

Deuteronomy 7: A Covenant Sermon

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When dealing with a passage from the Pentateuch, and especially from the Mosaic covenant sermon material in the early chapters of Deuteronomy, the question of authorship is of central concern, since there are many different viewpoints regarding the final form of the five books. The predominant scholarly opinions concerning Deuteronomy are the following:

1. Moses recorded the speeches and the laws as he delivered them to the Israelites at Moab.
2. The sayings of Moses and the giving of the law were preserved and written down in Yahwistic circles through the monarchical period, primarily in Northern Israel. As the historical situation changed, certain elements were added or omitted to make the material relevant to the new situation.
3. The work was composed in the seventh century in reaction to the apostasies of Ahaz and Manasseh. The ancient legal material in the book was placed in the context of a covenant renewal at the time when reform was essential if Judah was to remain a people under God. This article will not depend on any one theory of authorship, but certain points may immediately be noted in preparation for the actual exegesis of Deuteronomy 7.

First, even conservative scholars such as R. K. Harrison recognize that chapter 34, the account of Moses' death, is added to the original form of Deuteronomy. It is also significant that the book begins with "These are the words that Moses spoke. . . ," as though someone later was putting in written form this farewell address of Moses. Indeed, the entire Pentateuch is narrated in the third person. This situation is comparable to the New Testament, which was written by Jesus' followers rather than Jesus himself. Just as the Gospel writers selected their material from the abundance of available tradition about the Lord

to take their evangelical and theological thirst to their particular audiences (cf. Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30-31), so did those who recorded the words of Moses present and even elaborate upon them in ways that met their theological needs. It is a fundamental principle of exegesis the biblical materials are to be understood on the basis of their situation in life, both of the original event or saying and of the later audience to which the written account is addressed: Their purpose was to meet the needs of a live historical situation with truth from God and not simply to compile a biography of a great leader such as Moses or Jesus.

A second important observation is that the parenthetic material in Deuteronomy is clearly Mosaic in thought and content. Chapter 7 quotes frequently from the "Book of the Covenant" (Exodus 21-23), the laws given by Moses at Sinai in connection with the Decalogue in chapter 20. Deuteronomy is thus centered on the covenant given through Moses and in effect reiterates it as his last testimony to the nation. The book is structured, roughly, in the form of an ancient covenant document, with many elements of the Hittite suzerainty treaty: historical prologue, stipulations in the form of commandments, cosmic witnesses (30:19), and blessings and curses,¹ found in Deuteronomy 7 as well as in the later chapters. Chapter 29 begins with the statement "These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel" in addition to the covenant made "at Horeb." The essential theme of Deuteronomy, therefore, is the renewal of the covenant. Those who felt the need in it later times for such a revival of dedication to Yahweh quite naturally saw in this Mosaic covenant material the basis for such an endeavor.

Deuteronomy is, as Nicholson states, "the deposit of the authentic Mosaic faith as it developed during the course of Israel's history in the land of Canaan." The "stream of tradition" was transmitted down to the seventh century until

. . . under the shadow of the destruction of the northern tribes and the threat of a similar fate for the remaining Judean kingdom it was formulated into the book of Deuteronomy in an attempt to

1. G. E. Mendenhall, "Covenant," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, I. 714, 715.

revive the nation and ensure its future as Yahweh's covenant people.²

Those who wrote down Deuteronomy in its final form brought Moses' words to bear with renewed force on the situation of the nation at a critical moment in the history of God's people, when a weakened faith was perceived as totally inadequate for the future of the covenant nation. Many scholars observe affiliations between the parenthesis of Deuteronomy and the prophetic activity beginning in the eighth century. God's love for Israel, which is an integral idea in Deuteronomy 7, is a prominent theme in Hosea (3:1; 11:1; 14:4).

