

Preachers' Gatherings 2019

Preaching Deuteronomy

**Introduction and
Possible sermon series**

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Preaching Deuteronomy

Parts 1 and 2

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PART 1 INTRODUCTION

‘The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and all your soul, and live.’ *Deuteronomy 30.6*

‘I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers.’ *Deuteronomy 30 v. 19, 20*

Key Verse: 6.3

Hear O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you.

Checklist of prominent terms

(see ‘Theology of Deuteronomy’ p25)

There are a few oft-repeated terms that catch the heart of Moses’ preaching in Deuteronomy. They encapsulate the responsibility of the preacher of Deuteronomy.

Terms

The **land** God has given you (156x)

(= their rest: ch.12 v.9f)

The **heart** (33x)

Obey (31x)

Love: God’s for us; ours for him (29x)

Covenant (25x)

The **one place** of worship (20x)

Laws usually plus commands & decrees (22x) Matt. 5.17-20; 1 Cor. 9.19-23

Remember (16x), **do not forget** (10x) Luke 17.15f; Ephesians 2.11-13

NT //s

Heb.3&4; Eph.1.18-20, 3.14-19;

Phil.3.12

Heb.8.10-12 fulfilling Deut.30.6

Phil.2.12; 1 Thes. 4.1-8; 1 John 5.2f

John 3.16; Matt.22.36-40; Gal.2.20

Matt.26.28; 2 Cor.3.6; Heb. (17 esp 7.22, ch. 8-10, 12.24, 13.20

John 4.23; 1 Cor.2.2; Gal.6.14; Acts 4.12

The Vision

For preachers to be thrilled by, keen to unfold and unleash, all-Deuteronomy; and to feel able to do so.

The Remit

‘To equip preachers, over four hours, to be able to start teaching a book of the Bible within two weeks.’

The Resource

Part 1 Introduction to Deuteronomy

Part 2 Sermon Resources

Our love for God, his for us

‘A commitment demonstrated in actions that serve the interests and pleasure of your covenant partner.’

Daniel Block *Deuteronomy* p. 698

Deuteronomy at a glance: Summary of chapters

N = material that is evidently narrative or editorial material.

S = where the text presents itself as the start of the next speech/ sermon.

I. Prologue: historical review - “So this time, listen!” (1-4)

a). Review of recent events, ch. 1-3

N **Ch. 1.** These are Moses' words East of Jordan explaining God's laws and teachings.

S “Remember Sinai and the promise you'll occupy the land (I appointed judges) At Kadesh Barnea I said Enter; you wouldn't trust; Lord angry ...

Ch. 2 ... so we spent 38 yrs in desert but then killed Sihon and took his land ...

Ch. 3 ... ditto to Og. Gave their lands to 3 tribes, the fighting men to help conquer Canaan. Which I prayed to enter, but Lord said ‘No’, ‘cos of you.

b). Recall to the covenant

Ch. 4 Obey the laws so as to occupy the land & show the nations. Remember, and tell children, the Covenant. Involves 10 Commandments, all the laws, and no idolatry.”

N Cities of refuge. Moses gave the people God's laws and teachings East of R Jordan.

II. God's covenant with us (5-31)

a). Its core: the ten commandments, ch. 5

S **Ch. 5** “Listen to the covenant (v.6-21: preamble and 10 commandments). At Sinai you were scared. So the Lord gave them to me for you to obey.

b). Its spirit: the love of God ch. 6-11

Ch. 6 The Lord our God is One. Love him with all your heart, soul and strength. Remember & teach your children.

Ch. 7 God will give you the land. Don't make alliances. He's keeping his promise to your ancestors. He loves and, on your obedience, will bless you. Don't be afraid. He will drive out your enemies little by little.

Ch. 8 Obey! Man lives by ... every Word. God will bring you in; remember him.

Ch. 9 He will drive the people out not because *you* are good but because *they* are wicked. Remember you're stubborn! I prayed for 40 days for you ...

Ch. 10 ... and cut new stones for the repeat 10 commandments.”

N 10.6-9 narrative re the journey and the appointment of the Levites

S “Worship and love God. Love the foreigners among you.

Ch. 11 (not your children but) *you* saw what God did to the Egyptians. Obey and love him and see the blessings ... or not (v.26)! Your choice.

c). Its stipulations: The Law expounded, ch. 12-26

Specific laws for Israel the church-nation state in the promised land

Ch. 12 *These are the laws.* Destroy pagan places: *the Lord will choose one place* for your worship sacrifices: which enjoy! Never eat blood. Eschew pagan practices.

Ch. 13 Don’t follow even a prophet if he leads you away from the Lord: Death.

Ch. 14 No pagan mourning or unclean food. Tithe produce and eat it (or what it buys on sale) at *the one worship place*. Every 3rd year give it to the Levites and poor.

Ch. 15 Every 7th year cancel debts. Generous to the poor. Release slave every 7th year unless they wish to stay. 1st born animals are the Lord’s: eat them at *the one worship place*, but not the blood.

Ch. 16 Celebrate Passover, Harvest, Shelters at *the one worship place*. Judges must be just.

Ch. 17 (justice ctd) Idolatry: death penalty. Needs 2+ witnesses. Take difficult cases to *the one worship place*; priest + judge decide. Standards for a king.

Ch. 18 Offerings for Levites and priests. Beware pagan practices. God will send prophets like me; test them.

Ch. 19 Cities of refuge. Ancient boundaries. 2+ witnesses.

Ch. 20 Principles of war.

Ch. 21 Unsolved murders. Marrying a POW. Rights of first-born. Death to rebellious son. Don’t leave body on tree overnight: that’s cursed.

Ch. 22 Care for stray animals. No cross-dressing. Spare a mother bird. Railings round roofs. Virginity on marriage. Adultery, fornication, rape.

Ch. 23 Whom to exclude (eg Moabites) from worship. Clean military camps. Runaway slaves; keep your vows; plucking neighbour’s crops.

Ch. 24 Divorce. No remarriage. Don’t oppress or infect neighbour. Punish criminal but not their family. Leave produce for the poor to glean.

Ch. 25 Punishment in civil cases. Don’t muzzle ox. Levirate marriage. Honest scales. Exterminate the Amalekites for what they did vs God and you.

Ch. 26 At Harvest, remember Egyptian bondage. Tithe. *Keep these laws.*”

d). Its sanctions: curses or blessings, ch. 27 & 28.

NS **Ch. 27** (Moses + elders) “As you enter the land, write these laws on stones. Sacrifice on Mt Ebal.”

NS (v. 9) (Moses + priests) “You’re God’s people; obey him.”

NS (v. 11) (Moses) “6 tribes on Gerizim (blessings) and 6 on Ebal (curses); Levites to recite the curses (detail given), people to say Amen

Ch. 28 ... and the blessings on Mt Gerizim. But if disobey: defeat, sickness, exile”

e). Its acceptance: choose life, ch. 29 & 30.

N **Ch. 29.1** Editorial note: here are the terms of the Covenant

S (v.2-29) (Moses) “You saw the exodus miracle but you still don’t *see* it. You’re here to enter into covenant. Don’t go your own way, lest disasters. There *are* secret things, but the Law is revealed.

Ch. 30 Turn to the Lord and he’ll restore and return you here even from exile (ch. 28.end) and circumcise your hearts. It’s not too hard: choose life (the Lord is your life), be faithful to him, and you’ll live long in the land.

f). Its living preservation: re-read regularly, ch. 31

Ch. 31 Joshua will lead you. Be courageous.”

N Moses’ charge to Joshua; wrote Law, to be read every seventh year. Lord spoke to M of their unfaithfulness & to J to be courageous. Keep Law beside ark.

III. Epilogue: Moses’ handover and death (32-34)

a). Moses’ song, ch. 32

S **Ch. 32** Song of Moses. “Take these words to heart: they are your life.”

N 32.48-52: God speaks. Moses is to die on Mt Nebo, not enter the land.

b). Moses’ blessing, ch. 33

S **Ch. 33** Moses’ blessing. “Happy you: no God is like your God.”

c). Moses’ death, Joshua succeeds him, Moses’ epitaph, ch. 34

N **Ch. 34** Moses saw the land, died, buried. 120y.o; his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. Joshua took over. M was peerless: Lord spoke to him face to face, w. incomparable miracles.

Why preach through Deuteronomy?

1. It concerns a key stage in the life of Israel. They have been given their constitution. Now they are about to live it out as a nation settled in their own land for the first time. The last time they were there they were 70 people.¹ Now they were – what, a million? – who had been plodding and grumbling for 38 years: a whole generation who had not personally seen Sinai or heard the book of the law. They were not ‘getting it,’ not *seeing* what it was all about (29.4). They regularly tuned God out and would be tempted to tune in to the local religions, as they had on the way there (Num.25.1). Is this not timely? Deut. shows how a man of God addressed such a situation and laid the foundation of the state of Israel.
2. Deut. is a key book in Scripture. ‘No OT book has exerted a greater influence on the formation and development of both Jewish and Christian thought and practice than Deut. Its doctrine is foundational within the OT. The prophets recall its teaching and challenge their contemporaries with Deuteronomy’s clear and unequivocal demands. Kings were reminded of its high ideals and leading officials rehearsed its truths in times of national crisis.’² ‘Since this book offers the most systematic presentation of theological truth in the entire OT, we may compare its place to that of Romans in the NT. A comparison with John may be even more appropriate. Just as John wrote his Gospel after several decades of reflection on the Death/Resurrection of Jesus, so Moses preached the sermons in Deut. after almost four decades of reflection on the significance of the Exodus and God’s covenant with Israel.’³
3. Deut. informs NT faith. The UBS Greek NT lists 195 Deut. quotations in the NT. Andrew Thomson lists 45 giving them in both Deut. and NT order. Raymond Brown says, ‘its quotations are found in 17 NT books & over 80 references from its pages are found within the NT literature.’ This is appropriate because there is a real equivalence between their situation in life and ours. God has rescued them with a mighty salvation, claimed them as his own; and they are poised to receive all that he now has for them in the land/territory/rest they are about to take possession of. The same is true of us. What he did for them in physical history he does for us in spiritual fulfilment; their journey is a metaphor for the life of faith.

¹ Gen.46.27

² Raymond Brown p. 13

³ Daniel Block p. 25

4. Deuteronomy is great preaching. Moses is so involved with his people. 'It is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.' More happily, 'Impress these commandments on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road.' If you are sensitive some of his approach will make you think about yourself: 'It's your fault I am not to be allowed to enter the land' (1.37). Is that a balanced comment, or the inspired record of a hurt and imperfect servant getting back at the people? It's a great book for the preacher.
5. Whether obedience is legalism is a hot topic just now. Deut forces us to consider how to preach OT law (see 'how not to preach Deut,' below).
6. It cannot but make more tender our appreciation of God. The doctrine of his impassibility can lead us to portray him in a way that implies lack of feeling. Well, consider texts such as these: 'When the Lord heard what you said, he was angry and solemnly swore 'not a man of this evil generation shall see the good land.' 'Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep my commands so that it might go well with them and their children!' 'It was because the Lord loved you that he redeemed you from slavery.'⁴
7. Deut. provides a thought-provoking, open-ended programme for organising the whole life of a nation politically, socially and religiously. It has much to offer any society and certainly ours as the Christian values that formerly shaped it are being lost and increasingly opposed. See 'Theology' section below, page 28, no. 5.

⁴ 1.34, 5.29, 7.8

The Historical Setting

In around 1446BC⁵ the Hebrew people escaped from slavery in Egypt. They started back to Canaan, the land God had promised to their forefathers. They crossed the Reed Sea and 'Pharaoh's army got drowned.' What a rescue. God led them south to Mt Sinai (= Horeb) and gave them their constitution (Ex. 20). They were to be a nation under his reign by a covenant typical of the period, the ten commandments being its core laws. Led north again to Kadesh Barnea they declined God's forward call. They were condemned to wandering round the Sinai peninsula until that whole untrusting generation had died out. All, that is, except Joshua and Caleb and their families, and Moses. A journey of 11 days had taken 38 years through lack of trust in God and fear of the difficulties.

The re-entry into the promised land, in addition to being something God had promised, was to serve at least two larger purposes: one of salvation, one of judgment.

Around 2000 BC God had made a promise to an extraordinary man, Abram from Ur of the Chaldees, the low-lying area immediately north of the Persian Gulf. God swore to make his descendants into a great nation, protect them and through them bring blessing to all the peoples on earth (Gen.12.1-3). Our Lord Jesus is, of course, the heart and source of that blessing. In fulfilling that larger, redeeming purpose God would give them the land of Canaan (Gen.12.4-7).

His second purpose was ecological cleansing and ethnic judgement. What about the current inhabitants? Canaan had been occupied from Abram's time till then by a group of peoples who had increasingly engaged in practices that defiled the land and disgusted God (Lev.18.24-28; Deut. 18.9-13). But he was not prepared to act until their sin had reached its full measure (Gen.15.16). 'Until it was *right* to invade, God's people must wait, if it cost them centuries of hardship. This is one of the pivotal sayings of the Old Testament.'⁶ The sin of the Amorites had now reached that foul nadir. It was time to cleanse the land and destroy its inhabitants. The judge of all the earth acts justly.

Thus, in fulfilment of purposes far more significant than they appreciated (and isn't that true of all of us?), forty years after the exodus from Egypt we find the Hebrews just east of Canaan and being prepared to conquer and

⁵ Or possibly 1292-ish. The cross-checking of Egyptian and middle eastern dates is extremely complex and scholars differ in their final conclusion.

⁶ Kidner on Gen.15.16.

occupy it. Had they learnt from the 40-year delay? What would they now make of the factors that had frightened them, the size of the inhabitants and the defences round their cities? Faith is always spelt r-i-s-k; would they act in faith this time? A word was needed, and that word is the book now before us.

These issues are part of the service we owe our people when preaching through Deuteronomy. Like Israel we do not know the repercussions of the decisions we make: how much is at stake when we trust God or fail to, risk all or fail to, refuse temptation or fail to. Who knows what will happen if you stand up for Jesus when strongly tempted not to? Perhaps someone's salvation, or your congregation's or denomination's future, or the repercussions of your martyrdom or reputation as a Christian, or the faith of your grandchildren, or the honour of God, hang in the balance. Do I live *coram Deo*: before the face of God, under his gaze?

There was an interesting outcome of an IVF house-party at the Keswick Convention some years ago. An overseas student joined them but did not attend a single meeting. At the end of the week he asked to become a Christian. Why, they asked. He said he had watched their lives; he mentioned their cheerfully doing the washing up without being asked to. Whatever it was that made them like that, he wanted it. Our living is momentous, and it is that awareness that Deuteronomy is full of.

Introduction to Deuteronomy

Given the historical setting you could almost guess what message the people needed. Imagine the Scottish rugby team just before a match against the auld enemy. What is the head coach to say? ‘I have chosen *you*, and I love every one of you. You have a frustrating tendency to take your eye off the ball and to incur unnecessary penalties, but on top form you are invincible. Remember the basics and the game plan. We want territorial possession. We want total mutual support. Townsend, Laidlaw, **Scotland**: think of the names at stake!’

Chosen; loved; penalties or invincibility, curses or blessing; gaining possession of the territory; the game plan; living by the basics; the names at stake: these are the key themes in Deuteronomy too, and expressed in similar spirit. It is a plea, a reminder of the basics, a pep talk, an appeal.

This should inform how we preach it. These sermons (that is what Deuteronomy is) are passionate, warm hearted, broken hearted, with a vision for the life of God’s people. They are not dry moralising or theoretical explorations of legal niceties. They are engaging teaching and an appeal to be a certain kind of people through succeeding generations. If we are to be faithful to Deut., so must our sermons be. God has chosen us, in love. He has entered into a ‘covenant of grace to deliver us out of our estate of sin and misery and to bring us into an estate of salvation by a redeemer’ (Shorter Catechism qu.20). What kind of people are we going to be, for his sake who saved us?

That is how Jesus used it. It was Deuteronomy he quoted when faced with his life’s three great temptations (Matt.4.1-11 and parallels). Deuteronomy when insisting on proper judicial procedure (Matt.18.16), marriage and divorce (Mark 10 and parallels). Deuteronomy gave him the greatest commandment, to love God (Matt.22.37).

It was the same for the early church. Deuteronomy gave them their realisation that Jesus was the promised Prophet (Acts 3.22f, 7.37). Paul found here that God’s righteousness is not difficult by way of law-keeping, but close to us through faith (Rom.10.6-8). He quotes Deut. at least fourteen times, including his understanding of the cross ‘cursed is everyone hung on a tree’ (Gal.3.13), and the validity of ministerial support (1 Tim.5.18).

The title ‘Deutero-nomy’ means ‘second law,’ a title chosen through a mistake in translation. Deut. 17.18 says ‘the (future) king is to write a *copy* of this law (and) read it all the days of his life.’ (italics mine). The translators of the LXX wrote *second* instead of *copy*. The Hebrew title is taken, as always, from its opening words: ‘these (are) the words,’ i.e. of Moses, following on from the end of Numbers. But the LXX’s translation error is not an unhappy one.

At its heart Deut. spells out what obedience to the ten commandments is to look like, in Israel the nation state, once they are in the promised land. The disadvantage of the title is that it obscures Deuteronomy's provenance as a 'before I die' appeal akin to John 14-17 or the deathbed blessings by Isaac and Jacob. Our sermon series must carry that feel of a biographical, personal matter of the heart.

Deuteronomy resources Christian doctrine and practice in equal measure. Wenham calls it 'arguably the most influential book of the OT. It brings the Pentateuch to a climactic conclusion. It is at the same time the first of the prophetic books, with the greatest of Israel's prophets, Moses, giving his last impassioned sermons to Israel before he dies'.⁷

Deut. combines features of two types of document characteristic of its era: suzerainty treaties⁸ and law codes.

