

The Structure of Deuteronomy

There is a lot going on in Deuteronomy, but the structure of the book itself is reasonably tidy. Here are three ways to look at it:

1) Big Picture

At a high-level, the book is made up primarily of three speeches from Moses to the people of God as they stand in the plains of Moab at the edge of the promised Land. The oral nature of this book becomes apparent quickly: there is a lot of repetition!

- Speech 1 (1.6-4.40)
- Speech 2 (5.1-28.68)
- Speech 3 (29.2-31.13)

2) Historical Context

The book also follows the pattern of ancient Hittite covenant, which is a good piece of evidence for dating Deuteronomy to the time of Moses. This model doesn't capture all the features of the book, but it is an important dimension to be aware of. From this perspective the book breaks down as follows:

- Preamble (1.1-5)
- Historical Prologue (1.6-4.49)
- General Stipulations (chs.5-11).
- Specific Stipulations (chs.12-26).
- Blessings and Curses (chs.27-28).
- Witnesses (30.19; 31.19; 32.1-43)

3) Thematic Progression

Both of the above structures are helpful, but don't always track with the clear movement of thought and action in this remarkable book. Another way to look at Deuteronomy is to follow the major thematic progressions. Here's one way to do that:

- Israel's Recent History in the Wilderness (chs.1-3)
- The Call to Covenant (chs.4-11)
 - The Privilege of Relationship with God (ch.4)
 - The Ten Commandments (ch.5)
 - The Greatest Commandment (ch.6)
 - A Chosen and Humble People (chs.7-9)
 - Loving and Serving God Alone (chs.10-11)
- The Covenant in Detail (chs.12-26)
 - Places of Worship (12.1-28)

- The Danger of Idolatry (12.29-13.18)
- Religious Practices (chs.14-15)
- Major Festivals (ch.16)
- Sacrifices, Priests, and Kings (ch.17-18)
- Cities of Refuge and Legal Procedure (ch.19)
- Just War (ch.20)
- Murder and Family (ch.21)
- Miscellaneous Laws of a Mixed Nature! (chs.22-25)
- Celebrating God's Covenant (ch.26)
- The Moment of Decision (ch.27-28)
- A Final Appeal to Faithfulness (chs.29-30)
- A Changing of the Guard (ch.31)
- Songs and Blessings (chs.32-33)
- The Death of Moses (ch.34)