

Session 13, Deuteronomy and the Canon

Dr. Cynthia Parker

This is Dr. Cynthia Parker and her teaching on the book of Deuteronomy. This is session 13, Deuteronomy and the Canon.

Introduction

We have finished the book of Deuteronomy except for the last final chapters, which are going to be kind of our endnotes in the last little bit of what's happening. Since we just previously discussed the end of the law code and these covenant ratification ceremonies, and these events that the Israelites are going to participate in once they step over into the land, this is a good natural place for us to pause just for a moment and think about what we've learned through the book of Deuteronomy.

Themes of Deuteronomy

So, Deuteronomy has been giving us many different themes. Of course, one of the significant ones is that God is in relationship with his people, and there is a covenant between them. And so, we have these stipulations. These are what things you should do so that things go well with you. And we have this casting of a vision of all that can go well in the land if you adhere to the covenant and the laws that God has given to his people. We have noticed that the Israelites are on the world stage that they will never be able to go out and conquer the world. Their land will not support that. But the world comes through them, and there's an interaction between the Israelites and the people around them.

So, taking some of these concepts, then, it shouldn't be that much of a surprise that Deuteronomy is very closely connected to several books in the Hebrew Bible, and I would say especially with some of the prophetic books.

Deuteronomy and the Historical Narratives

Now we mentioned earlier when we were talking about the history, the writing down of Deuteronomy. And I mentioned a gentleman named Martin Noth. His idea was the idea that Deuteronomy is supposed to be the prologue to, or the introduction to, the historical books starting with Joshua and going through Kings because there are so many references throughout the historical narratives, where people are called good or evil based on how well they're adhering to the covenant with God.

Deuteronomy and Hosea

So, in that way, Deuteronomy is hugely influential in how we read the historical narratives. But what about some of the other books? So, we have clusters of writings by prophets. I would like to mention some of those and just reflect with you about how several of the themes that these prophets bring up end up being themes we've already learned, we've already studied and should sound familiar to you because of this study that we've done in the book of Deuteronomy.

The first one I would like to mention is Hosea. So, Hosea is one, and we call him a Minor Prophet, which by no means means that his ministry was minor. It just means he's not one of the really big prophets that has a really big collection of work associated with his name. So, the big prophets or the Major Prophets would be people like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Hosea belongs to the Book of The Twelve. So, the writings of Hosea have been collected, or the sayings of Hosea have been collected and written down.

We don't know where Hosea is from. We don't have a city that he is from, but we know he's from the Northern Kingdom of Israel. So, historically we're at the point in time where the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom have already split from each other. So, Hosea is part of the prophets that are sent to the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

One of the themes that he comes up with and that he talks about is God's divine compassion. So, the first couple of chapters of Hosea are all about how God has an enduring substantial love for his people even when they turn away from him. We get this shown within Hosea himself and the prostitute wife that he is called to go and marry. So even in Hosea's life and his persistence to love her and stay married to her is supposed to be an example of how God stays in a relationship with his people even when they go and follow other gods.

We also have the idea in Hosea that forgetting God and going after other gods, and the idea that God will continue to pursue his people. So, Hosea rebukes the Northern Kingdom of Israel for bringing in and adapting worship of other gods.

Hosea is very quick to rebuke the Northern Kingdom for having a multitude of sanctuaries built for other gods and a multitude of altars for other gods. There's also the idea that there are problems from mixing with people. So, these are all things that Deuteronomy has dealt with as well. The idea that there is only one God and he is God alone, that the people should have one altar at the chosen place, and that there shouldn't be mixing with other people groups lest their hearts or the hearts of the Israelites be turned away.

