

Miles Hopgood

How Luther Regards Moses

The Lectures on Deuteronomy



Academic Studies

98



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Volume 98

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ACADEMICS

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Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek:
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data available online: <https://dnb.de>.

© 2023 by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Robert-Bosch-Breite 10, 37079 Göttingen, Germany,
an imprint of the Brill-Group (Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands;
Brill USA Inc., Boston MA, USA; Brill Asia Pte Ltd, Singapore; Brill Deutschland GmbH,
Paderborn, Germany; Brill Österreich GmbH, Vienna, Austria)
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Brill Fink, Brill mentis, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Böhlau, V&R unipress
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Cover design: SchwabScantechnik, Göttingen
Typesetting: le-tex publishing services, Leipzig

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com

ISSN 2197-0165
ISBN 978-3-647-50007-2

For Felix, who raced this project to completion,
for Alma, who raced it to publication,
and for Kayla, without whose love neither they nor this work would be here

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Abbreviations

CCL	<i>Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina.</i> Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1953.
CH	<i>Church History</i>
FC	<i>Fathers of the Church: A New Translation.</i> Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1947.
JLE	<i>Journal of Lutheran Ethics</i>
LQ	<i>Lutheran Quarterly</i>
LuJ	<i>Lutherjahrbuch</i>
LW	Luther's Works. Ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Boyd Brown. 75 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955.
MQR	<i>Mennonite Quarterly Review</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NZStH	<i>Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie.</i> Berlin: de Gruyter, 1959.
OEL	<i>Oxford Encyclopedia of Martin Luther.</i> 3 vols. Ed. Derek R. Nelson and Paul R. Hinlicky. Oxford: University Press, 2017.
PG	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca.</i> 166 vols. Ed. J.-P. Minge. Paris: Minge, 1857–1886.
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina.</i> 221 vols. Ed. J.-P. Minge. Paris: Minge, 1844–1864.
SC	<i>Sources Chrétiennes.</i> Ed. H. de Lubac and J. Daniélou. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1941.
SCJ	<i>Sixteenth Century Journal</i>
WA	D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. 73 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2007.
WA,Br	D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Briefwechsel. 18 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930–85.
WA,DB	D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Bibel. 12 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1906–61.
ZThK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

Conventions

In citing Luther's writings, references to both the Weimar and American editions have been made when a work appears in both. Where a work appears only in the Weimar, only it is referenced. Quotations from Luther's writings are given in English, using the translation from the American edition if one exists and using original translation if one does not. At times, corrections to the translations from the American edition proved necessary; these are noted along with the citation, accompanied by a rationale. Quotations of the original Latin or German of Luther's writings are given where they offer insights relevant to the analysis that cannot be communicated in translation. In citing secondary literature, efforts have been made to provide citations in their original languages where possible. When a secondary source is available in English translation, a citation of the English translation has been included as well. Sources originally in English which are translated into other languages are cited only in English.

On the use of capitalization beyond standard writing conventions, terms are capitalized when used theologically and not capitalized when they are used generally. For example, "the Law" refers to Luther's theological concept of the Law, rather than the abstract concept of civic law, which would be referred to as "the law." Likewise, "the Gospel" refers to Luther's theological concept, while "the gospel" refers to the general Christian message. The conventions of capitalizing the Ten Commandments (as well as each enumerated commandment), the Decalogue, the Mosaic Law, the Bible, the Gospels, and Scripture have been followed.

Introduction

A pivotal moment for Luther on the Old Testament and Mosaic Law

It is natural for modern readers to disassociate the Pentateuch from a sense of authorship. By dint of the documentary hypothesis, which rejects a single author in favor of a redactor with several sources, scholars tend to think of the Pentateuch in terms of historical audience and source communities. Meanwhile, lay readers tend to think of the Pentateuch in terms of episodic stories (e. g. “Noah and the Ark,” “The Binding of Isaac,” “The Parting of the Red Sea”) rather than as a historically *whole* text with an authorial voice. Both of these perspectives, valid in their own right, nevertheless distance us from one crucial aspect of how these books were read for the majority of their history: as the work of Moses.