The similarity in style between Deuteronomy and Jeremiah has been widely observed.³ Dahl notes elements as well of the "social passion of Amos" and the "national devotion of Isaiah."⁴ The "book of the law" found in the temple during Josiah's reign probably was at least the essential part of the present fifth book of the Pentateuch, which is itself a "book of the law" (28:61; 29:21; 30:10; 31:26). Josiah's covenant to keep Yahweh's commandments "with all his heart and all his soul" (2 Kings 23:3) echoes the command of Deuteronomy 26:16. The reforms which Josiah proceeded to institute involved the destruction of all vestiges of polytheism and idolatry, as the reading of Deuteronomy might well have prompted. He had already begun to restore the political and religious status of Israel when repairs to the temple probably led to the discovery of the "book of the law."⁵

Deuteronomy 7 is founded on the covenant relationship between God and his people based on his mighty acts on their behalf in the past and the potential for the future if the covenant criteria are maintained. As a genre it may best be termed a "covenant sermon." Its contents include encouragement, warning, promise, remembrance, and admonition. The chapter has universal implications beyond its immediate context and expounds the central themes of the Jewish (and indeed the Christian) religion. While several chapters in Deuteronomy,

2. E. W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 121.

3. G. Ernest Wright, "Deuteronomy," *The Interpreter's Bible*, II. 319.

4. George Dahl, "The Case for the Currently Accepted Date of Deuteronomy," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 47 (1928), pp. 373, 374.

5. Wright, op. cit., p.322; cf. his discussion of the disintegration of the Assyrian Empire, which left Judah free for a time to pursue its own affairs.

notably the one immediately preceding, stress the loving response demanded by the one great God, Deuteronomy 7 emphasizes the *hesed* bestowed by God upon his own. The chapter is essentially a unified homiletic presentation, despite the diverse elements within it. Like the rest of the book, and indeed the entire Deuteronomistic corpus, its material is subordinated to the overriding concern of total dedication to Yahweh.

It is said that the idea of love is more prominent in Deuteronomy than anywhere else in the Old Testament.⁶ Chapters 6 and 7, and others as well, make it evident that love on the part of both God and men is the central element in the covenant relationship. In 7:9 God's faithfulness to his *berith* is inseparably linked with his *hesed*. The chapter is in fact one of the outstanding expositions of grace in the Old Testament. The author recognizes that the tremendous blessings bestowed by Yahweh upon his chosen people are based solely on his love and election. Of course, Israel is expected to respond wholeheartedly to God's acts. Although there are many statutes and commandments to observe, these are subsidiary to the "great commendment" to love, to devote one's whole being to Yahweh. In fact, Eichrodt maintains, the covenant stipulations are "examples and practical guides" to help Israel fulfill the "commandment of love."⁷ They outline a "way of life" by which God's people can prosper under the "gracious benefaction" of Yahweh and his covenant.⁸ The concept of God as one who loves, not only with respect to the *hesed* promised in the second commandment (Exodus 20:6), but also in a very personal way (*'ahab*), is certainly a significant biblical viewpoint. Deuteronomy 7 is a noteworthy segment of a work which presents this sophisticated formulation of God's relationship to Israel to an age badly in need of its powerful truths.

The *Sitz Im Leben* of Deuteronomy 7

Several factors are involved in the determination of the origins of the material in the chapter. It is part of a sermon which reiterates the

6. Jacob M. Myers, "The Requisites for Response: On the Theology of Deuteronomy," *Interpretation*, 15 (January, 1961), 29.

