

## *Introducing the Old Testament*

### Worksheet for Week 4

#### Deuteronomy

Our study topic for this week is the book of Deuteronomy. This book is the fifth and final book of the Pentateuch. I suggest you begin by first reading the chapter in Philip Yancey's book. Then, read the introduction to Deuteronomy in your study bible and, if you have one, the entry on the book in your Bible dictionary. Then read through the daily passages suggested on this worksheet. If you feel ambitious, you could even read the entire book, though Deuteronomy is rather long. You might want to read the passages in an easier translation like the New Living Translation, and then read the passages in the NRSV or NIV.

#### *The Structures of Covenant Life*

I found the phrase, "the structures of covenant life," in Birch et al<sup>1</sup>. It summarizes very well the focus of the last half of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. God had chosen a people and promised them a land. In these books, God tells his people how they are to live in covenant with him. He tells them how they are to worship him, how they are to organize and administer their society, and how they are to build relationships among themselves. Thus, nearly all aspects of the community's life are touched by God's word: the foods they are to eat, the ways they are to dress, the sacrifices they are to make (and not make!). Though the Israelites referred to the Torah as the Law, our word "instruction" would be closer to what they meant. The Law was not simply a list of rules for managing an orderly society; rather, the Law showed the Israelites, the chosen people of God, how they were to live in relationship with the LORD, the one true God. The Law also marked the Israelites as God's people, different from all others. The odd dietary laws, keeping the Sabbath, the practice of circumcision, and so on were all membership badges worn by God's people, setting them apart from all the cultures around them. In an important sense, they were the badges of the covenant.

#### *Deuteronomy*

There are a few things to keep in mind as you read Deuteronomy.

- Though the book contains many laws, it is much more a book of the heart. Look for the spirit of the law, the instruction given by God to Israel. Notice that the book reads much more like a sermon than some sort of legal code.
- There are several ways to outline or organize the book. The authors of the Open Bible see the book as a series of three sermons. What God has done for Israel (1:1 - 4:43), What God expects of Israel (4:44-26:19), and What God will do for Israel (27:1 - 34:12). Many scholars see the book as a covenant that elaborates on the Ten Commandments. (Compare Deuteronomy 5:6-21 with Exodus 20:1-17 and remember that Exodus is set nearly 40 years before Deuteronomy!)
- In its structure and much of its language, Deuteronomy is a treaty/covenant between a king and his people. In class, we'll very briefly compare the book to a standard ancient near-eastern treaty. They both have preambles, a reminder of all the things the king has done for his people, laws/regulations, blessings that come from keeping the law, and curses that will flow from breaking the laws. But, of course, Israel's covenant was not with some earthly king, but with God himself, the one true god.
- The Law given by Moses was seen as a delight by the Israelites, not a burden. They are God's instructions to Israel on how they are to live in relationship with him. There is one God, one people, one land, one place to worship, and one law.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Birch et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999)

## Bible Readings for Week 4

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p><b>Day 1 Deuteronomy 4:44 – 5:27 (you might compare this to Exodus 20)</b></p>	<p><b>Day 2 Deuteronomy 5:28 – 6:25 (esp. 6:4-9)</b></p>
<p><b>Day 3 Deuteronomy 7:1-11; 10:12-22</b></p>	<p><b>Day 4 Deuteronomy Chapter 28 – blessings &amp; curses!</b></p>
<p><b>Day 5 Deuteronomy 29:16 – 30:10</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Weekly Prayer Concerns</b></p>