For as long as it has been written in its present form, the Pentateuch has been associated with Moses. When the scroll is lifted after being read aloud in the synagogue, it is accompanied by the chant: “This is the Torah which Moses placed before the children of Israel.”¹ In his Thirteen Principles of Faith, Maimonides lays out the implication of these words more fully, writing that “we believe that this entire Torah which is found in our hands today is the Torah which was given through Moses, and that it is all of divine origin.”² That Maimonides is so firm on this point belies more ancient concerns over whether Moses was indeed the author of the *entire* Torah. For example, there is the debate in the Talmud over how to reconcile Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy with the fact that the book keeps going after recounting the death of Moses in Deut 34:5. Rabbi Yehuda reasons that Joshua bin Nun must have taken over its writing from this point forward, but Rabbi Shimon balks at the idea. He points out that God had already commanded Moses to put the Torah by the side of the Ark of the Covenant in Deut 31:26, as well as the scandal of imagining the Torah could be left missing a single letter. Rather than Moses passing the Torah on to Joshua to complete, Rabbi Shimon offers a more poetic version of events:

Rabbi Shimon explains: Rather, until this point, i. e., the verse describing the death of Moses [Deut 34:5], the Holy One, Blessed be He, dictated and Moses wrote the text and repeated after Him. From this point forward, with regard to Moses’ death, the Holy One,

1 Known as the *V’zot haTorah*, the text of this chant is a combination of Num 9:23 and Deut 4:44.

2 Moses Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishnah Tractate Sanhedrin* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1981), 155.

Blessed be He, dictated and Moses wrote with tears without repeating the words, due to his great sorrow.³

These concerns over Mosaic authorship and its implications are not restricted to Jewish interpreters. We find them also among those Christians who received the Hebrew Bible as scripture. For example, interest in Moses stretched beyond his work as an author, as seen in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*, where Moses becomes a source of understanding of the ascent to God, or in John Chrysostom's preaching, where he frequently exegetes Moses according to his concept of the Stoic man of virtue while trying to rescue him from Judaism.⁴ In choosing to retain the Hebrew Bible, Christians inherited many of these same debates and added not a few of their own.

One way we can gloss disputes over Mosaic authorship is that they represent a struggle with the evidence which will lead modern scholars to adopt the documentary hypothesis, evidence which conflicts with the concept of a single author. This would explain many of the material issues at hand, but it does not account for the *passion* the question evokes, nor does it explain the extended interest in Moses beyond the work of mere receiver of the Torah. What distances the modern reader of the Pentateuch from the pre-modern is not merely the belief that the Pentateuch had a single author or that its author was the historic Moses. Rather, it's what having an author *like Moses* gives the Pentateuch, namely a story and history of its own. The Pentateuch having an author like Moses – whose life and person is so integral to its own contents – gives the Pentateuch a material anchor, locating it within time and space. And much in the same way many people think of an author's writings as how they “live on” after they die, or how some perceive (however problematically) an author's life to hold insights into their writings, Moses being the author of the Pentateuch makes him a richer figure just as it adds a layer of potential meaning to the text itself. Together and inseparable, Moses and the Pentateuch become greater than the sum of their parts. A place in history for Rabbi Shimon, a ladder bridging the human and divine for Gregory, an exemplar of Christian virtue for Chrysostom: to each, author and scripture connected provides them a deeper meaning than either does apart.

In this way, we arrive at the first, central question of this project: who is Moses for Martin Luther? How does Luther understand him, and how does this understanding

3 Talmud, *b. Menah. 30a*, in *William Davidson Talmud*, <https://www.sefaria.org/Menachot.30a?lang=bi>, Sefaria (2017) [Accessed 1 July 2019].

4 See Demetrios E. Tonias, “The Image of Moses in John Chrysostom's View of Jews and Judaism,” in *Church Studies*, *Nis 9* (2012), p.170–1. It must be noted that Chrysostom frequently appeals to Moses in his anti-Jewish polemics with the trope of Moses as frustrated leader set against his obstinate people.