- The suzerain was a king or state in control of another, but in which the vassal state still ran its own affairs. Examples are the Hittite treaties of about 1500-1200BC. The Hittites were based in the area of eastern Turkey and Syria. Their treaties boasted of the kindness of the Hittite king in allowing the vassal state such freedom, and then spelt out the relationship between them. Deut. has this feel because its great passion is the kingship of God over the people ('What a suzerain *we* have!!'), while making them responsible for how his reign worked out in practice.
- Law codes took up previous statutes, explained them and applied them to specific situations. An example is the code of Hammurabi, king of Babylon c. 1792-1750 BC. In similar vein Deut. spells out the way that the ten commandments – already given at Sinai (Ex.20) – are to be lived out in the forthcoming new situation when they will change from being desert wanderers to a nation state settled in their own land. They have already been expounded in the book of the Covenant (Ex.20-23) but that is shorter and less systematic. In Deut. Moses does a fuller job more specifically adapted to life in the promised land, now they are about to enter it.

That combination is useful for the preacher. Thinking of salvation as *Jesus'* suzerainty treaty with us he is our Lord and master, but not so as to remove our autonomy. We are responsible for delivering our loyalty where the rubber hits the road: 'by constant use, training ourselves to distinguish good from evil'.⁹ The fact that our covenant with Jesus includes salvation *law codes*, OT and NT, reminds us that Jesus reigns over every aspect of our life and it is so useful to

⁷ Gordon Wenham 'Exploring the OT, vol. I The Pentateuch,' IVP, 2003, p.123

⁸ Wenham 125f; and Wikipedia on 'suzerainty' is surprisingly good.

⁹ Heb.5.13 & 14

have paradigm principles (as distinct from casuistic details) as we consider what to do in each successive situation. Like other behaviour codes – the Book of the Covenant (Ex.20-23), the sermon on the mount, Paul’s moral lists – Deut has a value found nowhere else.

Wenham compares the structure of Deuteronomy with these two types of contemporary document¹⁰ in a way I have modified slightly:

Table 1. Similarities to contemporary legal codes and treaties

Law code eg Hammurabi 1750BC	Deuteronomy Mostly Moses: 1430-20?	Treaty eg Hittite c.1500-1200 BC
Historical prologue	Prologue: 1-4	Historical prologue
	Reminder + appeal: 5-11	
Laws	Stipulations expounding the Law: 12-26	Treaty stipulations
‘Document clause’: store and read	(deferred till ch. 31)	‘Document clause’: store and read
	no equivalent: only YHWH	gods witnessing treaty
Blessings	Curses (long), blessings & curses: 27 & 28	Curses (long)
Curses (short)		Blessings
	Acceptance: 29, 30	
(equivalent of document clause above)	Preservation clause: store and read: 31	(equivalent of document clause above)
	Epilogue: succession and biographical note: 32-34	

Moses uses ideas and terms familiar to his generation to make substantial theological points, while modifying the structure of contemporary codes and treaties to serve his own purposes. The dominant message was that God had made a divine covenant with them, with applications of the Decalogue covering every part of life.

Shalom Paul identifies ten interesting ways in which Biblical law is distinctive;¹¹ it is worth considering how different is this approach to life and justice, from current worldviews; and how much it has to offer societies both secular and of other religions.

¹⁰ Wenham p. 125

¹¹ Shalom M Paul, *Studies in the book of the covenant in the light of cuneiform and biblical law*, Vet. Test. Supp. 18, Leiden, Brill, 1970 p. 37-42 and 100-101

1. Since law is an expression of God's will, all crime is sin.
2. Since the whole of life is under God's reign, man's civil, religious and moral obligations are interwoven in a single body of law (the Roman distinction between human and divine law is absent).
3. Since God is the legislator, Israel is responsible to him, not to any human ruler or legislative body. Uprightness, we might say, is unmediated.
4. Since God gives the law not to the king but to Israel (in Mesopotamia the gods gave the law to the king alone), every member of society is responsible to uphold justice and the rights of society: to observe the law and see that it is observed by the community.
5. The law is put in the public domain and re-read every seven years. It is prospective and prescriptive (in Hammurabi it was handed to professional jurists and you only learned of your rights in law after the crime was committed). Everyone knows where they are.
6. Law serves as an instrument of education. This was unique to Biblical legislation and meant that everyone understood their individual and communal obligations.
7. Since man is made in God's image, human life is sacred and whoever kills must give a reckoning for it.
8. Brutal and multiple punishments, common in other codes, are virtually absent. The limit is a life for a life, executed solely on the offender.
9. All men being created equal, class distinction is excluded in the meting out of justice. The *lex talionis* limits punishment to the offender and the measure of the injury (in other societies, the rich got away with paying off the injured party in a way denied to the poor).
10. Laws pertaining to slaves protected them and preserved their dignity. Eg his status is temporary, he must not be abused; he is not merely his owner's chattel.

S. Paul comments, law is an index of a civilisation and reflects the values of that civilisation.¹² In these days when Sharia law is increasingly advocated in UK, when the deliberations of family law courts are secret and their decisions not open to appeal, when you can receive a ten-year sentence for financial misdemeanour and only two for rape, when some 4000 prisoners are serving hugely longer sentences than their deeds deserve under the wicked and Kafkaesque IPP law (Imprisonment for Public Protection) despite Ken Clarke abolishing it, the values in Deut. ch. 5-26 deserve all the exposure we can give them.

¹² S. Paul op cit p. 1

Jesus in Deuteronomy

On the Emmaus road the risen Jesus ‘interpreted in all the Scriptures the things about himself’ He started with ‘Moses and all the prophets’ (Luke 24.27): a traditional term for the Hebrew Bible. So the OT, in all its parts, points to Jesus. I’d pay to hear that podcast.

I’m guessing he showed the flow of God’s purpose and the pattern of his working (e.g. sin can only be dealt with by way of a death) more than individual texts. But we can be sure of one text he quoted because Luke’s next few pages, the first chapters of Acts, twice record apostles quoting it. Deut.18, said Peter in Solomon’s colonnade, promises a prophet like Moses, and Jesus is he. Stephen’s testimony spelt out the parallel further.¹³

Starting with those clues it seems to me that our Lord is present in Deut in at least four distinct ways.

1. The whole book breathes his spirit. It is an exposition of the love of God for his people and their love for him. When asked what was the greatest commandment, Jesus quotes Deut. 6.5. His spirit surfaces page after page:

- Deut 8.3 = Matt.4.4 Man does not live by bread alone but by every word ...
- Deut 6.16 = Matt.4.7 Do not put God to the test
- Deut 5.29, 6.4 etc = John 14.15 if you love me you will keep my commandments

The UBS Greek NT lists 195 quotations or direct echoes. Deut. breathes Jesus.

2. I see two texts that are there directly to predict Jesus.

- Deut.18.15-22 ‘I will raise up a prophet like you. I will put my words in his mouth.’ By NT times ‘The Prophet’ was expected and people wondered if Jesus were he. Seeing the feeding of the five thousand they said, ‘Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.’ His words at the Feast of Tabernacles convinced them: ‘When they heard these words, some of the people said, ‘This really is the Prophet.’ After the Emmaus road talk Peter confirmed it.¹⁴
- Deut.21.23 ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree’ = Gal.3.13.

¹³ Acts 3.19-22; 7.37

¹⁴ John 1.21, 45; John 6.14; John 7.40; Acts 3.22

3. Patterns that Jesus ‘re-enacts and escalates to show their fulfilment or eschatological inauguration at a new level.’¹⁵

- As Stephen said in his martyrdom speech, Moses was sent by God to be his people’s ruler and redeemer, doing miraculous signs and receiving living words to pass on to them.¹⁶
- Hebrews 3.1-6 spells out the comparison and contrast. Moses was faithful as a son in God’s house, Jesus as Son over it. John likewise: ‘The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’ (John 1.19).
- Moses provided the manna; Jesus is the true manna. The people were baptised into Moses¹⁷; Christians are baptised into Christ.
- Take Exodus-Deut. together and the pattern is irresistible. Both were goodly children, delivered from violent death as infants, called out of Egypt, left their palace to deliver God’s people from bondage, were rejected at first by their people, were meek and faithful, had people who wanted to stone them, finished the work God gave them to do, spoke with God face to face at unique depth, refused a kingdom, made the sea obey them, were the objects of a king’s wrath, went through years of silent training, mediated between God and people. ‘Moses wrote of me’ (John 5.46).
- 2 Cor.3.7-18 compares the ministries of Moses and the Spirit. Those who overcome will sing the (one) song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev.15.3).
- Godly ministry is opposed: by the people against Moses, by the religious leaders against Jesus, and by those who love themselves in the last days. Hebrews calls us not to be like those who rebelled against Moses.¹⁸
- In Deut. we see Moses, like Jesus, outside the camp: denied the land that is promised to Israel. ‘There is something vicarious about his suffering’.¹⁹

Deuteronomy is full of Jesus.

¹⁵ Darrell Bock, *Luke*, Vol. 2, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1996, p. 1918 on Lk.24.27

¹⁶ Acts 7.35-37

¹⁷ John 6.32; 1 Cor. 10. 2

¹⁸ Deut.1.43; 2 Tim.3.8; Heb.3.16-4.1

¹⁹ McConville 478f

4. The new covenant mediated by Christ is clearly promised in the very book that expounds the first one. 30.6 still astonishes me. Moses prophesies that after the return from exile, ‘The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.’ When writing of the new covenant Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hebrews take their language exactly from Deut. 30.1-8:

- The return from exile: 30.1-5 = Jer.31.23 = Ezek.36.24
- God will circumcise their hearts to love him 30.6 = Jer. 31.33 = Ezek. 36.26 = Heb.8.10
- There will be a new obedience: 30.8 = Jer.31.33 = Ezek.36.27 = Heb. 8.10,11
- Forgiveness and prosperity will follow: 30.9 = Jer.31.34-40 = Ezek. 36.29 = Heb.8.12

Particularly seminal is the death-resurrection pattern. Moses so loves the people, longs to enter the promised land; but his death must precede that new life. Tolkien puts the principle nicely. After destroying the ring of power Frodo heads for The Havens. Sam says ‘I thought you were going to enjoy the Shire for years because of all you’ve done.’ ‘So I thought once,’ says Frodo, ‘but I’ve been too deeply hurt. I tried to save the Shire. It has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger. Someone has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them ... But you are my heir. All that I had and might have had I leave to you.’ He could have been writing about Moses or Jesus. Compare p. 27 note 40.

Authorship and Unity

Dates all the way from the 15th century BC to the fifth have been promoted for the penning of Deut. My chief response is: Deut presents itself as mostly spoken and then written by Moses, and forbids false witness.²⁰ Jesus put his imprimatur on this; Peter, Paul and ‘Auctor’ (the name used for the author of Hebrews) followed him.²¹ There is plenty of supporting evidence and argument.²² Moses is the author of the vast majority of Deut., just as it claims. The canonical Deut. includes editing, as my ‘N’ sections show. Some of this might have been Moses’ work. For other parts such as the account of his death and the assessment of his life we are not told the author. Brown suggests Joshua or Eleazar as possibilities, Andrew Thomson hazards Samuel.²³ As to unity, the design of the book has an unanswerable coherence (see ‘Structure’ below). This is a single, beautifully designed and executed opus.

Date

The date follows from the authorship. Moses spoke and wrote nearly all of Deut. towards the very end of his life. There is not enough evidence to be sure who did the final editing so the date of the canonical Deut. is unknown.

Moses the man

Imperfect, with anger and arrogance sometimes close to the surface²⁴, a man of action who found it difficult to delegate; consumed with passion for God, prayerful, holy²⁵; what an opportunity Moses presents for people to come to terms with who they are and what God can do through them.

²⁰ 1.1,5 and *passim*; 31.9 & 22; 5.20

²¹ Matt.19.7; Mark 7.10 etc (note that the words of Moses are simultaneously the commands of God); Acts 3.22 etc; Rom.10.5,19 etc; Heb.12.21. The doctrine of the perspicuity (clarity) of scripture, to which Deut. (6.6f) makes a contribution, supports this: eg Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* IVP 1994 p. 105-111

²² Most of the commentaries include discussion about the composition of the Pentateuch, documentary hypotheses included. Gordon Wenham’s p. 159-185 is a helpful overview. McConville p.38 comments “The assembly of Israel is the context that does best justice to Deuteronomy’s character as both written document and spoken word.”

²³ Brown p. 18 n.17; Thomson p. 9 n.1

²⁴ Ex.2.12; Num.16.5,.20.6-12; Deut. 3.26, 32.51

²⁵ Ex.17.4, 32.11-14, 33.9-11,13,18; Num.14.10-20; Deut.34.10-12

The danger is of presenting two-dimensional portraits of the Biblical heroes. The author becomes entwined with the scripture in our thinking and we do not want to suggest, or our hearers to assume, that the Bible is flawed. Actually, the perfection of holy scripture is enhanced if we represent its personalities accurately. Nowhere is this more relevant than in respect of Moses. Take these two accounts of the same event:

The Lord said to Moses, Send some men to explore the land of Canaan which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders. So at the Lord's command Moses sent them out (Num.13.1f)	I said, the Lord has given you the land. Go up and take possession. Then all of you came to me and said, Let us send men to spy out the land and bring back a report. The idea seemed good to me so I selected twelve of you (Deut.1.20f)
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It is interesting how memory puts a spin on an event. The spying out of Canaan was an unhappy, divisive occasion that led to Israel wandering in the wilderness for 38 years. Those years included grumblings that led to real heartbreak:

"The Lord said to Moses, "Take the staff, speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water." Moses took the staff and said to them, Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock? Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff.

Water gushed out, but the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them." ²⁶

His reaction – anger, arrogance, personal disobedience – disqualified him from entering into the promised land. I have painful memories of acting just like that, and I don't doubt that it has limited my usefulness although the Lord is forgiving. Look at the box again: a plain instruction from the Lord is remembered as a request from a stiff-necked and untrusting people, to which Moses acceded but rather wishes he hadn't. How holy is scripture! What a mixture we its servants are! How searching is its word! 'Nearly all the wisdom that we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.'²⁷ Observing Moses took me to Jesus.

²⁶ Num.20.2-12

²⁷ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.1.1

Structure of Deuteronomy

It is often said that Deuteronomy consists of three sermons. As indicated by the marginal Ns and Ss in 'Deuteronomy at a glance' above (p. 5-7) however, the book has nine sermon sections (S) divided up by ten narrative or editorial insertions (N).²⁸ I do not think 'three sermons'²⁹ is how Deut presents itself, so much as an autobiographical narrative of preaching in the territory of Moab. Moses is saying, 'This is how we got here. Here are lessons to learn from that, instructions, and appeal as we go on into the land.' It is important nonetheless to reflect its genre as preaching as well as biographical narrative.

The structure below is an analysis of the function that each successive section of Deut. is performing.

I. Prologue (1-4)

- a. Review of recent events (ch. 1-3)
- b. Recall to the covenant (ch. 4)

II. God's Covenant with them (5-31)

- a. Its core: the 10 commandments (ch. 5)
- b. Its spirit: the love of God (ch. 6-11)
- c. Its stipulations: The Law expounded (ch. 12-26)
- d. Its sanctions: penalties and blessings (ch. 27, 28)
- e. Its acceptance: vassal to sign (ch. 29, 30)
- f. Its preservation: to be read every seven years (ch.31)

III. Epilogue (32-34)

- a. Moses' song (ch. 32)
- b. Moses' blessing (ch. 33)
- c. Moses' death, Joshua succeeds him, Moses' epitaph (ch. 34)

Each section makes its own pastoral contribution and opens up its own preaching responsibility.

²⁸ Harman's statement (p. 11) that narrative occurs only in 1.1-5 and parts of ch. 29, 31-34 is not quite accurate, as shown by the marginal 'N's on my p.5-7.

²⁹ Eg Wenham p. 125

Flow of themes in Deuteronomy

Ch. 1-4: Historical review → so this time, listen

1.1-5 Heading: these are the words Moses spoke east of Jordan

Ch. 1.6-3.29 Review of journey Horeb (Sinai) to Moab:

- 1.6-2.1 their parents' generation
- 2.2-3.29 their generation

Ch. 4.1-40 Appeal: listen this time!

Ch. 4.41-43 Cities of refuge east of Jordan

Ch. 5-11: Loving God with all your heart

4.44-49 Heading: here are the law and stipulations Moses gave them

Ch. 5 God has made a covenant of salvation with us ...

Ch. 6 ... so love him back and teach your children to also.

Ch. 7 He chose you simply because he loves you.

Ch. 8 Don't let your prosperity in the promised land make you proud –

Ch. 9 - remember you're a 'golden calf' people,

Ch. 10 , and circumcise your hearts.

Ch. 11 Obey & love him, and know the blessings ... or not. Your choice.

Ch. 12-26: Life in the church-state in the promised land

12.1 Heading: these are the decrees and laws (*notice how wide-ranging*)

Ch. 12 Loyal worship

Ch. 13 No idolatry

Ch. 14 Clean and unclean foods, and tithes

Ch. 15.1-18 Releasing slaves, cancelling debts

Ch. 15.19-16.17 Firstlings and festivals

Ch. 16.18-18.22 Leaders: judges, priests, kings, prophets

Ch. 19.1-22.9(or 12) Protect life, esp human

Ch. 22.13-23.18 Gender and exclusion issues

Ch. 23.19-24.7 Property law

Ch. 24.8-25.4 Protect the disadvantaged

Ch. 25.5-19 Various additional laws

Ch. 26 Concluding section

Ch. 27-34: Weighing it up, closing the deal, staying faithful, moving on

27.1-4 Heading: Prepare the altar on Mt Ebal

Ch. 27 & 28 Weighing it up: the cost of disobeying, the blessings of obeying

Ch. 29 & 30 Closing the deal: embrace this covenant, choose life

Ch. 31 Staying faithful: nation to re-read the law every 7 years.

Ch. 32-34 Moving on

- Moses' song: ch. 32
- Moses' blessing: ch. 33
- Moses' death, successor, epitaph: ch. 34

It is not difficult to make 21st century messages from such.

Several excellent recent commentaries structure 6-26 or 12-26 by which of the ten commandments each section is expounding, so I next discuss this possibility.

Additional note: do chapters 6-26 (or 12-26) follow the ten commandments in order?

