

CHOOSE LIFE

COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

Based on God's demonstrated faithfulness, take possession of God's promises and their associated blessings by choosing life in loving the Lord and obeying His commands.

Paul Apple (April 2022)

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

6:18 *"You shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may be well with you and that you may go in and possess the good land which the Lord swore to give your fathers"*

10:12-13 *"Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the Lord's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?"*

30:19-20 *"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So CHOOSE LIFE in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."*

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BACKGROUND NOTES

I. GENERAL COMMENTS:

Adam Clarke: As the Israelites were now about to enter into the promised land, and many of them had not witnessed the different transactions in the wilderness, the former generations having been all destroyed except Joshua and Caleb; to impress their hearts with a deep sense of their obligation to God, and to prepare them for the inheritance which God had prepared for them. Moses here repeats the principal occurrences of the forty years, now almost elapsed; shows them the absolute necessity of fearing, loving, and obeying God; repeats the ten commandments, and particularly explains each, and the ordinances belonging to them, adding others which he had not delivered before; confirms the whole law in a most solemn manner, with exceeding great and precious promises to them that keep it, and a denunciation of the most awful judgments against those who should break it; renews the covenant between God and the people; prophesies of things which should come to pass in the latter days; blesses each of the tribes, prophetically, with the choicest spiritual and temporal blessings; and then, having viewed the whole extent of the land, from the top of Mount Nebo or Pisgah, he yielded up the ghost, and was privately buried by God, leaving Joshua the son of Nun for his successor

Matthew Patton: Deuteronomy is the mountain at the center of the Old Testament. Everything in the Pentateuch leads up to it, with its climactic renewal of God's covenant relationship with his people. And everything in the rest of the OT flows out from it: the blessings of the land (Joshua–1 Kings), the curses of the covenant (2 Kings–Malachi), and the subsequent need for a savior. And at the top of the mountain is none other than the God of Deuteronomy, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When such breathtaking heights beckon, won't you climb this mountain with me?

Henrietta Mears: You will come to appreciate the full force & magnetic beauty of Deuteronomy only as you read its pages....Nothing in literature matches the majesty of its eloquence. Nothing in the OT has any more powerful appeal for the spiritual life. No book in all the Word of God pictures better the life that is lived according to God's will & the blessings showered upon the soul who comes into the richness & fullness of spiritual living along the rugged pathway of simple obedience...If you want a taste of heaven on earth, become familiar with Deuteronomy.

Tyler Velin: I have grown a fond appreciation for this book, which is mostly a pastoral sermon to a people in a time of transition (**Deut. 1:3**). I had heard one commentator say that Deuteronomy is to the whole Old Testament what Romans is to the New Testament: a handbook of practical and gospel-centered theology. I couldn't agree more (not to mention Deuteronomy is Jesus' favorite book to quote in the gospels).

David Malick: Message Statement – Covenant history and stipulations made with Israel at Mount Horeb and interpreted by Moses in Moab across from Beth-peor necessitate committed obedience on behalf of the nation and its leaders (though ultimately through YHWH) to experience blessing, rather than cursing, in their occupation of the Land.

Ray Stedman: Deuteronomy is the last of the five books by Moses. It is a pastime of scholars today and a supposed mark of intelligence to raise the question of whether or not Moses actually wrote these books. There are those who maintain that Moses really wasn't the writer, but that the Pentateuch was made up by some unknown editor who went through ancient books and abstracted various parts, putting them together in a collection.

They say we now have nothing more than a collection of writings by unknown authors whose names have been totally lost to us, and that Moses' name was simply added as the author. This is what is called the **documentary theory** of scriptures; anyone who studies comparative religions in high school or college will probably be exposed to it. . . [this theory has been completely debunked]

But before [Moses] left, he preached this tremendous message that we have recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. This great sermon was delivered at the end of forty years of wandering in the wilderness. This was a new generation of people who were camped just across the Jordan River, not far from the City of Jericho. The message looks ahead to the life that will be theirs when they have entered into the land. They are through with the wilderness and ready to enter the land of Canaan.

Now let me remind you that these five books of Moses are what might be called God's visual aids to demonstrate what is happening to us in our own spiritual life. As God leads the people of Israel out of Egypt through the wilderness into the land of Canaan, they reproduce in all their journey the exact same problems, same obstacles, same enemies, and the same victories that we will be encountering all through the journey of our spiritual life. The bondage depicted by Israel as slaves of Egypt is the same as the bondage to the world we experienced before we were Christians. And the land of Canaan, flowing with milk and honey, pictures a life filled with continual victory, which can be ours in Christ. All this is God's way of picturing for us what is happening in our individual lives. . .

[The **purpose of the law** was to reveal to us how sinful we really are and how incapable we are of keeping God's law.]

If you read carefully through Deuteronomy you will find two themes running throughout this entire discourse that are not found in Leviticus or Exodus. The first great theme is of **man's utter weakness and inability**, even though he is cleansed to do anything in himself to please God. There is nothing he can do in himself. His sincere, dedicated efforts to please avail nothing. . .

Accompanying this theme is that of **God's abiding presence** as the strength of the believer. . .

But Israel found it utterly impossible to live by the law on that basis. Now Paul says, again quoting from Moses -- this time in Deuteronomy:

But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down)... But what does it say? The word is near you on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); because,

if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Rom. 10:6a, 10:8-9)

There it is. The two great things are the **death of the Lord Jesus** and the **raising again** from the dead, making his life available to others. This is what Paul calls "*the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*" (**Rom. 8:2**) fulfilling by another principle the righteousness which the law demands.

International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: The author's interest is entirely **moral**. His one supreme purpose is to arouse Israel's loyalty to Yahweh and to His revealed law. Taken as a whole the book is an exposition of the great commandment, '*Thou shalt love Yahweh thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*'

G. Ernest Wright: Deuteronomy is not a juridical book prepared for the use of the judges, kings, and priests of Israel, whose task it was to administer law. It was written for the **community**, for the "church" of Israel, as a whole. It is a preaching, a proclamation and exposition of the faith of the nation, which includes the law as the expression of the will of God which must be obeyed, but which in itself is not primarily a law. It is a gospel of the redeeming God who has saved a people from slavery and has bound them to himself in a covenant. He wishes them to know the true source of their security in the land he is giving them. By this knowledge not only will they be encouraged in the faith, but they will be warned of the consequences of faithlessness and be in possession of the means whereby both prosperity and disaster may be interpreted. (*The Interpreter's Bible*)

Mayes: The **general theme** of Deuteronomy can be comprehensively stated in a single sentence: it is a call to the service of one God by an elect people centered around one sanctuary, through obedience to the law in the land which God has given.

