

Deuteronomy. Bethesda. 15 January 2001. Reading : Exod 20.1; Lev 1.1; Num 1.1; Deut 1.1a, 5; 4.37-40a; 15.1-2,7-15. (NKJV)

The scene is set in plains of Moab. The time is the interval between end wilderness wanderings and crossing of Jordan. Israel poised "Go in and possess the land", 1.8; first of 52 "possess". Sadly, not to include Moses – fact referred to four times (1.37; 3.21-26; 4.21; 34.4); in ch 3 record very moving prayer at time first commission Joshua take over leadership, "please, let me go over and see"; Lord replied firmly, "Enough, don't mention it again" (Num 27).

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In some ways differs revelation given at Sinai; point made by Moses in 29.1. Much of earlier material omitted from Deuteronomy and much new material added. Are at least three ways that differ to laws in Exod & Lev : **(i) the situation faced.** Deut entirely suited to new circumstances – conquest and occupation of land of Canaan; eg told destroy altars and images, 7.1-5; given building regulations for houses, 22.8; told write key elements of God's law on door-posts and gates, well as bind hands and between eyes, 6.8-9 with Exod 13.16. **(ii) the target audience.** Although priests and Levites mentioned in D, only in connection with rights and privileges, not duties – no instructions as to ritual, garments or sacrifices - or construction of sanctuary as Exod & Lev. Focus rather on people in general – what they need to know when enter land. **(iii) the nature of the speeches.** Books of Exod & Lev (& Num) made up of words spoken by God to Moses or to people via M. Deut (except small part at end) = spoken by Moses to people. In sense is book of sermons. "Moses began to explain this law", 1.5 [AV = declare (not usual; x3, other = make plain, 27.8; Hab 2.2)] In context, refer to expository preaching. Set tone whole book. Eg read in ch 15; vv1-2 = law first stated about release of debts, then, 7-11, exhort open hand wide and not refuse loan because year of cancellation of debts drew near. As expect, 10 commandments provide Moses with main basis for sermons. As preach, switch back and fore between addressing individuals personally and nation collectively. After all, nation made up individuals and God concerned both. Place great emphasis on people's motives – God was looking for grateful, willing, loving obedience, "Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity ... ", 28.47. Stress more than once that all that God commanded is "for our good (benefit) always", 6.24; 10.13. Sadly, because of man's sinfulness, these very commandments which set out the way to happy and satisfying life became fuel for lust and legality.

Structure of messages and book familiar to Moses and people of day. Follow pattern of what were, and are, known as "vassal treaties". These were a common feature of international law for almost 2000 years [25-7 BC]. Drawn up when some great power conquer smaller state and imposed conditions of service. Of particular interest to us are Hittite treaties. (Not local Canaanite tribe, Deut 7.1, 20.17. Kingdom of Hatti flourish best part 1000 years, based central Turkey, for 2 centuries rival Egypt and Babylon – on one occasion succeed in entering and plundering Babylon. One of big fellas of ancient NE. Hittite treaties tend have certain common features : [slide]. Structure of Deut not identical but remarkably close [slide].

We know that Egypt also impose similar treaties on vassals. Indeed, some evidence treaties of this kind imposed on foreign labour forces in Egypt around time Exodus. Israel = obvious candidate for one. God chose adapt the familiar treaty format for His own purpose; use it to express the relationship between Israel and Self. Implication of doing this was clear. You may ask whether structure of Moses' speeches and the book matter? Answer is "Yes, indeed". The very structure declared plainly that the Lord had redeemed Israel from bond-service in Egypt to be *His* bond-servant. The people had exchanged the service of Pharaoh and his gods for that of Lord, God of fathers. This point was repeatedly made by M. Constantly he appealed back to what and where Israel had been and to their redemption by God's mighty power. He employed a standard formula, "Remember that you were bond-slaves in land of Egypt. Therefore I command you to do this" and this in a variety of contexts : it was the motive for keeping sabbath, 5.15, the reason the Israelite should be generous to bond-slaves who they set free (where obvious link), 15.15, the reason nation should keep Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), 16.12, the reason people shouldn't deprive widows, orphans and strangers of their rights, 24.18, and the reason they were required to make positive provision for them, 24.22. "Remember that you were bond-slaves in land of Egypt. *Therefore* I command you to do this". We too been saved to serve; "He died for all, that those who live should live no longer *for themselves*, but *for Him*", 2 Cor 5.15.

