* never appears in the Old Testament in the plural. *"Covenants"* does not exist. What Moses is appealing for is that his contemporaries fully appropriate that earlier covenant for themselves. God's word to the first generation is to be appropriated by the next generation. Nowhere does Moses even hint that God needs to do something more or that his work is unfinished. God has done everything necessary to make possible the obedience of every generation.

The second point of interest in this chapter is the second reading of the Ten Commandments (cf. the first version in Exod. 20:1-17). There are indeed differences, some major, some minor, between Deuteronomy's version of the Decalogue and the version in Exodus. Most of these we reviewed in the section about Exodus. Here, however, we need to ask what specific role is played by the repetition of the Decalogue at this point in Deuteronomy. Thus far we have encountered the recalling of history; now we encounter the recalling of Sinaitic law.¹

Is this repetition Moses' way of reminding his audience that God's law is immutable and eternal? God does not issue revised versions of his will about idolatry, murder, theft, and coveting. To be sure, there is adaptation in some particulars to new circumstances. There are amendments to the constitution. But the revelatory truths of the Decalogue are firmly set for the next generation and generations thereafter. To erase the prohibition against coveting or disrespect to one's parents is no more possible than to strike the phrase *"all men are created equal"* from the Declaration of Independence.

Thus, for this new generation, the simple recitation of that old law is sufficient. But that old law must become my law, the standard and authority by which I measure my life and my lifestyle. The issue, then, is making past history present history. There are many generations, but only one law.

Following the recital of the Decalogue, Moses reminds the people of tremors that they experienced when God did speak (5:23–27), and how they were only too happy to select Moses to stand in the breach between themselves and God. God consented to this arrangement (5:28–29). Interestingly, in v. 29 God can only hope and desire that his people will fear him and keep his commandments.

The immediate function of these verses is to emphasize Moses' unique mediatorial position. He alone stands between God and Israel. His credentials are both congregational appointment and divine approval. As such, this position confers on him the role of teacher and invests his announcements with authority.

The repetition of the Decalogue had impressed on Israel the idea of one divine law. The theme of oneness is then continued into the second half of ch. 5. Not only is there *one law*, there also is only *one mediator*. So again, the idea of oneness, sounded in ch. 5, is perpetuated in ch. 6. The progression is *one law, one mediator*, and now *one Lord*.

Why must there be at this point a reference to one God? For one thing, much of ch. 6 is an elaboration of the first commandment, or a spelling out of the implications of 5:6–10: “*you shall love the LORD your God*” (6:5) and “*thousands of those who love me*” (5:10); “*who brought you out of the land of Egypt*” (6:12) and “*who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage*” (5:6); “*you shall not go after other gods*” (6:14) and “*you shall have no other gods*” (5:7); “*the LORD your God ... is a jealous God*” (6:15) and “*I the LORD your God am a jealous God*” (5:9); “*you shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD*” (6:17) and “*who ... keep my commandments*” (5:10).

Here and elsewhere Deuteronomy juxtaposes love for God (6:5) and following God's commandments (6:6). Note the similar joinings in 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 19:9; 30:16. It is as if Deuteronomy makes the case that one loves God by obeying and honoring him and by making a commitment to holy living. W. L. Moran (1963) has demonstrated from ancient Near Eastern texts of the second and first millennia B.C. that a king is to “*love*” his vassal—that is, provide for the vassal's needs and effectively lead his subjects. The vassal likewise is to “*love*” his king—that is, serve him loyally. How the vassal “*loves*” his royal head is how, in such texts in Deuteronomy, the child of God is to “*love*” his or her Lord. This is, of course, quite close to Jesus' statement “*If you love me, you will obey what I command*” (John 14:15). Love as obedience does not suggest, however, that Deuteronomy advocates an emotionless version of loyalty. If passionate feelings without actions are unacceptable, so are actions devoid of feelings of love (Lapsley 2003).

I suspect that the Old Testament's (and Deuteronomy's in particular) concept of monotheism is to be understood not ontologically, but historically. That is, the emphasis is not with one being or more than one being, but whether this being acts in a way that is consistent. A god who does one thing in a certain situation one time and does a different thing in that same situation another time leaves us with two gods. A god who is inconsistent is historically polytheistic. This point is beautifully illustrated by Paul in Rom. 3:21–31, the aim of which is to show that all people—Jew and Gentile alike—are justified through faith. Inserted into this theological argument is the statement “*since God is one*” (Rom. 3:30). If with the Gentiles God does one thing and with the Jews, he does another, then we have two gods. But God does not do that.

Moses consistently reminds his people that their appropriate response to God—love, fear, obey—is indeed just that, a response. They were delivered from Egypt by grace. They were preserved in the wilderness by grace. They will receive the land of promise by grace. Chapter 6 illustrates the proper perspective. Verses 1–9 and 12–19 emphasize human responsibility; vv. 10–11 and 20–23 emphasize divine grace, especially the gratuitous gift of land.

A CALL TO REMEMBRANCE (7–11)

If Israel needs a proper relationship to God (ch. 6), it is also incumbent upon the people to have a proper relationship to those among whom they will live (ch. 7)—Israel is something of a dwarf surrounded by giants. Moses' counsel is clear: do not fraternize with your neighbors (7:1–5). His second counsel is equally clear: do not live in fear of them (7:17–26).

