

## Deuteronomy (March 24)

### Reading Deuteronomy

She huddled her child in a smothering embrace, scolding and weeping. The boy had toddled out to the tent to visit the animals fenced and staked outside. A bull calf drew the boy's attention. He walked beside the animal, brushing its soft, shaggy coat with his hand. The touch of his hand tickled the calf's side. It kicked, just missing the boy's head. It raised its foot again as the boy's mother pulled her child away – just in time.

In Deuteronomy, the Lord reminds Israel that they are his treasured possession. Moses begins his address as the Lord's prophet, reminding Israel of how the Lord delivered them from the bondage of Egypt and how they abused their freedom while in the wilderness by worshiping the golden calf. Deuteronomy delivers the Lord's rebuke against disobedience, yet it also affirms God's surpassing, parental love for his people.

### Title

The word "Deuteronomy" (meaning "repetition of the law"), as the name of the last book of the Pentateuch, arose from a mistranslation in the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate of a phrase in Deuteronomy 17:18, which in Hebrew means "copy of the law." The error is not serious, however, since Deuteronomy is, in a certain sense, a "repetition of the law." The Hebrew name of the book is *'elleh haddebarim* ("These are the words") or, more simply, *debarim* ("words").

### Author

The book itself testifies that, for the most part, Moses wrote it, and other Old Testament books agree – though, of course, the preamble (Deuteronomy 1:1-5) and the report of Moses' death (chapter 34) may have been written by someone else. Jesus also bears testimony to Mosaic authorship, and so do other New Testament writers. In the New Testament, there are almost 100 quotations of and allusions to Deuteronomy. Tradition uniformly testifies to the Mosaic authorship of the book.

### Historical Setting

Deuteronomy locates Moses and the Israelites in the territory of Moab in the area where the Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea. As his final act at this important time of transferring leadership to Joshua, Moses delivered his farewell addresses to prepare the people for their entrance into Canaan. These addresses were actually a covenant renewal. In them, Moses emphasized the laws that were especially needed at such a time, and he presented them in a way appropriate to the situation. In contrast to the matter-of-fact narratives of Leviticus and Numbers, the book of Deuteronomy comes to us from Moses' heart in a warm, personal, sermon-like form of expression.

### Theological Teaching

The love relationship of the Lord to his people and that of the people to the Lord as their covenant God pervade the whole book. Deuteronomy's spiritual emphasis and its call to total commitment to the Lord in worship and obedience inspired references to its message throughout the rest of Scripture.

### Blessings for Readers

Although many passages in Deuteronomy describe civil and ceremonial laws for Old Testament Israel, take special note of how Moses emphasizes the Lord's love and election of his people, which extends to believers today. Deuteronomy shows us the heart of God: his wrath and his mercy.