Use structure for headings by which to survey contents of book. In time, hope do no more than give taste. Console self can tie up any loose ends next week.

Preamble. A Hittite treaty began by identifying author and give title. [Mursulis II, little later than exodus] Moses make clear he was only mediator, "spoke according to all Lord had given him", 1.3. Date as 1/11/40 from exodus (new beginning). V2 drop in fact was only 11 days journey from Horeb to Kadesh. Moses point out that, because unbelief and rebellion, Israel had wasted 40 years.

Prologue, historical review. First main section of Hittite treaty rehearse the kind and benevolent actions of great Hittite king towards vassal, which intended move vassal to feelings of gratitude and inspire devotion and loyalty. Was vital element of treaty; often, as here, of considerable length. For his part, Moses refer (i) the promises and covenant given to patriarchs (out of love and reinforced by oath); (ii) the deliverance from Egypt (called iron furnace, for smelting iron, 4.20); (iii) the revelation of God's word at Horeb (Sinai), 4.7; (iv) God's sustaining care through wilderness (great and terrible,

1.19; 2.7) where in spite of perversity "lacked nothing", 2.7; and, finally (v) recent victory He already given over Sihon and king of Bashan, graced by parents delightful name of Og. [Was fear of giants caused rebellion at Kadesh. Significant therefore that tell of 3 races of giants destroyed by neighbouring nations while Israel in desert.] Practical implications rammed home : "Therefore" x4 AV; eg read 4.37-40, "He loved, He chose, He brought out; you shall therefore keep His statutes". In light of God's goodness to them, exhort gratitude, obedience and loyalty to Lord. Old Testament version of Rom 12.1.

General stipulations. Hittite treaties set out basis of relationship between 2 parties, usually summarising purpose of specific regulations which follow. This section of Deut commence statement of 10 C (4.13; 10.4) and circumstances in which given, ch 5. Secular always insist no alliances or treaties with other nations. This section therefore concentrate mainly on 1st 2 commandments, warning repeatedly against idolatry which would constitute disloyalty and rebellion. The Lord is the "Jealous God" not only in 10 commandments, 5.7-9a, but "you not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples around you, for Lord your God is a jealous God", 6.14-15a. Simply not tolerate other gods; if they follow, serve and worship, Lord's anger be roused and they will surely perish, 8.19, 11.16-17. They must utterly destroy Canaanites because danger of turning Israel to idols and images, 7.2-4. Section provides some brief summaries of what to come in later sections, "He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the resident stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore you love the stranger", 10.18-19; set stage for much follow in chs 12-26. End of section, 11.26-29, refer blessing follow in wake of obedience and curse follow in wake of disobedience, which amplified in chs 27-28.

Stress that promised land would indeed be great place - and that it would be theirs entirely by gift and grace, and not self-effort; they would enjoy cities not built, houses not stocked, wells not dug, vineyards not planted, 6.10-11. Also that land not be as demanding as Egypt, 11.10-12 (where man-made irrigation systems required continual operation; in contrast new land would drink water rain heaven, guaranteed by One who never take watchful eyes off it). But the land was also fraught with dangers. Possession of the land would bring its own temptations. The very prosperity and fullness which enjoy there would expose to pride and self-sufficiency; the danger that "forget Lord and say in heart, My own strength and power have gained me this wealth", 8.11-17. Their main safeguard and defence lay in their memories. They were to be careful to remember, and to teach their children, the history of exodus and that of their previous experience as bond-slaves in Egypt, 6.20-24.

Specific. Fascinating section. Discover what do : to make your house safe, 22.8; in case of an unsolved murder (no Hercule Poirot), 21.1-9; in a case of kidnapping, 24.7; if come across bird's nest with motherbird sitting on eggs or chicks, 22.6-7.

