

Handout 1: Deuteronomy Lesson 3

Central theme of part I of Moses first homily:

- Israel's victory over her enemies and her prosperity in the Promised Land is assured if the Israelites will have faith in God and be obedient to His covenant.

Central themes of part II of Moses' first homily are found in 4:1, 5 and 9:

1. To have life the Israelites must "hear", "see", and "do/live" God's Law. That life itself depends on living the commandments is repeated seven times in Moses' three homilies (Dt 4:1, 40; 5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9).
2. They must teach the Law to succeeding generations (Dt 4:9).

Moses' appeal to the new generation is literally to:

- **hear** and be instructed in God's commands and prohibitions (vs. 1)
- **see** through past events the results of obedience versus disobedience (vs. 5)
- **do** what God has commanded so that they might live to enter the Promised Land (repeated seven times in 4:1, 5, 6, 13, 14; 5:1; 6:1).

The reverse order chronology of 4:1-32:

- Beth-Peor/Baal-Peor
- The events at Sinai (in order)
- The Creation event

Chronological events mentioned in the conclusion of Moses' homily in Dt 4:33-40:

- The burning bush
- The Exodus liberation
- Theophany at Sinai

Moses refers to Yahweh's commandments by several terms, usually using two terms at a time. In addition to *hukkim* and *mishpatim* (verse 1), he uses *mitzvah*, "commandment" (verse 2) and *'edot*, usually translated as "decrees" (verse 45):

1. *hukkim*, from the root "engrave," pertains to officially engraved laws or decrees.
2. *mishpatim* are rules issued by a judge or a ruler (judge/ruler = *shofet*).
3. *mitzvahim* from the root "command," is literally "commandments."
4. *'edot*, literally "testimonies," refers to the stipulations of a covenant treaty (*'edut*) imposed by a great king upon his vassal.

In Rabbinic exegesis, *mishpatim* and *hukkim* are understood to refer to two broad categories of commandments:

1. *mishpatim* are understood to be laws in which the purpose for the law is evident and which mankind would have devised for the good of society even if God had never commanded them (i.e., prohibitions against murder and theft—justice that stems from the natural law inherit in all humans).
2. *hukkim* are understood to be commandments like the purity and dietary laws, for which the reason is not obvious, and the other laws that must be obeyed as expressions of belief in God's divine sovereignty.

The word *torah* is from the prime root *horah*, "to teach," and is more accurately translated "teaching" or "instruction" (see Dt 1:5; 4:8, 44; 17:18, 19; 27:3, 8, 26; 28:58; 29:28; 31:9, 11, 12, 24; 32:46).

Handout 2: Deuteronomy Lesson 3

The uniqueness of Israel as a nation is tied to:

1. Israel's proximity to her extraordinary God.
2. The unique Laws He has given Israel to bind her to Him as His covenant people.
3. The wisdom imparted to Israel through God's divine Law.

Deuteronomy 4:2 *You must add nothing to what I command you, and take nothing from it, but keep [samar] the commandments [mitsvot] of Yahweh your God just as I lay them down for you.*

The command to “keep/guard” using the Hebrew word *samar* is found in God's command to Adam to guard/keep the garden Sanctuary in Genesis 2:15, for the cherubim to guard the entrance to Eden and the Tree of Life with their flashing swords in Genesis 4:24, and the same word used repeatedly in Leviticus in the instructions to the Levites to guard the Sanctuary (i.e., Lev 8:35; Num 1:53; 3:32; etc.)

The warning to guard the words of the Law and not to add or take from Yahweh's commands and prohibitions is the language of covenant treaties and covenant lawsuits.

The command is found in five Scripture passages:

1. In Deuteronomy 4:2 at the beginning of Moses' commentary on the observances of the Law of the Sinai Covenant that is written in the covenant treaty format.
2. In Jeremiah 26:2 where those who come to worship in the Temple are warned to say only what Yahweh has ordered, “omitting not one syllable” in Jeremiah's covenant lawsuit against an apostate Judean kingdom.
3. The warning not to tamper with the words of God in Proverbs 30:5-6
4. The warning not to add or subtract from the account of God's works in Ecclesiastes 3:14
5. The final command is found the end of the body of Sacred Scripture in Revelation 22:18-19, in the covenant lawsuit against the generation that rejected the Messiah and the formation of the new covenant document with the restored Israel of the New Covenant Church.

In Deuteronomy 13:1 there is a similar warning but it only applies to the specific prohibition against pagan worship and does not apply to the entire body of God's commandments.

... *for Yahweh your God is a consuming fire, a jealous [kanna'] God.* The Hebrew word *kanna'* combines the meanings of “jealous” and “zealous,” two words that have a common origin in English. Etymologically this word is similar to the Hebrew words for “fervent” and “incensed”, which are derived from words that refer to “fire” and “heat.” The Hebrew root *kn'*, which apparently means “to become dark red,” is often associated with fire and primarily refers to passions like love, anger, indignation and jealousy, especially when those passions are aroused when one's prerogatives have been taken by or given over to another. Hence, the connection Moses makes between God's impassioned love for Israel that will tolerate no rivals and the metaphor of God as a consuming fire (*The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy*, page 65). Israel was also familiar with the fiery manifestations of God in the fire-cloud pillar and the fire on Mt. Sinai.