7. Walther Eichrodt, "Covenant and Law," *Interpretation*, 20 (July, 1966), 313.

8. *Ibid.*, 309, 310.

covenant founded at Horeb (5:2ff.). This parenetic material is part of a document structured according to the ancient covenant formula. The point is made in 5:3 that the covenant is made with "all of us here alive this day" and not just the "fathers" coming out of Egypt. The phrase "this day" recurs in 8:18; 11:26; 11:32; and 26:16-18. It is evident that chapters 5-11, connected by common ideas and particularly the motif of the land, are concerned with a covenant renewal activity. Von Rad thinks that the setting of this reiteration of the Mosaic covenant was originally cultic and that for this purpose Deuteronomy is arranged according to the liturgy of a festival of the cult.⁹ It has been altered, however, into the form of homiletic instruction for the laity.¹⁰ Such a covenant ceremony may in fact have taken place from the early days of Israel on the basis of the farewell speeches of Moses and Joshua, who also "made a covenant" with the people at Shechem (Joshua 24:25). If so, Shechem or one of the other old shrines could have been the primary location for such a cultic event down through the monarchical period. The powerful emphasis on purification from idols and foreign gods calls to mind kings such as Ahab and Manasseh, although the Deuteronomistic historian condemns all the kings of North Israel and many of those of Judah. It may be presumed that groups of ardent Yahwists carried on the covenant ceremony in spite of hostile monarchs. The Dead Sea Scrolls reveal that such an event took place periodically in the Qumran community,¹¹ a group which also withdrew from undesirable developments in the religion of God's chosen nation. This sermon therefore uses the covenant words of Moses for Israel's later worship and renewal of faith.

But what information does Deuteronomy 7 provide concerning its specific setting in life? From verse 5, there is clearly a problem with Canaanite religion, which included *'asherim* and *masseboth*.¹² Although these references do not establish precisely the location, they suggest the areas toward the north, closer to Syria, as in the Elijah stories. Several expressions in the chapter, like others in the book, are

9. Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, tr. Dorothea Barton (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 12.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

11. G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 72-74.

12. Joseph Reider, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1937), pp. 81, 82.

stylistically close to those of the "E" Pentateuchal source, which many scholars believe to be grounded in North Israel: "to serve other gods" (7:4), "Yahweh will bless thee" (7:13), "the Amorites" (7:1). Though not in chapter 7, the name "Horeb" (cf. 5:2) for Sinai is a particularly notable correlation.¹³ Deuteronomy 7 must be considered to have a particular message for its immediate audience. It seems likely that the latter-day faithful have taken the covenant of Moses with the people and applied it to a time when the battle against the importation of foreign cultic practices into Yahwism was at its height.¹⁴ There is such a radical concern for separation from the slightest foreign taint (cf. vss. 2-5, 25-26) that one must assume that contamination is a critical and immediate problem. The best analysis seems to be that the material was passed down through northern Yahwistic circles, became influential in Judah after the downfall of Israel (when Judah began to feel the threat of imminent destruction), and became in final form a strongly parenetic recall of the covenant to the nation during and after Josiah's reform. Conceivably it was part of a great ceremony centered on the material in Deuteronomy at some time in the interlude between the apostasy of Manasseh and the years just before the exile.

Relations with Other Nations

Deuteronomy 7 is not universalistic in theology. The emphasis is rather upon separateness of the covenant nation from foreign contact. The first five verses speak of the utter destruction which the Israelites must bring about to the peoples who do not worship Yahweh. He will bring them into the land and will "clear away" (*nashal*) many nations so that they may possess it. The land is the central motif in the early chapters of Deuteronomy. It represents tangibly the saving gift of God promised since the time of the patriarchs. It is singularly appropriate as a representation of God's love and grace at any moment in Israel's history. The promise of the "fathers" (7:8), now to be fulfilled, is indeed solely dependent upon the Lord, for all the nations are mightier than Israel; yet there are conditions to be observed by the people so that the blessing of the land under God's covenant may continue to be realized. As Miller says, "The ideas of the divine gift and human

13. Wright. *op. cit.*, pp. 318-320.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 324.

participation are not incompatible. . . ."15 Yahweh "brings" (*bo* in the Hiphil), but the people are about to "enter" (*bo* as a Qal participle); he clears away the nations,¹⁶ but they must destroy them and their worship. It is an act of faithful response to carry out these stipulations against great odds.¹⁷

