

Deuteronomy

*This is part of an ongoing series of short articles designed to help us understand what scripture is and what is **in** each book of scripture. Previous articles can be found at www.openarms-communityofchrist.org.*

Deuteronomy follows Numbers in the Christian canon (collection of books). The title means “second law”, and it is basically a reaffirmation of the covenant between God and the people of Israel.

When Numbers ended, the people of Israel were getting ready to enter the land of promise, ready to attack. Before that story continues, Deuteronomy gives what is supposedly Moses’ farewell message to the people. There are actually three sections in this message.

The first one (chapters 1:6 to 4:40) is a brief review of the people’s exodus from Egypt and their initial fears and refusal to do what God asked them to. At the end of this message, Moses sets apart three cities of refuge, where someone who accidentally killed another could live in safety.

The second message (chapters 5 through 28) is considerably longer and contains an expression and expansion of the law that was given in Exodus. It also contains a basic foundation for living in the promised land--“Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.”

The third message (chapters 29 and 30) is another brief one, a plea to the Israelites to obey God’s commandments so that they will live long in the land.

The last three chapters pick up the story where it ended in Numbers, with Moses commissioning Joshua to take the people into the promised land. Moses sings a song of praise, and also blesses each of the tribes of the people. After this, Moses is allowed to ascend into the mountain so that he could see the promised land, even though he wasn’t going to be allowed to enter it.

Although Deuteronomy is based on ancient traditions, it seems to have been written (or rewritten) much later at a time when the temple at Jerusalem was seen as the central place for worship. Local shrines were to be eliminated, and the earlier teachings were reinterpreted in light of later experience.