II. TITLE:

John MacArthur: The English title "*Deuteronomy*" comes from the Greek Septuagint (LXX) mistranslation of "*copy of this law*" in **17:18** as "*second law*," which was rendered *Deuteronomium* in the Latin version (Vulgate). The Hebrew title of the book is translated "*These are the words*," from the first two Hebrew words of the book. The Hebrew title is a better description of the book since it is not a "*second law*," but rather the record of Moses' words of explanation concerning the law. Deuteronomy completes the five-part literary unit called the Pentateuch.

Chuck Swindoll: Deuteronomy means "*second law*," a term mistakenly derived from the Hebrew word *mishneh* in **Deuteronomy 17:18**. In that context, Moses simply commands the king to make a "*copy of the law*." But Deuteronomy does something more than give a simple copy of the Law. The book offers a restatement of the Law for a new generation, rather than a mere copy of what had gone before. Deuteronomy records this "*second law*"—namely Moses's **series of sermons** in which he restated God's commands originally given to the Israelites some forty years earlier in Exodus and Leviticus.

Pulpit Commentary: This book, which ranks as the closing book of the Pentateuch, the Fifth of the Fiftths of the Law..., as the Jews designate it, is in the Hebrew canon named from its two initial words, '*Elleh Had-debhârim*, or simply *Debhârim*, according to an ancient usage with the Jews.... The name *Deuteronomy* it received from the Greek translators, whom the Vulgate follows... Probably this was the name in use among the Hellenistic Jews, for this may be regarded as a fair rendering of the phrase, *Mishneh Hat-torah*, '*Iteration of the Law*,' by which some of the rabbis designate this book – a phrase taken from **ch. xvi. 18**, though there having a different sense... The name '*Deuteronomy*' is thus somewhat misleading, as it is apt to suggest that there is in this book either a second code of laws or a recapitulation of laws already delivered, whereas it is rather a summary, in a hortatory manner, of what it most concerned the people to keep in mind, both of the Lord's doings on their behalf, and of what it was his will they should specially observe and do when settled in the Promised Land."

John Schultz: We could caption the book of Deuteronomy with the title of one of **Francis Schaeffer's** books: **How Then Shall We Live?**

III. AUTHORSHIP / THEORIES OF COMPOSITION:

J. Sidlow Baxter: After the fiery testing to which the Pentateuch has been subjected by the merciless Biblical criticism of recent years, there can remain little if any doubt that the first five books of our Bible – substantially as we now have them – are from the pen of Moses.

Chuck Swindoll: "*These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel,*" says **Deuteronomy 1:1**. Mosaic authorship of this book finds the usual support from Jewish tradition (with the entire Pentateuch) but also from within the biblical text. Several times, Deuteronomy asserts Moses as author (**1:1; 4:44; 29:1**). Speaking to Joshua, Moses's successor, the Lord referred to this "*book of the law*" as that which Moses commanded (**Joshua 1:8**). And when future Old Testament and New Testament writers quoted from Deuteronomy, they often referred to it as originating with Moses (**1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; Ezra 3:2; Nehemiah 1:7; Malachi 4:4; Matthew 19:7**).

Some obvious editorial changes were made to the text sometime after Moses recorded the bulk of it. For instance, he could not have written the final chapter, which dealt with his death.

However, these and other small changes do not affect the generally accepted authorship of Moses.

Thomas Constable: There are a few passages in the book that were apparently added by a later inspired editor: **1:1; 2:10-11, 20-23; 3:9, 11, 13b-14; 10:6-9; 34**. Of course, Moses could have written these verses too, but this would be quite unusual. When these verses were added, we can only guess.

New Unger's Bible Dictionary: No other book of the Pentateuch bears so emphatic a testimony of its Mosaic authorship. It is of unusual interest that critics most dogmatically reject the Mosaic authorship of this book in the face of these clear assertions. Over against these critical claims

conservative scholars see ample evidence to maintain the Mosaic authenticity of this book. The general character of the writing, its code of conquest, its exhortatory nature, its plan as a military law-book of a pilgrim people about to enter Canaan, together with the scope and spirit of the writing are peculiarly suited for the Mosaic era and completely unsuitable for a later age. Moses is mentioned more than forty times in the book, mostly as the authoritative author of the subject matter. The first person predominates. The language purports to come directly from Moses. If Moses is not the actual author, the book can hardly be excused from being a literary forgery, scarcely worthy of canonical Scripture.

IV. DATE OF WRITING / HISTORICAL SETTING:

Chuck Swindoll: Deuteronomy was written around 1406 BC, at the end of the forty years of wandering endured by the nation of Israel. At the time, the people were camped on the east side of the Jordan River, on the plains of Moab, across from the city of Jericho (**Deuteronomy 1:1; 29:1**). They were on the verge of entering the land that had been promised centuries earlier to their forefathers (**Genesis 12:1, 6–9**). The children who had left Egypt were now adults, ready to conquer and settle the Promised Land. Before that could happen, the Lord reiterated through Moses His covenant with them.

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Deuteronomy.html>

These sermons were given during the 40-day period prior to Israel's entering the Promised Land. The first sermon was delivered on the 1st day of the 11th month (**1:3**), and the Israelites crossed the Jordan 70 days later, on the 10th day of the 1st month (**Joshua 4:19**). Subtract 30 days of mourning after Moses' death (**Deuteronomy 34:8**), and we're left with 40 days. The year was 1406 B.C.

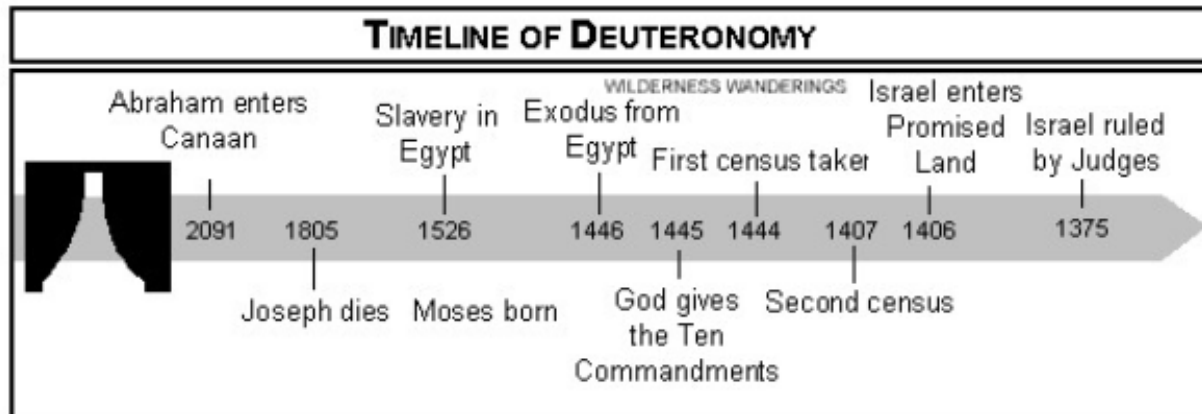
John MacArthur: The majority of the book is comprised of **farewell speeches** that the 120-year-old Moses gave to Israel, beginning on the first day of the 11th month of the 40th year after the Exodus from Egypt (**1:3**). These speeches can be dated Jan.–Feb., **1405 B.C.** In the last few weeks of Moses' life, he committed these speeches to writing and gave them to the priests and elders for the coming generations of Israel (**31:9, 24–26**).