There is much in Deuteronomy that is derived from the so-called "Book of the Covenant" (Exodus 21-23), the laws given in connection with the decalogue.¹⁸ This observation reinforces the idea that Deuteronomy is concerned with the renewal of the covenant originally given at Sinai. The major part of the material is therefore of ancient origin and is to be traced back to the Mosaic giving of the law. Deuteronomy 7 has close affiliations with Exodus 23 in particular, and also with Exodus 34, which repeats the covenant given on Sinai in terms that make it likely to be Deuteronomistic. Deuteronomy 7:2 states that no covenant shall be made with the conquered peoples, nor is Israel to "favor" them (*hanan*) by sparing them. Exodus 23:32 commands the Israelites: "You shall make no covenant with them; or with their gods." The concept of the *herem*, or ban, wherein the inhabitants are utterly exterminated as a devotion to Yahweh, is almost solely Deuteronomistic.¹⁹ It is extended to the entire body of peoples in Canaan. The proscribing of foreign wives in 7:3 is a further development toward exclusivism in the covenant relationship, although Exodus 34:16 and other passages (possibly Deuteronomistic) in the historical works (Joshua 23:12, 13; Judges 3:6) do warn against the danger of marriage entanglements.²⁰

15. Patrick D. Miller, "The Gift of God: The Deuteronomic Theology of the Land," *Interpretation*, 23 (October, 1969), 455.

16. Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p. 67, notes that the list of inhabitants of the land in 7: 1 is "traditional" and appears with certain variations in Ex. 3:8, 17; 13:5.

17. Miller, *op. cit.*, 456.

18. Von Rad, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 14. Von Rad here and in succeeding pages argues at length that the Deuteronomic wording of the old laws, together with ones omitted as no longer applicable and other new ones, makes Deuteronomy as it now exists considerably later than the Book of the Covenant.

19. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 355. Besides several places in Deuteronomy, the term appears in Joshua and occasionally in the other historical books where Deuteronomistic redaction seems probable. It is rare in the older legal materials (cf. Ex. 22:19; Lev. 27:28, 29; Num. 21:2, 3, where a special vow is made).

20. George Adam Smith, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Cambridge: University Press, 1950), p. 107.

The first three verses of Deuteronomy 7 address the nation as singular throughout, with Moses as the speaker. Verse four begins a series of fluctuations between the singular and the plural which is characteristic of Deuteronomy²¹ and is notable in this chapter. Although some explanations will be offered for this phenomenon, the transitions are not sufficiently clear-cut to establish divergent literary strands. Verse four inexplicably intertwines two plurals with two singulars and even has the only first-person reference to God in the chapter, as a suffix. The LXX, which maintains a close translation of the MT, particularly in the early verses of the chapter, concurs with all these contradictory endings except the plural of *'abad*, with which other versions and one Hebrew MS also disagree. Verse five, which specifies the destruction of altars, pillars, idols and Asherim, is entirely in the plural. Although verse four cannot be satisfactorily explained, it is quite likely that verse five is late and purely Deuteronomistic material. The earlier exhortations are singular like their counterparts in Exodus 23 and 34, but the same plural intrusion is found in Exodus 34:13, which is almost identical to verse five. It is likely that these parallels are contemporary. The Old Testament references, other than in Deuteronomy (7:5; 12:3; 16:21, 22), to *masseboth* and *'asherim* together as monuments of Canaanite religion are all in the monarchical period and concentrated in its latter centuries.²² The phrase undoubtedly became stereotyped in the Deuteronomistic history, sometimes with the phrase "on every high hill and under every green tree" (1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:10; cf. Jeremiah 2:20; 3:6; 17:2).