Ever since Stephen Kaufman proposed in 1978-9³⁰ that ch. 12-26 expound the ten commandments in order, an almost irresistible thought, some commentators have used that correspondence as the basis for dividing out the central section of Deuteronomy. The trouble is, it is quite hard to match the passages to the commandments. Commentators match different ones. They allocate the first commandment for example to, respectively, ch. 6-11, ch. 7-11 and ch. 12. See tables 2 & 3 below.

They unanimously confess the difficulties caused by doing so. For example:

- Thomson says, “Some of the laws don’t seem to fit naturally under the heading of each commandment, leading to some debate as to whether this outline is real or imagined.”³¹
- Harman, having identified for example that ch. 14 is an exposition of the third commandment, says, “The contents of ch. 14 seem at first sight to be totally disconnected either with the third commandment or with the immediate context here in Deuteronomy.”³²

Tables 2 & 3 indicate the level of correspondence between the order of laws in the ten commandments and in Deuteronomy ch.6-26.

³⁰ S. Kaufman *'The Structure of the Deuteronomic Law'* Maarav 1, 1978-79, p. 105-58 (Maarav means Western; it is ‘a journal for the study of north-western Semitic languages and literatures’)

³¹ Thomson p. 15 n. 3

³² Harman p. 160

Table 2. Attempts to match Deut. 6/7-26 or 12-26 to Decalogue order

Commandment	Kaufman	Harman	Thomson	Manchester 'some commentators'
1. No other god: loyalty	} 12	6 – 11	7-11	12
2. No idol: worship		12.1 – 13.18	12.1-13.18	13
3. Name in vain: reverence	13, 14	14	14	14
4. Remember Sabbath*: rest	15.1 – 16.17	15.1 – 16.17	15.1-16.17	15, 16
5. Honour f + m: respect for authority	16.18 – 18.22	16.18-18.22	16.18-18.22	17, 18
6. no murder: respect for life	19.1 – 22.8	19.1 – 22.8	19.1-22.8	19-21
7. no adultery: respect for marriage	22.9 – 23.18	22.9 – 23.14	22.9-23.14	22,23
8. not steal: respect for property	23.19 – 24.7	23.15 – 24.7	23.15-24.7	} 24-26
9. no false witness: truthfulness	24.8 – 25.4	24.8 – 25.4	24.8-25.4	
10. not covet: contentment	25. 5-16	25.5 – 26.15	25.5-26.19	

*Except in the ten commandments (ch. 5), Deuteronomy does not mention the Sabbath, but it does spell out the annual cycle of festivals, and 7th year issues.

Table 3 analyses the match by the content of each section:

Table 3. Does Deut. expound the ten commandments in order?

Commandment	Kaufman	Does the Deut. content correspond? (note repetitions)
1 No other god: loyalty 2 No idol: worship	{ } 12 }	Destroy the current places of worship. Worship in the place God gives, not anywhere you please. Eat all the meat you want where you live, but not the blood & not the tithe. Don't ask after the locals' gods.
3 Name in vain: reverence	13, 14	Avoid false prophets, pagan mourning, unclean food. Eat tithe at the worship place. Give to Levites & poor every 3 rd year.
4 Remember Sabbath: rest	15.1 – 16.17	Cancel debts every 7yrs. Generous to the poor. Release slave every 7 th yr. Firstlings: eat at the worship place. Passover, Weeks, Tabernacles (but not Sabbath!).
5 Honour f+m: respect for authority	16.18 – 18.22	Judges. No Asherah poles. Sacrifices without flaw. Death to idolaters. Law courts. The king. The priests' share. No child sacrifice or sorcery. The prophet.
6 no murder: respect for life	19.1 – 22.8	Cities of refuge. 2 witnesses. Principles of war, incl. re trees. Unsolved murders. Marrying a POW. Rights of firstborn. Death for rebellious son. Body on tree. Straying ox. Transvestism. Birds' nests. Parapet roof.
7 no adultery: respect for marriage	22.9 – 23.18	Mixtures: seeds, ploughing, clothes. Tassels. Virginity, adultery, fornication, rape, father's wife. Exclude castrated, illegitimate, Moabites. Clean camp. Asylum seeker. Shrine prostitute.
8 not steal: respect property	23.19 – 24.7	Not charge interest. Pay vows. Hand reaping OK. Divorce certificate. Military duty. Millstones as security. Kidnap.
9 no false witness: truthfulness	24.8 – 25.4	Leprosy. Security for loans. Fair wages. Die for own sin. Gleanings for the poor. Punishment. Don't muzzle working ox.
10 not covet: contentment	25. 5-16	Levirate marriage. Brawling: if she grabs his testicles, cut her hand off. Honest weights.

If Moses did intend Deut. to follow the order of the Decalogue rigorously, it is clearly difficult to identify which correspondence he had in mind. There is some general match with the order of the ten commandments, and some apparent non-correspondence, but the basis of arrangement in detail seems

obscure. The variety of classifications in the commentaries reflects the same problem.

I have an additional difficulty with including anything before ch. 12 in such an analysis as Harman and Thomson do. The text itself identifies Ch. 12-26 as one unit intended to expound the Law, while ch. 5-11 are exhortation / motivation / appeal to respond to God's love. 'There is clearly a significant break in the text at the end of ch. 11, where exhortation gives way to the collection of laws,'³³ says Millar.

Mayes adds, re the closing verses of ch. 11, 'These verses are intended as a conclusion to the whole of ch. 1-11, in that after all the history and exhortation they bring Israel to the point of decision. The verses are also a prelude to what follows, since the decision which is now set before Israel concerns obedience or disobedience to the law which is about to be proclaimed.'³⁴

It is not just the change of theme that separates 1-11 from 12-26. The text provides an *inclusio* starting at 12.1, finishing at 26.16-19 and marking the passage as a unit:

12.1 'These are the decrees and laws you must
be careful to follow in the land...' ↓
Exposition of the decrees and laws, ch 12-26 ↓
26.16 'The Lord your God commands you this
day to follow these decrees and laws.'

In addition, ch. 27 'echoes the passage immediately preceding ch. 12, namely 11.26-32.' In fact the three parts of that short passage are now repeated in reverse order:

11.26-28	Blessing and curse pronounced in Moab
11.29-31	Ceremony of blessing and curse on Gerizim & Ebal
11.32	Call to obey commands
ch. 12-26	
26.16-19	Call to obey commands
ch. 27	Ceremony of blessing and curse on Gerizim and Ebal
ch. 28	Blessing and curse pronounced in Moab

³³ Millar p. 44

³⁴ A.D.H. Mayes *Deuteronomy* (New Century Bible) 1981 p. 217 quoted Millar p. 45

‘This structure has the effect of enclosing the laws of ch. 12 – 26 between exhortations to obedience’³⁵

Although we can reckon that every law and ethical decision is related in some way to the Decalogue, therefore, I end up underwhelmed by the proposal to structure Deut 6-26, 7-26 or 12-26 on this basis. Block comments that the attempt is forced.³⁶ Millar writes of Kaufman’s attempt, ‘There are two major problems with this scheme. Nowhere in ch. 12-25 is the Decalogue actually quoted, nor are the connections with it always terribly clear; (although) he shows that many of the laws fall within this Decalogue order.’³⁷

Millar then expounds ch.12-26 for forty pages and concludes - ch. 12-26 are extremely complex! ‘While we detected order in places, even order which corresponded very closely to that of the Decalogue, there are other parts of the collection where we could detect no rationale whatsoever behind the arrangement.’³⁸

It seems to me that in Deut. we see the same kind of ‘faithful yet free’ hermeneutic of the Decalogue, that Paul shows re the OT. The preceding books of the Pentateuch are so much the way Moses thinks that he just preaches on them, omitting and adding as the Holy Spirit guides. Hence the omission of marriage, death, contract and direct damage to property from OT law, and the additions that we see in Table 3 which have no obvious source in the successive commandments which some say is being expounded. Surprisingly, Deut. does not even have legislation about the Sabbath.

Michael Fishbane comments, ‘Biblical law collections may best be considered as prototypical compendia of legal and ethical norms rather than comprehensive codes.’³⁹ That guides our interpretation too, and the pastoral role we set for our sermons. Deut. is teaching us how to think, not covering every circumstance and telling us how to behave there. I conclude that it is better to structure Deut. in a way that respects the change of theme at 12.1 and the *inclusio* marking ch. 12-26. Hence my offered structure.

³⁵ McConville p. 387

³⁶ Block p. 170

³⁷ Millar p. 106-108.

³⁸ Millar p. 145

³⁹ M. Fishbane *Biblical interpretation in ancient Israel*’ Oxford 1985 p. 95 quoted Millar p. 105.

Theology

Most of the divisions of theology lie within Deuteronomy's pages: God, Scripture, man, sin, redemption, the work of the Holy Spirit (in gifting Joshua with wisdom); almost nothing directly about the Redeemer apart from the Prophet whom God will raise up.⁴⁰ But some theological themes are especially prominent and at least one (no. 5 below) is Deuteronomy's particular contribution.

1. *The interpersonal immanence of God* (his close involvement with creation).

Sinai frightened the people about God's *transcendence*. 'I stood between the Lord and you because you were afraid of the fire,'⁴¹ thunder and darkness. Deut. brings home God's *immanence*, his active involvement with us. He directed when they stayed, when and where they were to move on. When they said he hated them it made him angry. He personally watched over and provided for them during the desert wanderings. He spoke regularly in detail to guide their relationship with each successive nation, teaching them his reasons. He remembered his promises to their parents and saved them from slavery because he loved them.⁴² Deut. is a living demonstration in history of God having a will for our lives. He wants our conversation if we have anything to say to him (do we?).

2. *The need for a new heart.* Deut. is often called pessimistic about human nature but the truth is it combines great realism (and repetition on the matter) with the divine solution to that problem. Rather like Paul's letter to the Romans ... We are stiff-necked⁴³, reluctant and will never be any better unless God circumcises our hearts to love him with heart and soul.⁴⁴ See the Luther quote in the sermon notes on ch. 20 in Booklet 2.

3. *The momentousness of God being in covenant with us.* It is not a matter of two equal friends gentlemanly agreeing a joint venture. God declared his covenant with them, a covenant of love; it was he alone who made it. He is faithful and will stick to it. It is unilateral in establishment but mutual in

⁴⁰ 18.15ff; Matt.17.5?; Jn 6.14, 7.40; Acts 3.22. But there is plenty that reflects the coming Jesus. Moses is the servant *par excellence*. He is denied what is promised to Israel: there is something vicarious about his suffering. The lines to Isaiah's servant songs and Luke 4 are clear (McConville 478f).

⁴¹ Deut 5.5; Ex.19.16-25, 20.18-21

⁴² Respectively, 1.6; 1.27 & 34; 2.7; 2.19 & 24; 7.8; Psalm 139 esp v. 16.

⁴³ 9.6 & 13; 10.16; 31.27

⁴⁴ 1.28; 5.28f; 8.14; 10.16; 15.7; 17.17; 30.6; Jer.31.31f; Ezek.36.26f; John 3.1-16

accomplishment. Follow its terms carefully therefore, for it comes with curses attached as well as blessings. Violation of it is a terrible betrayal so remember it, remind yourself of it, bear it actively in mind, teach your children about it. Its terms *are*; they will affect the future for good or ill of your life and reputation and even God's.⁴⁵ Revere the power of this living reality.

4. *Ecclesiology*. Deut. emphasises two features.

- (a) The way the corporate and individual realities of being God's people coexist. Moses addresses all-Israel (that expression 10x): we are in this together. Yet each individual is responsible to play their part, teach their children, ensure justice, be kind to the needy, receive a new heart.
- (b) Our continuity with the past as God's one people. To those born after the events Moses says, 'It was not with your fathers that the Lord made this covenant but with us, with all of us who are here alive today. For the Christian, we were there when they crucified our Lord, hence Rom.6.8-14, Gal.2.20 and the present memory and Real Presence as we meet at his table.

5. *Politics, civil order, war, international relations*. Here is Deut.'s most important individual contribution to Biblical theology and the most difficult to do justice to. It is why I included war and the YHWH war (ch. 20) and the ordering of society (ch. 24) in my recommended sermon series. 'In its style, structure and content (Deut.) constitutes a single harmonious concept designed to organise the whole life of Israel under the one God Yahweh ... Deut. should be seen, in the context of the ancient world, as a radical blueprint for the life of a people, at the same time spiritual and political, and running counter to every other social-religious-political programme.'⁴⁶

You can see the implications all through my 'Deuteronomy at a glance' on ch. 12-26 above (p6), but for example here are Raymond Brown's headings for ch. 24. A godly society will protect women (1-4), newly married couples (5), debtors (6,10-13,17), vulnerable people (7), the community (from infectious diseases, 8 & 9), the innocent (16) and the weak (17-22).⁴⁷ That is what a God-obeying counter-culture will look like.

⁴⁵ 4.13 & 23, 5.2, 7.9, 8.18, 17.2, 29.9, 29.21 & 25, 6.6-12, 4.5-7, 29.22-25.

⁴⁶ McConville p. 20, 21.

⁴⁷ R. Brown p. 227-241; his chapter includes 25.1-4.

McConville summarises, 'Deut., or at least a form of it, is the document of a real political and religious constitution from a pre-monarchical period ... It aims to circumscribe the powers of the king ... the offices actually prescribed are those of judge, priest and prophet in their separate roles. But over all these is the people itself, addressed typically in the laws in the singular, 'thou.' (McConville mentions its difference from the prevalent ANE royal-cultic ideology in which the king is chief executive in cult and political admin). It establishes the role of Torah in Israel, for which the people as such is responsible ... it makes justice the essential principle of all administration (16.20); and it shows that the ultimate judge, and guarantor of justice even beyond the reach of the courts, is Yahweh himself ... It finds a real religious and political programme ... on the other hand it leads into an open future, not married to any one religious-political framework ... it is essentially about the nature of God, and what it means for life in human society.'

6. *Righteousness and justice, the foundation of God's rule.* 16.18-20, the heading and foundational principle of 16.18 – 18.22, contains two unique usages: the double-word 'justice-righteousness' (*mishpat-sedeq*, 18) is how officials must judge (or rule: *shaphat*) the people; and the doubled 'righteousness-righteousness' (*sedeq sedeq*, 20) shall you pursue.' The words merge, but righteousness is especially a character trait or principle of right action while justice is the embodiment of it, the resultant behaviour. Between these verses, v. 19 adds 'do not twist justice or show partiality.' It could not be more emphatic.

This section is Deuteronomy's treatment of the political and religious organisation of Israel. The two unique doublings indicate how critical is the principle. The passage appoints four offices of leadership side by side: judge, king, priest and prophet. None is supreme over the others; if there is any priority it lies with the judge who administers God's law, and the prophet who speaks God's word.⁴⁸

The words are so central, and vital, and Messianic,⁴⁹ that I quote Tim Keller at length in the Appendix, page 40.

7. *The words for God's law.* Three are often used together ('commands, decrees and laws' 6.1, 7.11, 8.11, 26.17); two, translated 'stipulations' and 'requirements' in NIV, are less common. The words overlap in meaning but each makes its own contribution to a believer's relationship with God.

⁴⁸ Wright p. 203

⁴⁹ eg Isaiah 42.1-3 on the vocation of Messiah has 'justice' 3 times in 4 verses.

- Commands, *mitzvah* (singular collective noun) carries the thought of the senior's right to rule. It is used of father to son, a king to his servants. It is also the word for the terms of a contract or the conditions of a covenant. The ten commandments are such (Ex. 24.12). At 'Bar Mitzvah' ('son of the commandments') you become in your own right one of the community with whom the Lord has entered into covenant. Living by the mitzvah gives insight and full life (5.29, 6.2, 8.1). The wisdom it gives, evokes respect from others (4.5f). Obeying it opens the door to the fullness of God's *hesed*, his grace (5.10).
- Decrees or statutes, *huqqim*. The verb means to engrave, hence decree, hence govern. The sense is often indistinguishable from *mitzvah*. Used with *shamar* (to observe, keep) indicating believers' calling to take notice of them in order to be diligent in our obedience.
- Laws or judgements, *mishpatim*. Mishpat is the action of a judge or governor including legislative, executive and judicial functions. Whereas we probably think of obeying the law, the ancients thought of themselves as ruled by their seniors. Compare the role of the modern Sheikh among the Bedouin. So the *mishpatim* come from God (1.17); hence Shalom Paul's point (p.15f above) about crime being sin.
- Stipulations, *edutim* (6. 17 & 20). *Edut* is to bear witness, as in 'the ark of the testimony.' It is God's own affirmation of his person and purpose, and includes a note of warning. Its essence in the NT is the proclamation of the Gospel.
- Requirements, *mishmeret* (11.1), same root as *shamar* above: to pay careful attention to, to observe, to guard as in 'guard the Gospel.'

Together these five terms add up to *Torah* (1.5): instruction, guidance. God's laws set out the behaviour that expresses God's being in covenant with us: the love between us, the actions that serve his interests and pleasure. He is our father and king; they display his character and constitute the sceptre by which he reigns over us. Many are the benefits that accrue – our wisdom, others' respect, God's grace poured out. Of course we want to know them well, obey them carefully: given the rewards, who wouldn't?

How *not* to preach Deuteronomy

There are many dangers in preaching OT law. Three ways of not doing it are:

- **As mere history.** It would be a shame if we stopped at exegesis and simply left our hearers better informed about the norms for living in 1300 BC.
- **As moral ought-ness.** Even worse would be to moralise, leaving us feeling, 'I'd better try harder.' Especially considering it includes capital punishment for rebellious sons who remain steadfastly impenitent ...
- **By direct transfer to 2019.** We are not the church-nation Israel living in 13th century BC. Their judicial laws have expired. We do not have the sacrificial system as the process of atonement. We have left those ceremonies behind.

Nonetheless Deut. has a tremendous amount to offer the 21st century Christian. In order to gain that benefit we must instead go by way of Jesus Christ: hence my "→Jesus → 2019" sequence when exploring the value of the successive sections of Deut. in Booklet 2.

What then is the role of Deut. law in a Christian's life? The question deserves larger treatment but here is a brief flow of thought.

