

Session 5: Deuteronomy

C. Deuteronomy and the Prophets

Deuteronomy is one collection in a developing tradition of law. But where did Deuteronomy come from? Exactly who collected it, where, when and why is unclear. It certainly helped Josiah to establish his authority, but it is unlikely to have been put together under his supervision. Much more likely is the possibility that it began life in the northern kingdom of Israel:

- Jerusalem is not mentioned as the site of the single central sanctuary of chapter 12
- There is no mention of the Davidic dynasty and in fact Deuteronomy is generally critical of kings
- There are close links with the teaching of Amos and Hosea, which we will examine more closely in this section

If it began as the work of scribes in the northern kingdom, it must have been brought to Judah after the fall of Samaria and worked on in secret under Manasseh and Amon, who would have suppressed it if they had found out about it. But in the new political climate under Josiah it would have been safe to have brought it to public attention. Was it planted in the Temple for the priest Hilkiah to find? Or was he one of the group already keeping it safe?

Activity 5.2

Study the following passages in Deuteronomy. For each passage, summarise its teaching in a few sentences:

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| 6:10-19 | 7:1-11 | 8:1-10 | 13:1-11 |
| 15:1-17 | 17:14-end | 18:9-end | 24:10-end |

Compare the teaching with the following summary of the main teachings of Hosea and Amos:

- The grace of God: Yahweh has a special love for Israel
- The covenant: Israel has a special responsibility to keep the Law
- Yahweh is the one who gave Israel the land and will give prosperity
- Yahweh desires justice, especially for the poor and powerless
- Kings and nobles are criticised and warned not to oppress the poor
- Unfaithfulness, idolatry and the worship of the 'high places' is condemned
- All Canaanite religious practices are condemned
- Yahweh looks for a warm, personal, loving response from his people

Now make a list of all the specific links between the teaching of the passages you have studied from Deuteronomy and the teaching of Amos and Hosea.

A summary of the main teachings of each passage

6:10-19 Yahweh is the giver of the land
 Israel is warned not to *forget* Yahweh (language that echoes Hosea)
 Yahweh is a jealous God and Israel is to be loyal to him alone
 They are to keep the commandments diligently

7:1-11 Israel is to make no covenant or to intermarry with other nations, in case they are enticed away to other gods
 Israel is Yahweh's treasured possession and they are holy (set apart) to him
 They have been chosen by grace because of Yahweh's love for them
 Yahweh shows covenant loyalty (*hesed*) and punishes those who disobey him

8:1-10 Israel is to observe the commandments
 The wilderness wanderings were a time of testing
 God provided the land and he will provide all they need
 Yahweh is like a parent who disciplines a child

13:1-11 Israel is worship Yahweh alone
 They are to put to death anyone advocating mixed worship
 This is to include false prophets

15:7-17 Israel is to care for the needy and powerless
 There is an obligation to be generous toward those in need
 God's blessing depends on their inner attitude as well as outward obedience

17:14-end Kings are acceptable as long as they are not foreigners
 They are not to have multiple wives or amass too much wealth
 They are to study the law and to observe it
 They are not to exalt themselves above the rest of the people

18:9-end There is to be no child sacrifice, soothsaying, divination, sorcery or mediums
 Israel must heed the prophets, but put false prophets to death
 True prophets are those whose words come true

24:10-end There is to be no exploitation of the poor: pledges are to be given back if needed overnight; wages are to be paid promptly
 Humanity is to be shown towards orphans, widows and strangers
 The rich are to be generous toward the poor at their own expense

Deuteronomy was influenced by the prophets of the 8th century and in its turn influenced the prophets of the 7th and 6th centuries. The passage in which Jeremiah was told by God to preach in Jerusalem in favour of 'this covenant' probably refers to Deuteronomy:

Jeremiah 11:6-8

6 And the Lord said to me: Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. For I solemnly warned your ancestors when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of an evil will. So I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not

Later, however, Jeremiah appears to have become disillusioned by the failure of the people of Judah to keep the law from their heart as Deuteronomy looks for:

Jeremiah 8:8-11

How can you say, 'We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us', when, in fact, the false pen of the scribes has made it into a lie? The wise shall be put to shame, they shall be dismayed and taken; since they have rejected the word of the Lord, what wisdom is in them? Therefore I will give their wives to others and their fields to conquerors, because from the least to the greatest everyone is greedy for unjust gain; from prophet to priest everyone deals falsely. They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace', when there is no peace.

Later in life, Jeremiah predicted the coming of a new covenant in which the torah, God's law, would be written on people's hearts.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.