Many stipulations concerned vertical relationship with God – people were (i) required worship at sanctuary in the place where set His name (not free erect as and when choose), (ii) forbidden serve true God as pagans did their false gods, ch 12, (iii) commanded stone all idolaters in nation – including near relatives and prophets. In latter case, if they invite serve idols and when speak in name idol thing come pass, were not believe, ch 13; if invite serve idols and when speak in name of Lord not come pass, were not believe, ch 18. Fate same all cases.

Many stipulations concerned horizontal relationship with others. Community of Israel was regarded as a large extended family or household; were children of Israel. All reckoned brothers; eg read in ch 15 about "brother" who poor or enslaved. Occur x20. Each member of community dear to Lord.

According to correspondence of day, Canaanites were characterised by injustice, greed, lying, theft, drunkenness, prostitution and child sacrifice. Elsewhere in ancient Near East, laws treated men in terms of status and standing in society rather than as individuals. Members of aristocracy, priests. Landowners and rulers always had advantage. [Code of Hammurabi shows plainly that slave and underprivileged counted for less than others in eyes of law.]

By way contrast, Israel required show deep concern for welfare of all, whether rich or poor. **Slaves** not be kept in permanent bondage and when set free ex-owner was to provide generously for him, 15.12-15. **Poor** – employer not hold back daily pay because counts on getting it; wealthy not refuse lend because year of release near, open hand wide (generously, give ungrudgingly and with happy liberality) even if 6th year, when lend was practically give gift, 15.7-11; if garment taken as pledge, return for him sleep in at night. If farmer miss a sheaf during harvest, forbidden go back for it; likewise forbidden go over boughs of olive trees again, or to glean in vineyard after gather grapes – what was missed first time around was to be left for widow, orphan, stranger, 24.19+. Note that poor were supported not as act of charity but as act of justice – this was their right. Many commands rest, not so much on compassion for poor but on their entitlement. Fact that entitled to the support enabled them to maintain their self-respect; didn't need to grovel or beg. Also respect to be shown for the privacy of poor man's home; creditor not allowed invade to reclaim pledge; stand outside while poor man fetched it, 24.10-11. Israelite was to count it a privilege to have fellowship with God in His care for poor and under-privileged. As already seen, 10.18-19, God "loves the stranger. Therefore you love the stranger". One of many lovely insights into God's feelings for those who suffer is buried among the curses of ch 27, "cursed is one who makes the blind to wander off the road", 27.18.

"Justice, justice you shall follow", 16.20. In land, justice must be done and seen to be done. Build in many legal safeguards : such as, (i) not act on hearsay, worthless characters lead town to idols, "inquire, search out and investigate thoroughly", 13.12-15; not listen mere gossip, "have you heard about". (ii) Require more than one witness before entertain charges, 17.6; 19.15. (iii) Build in real deterrent against false accusations, 19.16-21 – made to pay whatever tried obtain - even life itself. But law demand proportionate recompense for injuries - eye for eye - not able exact more. Took serious

view of crime but no cruelty or infringement of individual's dignity - as laws of other lands which encourage facial mutilation, castration and merciless flogging; in Israel guilty party not to be beaten more than 40 stripes, 25.3.

[Know that in war Canaanites slaughter and torture enemies. Chs 20-21 outline conduct of war (not Canaanites). Required always offer terms of peace before launch attack on city. Captured womenfolk to be treated humanely in marked contrast brutal and callous attitudes of pagans. Men of Israel who newly married excused fighting on compassionate grounds, 20.7.]

Blessings and curses. Loyalty to Lord was no trifling matter. 12 specific curses listed in ch 27. 6 matching blessings and curses of general nature in ch 28 according whether obey or not. General blessings expanded in 7 verses; curses in 49 (x7). Very serious issues were at stake. If people disobeyed, land of promise would rapidly become land of problems.

Final section. To some extent, summary of what gone before. On one hand, **several close parallels** with secular treaties. (A) Witnesses. Cite three kinds : (i) the heavens and the earth, 30.19; 31.28; (ii) the book of the law itself, 31.26 and (iii) the song (ode) which Lord gave to Moses, 31.19,21 and ch 32. In 2nd temple, song sung in six sections on successive sabbath mornings. (B) Regular public reading. Secular treaties were to be read as frequently as every 1 or 3 years. The law of God was to be read at the end of every 7 years, the year of release, at the feast of tabernacles (booths), 31.10-13, so that children hear at least once during childhood years when capable of understanding what mean. (C) Deposit safely. Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant to take the book and put it beside the ark, 31.26. (The stone tablets of commandments were inside.)