1. Adam and Eve simply lived that way in the Garden of Eden, doing God's perfect will and not needing absolution: they had no failures to atone for.
2. After the Fall, (a) God gave law codes: not covering every circumstance, but as collections of paradigmatic moral and legal norms. (b) The laws also provided for atonement for when people failed. (c) Since Israel lived as a body politic he gave them social and judicial laws for that time and place.
3. Jesus fulfilled all these laws on our account.⁵⁰
4. Thanks to Jesus we are not under them as a way to God's favour. But they are all true and valuable.⁵¹
 - The atonement ones are true. Jesus left them torn down like the temple curtain; but they teach us wondrously about absolution through Another's vicarious death.
 - The body politic ones are true. They expired with that body politic and Jesus lived the ones that applied in his time and age ('Render unto Caesar...'), but they teach us wondrously about building a society under God's reign.

⁵⁰ John 1.17; Rom.3.21

⁵¹ Matt.5.17-20; 1 Thes.4.3-8; 2 Tim.1.9, 3.16

- The moral ones are true. Jesus fulfilled the law for us and they have been done away with as the way to get on God's good side; but they teach us wondrously about the right way to live.

So God has made obsolete the first, Mosaic covenant we expound in Deuteronomy. As a way to God's favour, it has been done away with. But in the new covenant what has he written on our hearts? – those laws.⁵²

- We love the OT picture of atonement, so full of the Gospel.
- We love the OT programme for 13th century BC Israel living in Canaan among those neighbours. Even though much of its detail was only for that community, it is full of insight as we seek to be 21st century AD Christians living in Scotland among *our* neighbours.
- We love the moral guidance that finds an echo in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Our love for him is *law-shaped*.⁵³ The laws he gave us are *love-shaped*.⁵⁴

Sinclair Ferguson puts it beautifully from 1 Cor.9.20, 21. We are not under the law (*hupo nomos*). Yet nor are we outside the law (*a-nomos*). We are 'in-law of Christ' (*en-nomos Christou*). We married our heavenly Bridegroom and love our new in-law, God's law.⁵⁵

We feel some of this delight as we read Deut. Ch. 24, for example: let a society protect women, the newly married, debtors, the vulnerable. Of course! 'How lovely is your law,' we say. 'Let's do what we can to have society live like this.' Deut. has a role in Christian thinking, as 2 Tim.3.16 says.

5. What of the death penalty they impose, e.g. on a persistently, impenitently rebellious and profligate son (21.18-21)? The NT revokes the Law's sanctions while affirming its values: see John Murray quotes below, p36.
6. How are we going to keep these laws, live this lovingly? The Holy Spirit is given to us for this purpose: 'And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that *the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us*, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.'⁵⁶

⁵² Hebrews 8.7-13, as promised in Jeremiah 31.31-34.

⁵³ John 14.15-21; 1 John 2.3-6, 5.2-4

⁵⁴ Matt.22.35-40. My double phrase is modified from Sinclair Ferguson *Devoted to God* Banner of Truth 2016 p. 162.

⁵⁵ Op cit p. 185

⁵⁶ Rom. 8.1-4 in the context 7.1 – 8.17

Moses' achievement via Deuteronomy

1. He taught God's people to know themselves. As Socrates replied to his prosecutors, 'The unexamined life is not worth living.' Calvin made the same point on the first page of *The Institutes*: the first part of wisdom is to know God and ourselves. Thanks to Moses, Israel knew that they were loved, stiff-necked, in covenant with the sovereign Creator, with a hope and a better-covenant future.
2. He set up a way of running a country with values that remain the basis of Western civilisation: applied to their then context as a church state, but flexible enough to benefit every state in any era.
3. He ensured the just military cleansing of a morally filthy land, but only when the iniquity of the locals had reached its nadir; and instituted a spiritual foundation for its future health.
4. He brought a whole nation to lay claim to God's promises for the next stage in their history, and so took forward God's purposes for his generation.
5. Most important of all, he established within the Hebrew and now the Jewish and Christian soul for all time that God is in momentous, whole of life, ineradicable *covenant* with us.

Additional reading on the Christian and OT Law

Sinclair B. Ferguson *Devoted to God* Banner of Truth 2016 p.161-188.

Love doesn't *replace* law; it *fulfils* it (cp Rom 8:3). Love gives motivation; the law, direction.

John Murray *Principles of Conduct* Tyndale Press 1957 p. 53-55 shows a distinction between OT and NT law. Murray takes two examples: one from Paul, one from Jesus. (1) In respect of sleeping with your father's wife (Lev.20.11; 1 Cor.5.1f) the NT changes the punishment from the death penalty to excommunication. 'The gravity of the offence is established by the fact that the extreme of ecclesiastical censure is pronounced upon it. But the sanction ... in the OT economy is revoked. The sanction has been changed from the corporeal to the spiritual, a change which, by its very nature, underlines the gravity of the offence and therefore the abiding sanctity of the law violated by it.' (2) 'Our Lord instituted divorce as a permissible (but not preferred) recourse (Isaiah 50:1) for the innocent spouse who had been wronged by adultery on the part of the other (Matt.5.32, 19.9). By implication our Lord abrogated the death penalty for adultery. But ... the sin of adultery is not relieved of any of its heinousness as a violation of God's law. It is precisely because the spirituality of the law and the heinousness of its violation are more fully revealed that the abrogation of the penal sanction takes place.'

Westminster Confession ch. XIX, (XX)

I can't exactly recommend **Bruxy Cavey** (*Re*)Union Herald Press (Virginia) 2017 p. 139-162 but it is an attractive example of the 'Jesus has replaced law with love' position. I summarise above, p33, Sinclair's answer to that position.

General Bibliography now on page 77

Bibliography for Preachers, p79

Appendix: Tim Keller on Justice and Righteousness

‘When I was professor at a theological seminary in the mid-eighties, one of my students was a young man named Mark Gornik. One day we were standing at the copier and he told me that he was about to move into Sandtown, one of the poorest and most dangerous neighbourhoods in Baltimore. I remember being quite surprised. When I asked him why, he said simply, “To do justice.”

‘It had been decades since any white people had moved into Sandtown. For the first couple of years there, it was touch and go. Mark told a reporter, “The police thought I was a drug dealer, and the drug dealers thought I was a police officer. So, for a while there, I didn’t know who was going to shoot me first.” Yet over the years Mark, along with leaders in the community, established a church and a comprehensive set of ministries that have slowly transformed the neighbourhood.

‘Although Mark was living a comfortable, safe life, he became concerned about the most vulnerable, poor and marginalised members of our society, and made long-term personal sacrifices in order to serve their interests, needs and cause.

That is, according to the Bible, what it means to “do justice.”

‘Justice is Care for the Vulnerable

‘The Hebrew word for “justice,” *mishpat*, occurs in its various forms more than 200 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. Its most basic meaning is to treat people equitably. It means acquitting or punishing every person on the merits of the case, regardless of race or social status. Anyone who does the same wrong should be given the same penalty.

‘But *mishpat* means more than just the punishment of wrongdoing. It also means giving people their rights. Deuteronomy 18 directs that the priests of the tabernacle should be supported by a certain percentage of the people’s income. This support is described as “the priests’ *mishpat*,” which means their due or their right. *Mishpat*, then, is giving people what they are due, whether punishment or protection or care.

‘This is why, if you look at every place the word is used in the Old Testament, several classes of persons continually come up. Over and over again, *mishpat* describes taking up the care and cause of widows, orphans, immigrants and the poor—those who have been called “the quartet of the vulnerable.”

‘In pre-modern, agrarian societies, these four groups had no social power. They lived at subsistence level and were only days from starvation if there was any famine, invasion or even minor social unrest. Today, this quartet would be expanded to include the refugee, the migrant worker, the homeless and many single parents and elderly people.

‘The *mishpat*, or justness, of a society, according to the Bible, is evaluated by how it treats these groups. Any neglect shown to the needs of the members of this

quartet is not called merely a lack of mercy or charity but a violation of justice, of *mishpat*. God loves and defends those with the least economic and social power, and so should we. That is what it means to “do justice.”

Justice Reflects the Character of God

‘Why should we be concerned about the vulnerable ones? It is because God is concerned about them. It is striking to see how often God is introduced as the defender of these vulnerable groups.

‘Don’t miss the significance of this. When people ask me, “How do you want to be introduced?” I usually propose they say, “This is Tim Keller, minister at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City.” Of course, I am many other things, but that is the main thing I spend my time doing in public life.

‘Realise, then, how significant it is that the biblical writers introduce God as “a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows” (Psalm 68:4-5). This is one of the main things He does in the world. He identifies with the powerless. He takes up their cause.

Justice is Right Relationships

We must have a strong concern for the poor, but there is more to the biblical idea of justice than that. We get more insight when we consider a second Hebrew word that can be translated as “being just,” though it usually translated as “being righteous.” The word is *tzadeqah*, and it refers to a life of right relationships.

‘When most modern people see the word “righteousness” in the Bible, they tend to think of it in terms of private morality, such as sexual chastity or diligence in prayer and Bible study. But in the Bible, *tzadeqah* refers to day-to-day living in which a person conducts all relationships in family and society with fairness, generosity and equity. It is not surprising, then, to discover that *tzadeqah* and *mishpat* are brought together scores of times in the Bible.

‘These two words roughly correspond to what some have called “primary” and “rectifying justice.” Rectifying justice is *mishpat*. It means punishing wrongdoers and caring for the victims of unjust treatment. Primary justice, or *tzadeqah*, is behaviour that, if it was prevalent in the world, would render rectifying justice unnecessary, because everyone would be living in right relationship to everyone else. Therefore, though *tzadeqah* is primarily about being in a right relationship with God, the righteous life that results is profoundly social.

‘Rectifying justice, or *mishpat*, in our world could mean prosecuting the men who batter, exploit and rob poor women. It could also mean respectfully putting pressure on a local police department until they respond to calls and crimes as quickly in the poor part of town as in the prosperous part. Another example would be to form an organisation that both prosecutes and seeks justice against loan companies that prey on the poor and the elderly with dishonest and exploitative practices.

'Primary justice, or *tzadeqah*, may mean taking the time personally to meet the needs of the handicapped, the elderly or the hungry in our neighbourhoods. Or it could mean the establishment of new nonprofits to serve the interests of these classes of persons. It could also mean a group of families from the more prosperous side of town adopting the public school in a poor community and making generous donations of money and pro bono work in order to improve the quality of education there.

When these two words, *tzadeqah* and *mishpat*, are tied together, as they are over 36 times, the English expression that best conveys the meaning is “social justice.”

‘Justice includes Generosity

Many readers may be asking at this point why we are calling private giving to the poor “justice.” Some Christians believe that justice is strictly *mishpat*—the punishment of wrongdoing, period. This does not mean they think believers should be indifferent to the plight of the poor, but they would insist that helping the needy through generous giving should be called mercy, compassion or charity—not justice.

'In English, however, the word "charity" conveys a good but optional activity. Charity cannot be a requirement, for then it would not be charity. But this view does not fit in with the strength or balance of the biblical teaching.

'In the Scripture, gifts to the poor are called "acts of righteousness," as in Matthew 6:1-2. Not giving generously, then, is not stinginess but unrighteousness, a violation of God's law. In the book of Job, we see Job call every failure to help the poor a sin, offensive to God's splendour (Job 31:23) and deserving of judgment and punishment (v. 28). Remarkably, Job is asserting that it would be a sin against God to think of his goods as belonging to himself alone. To not "share his bread" and his assets with the poor would be unrighteous, a sin against God, and therefore by definition a violation of God's justice.

‘Despite the effort to draw a line between “justice” as legal fairness and sharing as “charity,” numerous Scripture passages make radical generosity one of the marks of living justly. The just person lives a life of honesty, equity and generosity in every aspect of his or her life.

'If you are trying to live a life in accordance with the Bible, the concept and call to justice are inescapable. We do justice when we give all human beings their due as creations of God. Doing justice includes not only the righting of wrongs but generosity and social concern, especially toward the poor and vulnerable.' ⁵⁷

⁵⁷ from Tim Keller *Generous Justice* Hodder & Stoughton 2012. Online extract: page numbers not stated.

PART 2 POSSIBLE SERMON SERIES

A. Deuteronomy in eight sermons

Sermon No.

Prologue (ch. 1-4)

1. Ch. 1 Remember God's promises and your waywardness.

God's covenant with his people (ch. 5-31)

a. Its core: the ten commandments, ch. 5

2. Ch. 5 I rescued you. My design for life: the ten commandments.

*b. Its spirit: the love of God (ch. 6-11)**

c. Its stipulations: the law expounded (ch. 12-26)

3. Ch. 12 Uproot idolatry, worship God and enjoy life.

4. Ch. 20 Principles of war and The YHWH War.

5. Ch. 24 Care for life esp. that of the disadvantaged.

d. Its sanctions: penalties and blessings, 27 & 28

e. Its acceptance: vassal to sign, ch. 29 & 30

6. Ch. 30 You need new hearts. It's not difficult. Choose life.

f. Its preservation: public reading every 7 years, ch. 31

Epilogue (ch. 32-34)

a. Moses' song, ch. 32

b. Moses' blessing, ch. 33

7. Ch. 33 Moses' blessing. Underneath are the everlasting arms.

c. Moses' death, Joshua succeeds him, Moses' epitaph, ch. 34

8. Ch. 34 Moses dies, Joshua takes over. God knew Moses face to face.

*If there were a ninth sermon it should be on ch. 6 with its moving *Shema*, love for God, family life, sharing the faith.

Note. Occasionally in the sermon resources I write 'wee exp.' or 'lively exp.'. It means 'relax and explain in a brief, lively way.'

For each sermon passage I have suggested its 'glowing heart' and 'OHL': the **Objective** which, it seems to me, it has for our **Hearers' Lives** including ours; and recorded the **core headings** I used recently for the eight sermons.

B. Deuteronomy in two sets of seven sermons

Sermon No.

Prologue (ch. 1-4)

1. Ch. 1 Remember God's promises and your waywardness.

God's covenant with his people (ch. 5-31)

a. Its core: the ten commandments, ch. 5

2. Ch. 5 I rescued you. My design for life: the ten commandments.

b. Its spirit: the love of God (ch. 6-11)

3. Ch. 6 One Lord, one love, one family loyalty.⁵⁸

4. Ch. 7 Exclusively chosen and loved.

5. Ch. 10 Walking in his ways.

c. Its stipulations: the law expounded (ch. 12-26)

6. Ch. 12 Uproot idolatry, worship God and enjoy life.

7. 16.18-17.20 Leadership in God's kingdom.

.....Series 2.....

8. Ch. 20 Principles of war and The YHWH War.

9. Ch. 24 Care for life esp. that of the disadvantaged.

d. Its sanctions: penalties and blessings, 27 & 28

10. Ch. 28 The blessings and dangers of being in covenant with God.

e. Its acceptance: vassal to sign, ch. 29 & 30

11. Ch. 30 You need new hearts. It's not difficult. Choose life.

f. Its preservation: public reading every 7 years, ch. 31

12. Ch. 31 Keep remembering God's covenant with you.

Epilogue (ch. 32-34)

a. Moses' song, ch. 32

b. Moses' blessing, ch. 33

13. Ch. 33 Moses' blessing. Underneath are the everlasting arms.

c. Moses' death, Joshua succeeds him, Moses' epitaph, ch. 34

14. Ch. 34 Moses dies, Joshua takes over. God knew Moses face to face.

⁵⁸ Modified from Chris Wright's title

Resource notes for suggested 8 sermon series

The booklet traces the sequence of thought in Deuteronomy, with the resources for each of the eight suggested sermons inserted after the introductory comments on that chapter.

The sequence of thought in Deuteronomy

Ch. 1 – 4. Historical review

Ch.1. Heading to whole book, and review of circumstances that brought them to this point. ‘Here is Deut. East of Jordan, after an 11 day journey that took 40 years, Moses preached as God directed.’

‘After Sinai YHWH took us north to enter the promised land, and I appointed leaders to help govern. At Kadesh we sent out spies. They found a good land but you grumbled and despite my protest would not enter. God was angry. “OK, you will not enter; I’ll give Canaan to your children. Back to the desert with you.” You then disobeyed by trying to enter after all; and of course were defeated.’

→ NT: 1 Cor.10 and Heb.3.15-4.7. Don’t deprive ourselves through unbelief and idolatry.

→ 2019: Useful lessons for when we start any new project. Easy to fear as we leave our comfort zone. Then reluctance. But risking all and moving on can bring so much joy. Put unbelief to death. ‘You hate us’ they said (1.27); do we believe God likes us?

Sermon 1: Chapter 1

‘Here we are about to enter; remember God’s promises and your waywardness’

Glowing heart: God is all generosity but his people can be an untrusting bunch. They say the unexamined life isn’t worth living: this gives the opportunity to learn from previous unbelief, trust him and take possession of what he gives them.

OHL: To be freshly open to the ‘Rest,’ the territory God has for us in salvation.

Notes towards a sermon.

- *The situation:* God’s people Israel on the edge of the promised land, about to enter at last. They needed to think about what was at stake.
- *The message for them:* We’re here 40 years late because of our unbelief, yet God has so much for us. Learn from our mistakes.

- *Christian implications:*
 - Have we *learnt* from our mistakes?
 - God offers us in spiritual fulfilment what he offered them in physical history. *They* were to enter the land as their rest (12.9,10); *we* are invited into God's rest, Heb.3.1-6 and 3.16 – 4.7.
 - How many stop short of full salvation, of wholly following the Lord (see Caleb, v. 36) and of the fabulous freedom in Christ, joy at new life, possession of all that God gives. These studies are your opportunity; start now.
- *Lesson for us:* So many Church folk fail to take possession of what God brings us in salvation. Appeal along lines of Phil.3.12.

My sermon's core headings: God –

- Achieved our rescue
- Calls us forward
- Wants us to learn
-

Ch. 2. Review of more recent events. 'Then we came north. We had to be peaceful with Edom, Moab and Ammon because YHWH gave them their lands as descendants of Esau and Lot. God has so looked after us (7). The unbelieving generation has now died out. We crossed the Arnon, offered peace to Sihon (whose land I have given you) and when they attacked us, conquered them.'

