

Deuteronomy 1:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

On this side Jordan, in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare this law, saying,

Analysis

On this side Jordan, in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare this law, saying,

The Hebrew be'eber haYarden ("on this side Jordan") indicates the east bank, in the plains of Moab opposite Jericho. Be'ar ("declare") means to make clear, explain, or expound - not merely recite but interpret and apply. Torah ("law") encompasses instruction, teaching, and covenant stipulations, not just legal codes but comprehensive divine guidance for covenant life.

This geographical and pedagogical introduction frames Deuteronomy as Moses' exposition of the law to the second generation before entering Canaan. Unlike the first giving at Sinai (Exodus 19-24), this is pastoral application for those who will possess the land. Moses functions as covenant mediator, teacher, and prophet, preparing Israel for life without his leadership.

The phrase "began Moses" (ho'il Moshe) can also mean "Moses undertook" or "Moses was willing," suggesting intentional, purposeful teaching. This isn't mere repetition but contextualized instruction for new circumstances. Deuteronomy's covenant renewal format parallels ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties, with historical prologue, stipulations, blessings, and curses - a legal framework Israel's audience would recognize.

Historical Context

Deuteronomy's events occur circa 1406 BCE (traditional dating) or 1250 BCE (late exodus dating) in the plains of Moab, just before Israel's Jordan crossing into Canaan. The forty years of wilderness wandering have elapsed; the exodus generation has died (except Caleb and Joshua). This new generation needs covenant instruction for the radically different challenges of settled agrarian life in Canaan versus nomadic wilderness existence.

The Trans-Jordan location is significant - Israel has already conquered the Amorite kingdoms of Sihon and Og (Deuteronomy 2-3), giving the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh their inheritance east of Jordan. Moses speaks from this position of initial victory but cannot himself enter the Promised Land due to his sin at Meribah (Numbers 20:12).

Ancient Near Eastern treaty documents provide remarkable parallels to Deuteronomy's structure, particularly Hittite suzerainty treaties (14th-13th centuries BCE). The "declare" or "expound" language indicates Moses is providing interpretive commentary, applying Sinaitic law to Canaanite settlement scenarios. This teaching ministry establishes a pattern for Scripture's ongoing interpretation and application across changing historical contexts.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does Moses' role as expositor and interpreter of the law inform our approach to biblical interpretation and application today?
2. What significance does the geographical setting (Trans-Jordan, threshold of the Promised Land) hold for understanding Deuteronomy's theological message?

3. How does Deuteronomy's covenant renewal structure help us understand the relationship between Old Testament law and New Testament grace?
4. In what ways does Moses' preparation of the second generation parallel the Church's responsibility to disciple successive generations of believers?
5. How should the contextualized nature of Deuteronomy's teaching shape our understanding of timeless principles versus cultural applications in Scripture?

Interlinear Text

אֶת	בְּאֵר	מֵשֶׁה	הַוֹּא	יָל	מִזְאָב	בְּאֶצְבָּע	בְּרִידָה	וְ	בְּעֵבֶר
On this side	Jordan	in the land	of Moab	began	Moses	to declare			H853
H5676	H3383	H776	H4124	H2974	H4872	H874			
הַתֹּוֹךְ	בְּזַה	אֶת	לְאַמְרָה:						
this law	H2063		saying						
H8451			H559						

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