of Moses shape Luther's reading of the Bible? Where do we see Luther's view of Moses shape his approach to reforming the church? To treat these questions across the entirety of Luther's writings is beyond the scope of a single project, so we take as our subject matter the beginning of Luther's serious engagement with Moses in his *Lectures on Deuteronomy*. Here, the depth of the connection between Moses and the Pentateuch for Luther is on full display, as is the importance of this question to understanding Luther's theology and work as a reformer more broadly. Led to these lectures by an interest in his view of Moses, what we will find in the process is that they mark a significant development in Luther's maturing thought and program of reform. In terms of his career as a university professor, with Deuteronomy Luther begins a trend of focusing primarily on the Old Testament in his teaching, one which will continue until the end of his life. The approach he pioneers here will be the same one we find at the end of his career as a fully formed hermeneutic for interpreting the Hebrew Bible. And as a theologian, here Luther demonstrates a level of maturity normally considered unobtained until a decade later with his 1535 lectures on Galatians. In sum, what we will see is that, despite frequently being overlooked by modern scholars, Luther's lectures on Deuteronomy mark a significant stage in his development as a theologian, exegete, and reformer.

Our project will begin with what ought to be a straightforward question: why did Luther lecture on Deuteronomy *at all*, let alone at one of the most pivotal periods in the growth of the Reformation? In March of 1522, Martin Luther had just endured what would have been a strong contender for the longest year in his life. He had just returned from a year of hiding following the Diet of Worms to regain control of the reform movement in Wittenberg, aghast at how it had progressed under the leadership of his colleagues, primarily Andreas Karlstadt. Coming off of this dramatic year, Luther does something which few scholars have observed and fewer still have sought to explain: he begins lecturing on Deuteronomy. What drove Luther to give lectures on Deuteronomy, and what concerns did Luther bring to them? To answer all these questions and set up our analysis, we will first approach the lectures by trying to make sense of the events which precipitated them. We will tease apart both the old and emerging conflicts which, as shall be argued, spurred Luther to study Deuteronomy. In particular, we will look at the falling-out between Luther and Karlstadt for evidence of how the Mosaic Law fit into the growing divide between them. By investigating the origins of the lectures, we will gain some purchase on why Luther would engage Deuteronomy at all and in this moment. Delving into his conflict with Karlstadt, we will see that Luther came to Deuteronomy in order to uncover how the Christian ought to take the law seriously without resorting to its allegorical interpretation or legalistically binding observation.

Once we have established Luther's motivation to lecture on Deuteronomy, we will begin to study the lectures themselves by focusing on how Luther regards Moses

in his exegesis and how this perspective in turn informs his emerging theology and work as a reformer. The central argument of this project will be that, in the Deuteronomy lectures, Luther views Moses as inhabiting three distinct roles or offices, namely those of author, prophet, and ruler. From chapters two through four, we shall take each of these offices of Moses one at a time, showing how Luther uses them to make sense of the Mosaic Law and conceive of how a Christian ought to profitably read and apply it. Step by step, each will show how Luther comes to form a coherent hermeneutical approach to Deuteronomy which allows him to respond to both the theological and practical dimensions of his dispute with Karlstadt, as well as the emerging conflict with Thomas Müntzer.

In the second chapter, which focuses on Moses as an author, we look at how Luther understands Moses to be an author in a modern sense, that is, someone who has agency as a writer and is artful in how he executes the craft of composing the text. From this investigation, we will gain insight into how Luther views the authority of scripture and how he is developing a new, exegetical approach centered around authorial intent. Because, for Luther, we only have access to Moses through what he wrote (and thus, through his work as an author), this chapter serves not only to provide insight into what this aspect of Moses means for Luther but also to the lectures themselves, creating a foundation for the subsequent chapters. Through it, we shall begin to see how Luther develops an approach to Moses that is remarkably personal and relational. Here, we will find that Luther is not merely reading a text. Rather, he feels he is encountering Moses as a person with thoughts, emotions, passions, and intentions, all of which the text ostensibly permits the reader to access. Understanding what Moses *wants* to say proves essential for Luther in accessing the true meaning of the written words, even in their literal sense. By leaning into what he perceives as Moses's authorial style and intent, Luther clears the first of his hurdles, finding a way to unlock deep insights into Christian faith in the text while remaining faithful to its letter and without resorting to what he perceives as allegory.