→ Jesus → 2019:

We too enter territory already given by God: salvation is a completed work (John 19.30) and good works are prepared for us, and we for them (Eph.2.10).

Ch. 3. Historical review ctd. 'Similarly with Og of Bashan, destroying the inhabitants and possessing TransJordan all the way from the Arnon gorge to Mt Hermon. I divided it between Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, their fighting men to help conquer Canaan. YHWH would not listen to my plea to enter but I encouraged Joshua in that regard.'

→ Jesus → 2019:

(1) Reuben wanted TransJordan for wealth's sake (echoes of Lot) and was allowed it as a concession; but it cost him dearly in the end.⁵⁹ Guard against covetousness.

⁵⁹ Num.32.1-5; 1 Kings 22.3; 2 Kings 10.32f, 15.29 etc. Comment in J Philip.

- (2) Joshua to take over: God might bury his workers (and denominations?) but he continues his work.
- (3) See how invested Moses was in God's promises (3.23); am I?
- (4) Was God being mean to Moses? Heb.12.4-11 he was acting as a good father, and Moses later entered the land and met Jesus⁶⁰: the 'harvest of peace and righteousness for those who have been trained by it.'

Ch. 4. Recall to the covenant. Ch. 4 is like the opening movement of a symphony, introducing the themes that later movements develop:

- God is especially present among his people *by his Word* (throughout the chapter, but esp v.12f).
- v.35 draws attention to God's 'singularity and integrity'⁶¹: there is no god like him, hence the hostility to all idolatry.
- God's justice and mercy work hand in hand (25-31).

'Observe my commands carefully: it will bring you respect among the nations. Teach them to your children. Flee idolatry: keep remembering God's covenant with you. Has any other god acted as I did at the Exodus? He is *God*.' Moses appointed TransJordan cities of refuge; v. 44f is the heading to the main message of Deut., really to ch. 5-11, -26 or -31.

→Jesus → 2019:

- (1) On v.6 the effect on the nations: the fullness of the spirit evokes respect.⁶²
- (2) The importance in our generation of our children knowing the difference between right and wrong;
- (3) Living God's way is still the road to his blessing.⁶³
- (4) Keep remembering God's mercy and telling the next generation;⁶⁴ how much part did Acts 21.5 (disciples, wives and children praying together for Paul) play in the continuation of the early church?

⁶⁰ Mark 9.1-13 and parallels

⁶¹ McConville's terms; cp Jas.1.17

⁶² Acts 2.42-47; 2 Cor.2.15f

⁶³ Mark 10.28-31; John 14.15-27, 15.1-17

⁶⁴ Eph.2.11f; 2 Tim 1.3-7, 3.14-4.5

Ch. 5 – 11 Loving God with all your heart

Intro: the spirit of ch. 5-11.

With ch. 5 we come to the next major section of Deut. Even just seeing the GNB headings gives matter for reflection. ‘The Lord’s own people … the *blessings* of obedience … a good land to be possessed … the Lord’s greatness … the blessings of the promised land.’ It’s reminiscent of Eph. 1.3-14 ‘The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ … every spiritual blessing … chosen us to be his … because of his love … make us his sons … free gift … forgiven … grace in such large measure … the Holy Spirit the guarantee.’ The sermons on this section just must put on display the grace, the largesse of God and the Person who overflows with them.

Ch. 5. The covenant in essence. ‘God made a covenant with us, starting “I brought you out of slavery, have no other gods before me.” You said “Moses we are afraid, you hear him for us.” Well, walk in this way so that you may live.’

→ Jesus → 2019:

This is not a ‘religion of works in order to attain life.’ It is the expression of gratitude for redemption. It is out of this that all ‘doing’ springs.

Sermon 2: Chapter 5

The covenant God makes with his people, then and now

Glowing heart: The Lord says to them/us his people: We are thirled to one another in solemn, fraught covenant. I’m your Saviour, here is the sort of people to be.

OHL: Wow, Jesus is in momentous personal covenant with me! Lord, change and mould my heart to live so that that is the living truth about me.

Notes towards a sermon:

- *Introduction:* We’ve seen that the people of Israel are on the verge of entering the promised land. They’ve been wandering for 40 years. Now is the time to get their faith right before crossing the Jordan & the battle of Jericho, starting a whole new life as a nation in their own land for the first time. Apprehensive, excited. *It is a key moment in their story.* They need a steady, motivating, guiding word. Nor is this just an ancient problem. We too can plod along in the duties of life, work and church yet living on the horizontal plane alone. As J.N.Darby said, ‘Alas! How often we have to reproach ourselves with going on in a round of Christian duty, faithful in general intention, but not flowing from the fresh realisation of the love of Christ to our souls.’ Let this moment from the Lord reach us too, today.

- *Content:* Here in Deut ch. 5 God affirms the covenant relationship that he has with Israel. In a sentence it is this, in all its sovereignty and grace: 'I will be your God and you will be my people.' Just like that, whether or not they want it, irrespective of desert, simply because God declares and thus makes it so. It is just the same with us.

But think about that for a minute. In James Philip's words, 'When we think who the Lord is, Creator of the ends of the earth, almighty, all-glorious, the Father of an infinite majesty – the greatness of God is so staggering when we think of it, yet that God takes pleasure in his people! The God who made the universe by the word of his power, the God who said, 'Let there be light and there was light,' the God who created the Milky Way with a snap of his fingers, that God takes pleasure in his people! The thing is absolutely fantastic, absolutely astounding.'⁶⁵

In this chapter God makes two basic points. The first – he is their saviour. The second – the type of people they are to be. Let's look at those in turn.

1. God is their saviour. 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.' (lively expl!). It is the situation of every believer now, although more so. Not from external slavery in the country of Egypt, but inner slavery to sins, sin and Satan. Rom.3.23f, John 8.36 ad lib.
2. The type of people they are to be: he states the ten commandments. This is the kind of people humankind was created to be, the sort that Adam and Eve were before the Fall, although now mostly put in negative terms because they are now sinners. It's worth very briefly rehearsing:
 - a. The first four commandments are Godward: to have no other god, to make no images of gods, not to misuse his name by their actions or words; to give one day in seven altogether from work to him. Let him have top place in their hearts and lives.
 - That God is top in our hearts and comes first in our lives is still the most important and happiest thing for a human being, as Jesus said: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind: this is the first and greatest commandment (Matt.22.36f wee lively exp!)
 - b. The next six commandments are man-ward: to bring honour to our parents, to save life and not destroy it, to be faithful about marriage, to respect others' property and not steal it, to tell the truth, to put covetousness and envy to death and to be content.

⁶⁵ J Philip, Bible Study 2 June 1976 'The theological basis of prayer' p. 3,4.

Again, Jesus affirms the second table of the law: 'And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments' (wee lively exp., with illustration)

God concludes, 'Oh that their hearts might fear me and keep my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children for ever!' (v. 29).

- *Conclusion.* The preacher Aijith Fernando tells of an occasion when planes by the score had to be cancelled at a certain airport. You can imagine the chaos. There was one staff member who kept her cool the whole time, explained what was happening, took all the vilification, helped with the alternative arrangements. A man came up to her at the end of it all and asked her name so he could write to the airline about her. She said, 'Well sir, you can write to the airline if you wish, but I'm not really working for the airline, I'm working for Jesus Christ.'

To what extent would you say *you* are gripped by the glory of God being in a covenant with you? To what extent are those two 'tables of the law' (Godward, man-ward) the sort of person you are? Could this be a day, for you, of a fresh marriage to Jesus? Or of choosing him as your saviour?

My sermon's core headings: God's covenant with his people:

- The grace that starts it
- The decrees that guide it
- The provision for failure (it was a communion service. Matt.26.27f)

Ch. 6. Love God and teach your children to. Ch. 6 puts in place the link between the Decalogue and the future life of Israel. The one-ness of God is a dominant theme (v.4). 'Listen so as to enjoy long life. Hear, Israel, YHWH our God is one. Love him with all your heart, soul and strength. Have the commandments on your hearts, impress them on your children. When prosperous, take care not to forget them. When your children ask, explain the Exodus rescue and God's command to obey so that we prosper.

→ Jesus → 2019:

- (1) Jesus said the *Shema* is the most important commandment (Mk.12.29). He wants not just hearers but disciples: in justification through faith, obedience has not become superfluous or secondary.⁶⁶
- (2) 'Wear this on your hands and foreheads, doorposts and gates' (v.8) means 'let this be how you think and behave at home and wherever you go.'⁶⁷
- (3) Impressing it on our children remains a value: Acts 2.39; Eph. 6.1-4 // Col.3.20f; 1 Tim.3.4f.

⁶⁶ Emil Brunner, quoted by J Philip ad loc.

⁶⁷ Micah 6.8

Ch. 7. Drive out the current inhabitants. Ch. 7 is ‘the main exposition in Deut. of Israel’s election.’⁶⁸ The rejection of other nations goes with this: all other rule is excluded, so that Israel can be a paradigm of God’s kingdom to the world. ‘Exterminate the Canaanites and their religious artefacts and do not intermarry with them: you are YHWH’s. He chose you because he loves you. If you follow his ways he will make you flourish. Do not fear them: remember YHWH and the exodus. But again: stay clear of detestable things.

→ Jesus → 2019:

- (1) The resolution called for in our growth to holiness, cp 1 Cor.9.26f, 2 Cor.6.14-7.1 ‘Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.’
- (2) from the words ‘if you obey he will love you:’ God can express his love to us when we walk with him, in a way that is not possible otherwise. // Christ lives in me -> I was caught up to paradise, heard inexpressible things.⁶⁹
- (3) from ‘fear not; remember:’ recollection is the cure for fear.⁷⁰

Ch. 8. Obey and stay grateful. The chapter is about dependence on God. ‘In the desert God tested your hearts. He made you hungry and provided manna so you would realise man lives not by bread alone but also by what he commands. How good he is: your clothes did not wear out (etc) for 40 years, and he is bringing you to a good land. Don’t forget, lest when prosperous you become proud.’

→ Jesus → 2019:

- (1) God continues to mature us by his disciplines.
- (2) the dangers of affluence. Stay grateful.
- (3) the importance of thankfulness: how good God was to them, is to us.⁷¹

Ch. 9. God will give you success; but remember you are golden calf people. On what basis may Israel enter the land, make his promises their reality? Entirely on the basis of his grace.⁷² ‘God will bring you into the land. When you drive out the Anakites don’t say that is because of your righteousness. It’s because of their wickedness. You are stiff-necked: remember the golden calf, Taberah, Massah, Kibroth-Hattaavah and your unbelief at Kadesh Barnea. I prayed 40 days and nights for God to relent towards you and save his reputation.’

⁶⁸ McConville p. 162.

⁶⁹ Gal.2.20 → 2 Cor.12.1-6, 1 John 1.1-7; John 14.21-23, Luke 7.36f.

⁷⁰ 1 Cor.11.24; Eph. 2.11f; 2 Tim.2.8; Heb.10.32; 2 Peter 1.12

⁷¹ v. 2,4,7,15,16. Ps.33.1, 107.8. Luke 17.15f; 2 Cor.9.15; Eph.5.20

⁷² McConville p.191

→ Jesus → 2019:

- (1) We are in the same danger of resisting the Holy Spirit.⁷³
- (2) God will fulfil his purposes for us as he did for them.⁷⁴
- (3) Much to learn and imitate from Moses' prayer life. The people, God's reputation, meant so much to him.⁷⁵

Ch. 10. Second set of Decalogue; do fear God. 'It is nothing less than a discourse on loving God. As such it becomes one of the profoundest expressions of deuteronomistic theology, because it develops this love command in the context of covenant faithfulness.'⁷⁶ It says, 'In response, God re-carved the ten commandments and let us go on.' Brief narrative about the priesthood. 'He asks that you love him and walk in his ways. He owns the universe, yet chose *you*. He cares for the weakest; do that too.'

→ Jesus → 2019: (1) That re-carving of the Decalogue speaks of God giving another chance, as he does so often.⁷⁷ (2) They had priests, and Christians are mediators to the world, 1 Pe.2.9. (3) Let those who speak against Christians keeping the law remember v.13: God's ways are for our good.⁷⁸ (4) *What* a God is shown in v. 14-18; cp Acts 17.24-28.

Ch. 11. Choose God and be blessed ... or not. Your choice. 'Love God and keep his laws for you are the Exodus people, both saved and warned (v.6f). Do realise that obedience gives strength and long life. The promised land is so fertile; don't be enticed away from YHWH. Keep his words in mind, teach them to your children and you will spread abroad victorious. You have a choice between blessing and curse, which you will declare on Mts Gerizim and Ebal.'

→ Jesus → 2019:

- (1) Here is the final, heart-felt appeal before the detailed stipulations of ch. 12-26. It is warm yet astringent. God is all grace, provident, rescuing, faithful; his ways bring strength and life in all its fullness. It is the same today.
- (2) The significance of the forward reference to Gerizim and Ebal: they will plant God's word in Canaan, as the Apostles did (Acts 12.24). Let us be quite clear how momentous it is to be the land of the Book.

⁷³ Acts 7.51; Eph.4.30; 1 Thes.5.19; Gal.5.17

⁷⁴ 9.1; Ps.90.17; Is.43.13; John 6.37; Phil.1.6; Heb.6.17

⁷⁵ 9.2; Ex.32.32; Luke 11.5-13, 18.1-14; Rom.9.3 – can we say that?

⁷⁶ McConville p. 207

⁷⁷ Isaiah 42.22 – 43.13; and with John Mark, Acts 15.38 -> 2 Tim.4.11.

⁷⁸ Also 1 John 5.3 and note 26 above.

Ch. 12 – 26 Laws for God’s church-state in the promised land

Ch. 12 opens Deut’s long central section and affirms its starting point: Israel is set apart to YHWH, so her first vocation is to glorify and enjoy him.

Preaching ch. 12-26

If we are not preaching every chapter, choosing which chapters to include raises the question what are the absolutely core themes in Moses’ practical application of the Covenant. Interestingly, the different analyses that approach this problem all produce three themes, but different ones.

(1). *Millar’s* solution for the purpose of drawing lessons from ch. 12-26 is to analyse the chapters thematically. ‘(Their) ethical demands result from the application of the Deuteronomic theology of *worship*; of *the land*; and of *human relationships*, to Israel’s new existence’ (italics mine):

- Worship: their primary responsibility in Canaan: not as the Canaanites, but at the place and in the manner God reveals.
- The land: God’s gift so that they may enjoy his company, and therefore not to be defiled eg by sin.
- Human relationships: they must do everything in their power to guard justice and equity so that the relationship for which they have been set apart may be fully enjoyed.⁷⁹

(2). *The Bible Project* takes the following as its themes. It has the advantage of taking the chapters in order:

- Ch. 12-16a Israel’s worship
- Ch. 16b-18 Israel’s leaders
- Ch. 19-26 Civil laws (marriage, family, business) and social justice.

(3). *My proposal.* I have taken account of the checklist (Booklet 1 p. 3) of issues that Moses himself treats as large and deals with repeatedly as the heart of God’s covenant relationship with his people: the land with its ‘one place for worship’ (which is the land in microcosm, being where he blesses and is especially present) in microcosm; the heart; obedience; the love of God. I have chosen the three passages **ch. 12** (centrality of God; death to idolatry), **ch. 20** (the battle to enter God’s territory; enlightened warfare) and **ch. 24** (what righteousness and justice look like in action in a community) to reflect these.

⁷⁹ Millar p. 145, 146

Ch. 12 Loyal worship in contrast to Canaanite religion. The negative *inclusio* vv.2-4 and 29-31 against Canaanite worship surrounds the positive issue of worshipping YHWH. The emphasis is on obeying YHWH:

- v. 5-7 it is to take place where YHWH says
- v. 8-12 theological basis: (a) as a pilgrim people, (b) enjoying YHWH's actual Presence.
- v. 13, 14 'not anywhere you *see* (NIV has 'anywhere you please') but as commanded' i.e. let the ear ('as God says'), not the eye ('this is an attractive-looking place; let's have a satisfying spectacle') be your canon.
- v. 15-25 Don't let this restrict your lives. Enjoy meat meals with the family (although not with the blood in) wherever you are living.
- v. 26-28 But the sacrifices – do them right, that it might go well with you.

Seeing this chapter through Jesus spectacles, notice the pilgrim spirit⁸⁰; the joy⁸¹; the 'as God says'⁸² and the v. 15-25 fullness of life⁸³.

Sermon 3: Chapter 12

The centrality of the united worship of God alone

Glowing heart: First requirement: be rid of all pagan homage and worship God where and why he says.

OHL: The first part of my spiritual reality will be to worship God, among his people, in his very presence: like the first question in the Catechism which says the chief end of man is to glorify and enjoy God for ever.

Notes towards a sermon:

Introduction. Today we take our first study in the core of Deut, ch. 12-26, in which Moses spells out how the ten commandments will work out for the religious, civil and moral life of Israel when they are in the promised land. v. 1 speaks of decrees and laws. There is not a great distinction between the words; 'decree' comes from 'to engrave' a precept or rule that should be obeyed, while 'laws' comes from to judge or govern, implying that they are the sceptre or ordinances by which the Lord exercises his reign over us. Significantly, Moses deals first with worship. A right relationship with God is the beginning of everything. He puts his description within a framework of 'not the way the pagans do it' (v. 2&3, 29-31) lest the people be tempted to

⁸⁰ Phil.1.23; Heb.11.13; 2 Peter 1.13-15; Calvin's Golden Booklet (Inst. 3. 6-10) on living with our gaze on heaven; 1 Cor.11.26 anent the Lord's Supper.

⁸¹ Acts 2.45f; Rom. 5.11; Phil.4.4; 1 Tim.6.17; 1 Pe.1.3-9

⁸² John 14.15; Rom.12.1f; 1 John 5.2f

⁸³ John 10.10

wonder, especially in difficult times, how their predecessors in the land went about *their* worship and are seduced away to other gods and practices. Moses strikes three special notes about worship:

1. *Not to other gods.* Just look at 2 & 3 about the previous inhabitants' worship places: Destroy completely, break down, smash, burn, cut down; wipe out their very names.