Hosea also talks and hammers this point that there is no other God except Yahweh. *Hesed* is what is desired. So *hesed* is that Hebrew word that has to do with covenantal love. Even more expansive, it's loving-kindness, it's the

inconvenience kind of love. It's the type of love that in the Ten Commandments, it says God has a hesed love for his people. That enduring love, inconvenient love. And in the book of Hosea, we have the only thing that God desires is for hesed love in return. That sounds familiar because in the book of Deuteronomy, we have this repetition over and over and over that what it is that God wants from his people is to love him and to follow his commandments. So, it has hesed that type of love that is communicated there.

We also have, along with this divine compassion, that we see at the very beginning of Hosea in the form of a husband-and-wife relationship. The latter chapters of Hosea talk about the love that God gives to his son. So, again, we have Israel, that shows up as the son of God, and the example of love that God has is like a father to his son. This also is very similar to Deuteronomy, even from the very opening chapters of Deuteronomy, where when Moses is talking about rehearsing the history of their story, he says, even in the wilderness, God was the father who picked up and carried his son through the wilderness. So, this idea that the relationship and love between God and his people are like a father-son relationship shows up in Hosea.

And we have reflections on the song of Moses or echoes of the Song of Moses, which we have not yet covered, but we will in the next lecture. But in the song of Moses and Hosea, there are actually very close similarities there.

We're going to talk about Amos next, but before we, we leave off with Hosea, I just want to mention there are so many things that are similar between Hosea and the Book of Deuteronomy -- in Amos as well. Amos is from roughly the same time period as Hosea. So, because Hosea and Amos have such a close connection with the book of Deuteronomy, some scholars have suggested that Hosea and Amos, these writings and the ministry of these two prophets

existed first and that Deuteronomy is actually borrowing the language from Hosea and Amos, as Deuteronomy is being written down. It's another one of the complicated factors that goes into us trying to figure out who wrote the book of Deuteronomy and who actually wrote it down.

Now also, what is curious is Hosea is from the Northern Kingdom of Israel. And the book of Deuteronomy has something of a northern focus. So, as we have talked about Deuteronomy and the chosen place very consistently throughout these lectures, I have not named the chosen place. I actually don't think Deuteronomy finds the name of the exact location of the chosen place to be significant. I think Deuteronomy is trying to say this chosen place, regardless of where it is, is how the land is structured. So, there is one place and one God at the center, and everyone falls under that umbrella. But many scholars, and if you read commentaries on the book of Deuteronomy, will say the chosen place, obviously, is Jerusalem because the temple ends up being built in Jerusalem. And so often, in commentaries, instead of using the phrase chosen place, they will actually use the word "Jerusalem."

Well, I'm not convinced of that argument. That and the fact that when Deuteronomy is talking about going into the land and ratifying the covenant, the ideas that we just talked about in the previous lecture and we talked about in the lecture related to Deuteronomy 11 that covenant is made up north Ebal and Gerizim are in the Northern Kingdom of Israel's territory. There's actually quite a bit of emphasis that is put on the northern portion of the land.

And so those who say that Deuteronomy wasn't written down until the time of Josiah, as king, are failing to recognize that there's a huge emphasis put on the northern part of the land because by the time of Josiah that northern part of the land had already been taken into exile by Assyria.

Now potentially, and this is a very common argument, that maybe those who wrote the book of Deuteronomy or actually finalized the words and wrote it down were original Northern Kingdom of Israel priests and Levites or a scribal collection of people, who then migrated down to Jerusalem. And so, then they start writing down all the different laws that influence Josiah's reform. So, these are all possibilities. But again, to focus on the north and to talk about how influential the north is and Deuteronomy does not ignore the northern territories of the land, we have Hosea, who is from the north, working in the Northern Kingdom of Israel and has a very close connection with the book of Deuteronomy.

So, either Hosea's writings come first and greatly influence the writing down of Deuteronomy, or Deuteronomy is already in existence. It has already been codified, and some will argue during the United Monarchy or in the early parts of the kingdom when all of the Israelites were still considered one.

So just to make you aware though, that Hosea, as a northern prophet, has a very tight connection with the book of Deuteronomy. They seem to know of each other.