R. K. Harrison: At the time the speeches were given, the Israelites were encamped in the plains of Moab. The area was a rather distinctive section of Moabite territory, whose core comprised the Plateau E. of the Dead Sea between the Wadis Arnon and Zared, but which for considerable periods of Moabite history extended well to the N of the Wad Arnon. The plains of Moab consisted of a well watered, productive area along the River Jordan, stretching from the Dead Sea N to the Wadi Nimrin for a distance of some 8 miles.

Albert Barnes: The speeches exhibit a unity of style and character which is strikingly consistent with such circumstances. They are pervaded by the same vein of thought, the same tone and tenor of feeling, the same peculiarities of conception and expression. They exhibit matter which is neither documentary nor traditional, but conveyed in the speaker's own words. Their aim is strictly **hortatory**; their style earnest, heart-stirring, impressive, in passages sublime, but throughout rhetorical; they keep constantly in view the circumstances then present and the crisis

to which the fortunes of Israel had at last been brought. Moses had before him not the men to whom by God's command he delivered the law at Sinai, but the generation following which had grown up in the wilderness.

Charles Ryrie: (*Ryrie Study Bible*)



V. LITERARY FORM AND STRUCTURE:

John MacArthur: Is the structure of Deuteronomy based on the secular treaties of Moses' day? During the last 35 years, many evangelical scholars have supported the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy by appealing to the similarities between the structure of the book and the ancient Near Eastern treaty form of the mid-second millennium B.C. (the approximate time of Moses). These **secular suzerainty treaties** (i.e., a ruler dictating his will to his vassals) followed a set pattern not used in the mid-first millennium B.C. These treaties usually contained the following elements:

- 1) preamble—identifying the parties to the covenant;
- 2) historical prologue—a history of the king's dealing with his vassals;
- 3) general and specific stipulations;
- 4) witnesses;
- 5) blessings and curses; and
- 6) oaths and covenant ratification.

Deuteronomy, it is believed, approximates this basic structure. While there is agreement that **1:1–5** is a preamble, **1:5–4:43** a historical prologue, and **chaps. 27, 28** feature blessings and cursings, there is no consensus as to how the rest of Deuteronomy fits this structure. While there might have been a **covenant renewal** on the plains of Moab, this is neither clearly explicit nor implicit in Deuteronomy. It is best to take the book for what it claims to be: the **explanation of the law** given by Moses for the new generation. The structure follows the speeches given by Moses.

ESV.org: It is a **motivational sermon**, urging Israel’s faithful obedience to the covenant laws given 40 years previously at Sinai (**Exodus 19–40**).

Donald Ackland: The distinctive literary style of Deuteronomy is clearly recognizable. . . It is preaching of the highest order. It deals with the profoundest truths, presented in the noblest oratory, addressed to the experience and needs of the listeners and intended to produce life-changing response.

Bruce Hurt: (*PreceptAustin.org*)

Dt 1:1-4:43	Dt 4:44-26:19			Dt 27:1-34:12			
Moses' First Discourse	Moses' Second Discourse			Moses' Third Discourse			
Historical Review	Legal Exposition			Prophetical Promises			
Looking Back 40 Years	Looking Up What God Expected of Israel			Looking Ahead What God Will Do for Israel			
Recapitulation of Wanderings	Rehearsal of Israel's Law			Ratification of Israel's Covenant	Historical Appendices		
Remembrance of the past	Commandments for the Present			Dt 27:1-30:20 Blessing and Cursing	Dt 31:1-34:12 Death of Moses		
Take Heed Don't forget	Ten Commands	Related Commands		Two Choices Affecting the Future		Moses' Parting Words	
Dt 1:1-4:43 Looking Back	Dt 4:44-11:32 Exposition of Decalogue	Dt 12:1-16:17 Ceremonial Laws	Dt 16:18-20:20 Civil Laws	Dt 21:1-26:19 Social Laws	Dt 27:1-28:68 Ratification of Covenant	Dt 29:1-30:20 Terms of Covenant	Dt 31:1-34:12 Moses' Song, Blessing, Death

Chuck Swindoll:

DEUTERONOMY

WILDERNESS WANDERING	Looking Back	Looking Up	Looking Ahead
	REMEMBER! <u>Failure at Kadesh-barnea</u> <u>Faithfulness of God</u>	REMEMBER! <u>Blessings accompany obedience</u> <u>Compromises weaken distinctives</u> <u>Consequences follow disobedience</u>	REMEMBER! <u>The land is yours; possess it!</u> <u>The Lord is holy; obey Him!</u>
	CHAPTERS 1–4	CHAPTERS 5–26	CHAPTERS 27–34
Location	Everything occurs on the edge of the Promised Land of Canaan.		
Leadership	At the beginning of the book, MOSES is the leader (34:5) by the end of the book, JOSHUA is the leader (1:38; 34:9)		
Time	The sermons recorded in Deuteronomy were first spoken (1:6) then written (31:24) during a period of 40 days (compare Deuteronomy 1:3; 34:8; Joshua 4:19).		
Theme	Remember to love the Lord your God and keep His commandments.		
Key Verses	6:4–9; 10:12–13; 30:19–20		
Christ In Deuteronomy	"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him" (18:15); Moses himself is also a type of Christ.		