On other hand, much of material has **no counterpart** in secular treaties. Hardly surprising because much of chs 29 and 30 concerned with future. Take form of prophecy, "when (not "if") all these things are come on you ... and you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice ... with all your heart and with all your soul, then the Lord your God will turn your captivity and will gather you from all the nations ... and will do you good, and multiply you above your fathers, and will circumcise your heart to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul", 30.1-6. God alone knows the details of future history of nation. Therefore immediately before, "secret (hidden) things belong Lord our God; but the things which are revealed belong to us and our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law", 29.29. may not understand all said about what to come; your business is to obey what you *do* understand!

Deut gives us therefore the last utterances of the man Moses - who had put up for so long with all sins and complaints of people. Whole book cover period of only 5 weeks. As John Wesley well said, "See how busy this great man was to do good, when he knew his time was short". We been considering God's covenant with nation of Israel. Wesley introduced idea of annual new year covenant service for Methodists. Appropriate me refer in January. Service ends with frightening personal prayer :

I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will.
Put me to doing; put me to suffering;
Let me be employed by you or laid aside for you;
Exalted for you or brought low for you;
Let me be full, let me be empty;
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all to your pleasure and disposal.

Pray : our God is consuming fire, living, holy, jealous.

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Exalted for you or brought low for you;
Let me be full, let me be empty;
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all to your pleasure and disposal.

Footnote

¹ See K. A. Kitchen, 'Ancient Orient and Old Testament, pages 92-93 : "*Covenants of the Late Second Millennium BC*. These covenants show a remarkably consistent scheme, as established by Korose **22** and summarized by Mendenhall:**23**

1. *Preamble or title*, identifying the author of the covenant.

2. *Historical prologue* or retrospect, mentioning previous relations between the two parties involved; past benefactions by the suzerain are a basis for the vassal's gratitude and future obedience.

3. *Stipulations*, basic and detailed; **24** the obligations laid upon the vassal by the sovereign.

4. (a). *Deposition* of a copy of the covenant in the vassal's sanctuary and

(b). *Periodic public reading* of the covenant terms to the people.

5. *Witnesses*, a long list of gods invoked to witness the covenant.

6. (a). *Curses*, invoked upon the vassal if he breaks the covenant, and

(b). *Blessings*, invoked upon the vassal if he keeps the covenant.

Nearly all the known treaties of the fourteenth thirteenth centuries BC follow this pattern closely. Sometimes some elements are omitted, but the order of them is almost invariable, **25** whenever the original texts are sufficiently well preserved to be analysed. This is, therefore, a stable form in the period concerned.

22 In his fundamental work, *Hethitische Staatsverträge*, 1931 (a new edition is expected); our main concern here is with the vassal or suzerainty treaties imposed on a vassal by an overlord or Great King.

23 BA 17 (1954) pp. 58-61.

24 For this distinction, cf. K. Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular*, 1960, pp. 20, 22-24 ('Grundsatzklärung' and 'Einzelbestimmungen').

25 Among all the late-2nd-millennium treaties analysed, only one had its historical prologue between two lots of stipulations (with Amurru, in Hittite and Babylonian versions; Freydank, *MIO* 7 (1960), pp. 358 ff. (text), 366 ff. (translation), with short basic stipulations just after the title, plus H. Klengel, *OLZ* 59 (1964), col. 437-445) And when the

treaties are concluded with tribal groups or leaders, not monarchs as vassals, the divine witnesses can appear in this position; so E. von Schuler, in G. Walser (ed.), *Neuere Hethiterforschung*, 1964 (= *Historia, Einzelschrift* 7), p. 38, citing treaties with Hukkanas and the Hayasa-people (Friedrich, *Staatsverträge*, II, No. 6), with Ishmirikka, Gasgeans, etc. (sources in Laroche, *RHA* 14/Fasc. 59 (1956), pp. 78-79, Nos. 87, 95, 96).