Although it was Josiah who carried out the great Deuteronomistic reform after the abominations of Manasseh, it is significant that Hezekiah also destroyed the *masseboth* and *'asherah* (2 Kings 18:4). Since only these kings are mentioned in this regard, it may be presumed that the great concern for exclusiveness of religion emerged during the period when Judah was under grave threat from foreign nations. The circles of covenant renewal and cult purity thus began to have influence in the South in the years following the downfall of North Israel, when prophetic activity was strong and some of the Northern Yahwists brought their traditions, including cult laws, worship materials, and a

21. Ibid., p.lxxiii.

22. Brown-Driver-Briggs, pp. 81, 663.

theology Influenced by prophets such as Hosea. The trend among the faithful was inevitably toward the revival of strict Yahwism and a tightening of rules about contact with outsiders. If the nation was to remain a distinct people in the face of foreign worship and military aggression, it must be totally faithful to Yahweh. Deuteronomy 7 builds on previous instructions to avoid pagan influence by stating this necessity in the strongest possible terms, with specifically detailed commands to allow marriages neither of daughters nor of sons and to destroy altars, pillars, Asherim, and idols. As Welch states, "Chapter 7 is intended to stiffen up the terms of the Code in the direction of segregating Israel from the heathen."²³ In earlier times, when laws such as that of Deuteronomy 21:10-13 were not a threat to the nation, the Code requires only a ritual purification from former heathenism;²⁴ now, Deuteronomy 7 and Exodus 34 demand a complete break with all possibilities for alien influence.

The Nature of the Covenant Relationship

The idea of separation is continued in verses 6-11, the magnificent passage about the love of Yahweh for his chosen people. The justification for the harsh actions toward foreigners previously commanded is set forth memorably. The nation is *'am qadosh* to Yahweh, chosen from all the nations as a people of "treasured value" (s^egullah) , or a "prized possession."²⁵ Although *qadosh* developed a rich variety of connotations involving morality and godliness, its "more elemental meaning" centers on "separation," according to Muilenberg²⁶ and most other commentators. Israel is special and consecrated; her existence has been solely determined by the choice of Yahweh and will continue only so long as she remains "set apart" and "treasured." These qualities of Israel expressed in verse 6 are parallel to Exodus 19:5, 6, where they are conditional upon Israel's obedience and keeping of the "covenant." Though Deuteronomy 26:18 and 28:9 are similar conditional statements, the emphasis in Deuteronomy 7 is upon God's

23. Adam C. Welch, "The Purpose of Deuteronomy, Chapter vii," *Expository Times*, 42 (June, 1931),411.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Lester J. Kuyper, "The Book of Deuteronomy," *Interpretation*, 6 (July, 1952), 331.

26. James Muilenberg, "Holiness," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, II. 617.

unconditional grace. Verses 7 and 8a, again in the plural address, elaborate the point of verse 6 by cautioning the nation to remember that their favored status with God is by no means because of greatness, since they were the least among the peoples.

In 7:8 two reasons are given for God's "attaching" himself (*hashaq*, a colorful verb of relationship²⁷) to Israel: his love and his oath to their fathers. It is not a covenant in the legal sense of two parties setting up a mutual agreement; it is a relationship of love based solely on the *hesed* of Yahweh but involving also the personal aspect of *'ahab*, which Toombs calls a "domestic" word.²⁸ Together the three different words used for Yahweh's attitude toward his people convey the fullness of what is involved in the love of God: closeness of attachment, fidelity, and personal feeling. The oath (*shebullah*) is the technical basis of the covenant, but love is its fundamental characteristic. Oath and covenant are virtual synonyms as used in Deuteronomy;²⁹ Yahweh has "sworn a covenant" (4:31; 8:18) to the fathers. Verses 7 and 8 (possibly excepting the last phrase of 8, which has a singular suffix after the verb³⁰) are Deuteronomic statements of God's grace in founding a covenant upon his love for his people and their response from the "heart."