Deuteronomy and Amos

So, what about Amos? Amos was also, at the same time as Hosea, except Amos comes from the southern Kingdom of Judah. So, he comes from Tekoa, a town that is just on the south side of Bethlehem. Amos is not a professional prophet. He's a farmer and a shepherd, and yet God called him and said to go north in order to give this message to the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

In the book of Amos, we see several different themes. The repetition over and over of how the Israelites were brought out of Egypt, and we're given the

land. That should sound like a very old theme to you because it has shown up so much in the book of Deuteronomy.

Amos rebukes the Northern Kingdom of Israel for their wrongful boasting about their own strength. And also, Deuteronomy is careful to say, do not think; remember when we did our little math formula from Deuteronomy 9, do not think you are going in because of your righteousness because if you actually remember correctly, you've been rebellious in the past. You are here because God is the one who is faithful, and so respond to God out of love. Well, Amos takes that and says, well, you Northern Kingdom of Israel, you are wrongfully boasting. You're taking credit for something that you do not deserve credit for.

They will also be rebuked for worshipping other gods outside of Yahweh, the only God. And at the heart of Amos, it's why I love the book of Amos so much, is social ethics. It is at the heart of his message, and we see how much he is bothered by the social ethics of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

So, in the Northern Kingdom of Israel at this time, they have structured themselves so that the king is at the pinnacle, at the top, where very heavy tributes and tithes are being extracted from the community. It is supplying an extremely wealthy livelihood for a very select few groups of people at the top, the upper echelon of society. And Amos has very strong rebukes that.

Well, again, after Deuteronomy, we've seen so many different laws in chapter 15 and then in chapter in some of the chapters scattered throughout 19 and 25 that talk about the proper kind of social ethics. Not that everyone has to be of the same wealth, but you do have to be mindful of the people on the perimeter of society. Amos rebukes the people for not adhering to that. Amos also is going to repeat this idea it is righteousness and righteousness we are pursuing. We heard that in Deuteronomy 16.

Amos also is going to repeat that trilogy, the "R" words that we just talked about in our last lecture of Deuteronomy: repent, return, and restoration is possible. So, Amos ends on a positive note; there is restoration that is possible. And it means turning away from the things that you were doing incorrectly to remember your one true God who brought you out of Egypt.

Deuteronomy and Micah

Well, not only Amos but Micah. So, Micah is also considered one of the Minor Prophets. Micah is from the Judean foothills. He's from the area of the Shephelah, the lowlands, that are to the west of Jerusalem. His message is primarily to the rulers of Jerusalem. So, his focus is on the Southern Kingdom.

One of his big messages is that the leaders are preying on the helplessness of the poor. We also have ideas of idolatry and images that have been problematic even within Jerusalem. So, even outside the temple in Jerusalem, even within the community in Jerusalem, there are problems going on with idol worship.

Well, we have also seen in the book of Deuteronomy not only a strong prohibition against other gods but to the idea of leadership. When we talked about leaders, we talked about leaders being of the people and among the people. Being columns, strong pillars, examples of how all the people are supposed to act before God. It is not a system of leadership that is built with one king at the very top. In fact, Deuteronomy somewhat diminishes the role of the king and puts him among his brothers.

Deuteronomy and Isaiah

So, we start to see that theme in Micah and Isaiah also. So Micah and Isaiah are contemporaries. So, if we look at Isaiah, who was also talking to the

Southern Kingdom of Judah and writing primarily to Jerusalem, we see, again, familiar themes. Yahweh is the one and only God, and the people are rebuked for not following God. Isaiah says that there are flagrant violations of the covenantal law and rebukes the people because they are using mediums and false prophets, soothsayers, and future fortune tellers. And all of that has been forbidden to the Israelite people.

He also condemns injustice and oppressive law. Isaiah, and I don't think I have it up here, but Isaiah also encourages the people that it's not ritual sacrifice that God is looking for. It is the actions that demonstrate the heart of the people.