Don't imagine for a moment this is narrow-mindedness. We prepare engaged couples for wedding vows that include 'keeping me only unto thee:' it's not unknown for people to hang on to rival relationships but it's unthinkable, it's a betrayal. Alcoholics know they mustn't touch a drop. Pagan worship brought people power, and sex, and wealth; there are times for being selective and exclusive, and worship is one such activity.

Even Jesus was tempted to wrong worship, and he answered the Devil from Deut: 'worship the Lord your God and serve him only.' The converts in Ephesus brought their sorcery scrolls and burnt them publicly, financially valuable though they were. Jesus called us to hate even our family in comparison to him. His place in our lives, as our God, is a place for him alone.

2. *With joy, in God's very presence.* He will have given them safety, and rest, and their inheritance (v.9, 10) – why not rejoice to belong to such a God, and enjoy him as they offer their worship? Three times Moses says, rejoice (7, 12, 18). How much more reason have we to enjoy God; cp Rom.5.11 and Bklt 1 n.36.

Seven times in this chapter alone, Moses speaks of *the one place* for worship (v. 5,5,11,14,18,21,26). The NT internalises that principle: 'neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem;' God seeks those who worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4.19-26).

3. *Amidst freedom of life.* There are sacrifices and freewill offerings to offer God centrally, but in the many places where they will live let them have all the meat they want (15, 20), the clean and the unclean alike (22). This liberty would also keep them from the temptation to turn to local Canaanite shrines.

Conclusion. The chief end of man is to glorify and enjoy God; have you discovered what you are for?

My sermon's core headings:

- Refuse the world's seduction
- Embrace the Lord's salvation
- Enjoy the Lord's provision

Ch. 13.1-14.2 No idolatry. Why is loyal worship so key? Because the idolatries of our neighbours are so attractive. They offer power, crops, sex, wealth, parties... Note the thrice-repeated protasis ('if...'), apodosis ('then...') and motivation (therefore...). The sin warned against is being enticed to other gods. The penalty is death. The three potential enemies of our souls are impressive prophets (1-5), our family or friends (6-11) and 'wicked people' (lit. 'sons of Belial', 12-18) enticing whole towns. Notice the reasons for capital punishment: to purge of evil; deterrence; to deflect the Lord's anger; and to open the door to his blessing.

Seeing this chapter through Jesus eyes reminds us how very important it is to guard our relationship with him. Cp 'you have forsaken your first love;' being enticed by modern day Balaks and Nicolaitans; tolerating Jezebels; putting our particular idolatries to death; the courage of some in Ephesus.⁸⁴

Ch. 14. Clean and unclean food and tithes (resuming the tithes and food theme from ch. 12). The two themes are linked superficially by the act of eating (3ff, 26ff), but more importantly by their expressing Israel's holiness: 'you are a people holy to the Lord, his treasured possession' (14.2).

- **Food.** The basis of the clean-unclean distinction is still not clear (hygiene? The 'normal' which speaks of life and the 'less normal' of death?). We are left with the important message to live by the distinctiveness God calls for, whether or not we understand it. v. 21b about not cooking a kid in its mother's milk occurs three times (also Ex. 23.19, 34.26): apparently a term in common currency, shorthand for 'avoid pagan practices.'⁸⁵ Simon Manchester made the useful suggestion it is wrong because it mixes what is life-giving with death.
- **Tithes.** A link section typical of Moses in that it simultaneously continues the eating theme and introduces the humanitarian instructions that follow. Bring a tenth of your produce, or what it buys on sale, to the one worship place. Again the basis is theological: God is the landowner, so eat it in the place he directs. Every third year, give it to the Levites and the poor (thus introducing the poor relief of ch. 15).

Ch. 15.1-18. Cancelling debts, releasing slaves. The dominant idea is release (the Son sets us free). Time and again Israel fell spiritually to a dominance by the rich, as the prophets tell. The release laws reverse this inequity. 'Every 7th year cancel debts and release slaves.' It is right to

⁸⁴ Rev 2.4, 2.14f, 2.20; 1 Cor. 10.14 with Col. 3.5; Acts 19.18-20

⁸⁵ Discussion by Millar p. 118f

distinguish their slavery from that which Wilberforce helped to eradicate. Slavery in Israel was an institution whereby the wealthy provided, by way of temporary indenture, employment to destitute self-employed small farmers.⁸⁶ In spirit it was a kind act, to be followed by release in the 7th year. Deut is notable in urging the additional generosity of a golden handshake matching God's generosity to the master (v.14). The challenge in v. 11 and 4 is very impressive: there will always be poor *in the land* but there should be no poor *among you*.

→ Jesus → 2019: Seeing this chapter through the eyes of the Jesus revolution brings Acts 2.42-47, Acts 4.32-5.11 irresistibly to mind; cp Acts 11.27-30; 1 Cor.11.17-22; 2 Cor. 8 & 9; Gal.6.10; Philemon.

Ch. 15.19 – 16.17 Firstlings and festivals. The feasts, ensuring that Israel regularly assemble before the Lord, further emphasise Israel's status as YHWH's people. 'The firstlings are YHWH's so eat them (without the blood); and celebrate Passover, Weeks and Tabernacles, where he appoints: the *whole* community (16.11).' Note the joy (11,14,15): God made it his part to liberate and give the land (= rest, 12.9f), theirs to enjoy and worship (could there be a sermon there). 'Celebrate' ('hg' חנָה, v.1,10,13) has the root notion of feast, holiday. Eg in 1 Sam.30.16 after the Amalekites raided Ziklag David found them eating, drinking and 'hg-ing': variously translated as revelling, dancing with joy, rejoicing and celebrating.

→ Jesus → 2019:

Celebrating God's mercies. Rom. 5.11; Phil.4.4; 1 Tim.6.17; 1 Pe.1.3-9 (as note 17 above). When Christian came up with the Cross and his burden loosed from off his shoulders, Bunyan goes on,

'Then was Christian glad and lightsom, and said with a merry heart, *He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death.* Then he stood still a while, to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the Cross should thus ease him of his burden. (then tears, and peace, and change of raiment, and Seal, and Bunyan goes on) 'Then Christian gave three leaps for joy, and went on singing.

*Blest Cross! Blest sepulchre! Blest rather be
The Man that there was put to shame for me*⁸⁷

They *celebrated* Passover; could we find ways of making the Lord's supper more like that while avoiding the dangers?

⁸⁶ Wenham p. 72

⁸⁷ John Bunyan *Grace Abounding and The Pilgrim's Progress* Oxford 1966 p. 169f

Ch. 16.18 – 18.22 Authorities: judges, justice, the king, the prophet.

Deut. moves from worship to the political and religious organisation of Israel. Moses will not enter the promised land. Torah will in his place, with the responsibility for its day to day living lying with the people, and its formal implementation lying with the judges (16.18f). Even then failure to obey will arise, and God will raise prophets to recall the people to God (18.14f).

16.18-20 lays down the general principle. Give (yes) the nation judges to dispense ‘justice-righteousness’ (v. 18) - a unique double word - and follow ‘*justice justice*’ (v. 20; my italics): a doubling that is also unique in the Hebrew Bible. This really matters. The tone of a nation (and congregation) is set by its leaders. Let the tone of the nation’s life be set by fairness in the courts. People must get a just deal in Israel.

Detailed procedure follows. Idolatry carries the death penalty (17.2-7). Let difficult cases be sent to judge plus priest (8-13). The objective: to purge the land of evil. The king, when appointed, must not be extravagant, must make himself familiar with Deut. and live accordingly (14-20). Priests and Levites to be supported by the people’s offerings (18.1-8). Detestable practices: remove them (9-13). God will raise up prophets, and one in particular, to be his mouthpiece and to be executed if they speak for other gods. ‘A prophet like me’ (15-18) is the one clear Messianism in Deut., which Peter made capital out of in his great speech in Solomon’s colonnade.⁸⁸

→ Jesus → 2019:

- On good procedure: Matt.18.15-20; 1 Cor.6.1-8; 1 Cor.14.40
- On appointing authorities to ensure it in the church: 1 Tim 3, Titus 1, 1Pe. 5
- On supporting and respecting them: 1 Cor. 9; Gal.6.6; 1 Thes.5.12f; 1 Tim.5.17-20; Heb.13.7
- On Christian respect for lawfully constituted authority: Rom. 13, Titus 3, 1 Pe.2.13f
- The Deut-promised prophet: Matt.21.11; John 1.1-18 esp 17f, 6.14, 30-35, 15.15; Acts 3.22, 7.37, Heb.1.1f. Compare the close of Deut. 34 and John 20: ‘many miracles ... none like him.’
- Luther’s doctrine of the godly prince being for the weal of the nation.

⁸⁸ Acts 3.17-23

Ch. 19.1 – 22.9 Protect life, especially human.

The concern is to limit loss of life. The cities of refuge (19.1-13) protect those guilty of accidental manslaughter from revenge murder by the go'el, the relative of the deceased⁸⁹. The boundary stone legislation (19.14) safeguarded a person's livelihood. The two-witness requirement (15-21) protected justice. Principles of war (ch. 20), the only OT laws on warfare, specified exemptions from military service and required attackers to offer terms of surrender except for the unique holy war of taking Canaan, 16-18. The latter has the purpose of securing Israel's 'rest' in their land.⁹⁰ Spare the fruit trees even in war (19f): you have a future to provide for. Murder pollutes the earth below us; 21.1-9 provides a procedure for unsolved murders in order to purge the land of that contamination. The case of the female POW (10-14) leads to prohibition against disinheriting a rightful heir; perhaps a livelihood as well as a justice issue (15-17)? Capital punishment for the impenitently rebellious son is afforded the protection of careful, proper procedure (18-21). Removing the body of a criminal from a tree (22f) likewise protects the land from curse and contamination; Paul makes use of the theology in expounding the Cross.⁹¹ Animal life is protected in 22.1-4, 6&7; why transvestism is placed at v. 6 is a mystery. The parapet round a flat roof is a life-saving regulation (22.8).

→Jesus → 2019 Jesus *our* 'city of refuge' acts as go'el, not only as older brother kinsman to redeem us from slavery but who conquered the Devil to avenge us. He bore our curse so that it might not fall on us. He protects our lives: John 3.16, John 10.

The principles of war (ch. 20) show compassion for both Israel (eg exemption if you were engaged to be married or simply afraid) and the enemy (offer terms of peace, don't ravage the land) and deserve to be learnt from. The two examples of total destruction are of the Canaanites who have had 400 years to repent and only become worse (7.1-7; 20.16-18), and apostate Israelites who have made a whole town deliberately idolatrous (13.12f). On the former, see the note on ecological cleansing in 'historical setting' in Booklet 1 p. 10.

Whether **ch. 22.9-12** on mixtures and tassels belongs here or in the next section, or Moses is being *stream of consciousness* in the Spirit and without known rationale in the order of decrees and laws at this point, is unclear to me.

⁸⁹ Numbers 35.9-30

⁹⁰ McConville p. 322

⁹¹ Gal. 3.13f. Jesus in bearing the curse removed it from us so that we Gentiles might receive the blessing, promised to Abraham, through Christ Jesus.

Sermon 4: Chapter 20

Is the OT bloodthirsty? And is ch. 20 connected with the spiritual warfare in which we engage?

Glowing heart: Israel were entering a theatre of war; God must rule in how they conducted it, and that has prophetic power in respect of modern warfare. The Kingdom of God is a theatre of spiritual war waged with different weapons but Deut. 20 has plenty we can learn from.

OHL: unembarrassment about the unique YHWH war of entry into the promised land; vision for the way wars must be waged if they become essential; clarity about our spiritual battling for the souls of the lost.

Notes towards a sermon:

Moses has dealt with personal violence in ch. 19. Ch. 20 deals with corporate violence, the practice of warfare. There are three sections to the chapter:

- preparation for war (1-9)
- principles of war (10-18)
 - general, and w.r.t. cities further afield: 'ordinary' war (10-15)
 - specific action w.r.t. the inhabitants of the promised land (16-18)
- the ecology of war (19, 20)

1. *Preparation for war (1-9).* Two features make this extraordinary chapter noteworthy. Do you see the God statements in 1, 4, 13, 16, 17, 18? The key to warfare is not their relationship with the nations but with the Lord. This sermon is not a war manual, it is 'torah', pastoral instruction.
 - a. So in v. 1-9 Moses the pastor addresses the fear that must accompany the prospect of battle. *First*, acknowledge the cause of it: horses, chariots and an army greater than yours. True. *Then*, the antidote to it: God goes with you, fights for you, will give you victory (the imperfect verb is saying 'be treading fear down' for those reasons. After all, God conquered the Egyptian army (v.1). *Finally*, the method of providing the antidote: the priests remind them that God goes with them, and the officers will offer a beautiful range of exemptions from military service and appoint commanders to ensure the people are well managed.
 - b. Secondly, kindness runs almost every stage of the process. There are plenty of let-outs for Israel: marriage, business, even plain fear (5-8). And there is a let-out for the enemy, the prior offer of peace (10f).
2. *The conduct of ordinary war (10-15).* Besiege the walled city that refuses the peace offer.⁹² The men who refused peace are to be killed. The women children and livestock are to be spared. The plunder may be kept and used.

⁹² Compare Ezek. 4.2 for more detail

All this is much more enlightened and moderate than the barbaric practices of the time.

3. *The unique YHWH war of entry (16-18).* Complete destruction (the famous *herem* or ban) is to apply here. The reason stated at this point is the protection of their relationship with the Lord (18) but others are given elsewhere. God had waited 400 years giving opportunity for repentance and the Canaanites had simply become more corrupt in disgusting ways (see booklet 1, historical setting and Gen.15.16-21, Lev. 18.24-28). He was executing justice on them using Israel: this was God's activity. 'God's elimination of the Canaanites was a necessary step in the history of salvation. A holy people requires a holy land.'⁹³ Not only so. We know from God's mercy to Rachel and family that repentance, siding with God and salvation were available to any that wanted it.⁹⁴ It was, moreover, a pattern role: we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ and 'receive what is due for the deeds done while in the body.'⁹⁵ If we think this punishment was bloodthirsty, it is a mere foretaste of judgement day: Jesus and the apostles give awesome warning of that judgement, where (to use their language) the worm is not quenched, the flames are prepared and the blood will run horse-high.⁹⁶ And think how muscular Jesus' thinking was about tragedies like those who died when a tower fell on them. 'Were they more guilty than other Jerusalemites? No; but unless you repent, you too will all perish' (Lk 13). We have no cause for embarrassment about God's unique, judging war of entry into the holy land.
4. *The ecology of war.* In the conduct of war, Israel were to be enlightened even about nature around them. Retain the fruit trees in the area: they are not your enemy (20.19), though you may use non-productive trees for siege. How different recent history and future health would be if Deut. 20 had been observed. Use of the defoliant Agent Orange in Vietnam not only destroyed half a nation's agriculture; even now and into the indefinite future its poison is causing frightening frequencies of genetic birth defects in the population. Listen to Deuteronomy.
5. *The spiritual battle for the kingship of God.* There is a war for the souls of humankind⁹⁷ but it is not a war against flesh and blood. We use spiritual

⁹³ D. Block, *Deuteronomy* p. 483

⁹⁴ Joshua 2.1-16, 6.22f

⁹⁵ 2 Cor.5.10

⁹⁶ Mark 9.48; Matt. 25.41 & 46; Rev. 14.20 & 19.13

⁹⁷ 1 Tim.1.18; 1 Peter 2.11

and argument weapons to rescue sinners from Satan's grip⁹⁸ and the armour that God supplies against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms in our own battles.⁹⁹

My sermon's core headings: A God of justice: rules of war –

- Look to God (v.1-4)
- Keep his rules (v. 5-15)
- The one LORD'S war: execute the Canaanites (v. 16-18)
- No scorched earth (v. 19, 20)

Ch. 22.13 – 23.18 Gender and exclusion. ‘These laws aim to ensure that the people are able to enjoy all the benefits of belonging within the covenant community.’¹⁰⁰ Scripture is clear that our human sexuality somehow links us with God's own self, since ‘in the image of God he created him male and female.’¹⁰¹ Edith Humphrey comments, ‘What we think and say and do about our sexuality is intimately connected to who we are - who we are in the created order, who we are in society, who we are with our spouses and friends, who we are ecclesially, and who we are in the new creation which God has brought into being and which he will complete through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is no doubt because of the inter-relatedness of this issue that it brings forth visceral reactions, for good or for ill.’¹⁰²

The evidence of order becomes ever more uncertain from this point, but the section is mostly about sexual relationships. 22.13-30 protects wives from unscrupulous husbands. Marriage is for life: he may not simply be rid of an unwanted wife but must provide proof of previous sexual experience (or perhaps of pregnancy¹⁰³) and so of belonging to another, abusing the covenant of marriage. The penalty is death ‘in order to purge the evil from among you.’ Deut. has modified contemporary legal ideas so as to emphasise the importance of women’s honour, a value which sets Israel apart from all other nations.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ 2 Cor.10.3-6

⁹⁹ Ephesians 6.10-20

¹⁰⁰ McConville p. 343

¹⁰¹ Gen.1.27

¹⁰² E. Humphrey, ‘Why this issue?’ (i.e. homosexual practice). Article prepared for the Faith and Order Commission of the Anglican Church in Canada

¹⁰³ G. Wenham ‘Betulah, a girl of marriageable age,’ *Vetus Testamentum* 22.326-48 1972 quoted in Millar p. 137

¹⁰⁴ Millar 137

Adultery, fornication and rape follow. Exclusion from worship on the basis of castration (23.1) perhaps refers to self-mutilation associated with Canaanite cults. Illegitimacy (23.2) is on the basis not of sex before marriage but of intermarriage with one of a pagan religion. Moses continues with exclusion from the Assembly: Moabites and Ammonites but not Edomites or Egyptians (23.3-8); the clean-ness of the military camp (9-14). Refugees are to be made welcome (15f); the section ends by forbidding cult prostitution (23.17f).