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VI. THEOLOGICAL THEMES

Daniel Block: It is within this covenantal context that we may understand the nature and role of **the law** in ancient Israel. According to Deuteronomy, within that relationship obedience to the law is:

- not a burden but a response to the supreme and unique privilege of knowing God’s will (**Deut. 4:6–8**)
- not a precondition to salvation but the grateful response of those who had already been saved (**6:20–25**)
- not primarily a duty imposed by one party on another but an expression of covenant love (**26:16–19**)
- not merely an external act but evidence of the circumcision of one’s heart and the internal disposition of fear of and love for God (**10:12–11:1; 30:6–9**)
- not a pressured response to a tyrant but a willing subordination of one’s entire being to the gracious divine suzerain (**6:4–9; 10:12–13**)

Chuck Swindoll: Moses addressed his words to “*all Israel*” at least twelve times. This phrase emphasized the **nation’s unity**, initiated by their covenant with God at Mount Sinai and forged in the wilderness. In the midst of widespread polytheism, Israel was distinctive in that they **worshipped one God**, Yahweh. Their God was totally unique; there was none other like Him among all the “gods” of the nations surrounding them. **Deuteronomy 6:4** codifies this belief in the Shema, the basic confession of faith in Judaism even today. “*Hear, O Israel! The LORD [Yahweh] is our God, the LORD [Yahweh] is one!*”

John MacArthur: The book of Deuteronomy, along with Psalms and Isaiah, reveals much about the attributes of God. Thus, it is directly quoted over 40 times in the NT (exceeded only by Psalms and Isaiah) with many more allusions to its content. Deuteronomy reveals that the Lord is the only God (**4:39; 6:4**), and that He is jealous (**4:24**), faithful (**7:9**), loving (**7:13**), merciful (**4:31**), yet angered by sin (**6:15**). This is the God who called Israel to Himself. . .

What was **the covenant** made in the land of Moab (**29:1**)? The majority opinion posits this covenant as a renewal of the **Sinaitic Covenant** made nearly 40 years before with the first generation. Here, Moses supposedly updated and renewed this same covenant with the second generation of Israel. The second view sees this covenant as a **Palestinian Covenant** which guarantees the nation of Israel’s right to the land, both at that time and in the future. A third position is that Moses in **chaps. 29, 30** anticipated the **New Covenant**, since he knew Israel would fail to keep the Sinaitic Covenant. The third view seems the best.

Eugene Merrill: Any attempt to deal with Deuteronomy theologically must do so with complete and appropriate attention to its form and its dominant covenant theme. This means that God's revelation of Himself and of other matters must be understood within a covenant context because it is His purpose in the document to represent Himself in a particularized role— Sovereign, Redeemer, covenant-maker, and benefactor.

ESV.org: Key Themes:

- God’s uniqueness (**4:1–40**).
- Israel’s election (**4:37–38; 7:6–8; 10:14–15; 14:2**).
- The land’s goodness (**1:25; 6:10–11; 8:7–13; 11:8–15**).
- God’s faithful promise-keeping (**1:8, 19–46; 7:1–26; 8:1–20; 9:1–10:11**).
- God’s power to defeat the enemies in the land (**2:1–3:11; 4:1–40; 7:1–26**).
- Exhortations to Israel to love, serve, fear, and obey God (**6:5; 10:12–13; 13:4**).
- Warnings against idolatry and instruction for proper worship of God (**4:9–31; 5:6–10; 7:1–5; 8:19–20; 12:1–32; 13:1–18**).
- The impact of God’s laws (**12:1–27:26**).
- Moses’ imminent death (**1:37; 3:26; 4:21; 32:51; 34:1–12**).

J. Sidlow Baxter: A Book of Transition –

Deuteronomy is a book of transition. It marks a transition in a fourfold way. First, it marks the transition to a **new generation**; for with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, and Moses himself, the old generation which came up from Egypt and was numbered at Sinai, had passed away, and a new generation had grown up. Second, it marks the transition to a **new possession**. The wilderness pilgrimage was to give place to the national occupancy of Canaan. Third, it marks the

transition to a **new experience**, to a new life - houses instead of tents, settled habitation instead of wandering, and, instead of the wilderness diet, the milk and honey and corn and wine of Canaan. Fourth, it marks the transition to a **new revelation** of God - the revelation of His love. From Genesis to Numbers the love of God is never spoken of but here, in Deuteronomy, we have the wonderful words: "*Because He loved thy fathers, therefore He chose their seed*" (**Dt 4:37**); "*the Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you because ye were more in number than any people, for ye were the fewest of all people; but because the Lord loved you*" (**Dt 7:7-8**); "*the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them*" (**Dt 10:15**); "*the Lord thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the Lord thy God loved thee*" (**Dt 23:5**).

While speaking of the transitional nature of Deuteronomy, it is interesting to mention that just as the Old Testament begins with five historical books - **Genesis to Deuteronomy**, so the New Testament begins with five historical books - **Matthew to Acts**; and there is a striking parallel between The Acts of the Apostles, the fifth book of the New Testament, and Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Old. The Acts, like Deuteronomy, marks a great transition. It marks the transition from the distinctive message of the "Gospels" to that of the epistles. Like Deuteronomy, it marks the transition to a new generation - a re-generation in Christ. Like Deuteronomy, it marks the transition to a new possession - a spiritual Canaan with "all blessings in the heavenlies, in Christ." Like Deuteronomy, it marks the transition to a new experience - a new birth, a new life, a new dynamic, in the Holy Spirit. Like Deuteronomy, it marks the transition to a new revelation of God - the revelation given in the Church epistles of "*the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God,*" namely, the Church; so that now "*there might be known, by the Church, the manifold wisdom of God*" (**Eph 3:10**).

But what is equally striking is that both Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the one group, and Acts, the fifth book of the other group, are books in which God gives His people a **second chance**. What is Deuteronomy? It is *deuteros nomos*, **the second giving of the Law**. Before the new generation is committed to Joshua's charge, Moses, at God's command, rehearses the Law to them. What is the book of the Acts? It is the second offer of the Kingdom of Heaven to the Jews, first at the capital, to the Jews of the homeland, and then through the empire, to the Jews of the dispersion.

Earl Kalland: God in Deuteronomy is personal, eternal, omnipotent, sovereign, purposeful, loving, holy, and righteous. The knowledge of his person and will is communicated by propositional, directive, exhortative, informative, and predictive revelation. No other God exists, though cognizance is taken of the gods believed in by other nations. The most important element of subjective theology in Deuteronomy is that of the absolutely unqualified, total commitment of the people to the Lord. Nothing less is acceptable. No dissimulation, no assimilation, no syncretism with other gods or religions or religious practices are to be tolerated. The people belong to the Lord alone. He is the absolute – though benevolent – sovereign, whose people uniquely and completely belong to him.

R. K. Harrison: In his hortatory discourses Moses promised Israel that the selfsame power which had wrought a miracle of deliverance at the time of the Exodus, and which had sustained the people through a generation of wilderness wanderings, would continue to undergird them in the promised land provided that the conditions attaching to the covenant agreement were honoured

by the Israelites. To this end Deuteronomy contains positive assurances that God will be with His people continually, alike in prosperity and adversity, and will fight for them in battle as He did at the time of the Exodus from Egypt.

