

How to Use This Book

This book aims to help the preacher or teacher understand the central aim and purpose of the text in order to preach or teach it to others. Unlike a commentary, therefore, it does not go into great exegetical detail. Instead, it helps us to engage with the themes of Deuteronomy, to keep the big picture in mind, and to think about how to present it to our hearers.

'Introducing Deuteronomy' examines the purpose, tone, themes, and structure of Deuteronomy, and gives some suggestions for possible preaching series in the book.

The remainder of the volume contains separate chapters on each preaching unit identified in the introductory chapter. The structure of each chapter is the same. It begins with a brief introduction to the unit. This is followed by 'Listening to the text', which outlines the context and structure of the unit and takes the reader through a section-by-section analysis of the text. Under the heading 'From text to message', a main theme and aim for the preaching unit is suggested, as well as ideas for

application. Each chapter concludes with suggestions for preaching, and some questions that could form the basis for a group Bible study.

Introducing Deuteronomy

Getting our Bearings in Deuteronomy

On a wedding day you promise your spouse, 'I will love you.' It's hopefully easy to do on *that* day. Yet it is a promise that, after a honeymoon, you will love them on Monday in how you talk, on Tuesday in serving them, on Wednesday in remembering what is important to them. Not perfectly – no one loves perfectly – but it is possible as a default setting, as an orientation of life.

Deuteronomy is the call to choose 'today' to love God with unswerving loyalty. To love him 'with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength'. To love God as a response to his grace. To love him with very practical obedience. To love him on a Monday and then again on a Tuesday and every day. It's fundamentally a call to love him from the heart and yet that love will be demonstrated in obeying him in the practical details of life. Not perfectly – no one loves the Lord perfectly, but it's possible as an orientation of life.

For the Christian reader, Deuteronomy is a vivid, urgent and passionate call to love Jesus Christ in response to his grace and demonstrate that love in obedience to him.

Deuteronomy is probably not the first book any preacher would choose to preach. For many years, I was scared of Deuteronomy and didn't know what to do with it, and yet I knew it was too important to ignore. It is the climax of the Pentateuch. It explains the fundamental categories of blessing and curse which explain the rest of Israel's history up until exile and return. It reveals what exactly it means for Jesus to become our curse (Gal. 3).

Along with Psalms, it is Jesus's favourite book! He quotes it regularly in the gospels. When asked which is the greatest commandment, Jesus famously answers, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength' (Mark 12:30). This is clearly a crucial command, yet the only place it appears in the Pentateuch is in Deuteronomy (6:5; 11:1; 13:3; 30:6).

However, in my entirely unscientific search of the internet, it appears to be one of the least preached books in our churches. Now, there are some natural reasons that might be the case:

- *Exegetical*: There are a variety of genres within the one book – there is history, poetry, law and prophecy. That is hard for both the preacher and the congregation.
- *Apologetical*: There is the *apparent* command to commit genocide, and we may think that too unpalatable for a modern audience. That's before we engage with laws within a patriarchal society that may sit uncomfortably today.

- *Relevancy*: There are a lot(!) of laws and we may think that Jesus has abrogated all of them so that they have no relevance. Or maybe we think that they are too complicated or boring to explain. (I really would want to disagree: wait until, for example, 14:26 is read: ‘Spend the money for whatever you desire ... wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves.’ The congregation will wonder what it means for them, but I don’t think they’ll say it’s a dull command!)
- *Applicatory*: Perhaps above all, we wonder how to preach Deuteronomy as Christian scripture. It is obvious that Moses preaches obedience for Israel as a response to God’s grace (Deuteronomy will not allow works righteousness; see 9:4-6). And yet it is equally obvious that Israel will fail and fall under God’s curse. We wonder: how does that apply to Christians? Happily, we will see that God’s grace triumphs.

What is Deuteronomy?

There ought to be no great debate about the authorship of Deuteronomy. Moses is declared to be the author of the three speeches and a song which compose the majority of the book, with occasional comments from an editor.

We are not served well by the Greek title of *Deuteronomos* (‘second law’) as it stresses the law code in the book. In fact, only a little over a third of the book is actually law, overwhelmingly found in chapters 12–26. The title in the Hebrew Torah is probably more helpful: *Debarim* – ‘The words’ which Moses spoke. The editor’s introduction tells us what is happening in the book: ‘Moses undertook to explain (or expound) this law’ (1:5).