

HITTITE TREATIES AND THE STRUCTURE OF DEUTERONOMY

Deuteronomy

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George Mendenhall (in "Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 17.2 [May 1954]: 49–76) observed that God's covenant with Israel is very much like treaties made between suzerains (monarchs) and their vassals among the Hittites. Evangelical scholar Meredith Kline went on to argue that the book of Deuteronomy as a whole is structured after this pattern, showing how the book of Deuteronomy parallels major elements of the Hittite suzerain treaty pattern of the second millennium BC (M. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963]). In this analogy, "law" holds the same position as "stipulations" within a treaty.

These parallels with Hittite and other second-millennium treaties support the early date and authenticity of Deuteronomy. Although liberal scholarship has sought parallels in first-millennium treaties, the best parallels are with the second-millennium ones. Thus the structure of Deuteronomy is evidence for its early date and evidence against the argument that seeks to date Deuteronomy to the seventh century.

The parallel between Hittite treaties and Deuteronomy gives insight into the relationship between law and covenant: God, like a suzerain, is the great King and initiator of the covenant. The Israelites, like the vassals of the Hittite treaties, are inferiors in the relationship and merely receive the offer of a relationship. Moreover, God's laws, like the stipulations of treaties, regulate a relationship only after it is established. Keeping stipulations of treaties did not establish a relationship between the Hittites and their vassals; instead, the relationship is established first by accepting the treaty, and then comes the obligation to keep the stipulations. Similarly, law keeping did not establish Israel's relationship with God; the covenant did. Thus covenant is more basic than law, since the covenant establishes a relationship, not the keeping of the laws. Even under the Mosaic covenant a relationship with God was based on God's gracious offer of a covenant relationship, not on Israel's keeping the law first.

Hittite Treaty Form	Parallel in Deuteronomy
PREAMBLE - <i>Identifies the parties of the treaty</i>	Deuteronomy 1:1–5
HISTORICAL PROLOGUE - <i>Reviews events leading to the treaty</i>	Deuteronomy 1:6–3:29
GENERAL STIPULATIONS - <i>States substance concerning the future relationship and summarizes the purpose of the specific stipulations</i>	Deuteronomy 4–11 - <i>This is a long exhortation of Moses for Israel to obey God.</i>
SPECIFIC STIPULATIONS	Deuteronomy 12–26 - <i>The sermon continues with a detailed exposition on what the law demands of Israel.</i>
BLESSINGS AND CURSES	Deuteronomy 27–28
DOCUMENT CLAUSE - <i>Calls for storage and periodic reading of the treaty</i>	Deuteronomy 27:1–5
DIVINE WITNESSES TO THE COVENANT - <i>Various deities are called on to witness the treaty</i>	Deuteronomy 29–33 - <i>Moses calls on heaven and earth as witnesses of the covenant between God and Israel (30:19; 31:28; 32:1–43).</i>
[No parallel]	Deuteronomy 34 - <i>Death of Moses</i>