

The Book of Deuteronomy: Summary and Dramatic Structure

Devarim (Exposition)

Chapters 1–3: The journey through the wilderness from Horeb (Sinai) to Kadesh and then to Moab is recalled.

Va'Etchanan (Rising Action)

Chapters 4–11: Second introduction at 4:44–49 the events at Mount Horeb (Mt. Sinai) from Parshah Devarim, with the giving of the Ten Commandments. Pronouncement of Monotheism, promise of the Promised Land and its bounty.

Eikev, Re'eh, Shoftim, Ki Teitzei, Ki Tavo (Climax)

Chapters 12–26: the Deuteronomic code: laws of ritual observance, governance, civil and criminal law. Could be called the “core” of Sefer Dvarim with everything else as a series of rings around it (like a Mishnah with Gemara). Chapters 27–28: Blessings and curses for those who keep and break the law. Scholars do not consider this to be the “code” but an appendage to the code. I have included it as part of the same genre, although technically it is not.

Nitzavim (Falling Action)

Chapters 29–30: Final summary of previous 28 chapters.

Vayelech, Haazinu, V'Zot HaBerachah (Resolution)

Chapters 31–34: Joshua is installed as the next leader of the Hebrews, Moses delivers the law to the Levites, and dies and is buried by God at Mt. Nebo.

The Song of Moses and the Blessing of Moses are included in this text as literary “arcs” within the resolution, providing drama to the ending of the Torah.

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