

Text: Dt 23.1-25**THEOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF DEUTERONOMY¹**

1. **Consider:** a review of God's faithfulness (1.6–4.40)
2. **Covenant:** an exposition of the law (5–26)

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3. **Commence:** preparations for renewing the covenant (27.1–28.68)
4. **Commit:** an exhortation to obedience (29.2–30.20)

*Exclusions and Inclusions***Deuteronomy 23**

A comment on hard passages: As we go through some of the laws of the OT they sometimes seem shocking to us in our modern context. We have to pay careful attention to what is being said and to compare Scripture with Scripture. Our passage today has a few statements like this. We will have to look at them carefully.

Exclusions and Inclusions of the Assembly (1-8)

“Assembly” = *qāhāl*, in LXX, either *ekklesia* or *sunagōgē*: Can refer to “any assembly” but “is especially an assembly for religious purposes.”²

“The ‘assembly’ (*qāhāl*) refers here to the formal gathering of the Lord’s people as a community at festival occasions and other times of public worship and not to the nation of Israel as such.”³

Assembly ≠ temple (or tabernacle)

Compare Lev 21.17-23, priests excluded from service, but not from membership

¹ Adapted from an outline in Lawrence O Richards, *The Bible Readers Companion*, electronic ed. (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1991), 117.

² Jack P. Lewis, “1991 קהָל,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 790.

³ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, v. 4 (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 307.

“even to the tenth generation,” *i.e.*, forever

“In spite of this restriction, Ammonites, Moabites, and any other people, could become members of the nation of Israel by becoming proselytes to Yahwism.”⁴

Also note the inclusion of Ruth into the nation, and three generations later, her descendant David sits on the throne.

“Disbarment from the assembly was not synonymous with exclusion from the covenant community itself as the one example of Ruth the Moabite makes clear. Having determined to return with her Israelite mother-in-law to Bethlehem, she vowed: “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16). This was more than mere wishful thinking or personal resolve, for Ruth went on to marry a leading citizen of Bethlehem (4:13), and she eventually became a great-grandmother of King David (4:21). There can be no doubt that Ruth was welcomed among the people of the Lord as one of their own though presumably never with access to the assembly.”⁵

Exclusions and Inclusions when in the Encampment (9-14)

“The Mosaic Law considered unclean everything that proceeded out of the human body. Perhaps this taught the Israelites that there is nothing good in man.”⁶

“Bodily emissions of the kind described here are of the most private and personal nature and must not be witnessed by others or cause them to become contaminated. In the language of the text they are ‘indecent’ (v. 14), even for the eyes of the Lord.”⁷

⁴ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 23.1.

⁵ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 309.

⁶ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Dt 23.9.

⁷ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 311.

Law of the Escaped Slave (15-16)

“It is likely that this unusual treatment of escaped slaves belongs in a discussion of purity precisely because God’s people, as a holy and distinct nation, must, as always, demonstrate that apartness in tangible ways. If it is customary for the heathen to repatriate slaves, Israel must not do so as an expression of the mercy and grace of its God.”⁸

Excluding the Offerings of Prostitutes (17-18)

“Though prostitution of any kind was regarded with contempt in ancient Israelite society and therefore as antithetical to covenant law and behavior (cf. Lev 19:29; 21:9; Deut 22:21), such practice in the name of religion was particularly reprehensible. So-called cultic prostitution was widespread among the fertility cults of the ancient Near Eastern world that saw in its employment a means of achieving productivity of plant, animal, and even human life. Whole guilds of male and female temple personnel participated in grossly sexual rituals designed to induce the various gods and goddesses to release their procreative powers on the earth. Nowhere was this more commonly practiced than among the peoples of Syria and Canaan, hence the special need to warn Israel against it.”⁹

Laws related to “Thou shalt not steal” (19-20)

Law of Interest on Loans (19-20)

Law of Vows (21-23)

Law of Eating Food by the Way (24-25)

To charge interest to a fellow-Israelite is tantamount to theft, and not allowed.

Making a vow and not repaying is the same as stealing from the Lord

The property of a farmer was inviolate, but a special provision allowed a traveler to take a handful of grapes or heads of grain as he passed by, implying the hospitality of the farmer as his (even inadvertent) host.

As always, God’s laws are concerned with purity. Some of them symbolize purity, others maintain purity by legislating righteous behaviour.

⁸ Merrill, 312.

⁹ Merrill, 313.

Application:

1. God is not an indulgent parent who accepts just anyone into his presence. The exclusions in this chapter are about the assemblies of National Israel in the OT. They illustrate God's spiritual discrimination in the eternal kingdom. Only those of faith may enter. OT saints looked forward to God's promise: Christ. NT saints look back to the historical provision of God's promise: Christ.
2. The emphasis of the law is on holiness, in attitude and action. While we are never as holy as our Lord Jesus is, if we are in him we will try to live up to him.