

## "INTRODUCTION TO DEUTERONOMY"

### (THE MESSAGE)

(Eugene Peterson)

Deuteronomy is a sermon—actually, a series of sermons. It is the longest sermon in the Bible and maybe the longest sermon ever. Deuteronomy presents Moses preaching on the Plains of Moab with all Israel assembled before him. It is his last sermon. When he completes it, he will leave his pulpit on the plains, climb a mountain, and die.

The setting is stirring and emotion packed. Moses entered the biblical story of salvation as a little baby born in Egypt under a death threat. Now, 120 years later, eyesight sharp as ever and walking with "a spring in his step" (Deuteronomy 34:7), he preaches this immense sermon and dies, still brimming with words and life.

This sermon does what all sermons are intended to do: Take God's words, written and spoken in the past, and take the human experience, ancestral and personal, of the listening congregation, and then reproduce the words and experience as a single event right now, in this present moment. No word that God has spoken is a mere literary artifact to be studied; no human experience is dead history merely to be regretted or admired. The continuous and insistent Mosaic repetitions of "today" and "this day" throughout these sermons keep attentions taut and responsive. Live this! Now!

*This commandment that I'm commanding you today isn't too much for you, it's not out of your reach. It's not on a high mountain—you don't have to get mountaineers to climb the peak and bring it down to your level and explain it before you can live it. And it's not across the ocean—you don't have to send sailors out to get it, bring it back, and then explain it before you can live it. No. The word is right here and now—as near as the tongue in your mouth, as near as the heart in your chest. Just do it!*

*Look at what I've done for you today: I've placed in front of you  
Life and Good  
Death and Evil.*

*And I command you today: Love God, your God. Walk in his ways. Keep his commandments, regulations, and rules so that you will live, really live, live exuberantly, blessed by God, your God, in the land you are about to enter and possess.*

The Plains of Moab are the last stop on the forty-year journey from Egyptian slavery to Promised-Land freedom. The People of Israel have experienced a lot as a congregation: deliverance, wandering, rebellion, war, providence, worship, guidance. The People of Israel have heard a lot from God: commandments, covenant conditions, sacrificial procedures. And now, poised at the River Jordan, ready to cross over and possess the new land, Moses, preaching his great Plains-of-Moab sermon, makes sure that they don't leave any of it behind—not so much as one detail of their experience or God's revelation. He puts their entire experience of salvation and providence into the present tense (chapters 1-11), he puts the entire revelation of commandment and covenant into the present tense (chapters 12-28), and then he wraps it all up in a charge and a song and a blessing to launch them into today's obedience and believing (chapters 29-34).

"Let's go."