We've seen this in Deuteronomy, where Deuteronomy is always telling people to remember, not the law, but remember who God is. And then respond to that memory in a way that loves and adores God. So, the call to action is one of action of imitating God, not the nations around them.

In Isaiah, we also get the idea that Zion or Jerusalem actually looks more like Sodom and Gomorrah. So, we saw that warning in the last chapter of Deuteronomy that we looked at in 29 and 30. The idea is that the land of Israel, one of the curses is that it will turn into brimstone and salt, the land. And it is reminiscent of Sodom and Gomorrah and how part of that connotation is the oppressiveness of the people in those cities.

Jeremiah is saying you don't get off the hook because Jerusalem is looking like Sodom and Gomorrah. So he is using the same reference point there. Isaiah is also going to look forward to a better day, which is again that hopefulness for restoration that we see at the end of the book of Deuteronomy. And again, the Song of Moses, which will be in the next lecture, is also almost word-for-word in Isaiah.

Deuteronomy and Jeremiah

Now another one of the great prophets is Jeremiah. And by the time of Jeremiah and the writing down of the sayings and the actions and the sermons of Jeremiah, it seems at least by this time Deuteronomy seems to have been written down or codified. Jeremiah seems to know of the book of Deuteronomy. So again, we find several different reflections back and forth on this book.

Jeremiah 7 is a great chapter that talks about how the covenant truly is conditional. So, God might have a covenantal of love, hesed, for his people. He's very persistent, except that this covenant that they've agreed to comes with the people required to act in kind, to respond to God in a particular way. In Jeremiah 7, we find the residents of Jerusalem were just counting on the fact that the temple is in Jerusalem, and so, therefore, the Babylonians won't kill them because God won't allow his house to be destroyed. Jeremiah says God doesn't care about his house nearly as much as he cares about your heart. And so, if you're going out and you are breaking all of these commandments on one day and at the end of the day, going to the temple and saying, "O, but God is here." That's not enough to save you.

Jeremiah repeats quite often the idea that what God wants is for the people's hearts to be circumcised and that there's an internal marking of the covenant in softness of heart. Jeremiah also talked quite a bit about Sabbath rest. In fact, Jeremiah says that part of the exile of the people to Babylon is due to the fact that the people have not been observing rest and the land itself, which turns into a character in the book of Jeremiah; the land is alive and vibrant, but that land has not enjoyed its Sabbath rest. So, the people will be taken out into exile.

Jeremiah also warns the people about taking advantage of the poor. Jeremiah also compares Jerusalem to Sodom and Gomorrah. And Jeremiah uses the phrase "the land of milk and honey." Now, that phrase is actually a common phrase in the Pentateuch. We see it in the book of Exodus; we see it a couple of times in Numbers. Deuteronomy loves the phrase and uses it quite a bit to talk about the quality of the land that they're going into. We no longer see the phrase through the historical narratives. It's not used. It goes out of fashion of sorts. There's a different phrase that is used as a shorthand phrase for the land prospering and doing well. But Jeremiah restores that and borrows that back. And again, he uses the term "the land filled with milk and honey" or "the land bursting forth or oozing with milk and honey." Jeremiah 2 also has connections with the song of Moses.

Deuteronomy and Psalms, and Proverbs

Now we could go all the way through the Psalms, we could go through Proverbs, and we could talk about those connections as well. So, there are very similar themes that show up. One, if we were to look through the book of Proverbs, Proverbs is a teaching that it is handed down from one generation to another. Where did your wisdom come from? These are the wise sayings and how to act and not act. This is very similar to the law code in Deuteronomy and is also quite similar to Deuteronomy in chapters 6 and 11. It is very specific to say parents should teach their children that it is an individual responsibility to pass down and hand down these significant teachings. Deuteronomy 4 says, "it is these teachings that are your wisdom." So within Proverbs, we have not only an emphasis on teaching children but the recognition that these statutes in these commandments are your wisdom and lead to a filled human existence.