In the third chapter, which focuses on Moses as a prophet, we examine what Luther means by applying the label of 'prophet' to Moses and how that shapes his interpretation of the law. To help show why this question is so pressing, we will situate it within the developing conflict over the pastor as prophet, which featured prominently in the emerging conflict between Luther and Thomas Müntzer. As we shall see, at issue is both the nature of Christian ministry and the question of how the Mosaic Law is to be read by Christians. Thus, our focus in this chapter will be to make sense of how Luther understands Moses to be a prophet, to see how he uses Moses to challenge Müntzer's view of prophecy, and to present how Moses as a prophet gives the Christian access to the law in a way that avoids the errors of the pope and of Karlstadt. We will also see how the connection between Moses as an author and prophet allows Luther to access the true understanding of the law.

What he finds is that Moses teaches the law not as a path to righteousness through obedience but rather as an experience of true faith in God.

In the fourth chapter, which focuses on Moses as a ruler, we look to how Luther distinguishes between Moses leading the people as their prophet and Moses governing them as their ruler. In doing so, we note both the importance of this distinction for his growing conflict with Karlstadt as well as for his own understanding of how the Christian should read the Mosaic Law profitably. What Luther sees in Moses as a ruler provides substantial insight into his own concept of government, both divine and human, and what it means to find in the Old Testament insight into a just civic order without opening the door to use the law as a source of righteousness. We will also see how Luther further distinguishes between faith and love, developing more deeply his own understanding of the relationship between trust in God and love of neighbor.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, we look beyond the Deuteronomy lectures to see how they influenced Luther's subsequent writings. In particular, we will examine what Luther writes against Karlstadt as their conflict comes to a head in 1525. The aim of this chapter will be to confirm our analysis in the first chapter, which situates the Deuteronomy lectures in the conflict between Luther and Karlstadt, as well as to demonstrate the influence of the Deuteronomy lectures through analyzing how Luther approaches the Old Testament in that conflict. We will then look briefly at how the exegetical approaches in Deuteronomy continue in Luther's lectures on Genesis, the only other book of Moses he will lecture on in his life, leaving us with a sense of whether what we find in his Deuteronomy lectures is only for a moment or if it begins an approach to scripture which we can still find in Luther's writings, over a decade later in his career. Here we will see how the approach to the Old Testament and Mosaic Law which emerged through the Deuteronomy lectures further develops and solidifies as part of Luther's thought, opening the way for us to consider the possibilities for how it will continue to grow over the rest of his career.

By tracing this arc in the Deuteronomy lectures and through the events of 1521 to 1525, we will aim to understand a pivotal moment in Luther's development as a reformer and exegete. As we shall see, the question of who Moses is for Luther is neither a small nor passing issue. The highly personal and relational approach Luther develops to Moses as an author, prophet, and ruler carries with it an array of implications for how scripture is to be read, Christianity is to be practiced, and society is to be organized, influencing the shape of the German Reformation.

1. Why Deuteronomy? Understanding the Purpose of the Lectures

1.1 Introduction

The first and perhaps most important question to ask is a direct one: Why did Martin Luther lecture on Deuteronomy? There are, of course, a number of different *whys* we could mean here, some of which would not require us to go very far to find an answer. For example, as a doctor charged with interpreting scripture, we might say that Luther needed no deeper rationale to lecture on Deuteronomy except a capricious *it was there*, and thus, as good a book as any. Yet time is a precious commodity, and as we shall see, there were many demands on Luther's attention when he decided to lecture on Deuteronomy. Even if we were to take at face value that someone in Luther's position needs no justification, the more we look at the situation of his life and the emerging reform movement centered around him, the more we find ourselves with a *why* driven by context. The first component of our question is therefore the *why* that asks *why now?* Why, at a time as tumultuous and demanding as the post-Wartburg period, would anyone in Luther's position select Deuteronomy from among all the books of scripture as a topic of interest?