Ch. 23.19-24.7 Property law. What drives these remarkable regulations is the vision of a society truly different from others, in which the use of wealth serves Israel's calling to be a brotherhood.¹⁰⁵ We are called to live out the covenant. Not charging an Israelite interest; paying one's vows (about property pledged to God, says Wenham); permission to hand-glean: these are clearly property issues. Proscribing remarriage is less so; it might involve the scam of acquiring your wife's dowry by making a false accusation against her.¹⁰⁶ Military exemption, security for debts and kidnap conclude the section.

Ch. 24.8 – 25.4 Protect the disadvantaged. Kaufman and Harman link this section to the ninth commandment about false witness (see tables 2 & 3 above) but given the content of the section that looks forced. I have chosen Millar's heading. It has the advantage of drawing attention to the repeated emphasis in Deut. on humanitarianism.¹⁰⁷

The section consists of regulations about leprous diseases, pledges for loans, fair wages, each person dying only for their own sin, leaving gleanings for the poor, punishments; and not muzzling a working ox.

Then Jesus → Col.3.15-24 and James 1.27 on kindness to others; 1 Cor.9.9 the rights of a working apostle, 1 Tim.5.18 honouring or rewarding a hardworking elder; Gal.6.10, Rom.13.8-10, and the passage on liberality towards needy Christians in 2 Cor.9.

¹⁰⁵ McConville p. 354

¹⁰⁶ R. Westbrook 'Prohibition on restoration of marriage in Dt.24.1-4' in *Studies in the Bible* ed. Japhet 1986 p. 387-405 quoted in Wenham *Exploring* p. 138f.

¹⁰⁷ Wenham quotes 5.14f; 10.18f; 12.18f; 14.21 & 29; 15.13-15; 16.11f & 14; 23.7, 15 & 16; 24.7, 14f, 17-22; 26.11-13 and asks us to notice how, and why, Deut wants slaves, immigrants, orphans, widows and the landless to be helped: p. 135.

Sermon 5: Chapter 24

How civil society will behave under God's reign, in Israel the church-nation, in the promised land.

Glowing heart: Let the wellbeing of the family and the vulnerable be the concern of all, for we are jointly in such a covenant.

OHL: Generosity, justice and kindness towards immigrant, widow and orphan.

Notes towards a sermon:

In our sermon series we move in this chapter from holy war to civil peace. 'The broad themes of the integrity of the people and justice for all its members continue here.'¹⁰⁸ We might not be under this law but we love to be its in-law. First, just get a feel for this society as I read the issues in this chapter:

No 'divorce so as to get the dowry' and then remarriage; marriage exemption from military duty; when taking security for a loan don't take a person's livelihood; kidnap is a capital offence; keep the regulations about leprous diseases. Preserve the dignity of debtors, pay fair wages on time. Punish only the guilty, not the family as well. Treat the alien, widow and orphan gently; leave the gleanings of the harvest for the poor to gather.

Can you see why Jesus said the second most important commandment was 'love your neighbour as yourself'? Deut. ch. 24 is more than law; it is full of reasons for being fair to folk and nurturing the family. Here are some: 'so that your wife can be happy' (v.5); protect people's livelihood especially those in difficulty; let evil be purged away. This is the opposite of exhaustive casuistry, it is illustrative examples of neighbourly integrity for a society where all are brothers. Let's see some details; would you notice the reasoning underlying the commands:

v.1-4, the only divorce law in the OT, permits it for 'indecent' behaviour: a word usually meaning naked. The divorcer was probably able to keep the dowry; maybe he was thinking of that all along. So after her second divorce he must not marry her again: she has been declared defiled. The woman is a victim thanks to at least one husband, maybe two, shaming her: not allowed.

v. 5 exemption for newly marrieds from military service because it brings her happiness! Pro family, pro marriage.

v. 6 don't take half a pair of millstones as security, it will deprive him of a livelihood. Family wellbeing and care for the poor again.

¹⁰⁸ McConville p. 356

v. 7 kidnap is done for profit, it's theft. Capital punishment to purge the land of this evil.

v. 8,9 leprosy diseases: must follow God's declared procedure because they spread. Therefore the priest is to be involved.

v. 10-13 Don't be oppressive when seeking security for a loan; respect the person. Even return his cloak overnight so he can sleep: the covenant which directs our community life protects the interests of all of us. (*wouldn't this be great in the UK?*).

v. 14f Pay wages fairly and on time, whether Israeli or immigrant.

v. 16 affirms the legal accountability of each individual; it is wrong to impugn the whole family.

v. 17f Ensure everyone receives justice, including the poor & disadvantaged.

v. 19-22 gleanings: this gives those in the weakest position a stake in the harvest. Everyone in the covenant community has the right to share in the blessings of the land, because the Lord has given it to *all* Israel. That limits the profits of the wealthy and the rich-poor gap: good.

Overall, God's covenant with them gave the land to all Israel (v.4). They are slaves no more (v. 18, 22) and no-one's freedom is to be infringed. The purpose of the land is blessing for everyone; economic self-interest must not disserve God's covenant with his people.

But these imperatives are not works of righteousness. They describe the integrity that flows from a right relationship with God and our neighbour; they flow from his Saviourhood into our community.

Challenge: Personal integrity and the wellbeing of others, including a limit to our own prosperity (time, talents and money) for the sake of the poor and vulnerable, form one seamless robe under the kingship of God. Does that value call for any reflection about my own approach to business, or to the poverty of so many Christians either here or in the world church?

My sermon's core headings: Signs of a Deut.24 society –

- Happy wives (v.1-5)
- Temporary debtors (v. 6, 10-13)
- Justice for all (v.16)
- Healthy neighbours (v. 8,9)
- Promptly paid workers (v.14,15)
- Support for the vulnerable (v.17-22)

Ch. 25.5-19 additional laws. This is the final section on individual inculcations before the rounding up of ch. 26. For Kaufman to link it to the tenth commandment (do not covet) seems to me to abandon exegesis. Its themes are Levirate marriage, a wife grabbing the opposing husband's testicles, honest weights, and the extermination of the Amalekites.

Ch. 26 Conclusion. Ch. 26, part of the framing structure around ch. 12-26, is a chapter of three great declarations reflecting exactly the covenant God has made with his people (v. 3, 5, 13, 17, 18):

- A declaration of God's salvation, 3-9
- A declaration of the people's commitment to obey, 13
- A declaration that both the people and the Lord are willing partners to the covenant, 17 & 18.¹⁰⁹ (*I do like that*)

'As soon as you are in the land, bring the first fruits as tribute to the grace of God in getting you here and giving you this wonderful land as your place of rest: rejoice (11)! And be generous: it will open you to God's blessing (12-15).' v. 16-19 closes the *inclusio* which 12.1 started. 'So, follow these decrees and laws because you are YHWH's treasured possession.' An excellent reason.

¹⁰⁹ McConville's fine analysis: p. 377

Ch. 27-34 Weighing it up, closing the deal, staying faithful, moving on

Weighing it up: ch. 27 & 28 provide the cost-benefit analysis of living God's way or not.

Ch. 27. Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. God *made* the covenant with them at Sinai (5.2), Moses has been *teaching* them about it in Moab; they are to *reaffirm* it as soon as they are in the promised land, at Shechem with all its memories and future significance.¹¹⁰ Prepare stones. Once across the Jordan, *write all this law* on them, set them on Mt Ebal and joyfully sacrifice fellowship offerings. *Recitation of curses:* for idolatry, injustice, bestiality, corruption. The people shall say 'Amen.'

→ Jesus → 2019:

- (1) All the sins listed are still wrong. How vital in our day that people know right from wrong and recognise that costs accompany breaking God's law.
- (2) The sacrifice to atone and restore fellowship with God is provided on Ebal, the mount of curses. A foreshadowing of the cross: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us (Gal.3.13)

Ch. 28. Blessings and curses ctd. All of life is under our relationship with God.

- a) *Blessings* that God will send upon obedience, in the form of children, crops, herds, general business, military victory, prosperity
- b) *Curses* that will come upon disobedience, in the form of ruin, disease, defeat, failure, oppression, scattered among the nations.

→ Jesus → 2019:

Living God's way is good for us, tending towards health and flourishing. Rom.8.11 He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who lives in you ... streams of living water will flow from him.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Gen.12.6 and 35.4; Jos. 20.7 and 24.1

¹¹¹ John 7.37, 4.13; Isaiah 58.6-14

Closing the deal: ch. 29 & 30 provide the terms for embracing the covenant and appeal to the people to choose life.

Ch. 29. The pep talk. The chapter drives home the momentousness of the choice they are about to make (ch.30). Narrative: 'so, those are the covenant terms.' (Moses:) 'You experienced the exodus but you still don't *see* it. You are here to embrace the covenant with YHWH so, no idolatry lest these curses come on you and people realise why. This revelation belongs to us and our children.'

Structure of chapter: 1-15 exhort to enter covenant; 16-29 warn vs apostasy.

→ Jesus → 2019:

- (1) the constant danger of 29.4: knowing the facts but not getting it. eg the religious establishment;¹¹² the crowds (eg Mk 10.48, 14.4-9); the disciples (Mark 8.14-20); ourselves.
- (2) the constant lesson of 29.29. There is plenty we are not told; but we are told enough, and it is for us. Cp Luke 13.1-5.

Ch. 30. Decision time: the promise of a new covenant and the call to choose life. Ch. 30 is the climax to which Moses has been leading. Now is the time, in view of all he has been saying, to make a definite, definitive, destiny-choosing, decisive Yes to God. It's like Rom.12.1-3. 'When you experience God's curses and blessings and take them to heart he will bring you back to the land, change your hearts, make you prosper and delight in you. Now, settle it. This is not difficult: it is near you. The choice is life and prosperity or death and destruction. Oh, choose life.'

→ Jesus → 2019:

- (1) The restoration comes when we take God's disciplines to heart (v.1). Do we learn from what God is trying to teach us? (Heb. 12.10f; v.6 is immense. New hearts is the only road to fullness of life and a healthy society.¹¹³
- (2) Like Moses, Jesus and the apostles said what is at stake and called for a response. It isn't too hard for anyone; it is a matter of mouth and heart (v.14), as Paul points out.¹¹⁴ People, choose life.

¹¹² Mark 2.1-3.6, 6.3, 14.63; John 3.10, 6.66, 9.28-34

¹¹³ Jer.31.33f; Ezek.36.25f; John 3.3-8; Rom. 8.1-3; Heb.8.8-12.

¹¹⁴ Mark 10.34-38; John 3.16; Acts 2.38, 16.29-31; Rom.3.19-26, and 10.6-11 where Paul uses v.11-14; 2 Cor.5.1-6.2.

Sermon 6: Chapter 30

New hearts are needed if we are going to obey the Lord. Choose life.

Glowing heart: Israel now knew what was at stake and it was decision time that day. Choose life: it needs to happen to every person.

OHL: Lord, I realise I need you to work in my life if I'm going to live as you and I want. I solemnly choose the covenant with you; do that inner miracle in me.

Notes towards a sermon:

Text: Deut. ch. 30

Context: The people know that they will end up in exile at some stage (28.64). They see how thick they've been recently (29.2-4). They know that a lot is at stake in whether a people choose the Lord or not (29.9, or 29.22 & 25?).

Content: Moses assures them that God will bring them back to the promised land even after a time of exile. He will change their hearts and they will obey him. Meanwhile today's task is plain and not difficult: it is, with heart and mouth (definite decision plus solemn declaration) to *choose life*. It's where the whole of Moses' preaching (Deut) has been taking them.

Relevance: This is a task for every person in every era. Many married couples do this sort of thing: they renew their wedding vows at 10 or 25 years married as though they'd never really said them before. For every Christian, time conceals a menace: going on in general intention, but dully. We need to renew our choice of Jesus.

Proposition: Let's follow Moses' sermon and come to that place.

Divisions: The chapter divides itself up very plainly:

- 1 - 10 A new covenant is promised
- 11-14 Today's step is not difficult
- 15-20 Choose life

Development:

1. A new covenant is promised, v. 1-10.

This is so exciting. Moses has been driving home how much they need God. 'You were unwilling; you grumbled; you did not trust; You are stiff-necked; circumcise your hearts; O that their hearts might fear me!' (1.26,27,32; 9.6 & 13; 10.16; 5.29). Their great need was an inner change, and that did not come during their lifetimes. But God here was promising the new thing that Jesus brought: a new covenant in which God would work inside a person. It's in v. 6: 'The Lord your God will circumcise your

hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you love him with all your heart and soul, and live.'

Through Ezekiel God put it in these words: 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.' Martin Luther makes exactly Moses' point when describing the change God works through the Gospel:

'None of us can keep God's law from the depth of our hearts.

Everyone finds, inside themselves, an aversion to God and attraction to evil. What the Holy Spirit does is to put an eagerness of love in our hearts as he frees us to put our faith in Jesus Christ.'

That change of heart enables the obedience which Moses promises in the next verses (*read v. 8 & 9*). [could brief exp Rom.8.1-3]

Have you known that warming of the heart towards Jesus? (*wee lively exp/ invitation*)

Moses put this event in the future, as indeed it was for Israel at that time. But in order for it to come about, Israel must respond to God's appeal for *that* day, and to that Moses now turns.

I don't know how long it took for Moses to preach the content of the last 29 chapters but the point was now reached where the people of Israel were called on to make a definite, intentional, destiny-determining decision about God's covenant with them. Moses spells it out as

- 11-14 it's not difficult:
- 15-20 accept, embrace, close with the covenant and commit.

2. Today's step is not difficult, v. 11-14

They didn't have to ascend to heaven for it. They didn't have to cross the seas. It was as close to them as breathing. It was to be a momentous, deliberate statement from the heart:

'the word is very near you: it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you can keep it.'

That's all it involved, and all it involves to this day as Paul affirms:

'The message about the Faith we are proclaiming is: if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, believing in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.' – Rom.10.8 & 9.

People evade it, fear it, avoid doing it; maybe some here today are avoiding it? It certainly is momentous and you have no idea where it will take you; but it is not difficult. Declare, believing: those are the steps.

3. Choose life, v. 15-20

Moses doesn't mince his words, notice. The choice is between (on the one hand) life and prosperity and (on the other) death and destruction (v. 15). In three verses he spells that out a bit more fully (16-18) and then calls heaven and earth to witness their decision.

The appeal, significantly, is put in the second person *singular*: 'Yes it's an all-Israel thing but this challenge is to every individual here. Let each one of you think hard about this. Don't do it lightly; but oh, each of you, *Do it*.'

You've probably signed some document that needs to be witnessed: a Will or marriage schedule. Heaven and earth are witnesses to today's decision (v. 19 read).

There's no reason not to treat this as our decision today. As we've seen, some of Deut. needs careful thought on how to baptise it into Christ and live it out now. We are not the church-nation Israel in that land at that time. We are the international world-wide kingdom and Deut. needs interpretation for this change. But today's choice for them is today's choice for us: life or death, spiritual flourishing or destruction. The appeal is in the singular: each one of us puts our personal hand to the choice; and to its implications for good or ill.

Now, friends, choose life (v. 19, 20).

If you want words, here is how Betty Stam of the CIM put it in 1934:

Lord I give up all my own plans and purposes, all my own desires and hopes, and accept your will for my life. I give myself, my life, my all utterly to you to be yours for ever. Fill me and seal me with your Holy Spirit. Use me as you will, send me where you will, work out your whole will in my life at any cost, now and for ever.

Conclusion. Looking back, we see that Moses promises God's people the new covenant that has now come in the person Jesus Christ. This better covenant is the one we may embrace. We see that doing so is not difficult. It involves believing in the heart and solemnly professing with our mouths. God now calls everyone everywhere to do that. We see that the choice involved is between eternal life and destruction. I appeal to you therefore, in view of God's mercies, to close with Christ today, whether for the first time or in life-determining renewal.

Time for quiet reflection and responsive prayer.

My sermon's core headings: The need to commit. Moses prophesies –

- A new covenant (v.1-10)
- An easy act (v.11-14)
- A momentous choice (v.15-20)

Ch. 31. Call to keep the covenant alive by 7-year reading. ‘The chapter is crucial for an understanding of the divine presence.’¹¹⁵ Moses: ‘I won’t lead you into the land, *God* will. Joshua, go with them.’ *The narrative then resumes.* Moses wrote Deut. down to be read every 7 years during Tabernacles. God warns the people will forsake him and be destroyed; commissions Moses’ song and Joshua to be leader. Deut. to be witness against them: so hard-hearted, due for disaster.

→ Jesus → 2019:

- (1) God buries his workmen, but carries on his work so focus on God’s purposes not our indispensability.¹¹⁶
- (2) For Joshua that would require courage (v.6); fix our eyes on Jesus (Heb.12.1f).
- (3) The law to be read to the whole assembly for renewal of commitment & understanding: importance of fostering a Heb.10.24f spirit, cp Acts 20.
- (4)

Ch. 32. Song of Moses. Starting with a structure that echoes an ANE lawsuit, Moses adds two sections about God’s grace:

The usual ANE lawsuit:

- Overlord calls witnesses, 1-3
- Accusation: I’ve kept the covenant between us but you haven’t, 4-9
- Overlord’s benevolence: think how I’ve cared for you, 10-14
- Whereas you’ve broken the covenant by your apostasy, 15-18
- Announcement of punishment, 19-25

‘But God’: two stanzas about God’s grace:

- But you are so thick, our Rock will show mercy, 26-35
- He will vindicate himself and save his people, 36-43

‘The song is a witness, first of all, to the deep and abiding love of Yahweh for his people.’¹¹⁷

‘God be praised, his ways are perfect. But his people are warped. Think how he blessed Jacob; but in your prosperity you have deserted him. He will send calamity and repay those who hate him. Take this to heart, people.’ → Moses is to die on Mt Nebo.

¹¹⁵ McConville p. 442

¹¹⁶ Acts 20.22-32; Phil.1.12-24; 2Tim 4.1-6

¹¹⁷ McConville p. 451, 461

→ Jesus → 2019:

- (1) Jesus and the apostles also gloried in God.¹¹⁸ (
- (2) Let us also remember (Eph.2.11f; Rev.3.3)
- (3) We too strive to hold out the word of life in a perverse generation (Phil.2.15f); and watch and pray lest we too fall.¹¹⁹

Ch 33. Moses' blessing. Opening and concluding praise (1-6 & 25-29) frame a benediction echoing Jacob's (Gen.49). A sense of God's actions (v.1-5) takes Moses to a word for each tribe except Simeon. There is special appreciation of Levi, delight in Benjamin, blessing on Joseph. In summary 'The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.' Israel will live in safety: who is like a people blessed by the LORD?