J. Sidlow Baxter: The ruling messages of these five writings of Moses, when taken together, make the Pentateuch a kind of Bible in miniature. In Genesis we have **ruin** through man's sin; in Exodus **redemption** by "blood" and "power"; in Leviticus **communion** on the ground of atonement; in Numbers **direction** by the guiding will of God; in Deuteronomy **destination** through the faithfulness of God. These five books also give us a progressive revelation of God. In Genesis we see the Divine **sovereignty**, in creation and election; in Exodus the Divine **power**, in redemption and emancipation; in Leviticus the Divine **holiness**, in the insistence on separation and sanctification; in Numbers the Divine "**goodness and severity**," in judging the old generation and preserving the new; in Deuteronomy the Divine **faithfulness**, in discipline and destination. We see, therefore, that Deuteronomy, the last of the five, which we are now to consider, is not **merely** the last in order, but the natural and beautiful **completion** of the Pentateuch.

Bob Deffinbaugh:

Israel's Response to What Lies Ahead --

THE FIRST ISSUE: HOW WILL THIS NEW GENERATION OF ISRAELITES RESPOND TO THE DIFFICULTY OF TAKING THE PROMISED LAND FROM THE CANAANITES? This issue was the turning point for the first generation of Israelites, who were terrified by the strength and size of their adversaries (**Numbers 13:26—14:35**). Moses knows full well that the difficulty of their task will be an issue the second generation must deal with as well. . .

THE SECOND ISSUE: THE DANGERS OF CANAANITE IDOLATRY AND IMMORALITY. The second issue facing the Israelites as they are preparing to enter the Promised Land is the temptation posed by the Canaanites' immorality and idolatry. . .

THE THIRD ISSUE: THE DANGERS OF APATHY, PRIDE, AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY. There is yet another serious danger for the Israelites as they prepare to possess the Promised Land of Canaan – that they become smug, arrogant, and self-sufficient. In other words, in their prosperity they will be tempted to forget that God is the source of their blessings and begin to take credit themselves. . .

Conclusion

The Book of Deuteronomy concludes with the "song of Moses" in **chapter 32**, a blessing pronounced by Moses (**chapter 33**), and a description of the death of Moses (**chapter 34**). One might conclude that the Book of Deuteronomy ends in a very depressing way. Even before the Israelites have set foot in the Promised Land, they are told that they will fail and that they will be cast out of the land. Where is the "good news" in all of this? Consider the following truths that we find in the Book of Deuteronomy.

First, God has given man a choice to serve God and live, or to disobey and die. . .

Second, the Book of Deuteronomy makes it clear that, left to himself, man can never merit God's

blessings on the basis of law-keeping. The problem with man is that he is fallen and he does not have a heart to serve God. . .

Third, the Israelites, left to themselves, will only bring divine judgment upon themselves. . .

Fourth, Israel's blessings will only come to pass on the basis of God's grace and His faithfulness to His covenant promises. . .

No wonder the Book of Deuteronomy is so often quoted in the New Testament. It foretells the history of the nation Israel. It lays the foundation for the gospel message. It calls upon men and women to trust in God and to obey His Word. It points to the salvation which Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah, will bring.

Moses called upon the second generation of Israelites to enter into a covenant relationship with God, just as the first generation had done. New Testament saints do not live under the old covenant, but rather under the new, but we must embrace the New Covenant in order to enter into its blessings. This we do by faith in Jesus Christ. In our church, we celebrate and remember the New Covenant each week by the celebration of the Lord's Table (communion). . .

The Book of Deuteronomy reminds us that every generation must enter into a covenant relationship with God. It is not enough that your mother or father trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation; you must personally embrace Christ's work on the cross of Calvary for the forgiveness of your sins, and for the gift of eternal life. If you have not done so, I urge you to do it this very moment. Simply acknowledge your sins, and that Jesus Christ bore the penalty for your sins on the cross of Calvary. Believe that God raised Him from the dead, and that in Him, and Him alone, you have eternal life. This choice is a simple one, but it is a matter of life and death.
<https://bible.org/seriespage/13-israel-s-covenant-renewal-deuteronomy>

Thomas Constable: One of the striking features of this book is the frequent references to **love** that recur throughout it. God's love for the patriarchs, and later the whole nation of Israel, is obvious in the previous four books of the Pentateuch, but Moses never articulated it directly. In Deuteronomy, for the first time, Moses revealed that it was God's love for Israel that motivated Him to deal with the Israelites as He had. One of the great revelations of this book is the motivation of God: God's love for people moved Him to bless. Moses referred to God's love for people as the motivation of His government in three of the book's major sections:

The explanation of God's love constitutes the climax of Moses' first address to the people (**1:6—4:40**), in which he reviewed God's faithfulness to the Israelites. It was because God loved them that He had treated them as He had (**4:32-40**, esp. v. 37).

In the second address, which is an exposition of the Mosaic Law (**chs. 5—26**), Moses explained that God's love motivated His laws (**7:7-11; 10:12-22**, esp. v. 15; **15:16; 23:5**; et al.).

In the conclusion of the book, which records Moses' blessing of the nation (**ch. 33**), he again reminded the people of God's love for them (**33:2-5**, esp. v. 3a).

Not only does Deuteronomy reveal that God's love is what motivates Him to govern His people as He does, but it also emphasizes that man's love for God should be what motivates His people to obey God (cf. **1 John 4:19**). This theme too recurs throughout the book:

In Moses' review of the law (**chs. 5—26**), he called on the Israelites to love God (**5:9-10; 6:4-5; 7:9; 10:12-13; 11:1, 13-14, 22-23; 13:1-13**, esp. vv. **1-3; 19:8-9**). The Israelites' obedience to God's laws expressed their love for God. Love is the most proper and adequate motivation for obedience and service.

We hear this theme again in Moses' third address (**chs. 29—30**), in which Moses exhorted the new generation of Israelites to obey their covenant, the Mosaic Covenant (**30:6, 15-20**).

The message of the book, then, is: **God's love for people motivates Him to bless His people, and our love for God should motivate us to obey Him.**

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Deuteronomy.html>

Practical Application: The book of Deuteronomy underscores the **importance of God's Word**. It is a vital part of our lives. Although we are no longer under the Old Testament law, we are still responsible to submit to the will of God in our lives. Simple obedience brings blessing, and sin has its own consequences.

None of us is “above the law.” Even Moses, the leader and prophet chosen by God, was required to obey. The reason that he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land was that he disobeyed the Lord's clear command (**Numbers 20:13**).

During the time of His testing in the wilderness, Jesus quoted from the book of Deuteronomy three times (**Matthew 4**). In so doing, Jesus illustrated for us the necessity of hiding God's Word in our hearts that we might not sin against Him (**Psalms 119:11**).

As Israel remembered God's faithfulness, so should we. The crossing of the Red Sea, the holy presence at Sinai, and the blessing of manna in the desert should be an encouragement to us as well. A great way to keep going forward is to take some time to look back and see what God has done.

We also have a beautiful picture in Deuteronomy of a loving God Who desires a relationship with His children. The Lord names love as the reason that He brought Israel out of Egypt “with a mighty hand” and redeemed them (**Deuteronomy 7:7-9**). What a wonderful thing to be free from the bondage of sin and loved by an all-powerful God!

OUTLINE OF DEUTERONOMY

CHOOSE LIFE

BIG IDEA:

**BASED ON GOD'S DEMONSTRATED FAITHFULNESS,
TAKE POSSESSION OF GOD'S PROMISES AND THEIR ASSOCIATED
BLESSINGS BY CHOOSING LIFE IN LOVING THE LORD AND
OBEYING HIS COMMANDS**

(1:1-8) INTRODUCTION AND INITIAL CHARGE: POSSESS THE LAND -- AN UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S COVENANT REQUIREMENTS PREPARES ISRAEL TO CROSS THE JORDAN AND TAKE POSSESSION OF THE PROMISED LAND

A. (:1-5) Introduction to the Book of Deuteronomy

1. (:1-2) Geographical Setting for the Final Messages of Moses
 - a. (:1) The Staging Area for Entering the Promised Land
 - b. (:2) The Shameful Delay of 40 Years for an 11 Day Journey
2. (:3-4) Historical Setting for the Final Messages of Moses
 - a. (:3) Marked by Specific Calendar Reference
 - b. (:4) Marked by Encouraging Military Accomplishments
3. (:5) Thematic Focus of the Final Messages of Moses: Explaining and Applying God's Revealed Covenant Requirements in Preparation for Taking Possession of the Land

B. (:6-8) Initial Charge to Take Possession of the Land

(:6a) Authority of Divine Revelation

1. (:6b-7) Finish the Journey
 - a. (:6b) No More Delay
 - b. (:7) Time to Move Out and Engage with the Inhabitants of the Promised Land
2. (:8) Fulfil the Divine Mission to Take Possession of the Promised Land
 - a. Casting the Vision
 - b. Command to Take Possession of the Promised Land
 - c. Covenant Promise

I. (1:9-4:43) MOSES' FIRST SPEECH: HISTORICAL PROLOGUE IN PREPARATION TO CROSS THE JORDAN AND TAKE POSSESSION OF THE PROMISED LAND

A. (1:9-18) Preparing for Conquest by Establishing Delegated Leadership Structure -- Qualified Leaders Share the Load and Adjudicate Justice

1. (:9-12) Calling Attention to His Unsustainable Leadership Burden --
The Need for Organizational Structure and Shared Leadership
 - a. (:9) Leadership In Isolation Can Become Especially Burdensome

- b. (:10-11) Growth Creates the Need for Shared Leadership
 - 1) (:10) Evaluating the Blessing of Past Growth
 - 2) (:11) Anticipating the Compounding of Future Growth
- c. (:12) People Problems Contribute to the Burden of Isolated Leadership
- 2. (:13-15) Choosing Qualified Leaders –
The Process of Appointing Capable Leaders to Put that Structure in Place
 - a. (:13) Essential Leadership Qualifications
 - b. (:14) Endorsement of Shared Leadership
 - c. (:15) Elevation of Qualified Leaders
- 3. (:16-18) Charging Judges –
The Key Factors in Administering Justice
 - (:16a) Charge to the Judges Introduced
 - a. (:16b) Judge Righteously
 - b. (:17a) Judge without Partiality
 - c. (:17b) Judge without Pressure or Intimidation
 - d. (:17c) Judge within the Scope of Your Limitations
 - (:18) Charge to the Judges

B. (1:19 – 2:1) History Lesson: Israel’s Earlier Disobedience Regarding Taking Possession of the Land – Israel’s Disobedience Flies in the Face of God’s Faithfulness and Assurances

- 1. (1:19-33) History Lessons Can Be Painful But Necessary
 - a. (:19-21) The Historical Challenge to Trust God and Possess the Land
 - 1) (:19) Command to Journey to Kadesh-barnea Obeyed
 - 2) (:20-21) Charge to Take the Promised Land
 - b. (:22-33) The Historical Failure of Disbelief and Fear
 - 1) (:22-25) Reconnaissance Mission
 - 2) (:26-28) Rebellion Resulted
 - 3) (:29-31) Reassurance Attempted
 - 4) (:32-33) Rejection of the Lord Despite His Demonstrated Faithfulness, Guidance and Power
- 2. (1:36-40) Disbelief and Rebellion Have Consequences
 - a. (:34-36) Evil Generation Judged Except for Caleb
 - b. (:37-38) Moses Judged but Joshua Elevated
 - 1) (:37) Moses Judged
 - 2) (:38) Joshua Elevated
 - c. (:39) Younger Generation Promised Possession of the Land
 - d. (:40) Moses Dispatched to Wilderness Delay
- 3. (1:41 – 2:1) Presumption and Self-Confidence Can Never be Substituted for Genuine Faith and Obedience
 - a. (:41) Presumption and Self Confidence
 - b. (:42-44) Defeat and Retreat
 - 1) (:42) Clear Warning
 - 2) (:43) Costly Rebellious Presumption
 - 3) (:44) Crushing Defeat
 - c. (:45-46) Remorse and Stagnation
 - 1) (:45) Remorse
 - 2) (:46) Stagnation
 - d. (2:1) Transition – Aimless Wandering of Delay Due to God’s Judgment

C. (2:2-23) Travel Instructions – In Their Journey to Their Own Promised Land, Israel Must Respect the Sovereign Lands of Edom, Moab and Ammon

1. (:2-8) Crossing the Land of Edom
 - (:2) Divine Revelation
 - a. (:3-5) Travel Instructions and Warning
 - 1) (:3-4a) Travel Instructions
 - 2) (:4b-5) Warning
 - b. (:6-7) Providential Provision
 - 1) (:6) Acquisition of Food and Water
 - 2) (:7) Acknowledgment of God's Provision
 - c. (:8) Travel Report
2. (:9-15) Crossing the Land of Moab
 - (:9a) Divine Revelation
 - a. (:9b) Warning
 - b. (:10-12) Historical Background
 - c. (:13) Travel Instructions and Report
 - 1) Travel Instructions
 - 2) Travel Report
 - d. (:14-15) Review of Wilderness Period
 - 1) (:14a) Duration
 - 2) (:14b-15) Disciplinary Purpose
3. (:16-25) Bypassing the Land of Ammon
 - (:16-17) Generational Transition
 - a. (:18-19) Travel Instructions and Warning
 - 1) (:18) Travel Instructions
 - 2) (:19) Warning
 - b. (:20-23) Historical Background