Another *why* that will be part of our investigation asks why Luther *himself* would lecture on Deuteronomy *at any* time. For even without considering the context of the lectures, that Luther would lecture on Deuteronomy *at all* may come as a surprise to many. The surprise is due in part to a persistent mischaracterization of Luther as indifferent to the law. In his own lifetime Luther often felt the need to defend himself against charges of antinomianism,¹ but this modern characterization is due primarily to Luther's emphasis on divine grace over human works as well as his acrimonious disposition toward the Jews, both theologically and politically. These forces have brought many to a position akin to Adolf von Harnack's misalignment of Luther with Marcion.²

However, such poor treatments of Luther's theology cannot alone account for the conventional wisdom surrounding Luther and the Old Testament. The role historians have played in accommodating disinterest cannot be ignored. While historians are certainly aware of the time Luther devoted to the Old Testament,

1 E. g. *De Libertate Christiana*, WA 7:59 [=On the Freedom of a Christian, LW 31:358]. (Hereafter, *Freedom of a Christian*).

2 Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: das Evangelium vom fremden Gott; Neue Studien zu Marcion*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960), 217.

the vast majority of work on the topic has focused only on Luther's early or late career – in other words, on the early Psalm³ lectures (1513–15)⁴ and, more recently, his Genesis lectures (1535–45).⁵ Given how quick many theologians have been to write off the early Luther as immature and the later Luther as past his prime, this has the cumulative effect of pushing Luther's Old Testament work to the margins.⁶ Focus on the early Psalm lectures has concerned itself with determining to what extent Luther was still a “medieval” exegete, while focus on the later Luther is often colored by questions of whether his relevance endures as his charismatic authority is institutionalized.⁷ That the Deuteronomy lectures have been so undertreated

3 We should wonder rightly whether Luther's work on the Psalms should be considered a part of his work on the Old Testament. In both Christian worship and the life of a monastic at this time, the Psalms occupied a place distinct from both the Old and the New Testaments and were read as a unique genre of literature. For the place of the Psalms in the monastic life, see Joseph Dyer ‘The Psalms in Monastic Prayer’ in *The Place of the Psalms in the Intellectual Culture of the High Middle Ages*, ed. Nancy van Deusen (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999). For the place of the psalms in medieval worship, see James W. McKinnon, ‘The Book of the Psalms, Monasticism, and the Western Liturgy’, in *The Place of the Psalms*, and Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston, with Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010).

4 The defining studies of Luther's early Psalm lectures remain Siegfried Raeder, *Die Benutzung des maresotischen Textes bei Luther in der Zeit zwischen der ersten und zweiten Psalmenvorlesung, 1515–1518* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1967) in German, and James Samuel Preus, *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to Luther* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969) in English. Good analysis can also be found in Heiko A. Oberman, ‘*Iustitia Christi*’ and ‘*Iustitia Dei*’: Luther and the Scholastic Doctrines of Justification’, in *Dawn of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), pp.104–125. However, more recent scholarship has continued to make significant contributions to our understanding of those lectures, e. g. Wichmann von Meding, *Luthers Gesangbuch: die gesungene Theologie eines christlichen Psalters* (Hamburg: Kovač, 1998) and Johannes Kunze, *Erasmus und Luther: der Einfluss des Erasmus auf die Kommentierung des Galaterbriefes und der Psalmen durch Luther 1519–1521* (Hamburg: Lit., 2000).

5 Gratefully, in the last fifteen years a number of excellent monographs on the Genesis lectures have appeared. Two have focused on Luther's treatment of the women in Genesis, cf. Sebina Heibsch, *Figura ecclesia: Lea und Rachel in Martin Luthers Genesispredigten* (Münster: Lit., 2002) and Mickey L. Mattox, ‘*Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs*’: *Martin Luther's Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the Enerrationes in Genesis, 1535–45* (Boston: Brill, 2003). A third has focused on the lectures and their role in identity-shaping, cf. John A. Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity* (Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2008). It has also featured extensively in other, broader studies, e. g. Michael Parsons, *Luther and Calvin on Old Testament Narrative Text* (Lewiston, New York: Edward Mellen Press, 2004).

6 There is a recent exception to this trend in the form of a dissertation covering in part Luther's Isaiah Lectures, cf. Inseo Song, ‘Dynamics of the Sense of Scripture: Luther and Calvin on the Book of Isaiah’ (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2015). See also the extensive work on Luther's lectures on Jonah in the aforementioned work by Parsons, note 4.

7 Cf. Volker Leppin, ‘Von charismatischer Leitung zur Institutionalisierung, Die Bedeutung der Monumentalisierung Luthers im Gesamtgeschehen der Reformation’, in *Transformationen* (Tübingen: