

Lesson 1b - History of Deuteronomy

The discovery of Deuteronomy

According to the biblical historians, in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, 622 B.C., Josiah received word from his scribe Shaphan that the priest Hilkiah had found a "scroll of the torah" in the Temple of Yahweh. When Shaphan read the text of this book that Hilkiah had found to the king, King Josiah tore his clothes, a sign of extreme anguish in the ancient Near East. The book that the priest Hilkiah said he found in the Temple in 622 B.C. was Deuteronomy. He consulted a prophetess concerning its meaning, and then he held a giant national ceremony of renewal of the covenant between God and the people. According to one of the biblical sources, Josiah's destruction of the high places followed the reading of this book. Josiah also destroyed the altar at Beth-El where one of King Jeroboam's golden calves had once stood. This religious act was also a political act. It blatantly expressed the Judean monarch's interest in the land that had once been the kingdom of Israel.

2 Kings 22:1

22 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem.

2 Kings 22:8–23:3

A Scroll of the Torah Discovered in the Temple

⁸ Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the scroll of the Torah in the temple of Yahweh," and Hilkiah gave the scroll to Shaphan and he read it. ⁹ Shaphan the secretary came to the king and returned the king a word, and he said, "Your servant poured out the money found in the temple, and they have given it into the hand of the doers of the work appointed over the temple of Yahweh." ¹⁰ Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king saying, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a scroll." Then Shaphan read before the king. ¹¹ When the king heard the words of the scroll of the Torah, he tore his

clothes. ¹² Then the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Acbor the son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the servant of the king, saying, ¹³ "Go, inquire of Yahweh for me and for the people and for all of Judah concerning the words of this scroll *that was found*. For the wrath of Yahweh that is kindled against us *is great* because our ancestors did not listen to the words of this scroll to do according to all that is written concerning us!"

The Prophetess Huldah Predicts Doom for Judah

¹⁴ So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Acbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah the son of Harhas, the keeper of the robes. Now she was living in Jerusalem in the second district. Then they spoke to her, ¹⁵ and she said to them, "Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, 'Say to the man who sent you to me, ¹⁶ "Thus says Yahweh, 'Look I am bringing evil to this place and upon its inhabitants, *according to* all of the words of that scroll that the king of Judah has read ¹⁷ because they have abandoned me and they have burned incense to other gods, provoking me to anger with all of the works of their hands. My wrath shall be kindled against this place and not be quenched.' "

¹⁸ And to the king of Judah who sent all of you to inquire of Yahweh, thus you shall say to him, "Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, '*Concerning* the words that you have heard, ¹⁹ because you have a responsive heart, and you humbled yourself before Yahweh when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants to become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before my face, I have also heard, declares Yahweh. ²⁰ Therefore look, I am gathering you to your ancestors, and you shall be gathered to your tombs in peace. Your eyes will not see all of the disaster that I am bringing onto this place. Then they reported the word to the king.

Josiah's Covenantal Reforms

²³ So the king sent *word*, and all of the elders of Judah and Jerusalem gathered to him. ² Then the king went up *to* the temple of Yahweh, and all of the men of

Judah and all of the inhabitants of Jerusalem *were* with him, *including* the priests, the prophets, and all of the people from smallest to greatest; and in their [hearing] he read all of the words of the scroll of the covenant that had been found in the temple of Yahweh. ³ Then the king stood by the pillar, and he made a covenant before Yahweh, to go after Yahweh and to keep his commands and his warnings and his statutes with all of *his* heart and with all of his soul, to keep the words of this covenant written on this scroll. Then all of the people joined in the covenant.

De Wette denied that the book was by Moses. He said that Deuteronomy was not an old, Mosaic book that had been lost for a long time and then found by the priest Hilkiah. Rather, De Wette said, Deuteronomy was written not long before it was "found" in the Temple, and the "finding" was just a charade. The book was written to provide grounds for Josiah's religious reform.

For example, the first commandment in the law code of Deuteronomy is to sacrifice to God only at a single place. Josiah did just that. He tore down all places of worship outside of the Temple. But this brought all the influence and income of the religion to the Jerusalem Temple priesthood, and it was a Jerusalem Temple priest who had found the book.

The early figures in Israel's history know nothing of any centralization law. Samuel, the prophet-priest-judge who anoints Saul and David, sacrifices in more than one place. The first three kings, Saul, David, and Solomon, also sacrifice at altars in various places.

The book of Deuteronomy is presented as Moses' farewell speech before his death. It is set in the plains of Moab, just across the Jordan River from the promised land. Moses and the people have arrived there after forty years of travel in the wilderness. Moses reviews the events of the forty years that he and the people have known each other. He gives them a code of laws by which to live in the new land. He appoints Joshua as his successor. Then he climbs a mountain from which he can see the land, and there he dies.

Deuteronomy and the next six books of the Bible: Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. These six books are known as the Early Prophets.

there was a strong unity between Deuteronomy and these six books of the Early Prophets. The tie between Deuteronomy and the six books that follow it appeared to be crucially integral. The full seven-book work as the Deuteronomistic history.

In the Bible, covenants are written contracts between God and humans. They are written according to the form and standard terminology of legal documents in the ancient Near East. J portrays a covenant between God and Abraham. Both J and E portray a covenant between God and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai (or Horeb) in Moses' time. In the book of Deuteronomy, the Mosaic covenant is understood to mean not only the laws given at Sinai/Horeb. It also includes laws that Yahweh gives to Moses in the plains of Moab, at the end of the forty years of travel through the wilderness.