D. (2:24 – 3:11) Conquest of Transjordanian Amorite Kings (Sihon & Og) – God Grants Victory as His People Fight the Battles to Possess the Promised Land

1. (2:24-37) Defeat of Sihon, King of Heshbon
 - a. (:24-25) Commissioning to Target Sihon, King of Heshbon, and His Land
 - 1) (:24a) Divine Travel Instructions
 - 2) (:24b) Divine Gift that Must be Seized
 - 3) (:25) Divine Intimidation that Weakens the Opposition
 - b. (:26-31) Conflict with Sihon Escalates
 - 1) (:26-29) Attempt at Peaceful Diplomacy
 - 2) (:30) Antagonism from Stubborn Sihon
 - 3) (:31) Advance Towards Occupation and Conquest
 - c. (:32-37) Conquest of Sihon Accomplished
 - 1) (:32-36) Scope of the Conquest
 - 2) (:37) Sheltered from the Conquest -- Restraint Shown to the Ammonites
2. (3:1-7) Defeat of Og, King of Bashan
 - a. (:1) Conflict Engaged with Og, King of Bashan
 - b. (:2) Confidence Based on Prior Conquest
 - c. (:3-7) Comprehensive Conquest
 - 1) (:3) All the People
 - 2) (:4-6) All the Cities

- 3) (:7) All the Booty
- (:8-11) Summary and Anecdotal Footnote
 - a. (:8-10) Summary of Both Conquests
 - b. (:11) Anecdotal Footnote

E. (3:12-29) Final Preparations for Crossing the Jordan – Resolving Issues of Reward, Responsibility, Rulership and Rationalization Prepared God’s People to Move Forward in Their Mission of Conquest

- 1. (:12-17) Issue of Reward (Inheritance) –
Distribution of the Possessed Land in Transjordan
 - (:12a) Possession of the Land -- Distribution of the Land:
 - a. (:12b) To the Reubenites and Gadites
 - b. (:13) To Manasseh
 - c. (:14) To Jair, the Son of Manasseh
 - d. (:15) To Machir
 - e. (:16-17) To the Reubenites and Gadites
- 2. (:18-20) Issue of Responsibility (Unity) –
Crossing Over the Jordan in Solidarity to Conquest the Promised Land
 - a. (:18a) Realized Possession of the Land West of the Jordan
 - b. (:18b-20) Responsibility for Fighting for Anticipated Possession of the Land East of the Jordan
 - 1) (:18b) Leading the Charge
 - 2) (:19-20) Securing Your Women, Children and Livestock
- 3. (:21-22) Issue of Rulership (Leadership) –
Charge to Joshua to Maintain Confidence in the Lord Who Fights for Israel
 - a. (:21) Confidence Based on Past Experience of Conquests Directed by the Lord
 - b. (:22) Confidence Based on the Lord’s Continuing Presence and Dominion
- 4. (:23-28) Issue of Rationalization (Request) –
Denial of Moses’ Petition to Cross the Jordan River and See the Good Land
 - a. (:23-25) Prayer of Moses
 - 1) (:23) Intensity of His Prayer
 - 2) (:24a) Invocation
 - 3) (:24b) Praise for God’s Demonstrated Power
 - 4) (:25) Petition
 - b. (:26-28) Denial by the Lord
 - 1) (:26) Response of Anger
 - 2) (:27) Response of Consolation
 - 3) (:28) Response of Leadership Transition
- (:29) Epilogue – Geographical Marker

F. (4:1-40) Covenant Faithfulness – Obedience to God’s Revelation – Life in the Land Depends on Covenant Faithfulness as the Uniqueness of Israel Responds to the Uniqueness of Their God

- (:1) Opening Challenge – Listen / Live / Locate
 - a. Listen to God’s Revealed Code of Laws
 - b. Live According to Moses’ Teaching of God’s Commands
 - c. Locate in the Promised Land which God has Gifted to You to Conquest

- (:2-8) Prologue – The Uniqueness of Israel
 - a. (:2-4) Israel’s Unique Privileges Heighten Her Responsibility
 - 1) (:2) Responsible to Maintain the Integrity of God’s Revealed Law
 - 2) (:3-4) Responsible to Maintain Covenant Loyalty
 - b. (:5-8) Israel’s Unique Privileges Should Motivate Obedience
 - 1) (:5-6) Resolve to Obey
 - 2) (:7-8) Reminder of Israel’s Unique Privileges
- 1. (:9-14) The Grace of Covenant Past: The Origins of Yahweh’s Covenant with Israel
 - a. (:9) Historical Experience of God’s Faithfulness
 - Must Keep You Anchored and
 - Must Inform Succeeding Generations
 - b. (:10-13) Historical Revelation of the Fundamental Covenant Principles
 - 1) (:10) Epic Experience at Horeb
 - 2) (:11) Visual Experience of Seeing the Fire and Cloud of God’s Presence
 - 3) (:12) Auditory Experience of Hearing God’ Voice
 - 4) (:13) Declared and Recorded Revelation of the Covenant
 - c. (:14) Historical Commission to Teach Covenant Faithfulness
- 2. (:15-24) The Grace of Covenant Present: The Essence of Yahweh’s Covenant with Israel
 - a. (:15-19) Avoid Idolatry
 - 1) (:15-18) The Covenant Relationship Must Not Attempt to Contain or Limit God (No Graven Images)
 - 2) (:19) The Covenant Relationship Must Not Worship the Creation
 - b. (:20) Appreciate Redemption
 - c. (:21-24) Appropriate the Promised Land
 - 1) (:21-22a) Blessing Withheld from Moses
 - 2) (:22) Blessing Realized by Present Generation
 - 3) (:23) Beware Not to Fall into Idolatry
 - 4) (:24) Beware of Offending God’s Jealousy
- 3. (:25-31) The Grace of Covenant Future: The Permanence of the Covenant
 - a. (:25) Future Covenant Breaking
 - b. (:26-28) Future Land Banishment
 - 1) (:26) Slaughter
 - 2) (:27) Scattering
 - 3) (:28) Servitude
 - c. (:29-31) Faithfulness of God Persists When You Repent
 - 1) (:29) Seeking and Finding God
 - 2) (:30) Returning to God and Obeying Him
 - 3) (:31) Three Evidences of God’s Enduring Compassion
- (:32-39) Epilogue – Uniqueness of Israel’s God
 - a. (:32-35) Investigation of God’s Uniqueness
 - 1) (:32a) Historical and Universal Investigation of God’s Uniqueness
 - 2) (:32b-34) Four Rhetorical Questions Investigating God’s Uniqueness
 - 3) (:35) Intent of the Investigation of God’s Uniqueness
 - b. (:36-38) Demonstration of God’s Uniqueness
 - 1) (:36) Personally Experiencing -- Hearing and Seeing
 - 2) (:37-38) Personally Benefiting