The reason for such advice is twofold. What Israel has in its favor is not impressive size—*“you were the fewest of all peoples”* (7:7)—but a life of holiness that mandates separation from everything impure (7:6). Elsewhere in the Pentateuch, Israel is urged and invited to holiness (*“you shall be holy/a holy nation”*), as in Exod. 19:6; 22:31; Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7, 26, but Deuteronomy describes Israel as already holy (Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9). Elsewhere in the Pentateuch holiness is a prospect; in Deuteronomy it is a possession. But even more importantly, Israel is the object of God's love and the recipient of the divine promise that the nations are God's problem, not Israel's (7:8–9, 20–24). Indeed, the Israelites do need, as 6:6 had urged, to put God's word in their hearts. For if they do so with their own word—*“if you say in your heart”* (7:17) the result is fright, anxiety, and consternation.

So, the Israelites need to know both, who the Lord is and the power of his word (ch. 6). They need to know who the enemy is and where to draw the line (ch. 7). They also need to make sure that they know who they are, and who they are not (ch. 8).

Perhaps in this eighth chapter Moses is suggesting that the Israelites should fear their enemies less than they fear themselves. The Israelites may become a more lethal weapon than any group of Hittites or Canaanites. To that end, 8:2 is a call to the Israelites to remember what the Lord did for them in the wilderness, in contrast to 7:18, which is a call to remember what the Lord did to Pharaoh in Egypt. The Lord humbled Pharaoh, but he also humbled Israel, as the incident in Exodus 16 illustrates.

In a sense, God is taking a risk in sending his children into a garden of Eden (8:7–10). The contrast between the wilderness and the resources of this land could not be drawn more strongly, for once a person has succeeded, it becomes fatally easy to forget help received along the way. Few people know how to handle affluence.

Gerhard von Rad (1966: 73) observes that phrases such as *“my power and the might of my hand”* (8:17) on the lips of God's people sounds very much like Lucifer's language in Isa. 14:12–14 and Ezek. 28:1–10. If Lucifer was cast down for his arrogance and presumption, the Israelites likewise will be cast out for theirs if they capitulate to that temptation. The way to avoid such a humiliation is for them to remember the Lord who brought them out of bondage (8:14), who led them through the wilderness (8:15), who fed them in the wilderness (8:16), who has given them power (8:18).

If we were to ask Moses, as we hear him speak throughout Deuteronomy 8, *“What things might we do that cause our relationship with God to go askew?”* he would answer:

1. let memory fail you (v. 2), *“remember”*; (v. 11), *“do not forget.”*
2. let vanity possess you (v. 14), *“your heart will become proud.”*
3. let prosperity intoxicate you (v. 13), *“your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase.”*
4. let security deceive you (v. 19), *“if you ... follow other gods and worship and bow down to them.”*

9:1–10:11 Launches into a discussion of a new dimension to the subject with *“Hear, O Israel!”* Moses demonstrates the sheer grace of YHWH's covenant relationship with Israel. He begins by focusing on Yahweh's ancient covenant promise to deliver the land of Canaan into their hands, demonstrating that if Israel ever experiences the fulfillment of this promise, it will not be based on their superior meritorious righteousness. On the contrary, Moses characterizes the nation as rebellious from the beginning. Among other examples, he focuses on the golden-calf fiasco at Horeb as exhibit A of their spiritual condition (9:1–24). Responding to Moses' intercession on their behalf (9:18–19, 25–29), Yahweh withdrew his threat to destroy them and by sheer

grace took them back as his covenant people. The production of new stone tablets of the covenant (10:1–5), the appointment of the Levites as priestly intermediaries (10:8–9), and Yahweh’s charge to Moses to lead them to the promised land (10:10–11) concretized YHWH’s answer to Moses’ prayer and his full acceptance of Israel as his covenant people.

10:12-11:1 If there is a single text that summarizes Moses covenantal theology, this is it. Adopting a catechetical rhetorical style, Moses begins with a question concerning what Yahweh, the divine Suzerain, expects of Israel, his vassals (10:12a). He answers the question in three parts, each of which prescribes the response demanded of Israel, followed by a statement of the grounds of this requirement (10:12b–15, 16–19, 20–22). The latter subdivide into a presentation of doxological and personal motivation for enthusiastic and grateful compliance with Yahweh’s expectations. The segment ends with a summary statement, involving what Jesus would call the Great Command (Matt 22:36–37): demonstrated love for Yahweh (Deut. 11:1).

CONCLUDING EXHORTATIONS FOR THE PRESENT GENERATION OF ISRAELITES (11:2–32)

If Moses began this address by treating the generation before him as if they had been at Horeb (5:1–5), he ends by pushing this generation’s experience back further, to the exodus from Egypt (11:2–4). Combining this miraculous event with their wilderness experiences, he reminds them that their very existence today is the result of Yahweh’s historical but gracious intervention on their behalf. He cites Dathan and Abiram as illustrations of the disastrous consequences of unfaithfulness to Yahweh and his covenant (11:2–7). In 11:8–26 he offers a lesson in covenantal geography, highlighting the importance of Israel’s obedience to their gracious Savior in their future well-being and in the maintenance of the three-part covenant relationship involving YHWH, Israel, and the land of Canaan. After an impassioned pastoral plea for Israel to accept YHWH’s gracious offer of the full life of blessing that he is presenting, and to avoid the curse by uncompromised devotion to Yahweh (11:26–28), Moses concludes the second address on an enigmatic note, pointing to a future ritual event at Gerizim and Ebal. In chapter 27 we will learn that through this ritual the promised land will be formally integrated into the tripartite covenant relationship. These instructions appear to substitute for the prose conclusions that end the first (4:41–44) and third (29:1 [Heb 28:69]) addresses.²

Works Cited

¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 391.

² Douglas Mangum, ed., *Lexham Context Commentary: Old Testament*, *Lexham Content Commentary* (Bellington, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), Dt.