→ Jesus → 2019:

- (1) the connection between what some of the patriarchs were and did in sticking up for God, and the benedictions pronounced on them, might well give us pause. It is both momentous for us personally:

‘Sow an act, reap a habit
Sow a habit, reap a character
Sow a character, reap a destiny’

And crucial also for the entail on our children and their children.

- (2) The individual benedictions are bathed in God: 1-5 and 26-29. He is behind, in front, around, above, beneath us, sword and shield, driving out our enemy.

Sermon 7: Chapter 33

Moses' blessing. Underneath are the everlasting arms

Intro: Here are Moses' last words, full of God and full of wisdom. It is another many-bits chapter; how to make a useful single preach? Note the structure (see chapter intro above).

Glowing heart: May God – what a God – bless each of you as He appoints, for you with your particular history, character and destiny. He's king, and he will bring you nothing but the good that's right for you all your days.

OHL: Trust in God's providence, personally applied, with awe at belonging to such a God.

¹¹⁸ Luke 10.17-21; Rom. 11.33f; 2 Cor.1.3f; Gal.6.14; Eph.1.3-10; 1 Pet.1.3-5

¹¹⁹ Matt.26.41; Rom. 7.21-25; Col.3.1-5; 2 Pet.1.3-10

Notes towards a sermon:

Some famous last words (thanks to Simon Manchester's sermon)

- Joan Crawford (film actress) when her maid offered to pray for her on her deathbed: 'Don't you dare ask God to help me.'
- Machiavelli: 'I want to go to hell, not heaven.'
- Joan of Arc: 'Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.'
- Beethoven: 'I shall hear when I'm in heaven.'
- Lord Rothschild: 'Obey the laws of Moses and always consult your mother.'

And of course in Scripture we have quite a few records of last words, of which Jacob's recorded in Gen. ch. 49 are the most closely connected with Moses' here. They differ in that Jacob speaks to individual patriarchs, Moses to the tribes whom they begat; and Moses makes no critical comments, he simply pronounces a benediction. These of Moses are magisterial, and prophetic in the most 'act of power' sense.

The blessing has three sections. The blessings on the tribes of Israel are sandwiched between tributes to God of equal length and linked by the use in each of 'Jeshurun' as a poetic name for Israel:¹²⁰

1 – 5	Vision of God coming from Sinai to the people gathered at Moab
6 – 25	Individual blessings on 11 of the 12 tribes (not Simeon)
26 – 29	A hymn of praise to God for his mercies to his fortunate people

1. *The Vision, v. 1-5*

Moses tells how he had a vision of God coming, shining, from Sinai via Paran (near Kadesh) and Seir (=Edom: south of where they were) to Israel gathered at Moab to hear God's instruction (1.1,4). Myriads of angels attended him (v.2). He just loves his people in all their thrawn-ness (v.3). There they were, gathered: his glory was shining over them, a million guardian angels in attendance. An experience repeatedly granted to his people in time of special need. The medical missionary Chrissie Chapman, for example, was in Burundi during the terrible civil war, with gunfire all around. David Ndaruhutse the centre director prayed God would open her eyes to see what he was seeing:

¹²⁰ Experts vary in how they interpret the name. The word is linked to *yasar* which means straight or upright. McConville says it emphasises her chosenness. Harman says that no diminutive ends in '–un' and it is better to take it as meaning law-keeping or upholding justice, a bit like Scotland having been known as the land of the Book. Either way 32.15, its first occurrence, points out the irony. The law-keeper is a law-breaker; the straight or upright one is crooked; the chosen one chose against God.

'I saw dozens of huge angels standing shoulder to shoulder on top of the six-foot high wall that surrounded the perimeter of our healing centre. These strong, shining heavenly beings clothed in full armour with gleaming breastplates were standing on top of the wall in a complete circle with their backs to us, looking outward. They looked so huge and strong. I was filled with so much awe that every bit of fear drained out of my body and could no longer touch me. From that moment, and for the next twelve years during which the war continued, I have never experienced nor felt fear for my life.'¹²¹

I wonder if we value highly enough the immensity of God, the love he has for us, the angelic protection unseen yet ever alert over our circumstances.

2. *The individual blessings on the tribes, v. 6-25*

It is fascinating, and thought-provoking, to see the link from the past into these words, from Jacob's blessings on the tribal patriarchs (Gen. 49); and the effect into the future of Moses' own words.

There is a lot here and I take just that one theme, linkage from past into future, in respect of three tribes that are mentioned and one that is not. You know the saying:

'Sow an act – reap a habit
Sow a habit – reap a character
Sow a character – reap a destiny.'

See how that theme worked out:

The *tribe of Simeon* is not mentioned. Gen 49 regrets his violent behaviour. The tribe of Simeon lost its separate territory quite early after the occupation of the promised land and is virtually unmentioned after this time. Sow an act ...

The *tribe of Reuben* (v.6): Gen 49 says how indecisive he was. Moses prays 'let him live' but accepts that the tribe might remain small.¹²² That came true. Sow an act ...

The *tribe of Levi* (v. 8-11) stood up for God during the golden calf debacle even against their own kith and kin: Ex.32.26-29. Moses said then, 'You have been set apart to the Lord today.' Moses' blessing remembers this and prays 'bless all his skills, O Lord, and be pleased with the work of his hands' (v. 9-11). Sow an act ...

¹²¹ E.g. Chrissie Chapman *The Night the Angels Came* Monarch 2016 p.36f

¹²² v. 6b is literally 'may his men be *a number*' whose natural meaning is 'few' says McConville, comparing Gen.34.30. The NIV footnote is to be preferred.

The *tribe of Joseph* (v. 13-17). Notice the abundance promised on what became the largest tribe, the two half-tribes Ephraim and Manasseh. The word for 'yield' of a crop is used five times: a fitting reaping for Joseph who had kept his relations, the land of Egypt and surrounding nations supplied with food in time of famine. Moses also mentions the burning bush: its only occurrence outside Ex. Ch. 3. Special blessing is pronounced on the man who had suffered so much, responded so nobly and come out as gold. The blessing came true in subsequent history. Sow an act ...

Does that not call us to examine our lives and consider what kind of entail we are bequeathing to our grandchildren? 'Sow an act' is of course a most New Testament vision:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.¹²³

What kind of person am I going to be?

3. *Who is like our God? How fortunate, the people whose God is the LORD, v. 26-29*

We quoted some famous last words, above. Here are Moses' very last words; what words. Notice where God is:¹²⁴

- *Above them, reigning*: 'who rides on the heavens to help you, and on the clouds in his majesty' (26)
- *Around them, protecting*: 'the eternal God is your refuge' (27)
- *Beneath them, catching and carrying*: 'and underneath are the everlasting arms' (27)
- *Before them, advancing* his plans for their lives: 'So Israel will live in safety alone; Jacob's spring is secure in a land of grain and new wine where the heavens drop dew' (28).

This being surrounded by God is fulfilled in the new covenant by God putting us 'in Christ', the NT shorthand for all that is implied in being being-saved. Look at Eph.1.3-14 for a seminal summary. Moses' arms failed at a crucial moment (Ex. 17.12); God's will never be missing however low we have fallen, and you cannot fall out of them. Our sins, troubles, illnesses, deaths – nothing can take God's people out of his arms. See Rom.8. 28-38 and be glad.

¹²³ Galatians 6.7. Actually 6.7-10 if we want it spelt out further.

¹²⁴ Thanks to Simon Manchester's sermon for most of this paragraph

My sermon's core headings: Moses' blessing –

- The God who loves us (v.1-5)
- The words that bless us (v. 6-25)
- The arms that hold us (v.26-29)

Ch. 34 Moses' death (wow), Joshua's succession. Moses' Epitaph.

Moses saw the land and died at the kiss of YHWH, still fit at 120: and what years. God buried him. Joshua took over. Moses the prophet was incomparable, whom the LORD knew face to face.

Three themes thus mark the chapter: the gift of the land, the continuation of God's work and the tribute to the great prophet. It is a picture of the life of faith: ever poised to receive God's blessings.

→ Jesus → 2019: Luke 23.46, John 19.30, Phil.3.10-14 and 2 Tim.4.6-8, please Father.

Sermon 8: Chapter 34

Moses' death and burial; Joshua takes over; final tribute to Moses

Glowing heart: You are your ministry

OHL: Lord Jesus that you and I might walk in close fellowship

Notes towards a sermon:

I don't know if you have simply read Moses' life, from Exodus to Deut. I did it as a young Christian because in those days 'Search the Scriptures' took you through the Pentateuch at the start of the course. The impact is almost overwhelming. I could hardly go to my lectures the day I read this chapter, so bereaved was I, so appalled that Moses was dead. There are lessons from Moses that modern Christians and pastors could benefit from.

The chapter structure is simple. *Moses dies* and God buries him; Moses had ordained *Joshua* who *now takes over*; important *final tribute to Moses*, important because it contains a message.

Each section says something profound to us.

1-8 *God's care* takes us into and through death

9 *God's next person* continues his work

9-12 *God's key* is given to usefulness in his service

1. God's care takes us into and through death, 1-8.

God showed Moses the whole of the promised land, north to south, east to west (v.1-3). He was promising that all Moses had worked for, God would faithfully bring about; but it was more than that. Viewing the land

was part of the legal process when purchasing: in later times the legal transfer was secured by the purchaser's formal inspection. Abraham did the same, as did the man in Jesus' parable.¹²⁵ God says, 'This is the beautiful land: inspect what I'm transferring to this people, and marvel at it.' It wasn't Moses' call to take the people in: that was the next leader's task. And so Moses dies 'at the mouth of the Lord' (v.5 literally): a rabbinic comment says 'at the kiss of the Lord.' He was still strong: in AV's words, 'his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated;' but he had completed the task for which God had made him special and trained him, and God kissed him into eternity.

When I'm scared of dying, it's the method of Lazarus' home-call that reassures me, and it makes the same point: 'the angels carried him to Abraham's bosom.'¹²⁶ It's OK: God's care takes us into and through death. Moses was gathered to his people.¹²⁷ Although he had disqualified himself from entering the promised land at this stage, he did so later when talking with Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9.28-31). God's care takes us into and through death to more and better. As Robert Browning said, 'The best is yet to be.'

2. God's next person continues his work, v. 9

Joshua had been well prepared for this. He it was who had fought as Moses prayed. He had been beside Moses on Sinai and in the tent of meeting as God spoke to him. Joshua had spoken up for entering the promised land; no wonder the Holy Spirit endowed him with the gift of leadership. Moses had commissioned him to be his successor and now the Holy Spirit endows him with the gift of wisdom. Faithful in smaller practical things, he had been increasingly Spirit-filled and gifted for larger things.¹²⁸ God buries his workers but continued his work; none of us is indispensable and we can safely leave his work in his hands. He will build his church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matt.16.18).

3. God's key to usefulness in his service, 10-12

'Moses, *whom the Lord knew face to face*' (v. 10). That explains everything about Moses' life and ministry. Jesus laid down the same canon: 'Did I know you?' (Matt.7.21-23).

¹²⁵ Gen.13.14f; Luke 14.18

¹²⁶ Luke 16.22

¹²⁷ Numbers 27.13

¹²⁸ Exodus 17.8-16, 24.13, 33.11; Num.14.6, 27.18; Deut 31.7 & 14, 34.9; Matt.25.21

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me: I *will not* set aside the grace of God.¹²⁹

What a giant. No one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did. But we have the same God. Everything that he intends to do through you will be accomplished; trust me.

My sermon's core headings: Moses' death and epitaph –

- God carries us through death
- He continues his work
- The key to usefulness

¹²⁹ Phil.3.10f, Gal.2.20f

Main themes covered in the eight-sermon series

Chapter

	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Message</i>
1	‘How we got here’ → Know yourself	Learn from our past and press on.
5	Covenant essence: I’m yours, you’re Mine	Value God’s covenant with us
12	Worship God alone, and enjoy Life	God First, and enjoy life
20	Principles of war; the LORD’S war	See life in the perspective of eternity and God’s justice
24	Civil life under God’s kingship	Labour for mutual support in our congregation and land.
30	Decision time: choose life	The need to choose eternal life while there is time
33	Moses’ blessing: Happy you, such a God	Rest in God’s blessing
34	Moses’ epitaph. Knowing God was the key to his greatness	Work to be far ben with the Lord

Overview of Deuteronomy - The Bible Project

Available online as a short movie, which builds up into an A4 printable page.

<https://thebibleproject.com> Click on Videos, then Bible Overviews: Old Testament

Or on a Video about the Torah, then Deuteronomy.

Or on Posters, Old Testament, Deuteronomy.

General Bibliography

See also the selected bibliography for preachers on p79

Daniel Block *Deuteronomy*, NIV Application Commentary, Grand Rapids, Zondervan 2012 is modern, thorough and he writes plainly if a little long-windedly. Its great strength is the threefold structure 'original meaning; bridging contexts; contemporary significance' so it is doing the task we set ourselves as preachers. Block really works to achieve that contemporary significance although he doesn't always satisfy or convince me. The ethical treatment of animals, for example, is very important but I'm not certain it exhausts the contemporary significance of 12.15-28.

Raymond Brown *The Message of Deuteronomy: not by bread alone* IVP (BST series) 1993. An outstandingly useful expository commentary.

Peter Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Hodder) 1976 gives more space than most to 'typical' introduction issues (unity, date, authorship, the Hebrew text, theology, problems) and dialogues with alternative viewpoints. The commentary is detailed and thorough.

Allan Harman *Deuteronomy* Christian Focus 2001 is verse by verse detailed exegesis. Excellent resource for the exegetical stage of sermon preparation. Less good on structure and not enough for my liking on relevance for Christians; but what it does, it does excellently.

Simon Manchester's Bible readings at the Crieff Fellowship, January 2016, are a good resource. His comments are very concentrated but perceptive, detailed and with pastoral wisdom. His sermons on the book are helpful: online on the website of St Thomas's North Sydney, Australia.

J. Gary Millar *Now Choose Life. Theology and ethics in Deuteronomy* IVP 1998. A feast, full of theological insight. His verse references are to the Hebrew numbering, which is often one digit higher than the English.

J. Gordon McConville *Deuteronomy* Apollos OT Commentary IVP 2002. Immensely able; more comment in Booklet 2 on bibliography for preachers.

Shalom Paul *Studies in the book of the covenant in the light of cuneiform and biblical law* Leiden Brill 1970 (Vetus Testamentum Supp. XVIII). Helpful analysis of the distinctives of Biblical law compared with contemporary ANE law codes. G.U. Lib ref. Law DF7 PAU.

David F Payne *Deuteronomy* in the Daily Study Bible series, Edinburgh, St Andrews Press 1985 is OK but I wouldn't write home about it.

George Philip's daily Bible reading notes are canny as always and available on the Hearing the Word website: <https://hearingtheword.org.uk> / Reading the Word.

James Philip's daily Bible reading notes are spiritually alive, admirable, with overview and theological insight. Available online at thetron.org / Resources / James Philip Bible Readings

W.H. Griffith Thomas *Through the Pentateuch chapter by chapter* Eerdmans 1957 is an immensely suggestive bullet-point type of book with an analysis followed by 'the message for meditation' for every chapter in Gen-Deut. He catches the exact burden of each chapter as few do.

Andrew Thomson *Opening up Deuteronomy* Day One 2015. Absolutely brilliant. I nearly bought you copies rather than prepare this booklet. In only 136 pages he expounds the whole book with judgement, clarity and some contemporariness.

J.A. Thompson *Deuteronomy* IVP 1974. A steady, reliable exegetical guide.

Gordon J Wenham *Exploring the Old Testament vol.1 The Pentateuch* IVP Downers Grove 2003 is stimulating. A concise introduction and overview full of information, questions to consider and summaries He covers Deut on p.123-43 but the whole book is valuable: eg on the theme, composition and rhetoric of the Pentateuch with brief discussions of alternative viewpoints.

C. Wright *Deuteronomy* NIBC Paternoster 1996. Profound, insightful; not easy to get hold of.

Selected Bibliography for preachers

- If only buying one book for detailed exegesis, we are spoiled for choice. My recommendation is **Allan Harman** for its clarity, accessibility and up-to-dateness. You can go straight to a verse and find a clear explanation. But **J.A.Thompson** or **Peter Craigie** will serve equally well.
- For exposition again there is a genuine choice, between Brown and Block. **Raymond Brown** (331 pages) is my suggestion, just. He combines clear explanation (including ANE life and literature) with contemporary application. The 1990s provenance is noticeable sometimes. His divisions of the book are soundly chosen and his sub-headings in each chapter close to genius. The only danger of using a BST book is that the author, rather than oneself, might determine the structure of the sermons: Brown's are so good it's tempting just to use them.
- For **Daniel Block** (818 pages...) see my comments in Bklt 1. He would serve equally well: although a bit long-winded, he is more up to date, provides more exegetical foundation and leaves you more room for independence in sermon design.
- To do both of the above you could buy **Block** but it would be harder work than using Harman; or **Brown** who is so full of life.
- To get the feel of a passage in ten seconds: **Andrew Thomson**.
- For academic detail: **J. Gordon McConville** 'Deuteronomy' in the Apollos series, IVP 2002. Very able. He has a frustrating lack of signposts: after introductory issues the contents page just says 'text and commentary,' and you look in vain, through much text, for an outline and structure, although it mostly appears in bits as you go along. Each passage has five treatments:
 - his translation
 - notes on the Hebrew text (English transliteration of the Hebrew)
 - form and structure
 - comment
 - explanation

The outline and structure of a passage are given in the third of those. For what he sets out to do – theological interpretation of the text in the context of the Biblical canon – he is, if densely written, exact and admirable (I don't agree with him that 30.8 rather than 30.6 is the core burden of 30.1-10).

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