Proverbs also talks about the discipline of children, where the idea of discipline is a self-modification of holding yourself back, of reigning in your desires. Deuteronomy does the same. Deuteronomy talks about it as a father disciplines his child, as God, the father, is disciplining or training up his child, the son of Israel.

Proverbs talk about it within the form of human relationships between parents and children.

Deuteronomy and the New Testament

New Testament also goes back to Deuteronomy quite a bit. And this I've mentioned even from the very beginning because I said one of the reasons we should be studying Deuteronomy is because it is one of the four most quoted Old Testament books in the New Testament. Some of these I have mentioned already as we have gone through various lectures in Deuteronomy. All of the gospels uphold every single one of the Ten Commandments. There are teachings about Sabbath; there are teachings about honoring God and only God. There are teachings about honoring parents, about not coveting. So the Gospels as a whole uphold the Ten Commandments, which were in Deuteronomy 5.

We did talk about Jesus and his forty days in the wilderness and how I love to think of Jesus as dwelling on and recounting and embodying and thinking about the words of Deuteronomy because when he is tempted, his responses all come out of the book of Deuteronomy.

He is one like Moses. This idea of the Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of Matthew is also something I mentioned in a previous lecture. Jesus is set up to look like that one great prophet that Deuteronomy 18 is promising, and like Moses was a very influential figure for the Israelites, Jesus is set up as one who is like Moses, who is the one who is the intermediary between God and the

people. He is the one who can come and actually explain to the people the hearts in the desires of God.

Deuteronomy and Paul

Obviously, there is a tie between love and doing the commandments. And some of these not only show up in the Gospels but show up in the writings of Paul. Or even we could say the book of Acts, the Luke-Acts, and then later in the writings of Paul demonstrates, in fact they focus quite a bit on the grace of God, the love of God, but always call people to then act in kind. We think of the book of Romans, and we think of the epistle of James; they all emphasize the fact that you don't just believe in something, it's not just head knowledge, but it is something you believe in, which is then demonstrated by the actions that you go out and choose to do in response.

Paul is very well-versed in Deuteronomy, which should not be surprising. Paul himself says that he is a Pharisee of Pharisees, which means he would have memorized the majority of the Old Testament. He would have memorized a lot of the oral teachings of the rabbis of his day. He would be very familiar with the text. He tends to use not only quotes out of Deuteronomy, but even the structure of the book to structure some of his own writings.

The Source

So, as we can see, Deuteronomy is everywhere, and there is a very recent modern book by James Michener. I mean, by recent, I mean it's not a biblical text. It's a couple of decades old by now. The name of the book is called, The Source. And it is a story of archaeologists, one primary archaeologist is an American, and the other one is an Israeli. So, one is really Jewish, and the American is Catholic, I believe. But the story is a fictional story of them coming together in the land of Israel to dig through history and expose layers of history.

There's a really interesting conversation in the book between the two archeologists because one, the American, turns to the Israeli and says I don't know why anyone would want to read the book of Deuteronomy. And Israeli, the Jewish Israeli archaeologist, turns and says, "Ah, but when I read the book of Deuteronomy, I can see the past ghosts of my ancestors walking through this land." This book is at the heart of our worship." And he tells the American go read the book of Deuteronomy four times and then come back and let's have this conversation. And the American goes and reads the book of Deuteronomy four times and, at the end, realizes that it is not only at the core of Jewish beliefs, but it is at the core of his Christian beliefs, as well.

Conclusion

And so, as we've seen, Deuteronomy is tightly connected to the other writings, the historical writings, the writings of the prophets, and the writings of the New Testament. It was common knowledge.

And so again, just as an encouragement to you, the more we read and understand Deuteronomy, the more we understand the heart of God and the heart that he is asking his people to have.

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