Verses 9-11 return to the singular address to state definitively (with the formula "know therefore") that Yahweh is a "faithful" God who keeps his *b^erith* and his *hesed* (whether the two are parallel or to be taken as distinct is uncertain) to those who make the response of *'ahab*³¹ and who keep his commandments. Here it is stated that the covenant is conditional, but love is placed before keeping the commandments, and Israel's part is wholly subordinate to the actions of Yahweh which have previously been described in detail. Verse 10 presents the negative side of Yahweh's dealings with men. Those who respond to God's overtures with hatred he will speedily requite. The point is made that the punishment will be to the individual and not to his descendants, as in Exodus 34:7. There is a notable contrast between

27. Cf. von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p. 68.

28. Lawrence E. Toombs, "Love and Justice in Deuteronomy," *Interpretation*, 19 (October, 1965), 402.

29. Gene M. Tucker, "Covenant Forms and Contract Forms," *Vetus Testamentum*, 15 (October, 1965), 497.

30. The LXX omits the suffix, although one is needed.

31. The LXX translates *hesed* with *eleos* and *'ahab* with *agapao*.

the never-ending grace of God for those who love him and the quick destruction for those who reject him, also emphasized in verse 4. The message is plainly yet eloquently stated: the God of steadfast love is faithful to his covenant; if you respond in kind to his choice of you as a people, you will be forever blessed. If you do not, as shown by your neglect of his commandments and your attentions to other gods, you may expect speedy and severe punishment (at the hand of these threatening nations around you).

God's Blessings in the land

The next verses of the covenant sermon set forth in detail the tangible blessings associated with Yahweh's covenant, particularly with respect to the one great gift of the land. Verse 12a, which restates the conditional aspect of keeping the *mishpatim*, is in the plural and therefore a probable later addition. The promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:17 states that God will "bless" and "multiply" the patriarchs and their descendants. Deuteronomy 7:13 significantly adds "love" (*'ahab*) before these two aspects of the promise. Descendants, produce, and domestic animals will be abundant and prosperous in the land. In parallel with "the offspring of thy cattle" is the interesting phrase *'ash^eroth soneka*, which implies some connection between the goddess Astarte and the fecundity of flocks which has come into the Hebrew language.³² It is undoubtedly an old and commonplace association, since otherwise the reference to a foreign goddess would not appear thus in Deuteronomy. These same two expressions in parallel occur in 28:4, 18, 51 and therefore constitute a stereotyped expression of blessing.

The latter verses (14--16) of this section of the sermon are taken largely from Exodus 23. The promise that there will be no barrenness or sickness is found in Exodus 23:25, 26, although the wording is different and other promises are included. Verse 15 elaborates this blessing of health by referring to Exodus 15:26, which affirms that the lord will not inflict upon his people the diseases which he gave to the Egyptians. This verse in Exodus thus clarifies the somewhat ambiguous

32. Cf. Smith, *op. cit.*, p.113; Brown-Driver-Briggs, p. 800.

wording of the statement in Deuteronomy, which could be taken to mean that the Israelites suffered the diseases.³³ They are evils which the Lord will again put upon those who hate Israel, rather than native diseases.³⁴ Verse 16 uses the figure of "consuming" (*'akal*) the peoples which Yahweh is giving over to the nation. They are "bread" for Israel because Yahweh is with her, as Joshua and Caleb confidently assert in Numbers 14:9. After these blessings are mentioned, the speaker commands, "thine eye shall not look with compassion (*hum*) upon them": This idiom is found also in 13:8; 19:13; 19:21; and 25:12.³⁵ The section concludes with an exhortation from Exodus 23:33 not to serve other gods because "that would be a snare (*moqesh*) to you." Even such a series of confident pronouncements of blessings cannot be left alone without a reminder that fidelity to Yahweh is the precondition.

Confidence in Yahweh's Promise

The last part of the sermon is a strong exhortation to faith in the context of war and conquest. With such a covenant as has been expounded, there is no need to worry about adverse odds. The people are reminded, as in 4:34, of the great power which Yahweh Elohim displayed in bringing the nation out of Egypt after smiting Pharaoh and his land. Remembrance of the Exodus is a significant feature of Israel's worship and parenesis. Here the "dramatic re-enactment" of the normative event gives it "meaning and direction for the present," in the process of reaffirming the covenant.³⁶ God has shown abundantly that he will take care of Israel and defeat her enemies. Further affirmations are taken from Exodus 23 in this regard. Yahweh will send "the hornet" to drive out the peoples (Exodus 23:28; cf. Joshua 24:12). He will not clear them away all at once, lest the wild beasts overrun the land (Exodus 23:29-30). He will "discomfit" or confuse them so that they may be destroyed (Exodus 23:27). No king will be able to stand before

33. The LXX adds the phrase *has heorakas* before "which you knew," thus rendering the comparison with Ex. 15:26 more probable if it is original.

34. Contra Smith and Reider, who cite diseases such as dysentery and elephantiasis as the probable references, apart from the plagues sent upon Egypt.

35. The verb *hum* is common in Ezekiel and other prophetic writings (Brown-Driver-Briggs, p. 299).

36. Edward P. Blair, "An Appeal to Remembrance: The Memory Motif in Deuteronomy," *Interpretation*, 15 (January, 1961), 44.

them. They are not to tremble before the peoples, because God, the great and fearful one, is in their midst. These verses "delineate the whole range of the conceptions connected with the Holy War," as von Rad observes in placing them in the context of the revived "sacral regulations" in the reform period.³⁷ Certainly they would be appropriate for the time when powerful nations threaten tiny and impotent Judah.

The last two verses of the chapter (25, 26) again become quite specific about what to do with the material objects of worship of the heathen religions. The first verb of verse 25 is in the second person plural, but the remainder of the section uses the singular address. The next verb (*hamaq*). In this concluding instruction is the same as that of the final commandment of the Decalogue--an interesting literary correlation to the original covenant.³⁸ No part of any idol is to be appropriated; all the gold and silver is an "abomination" and under the ban. Anything might be a "snare" which could bring its possessor under the ban with it. The intensive infinitive absolutes of *shiqqes* and *ti'ab* bring home the point with great force to accompany the repeated nouns *to'ebah* and *herem* in making this admonition as strong as could be imagined. The chapter thus concludes with the characteristic Deuteronomic strictures about idols, with extreme emphasis on the abominable nature and ritual effects of anything connected with them. It is somewhat difficult to imagine Moses using such violent language or expressing such strong cultic concern to the nation just before the conquest. These latter verses deal with the peculiarly Deuteronomic concern in the final form of the chapter.

Conclusion

Judah was in grave straits during the time of Hezekiah and afterwards. Assyria, and later Babylon, loomed large before her. Many yet remembered how God had delivered Israel in the past, and the prophets announced that the sin of the people would be punished by other nations acting according to the will of Yahweh. Some of the faithful became aware that a revived devotion to the Lord was vitally necessary, and the finding of the "book of the law" was the final

37. Gerhard von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, tr. David Stalker (London: SCM Press, 1953), pp. 54, 55.

38. William L. Moran, "The Conclusion of the Decalogue," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 29 (October, 1967), 543.

impetus to reform. Its contents were expanded into a re-presentation of the covenant, possibly in a great ceremony comparable to more localized ones in the past. The sermon form of Deuteronomy 7 and surrounding chapters brought the original, Mosaic covenant into renewed effect with a reminder of God's mighty acts and an exhortation to follow his covenant commands so that the nation may again fully share in its blessings. Such a "covenant renewal" may have taken place at various times and places, but never in the systematic fashion of Deuteronomy, of which chapter 7 is a microcosm. In it the old promises and commands are combined with stereotyped Deuteronomic phrasing and emphases to enjoin the radical observance of a covenant based on the love of a faithful God at a time when the nation needs him most.

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