- c. (:39) Assurance of God's Uniqueness
- (:40) Closing Challenge – Obey / Prosper / Persevere
 - a. Obey
 - b. Prosper
 - c. Persevere

G. (4:41-43) Historical Interlude – Three TransJordanian Cities of Refuge – Moses Implements a Legal System in the Newly Acquired TransJordanian Territory that Combines Mercy and Justice

- 1. (:41) Designation of the TransJordanian Cities of Refuge
 - a. Designated Cities
 - b. Designated Territory
- 2. (:42) Purpose of the TransJordanian Cities of Refuge
 - a. Destination for a Manslayer
 - b. Definition of a Manslayer
 - c. Destiny of a Manslayer
- 3. (:43) Location of the TransJordanian Cities of Refuge
 - a. Bezer
 - b. Ramoth
 - c. Golan

II. (4:44 – 26:19) MOSES' SECOND SPEECH – COVENANT STIPULATIONS

A. (4:44–11:32) General Covenant Stipulations

- 1. (4:44-49) Introduction to Moses' Second Address – Proclamation of the Law in Preparation to Cross the Jordan
 - a. (:44-45) Substance of the Message
 - 1) (:44) Summarized as the Law
 - 2) (:45) Detailed as the Testimonies, Statutes and Ordinances
 - b. (:46-49) Setting of the Message
 - 1) (:46a) General Location
 - 2) (:46b-47) Great Initial Victories
 - 3) (:48-49) Geographic Boundaries
- 2. (5:1-33) The Foundational Ten Commandments – The Exposition of Israel's Covenantal Relationship Begins with the Foundation of the Ten Commandments
 - (:1-5) Prologue – Summons to Obey the Law Based on the Historical Establishment of the Covenant
 - 1) (:1) Responsibility to Obey the Law
 - 2) (:2-3) Reflection on the Establishment of the Covenant
 - 3) (:4-5) Reinforcement by the Fearsome Experience of God's Glorious Presence
 - a. (:6-21) Ten Commandments (Ten Words)
 - (:6) Foundation: You Owe Exclusive Loyalty to the God of Your Redemption
 - 1) (:7) #1 – No Other Gods
 - 2) (:8-10) #2 – No Idolatry
 - 3) (:11) #3 – Don't Take the Name of the Lord in Vain
 - 4) (:12-15) #4 – Observe the Sabbath

- a) (:12) Statement of the Command
 - b) (:13-14) Explanation of the Command
 - c) (:15) Motivation for the Command
 - 5) (:16) #5 – Honor Father and Mother
 - 6) (:17) #6 – Don't Murder
 - 7) (:18) #7 – Don't Commit Adultery
 - 8) (:19) #8 – Don't Steal
 - 9) (:20) #9 – Don't Bear False Witness
 - 10) (:21) #10 – Don't Covet
 - b. (:22-27) Revelation Demands a Response – Desire for Moses to Serve as Mediator
 - 1) (:22) Revelation from God
 - a) Spoken Word of God
 - b) Sufficient Word of God
 - c) Written Word of God
 - 2) (:23-27) Response of the People
 - a) (:23) Motivated by Fear
 - b) (:24) Overwhelmed by God's Presence
 - c) (:25-26) Afraid of Being Consumed
 - d) (:27) Requesting that Moses Serve as a Mediating Buffer
 - c. (:28-33) Mediatorial Role of Moses
 - 1) (:28-29) Recognition of the Response of the People
 - 2) (:30-31) Reinforcement of the Mediatorial Role of Moses
 - a) (:30) Dismissing the People
 - b) (:31) Delivering Instructions to Moses to Communicate to the People
 - 3) (:32-33) Reiterated Exhortation
 - a) (:32-33a) Charge to Obey God's Law
 - b) (:33b) Consequences of Obedience
3. (6:1-9) Fundamental Truth and Expression of the Covenant Relationship – Covenant Commitment Must be Wholeheartedly Lived Out and Propagated to Future Generations
- (:1-3) Prologue – The Intent of the Covenant Commitment
 - 1) (:1) Obedience Ensures Possession of the Land
 - 2) (:2) Fear of the Lord Ensures Prosperity and Long Life in the Land
 - 3) (:3) Obedience Ensures Multiplication in the Promised Land of Prosperity
 - a. (:4) Fundamental Truth of the Covenant Relationship
 - b. (:5) Fundamental Expression of the Covenant Relationship
 - c. (:6-9) Faithful Propagation of the Covenant Commitment to Future Generations
 - 1) (:6) Internal Appropriation
 - 2) (:7) Family Indoctrination
 - 3) (:8) Public Representation
 - 4) (:9) Entranceway Representation
4. (6:10-25) Protecting Future Generations Against Abandoning Devotion to God – Both Prosperity and Hardship Can Tempt God's People to Forget the Historical Experience of Redemption so Protect Future Generations with Historical Instruction

- a. (:10-19) Preparation for Facing Future Temptation
 - 1) (:10-11) Delight in God's Grace –
 - Description of the Rich Blessing of the Promised Land
 - a) (:10a) Fulfillment of the Covenant Promise to the Patriarchs
 - b) (:10b-11a) Facilitated by God's Grace Rather than Israel's Labors
 - c) (:11b) Fulfillment of Your Appetites
 - 2) (:12-15) Deal with the Danger of Forgetting God = Tempted by Prosperity
 - a) (:12) Guard Yourself
 - b) (:13-14) Fear God Alone
 - c) (:15a) Don't Provoke God to Jealousy
 - d) (:15b) Don't Stir Up God's Anger
 - 3) (:16) Deal with the Danger of Testing God = Tempted by Hardship
 - 4) (:17-19) Direct Subsequent Generations to Keep Obeying God
 - a) (:17-18a) Obedience Pleases the Lord
 - b) (:18b-19) Obedience Prospers the Nation
- b. (:20-25) Propagation of Covenant Responsibility to Succeeding Generations
 - 1) (:20-23) Testify to the Historical Rationale for Obedience
 - a) (:20) Capitalize on Teaching Moments with Your Children
 - b) (:21-23) Connect the Experience of Past Redemption to Present Prosperity
 - 2) (:24-25) Teach Obedience as the Privileged Response of Redemption
 - a) (:24) Purpose of God's Commands = Our Good
 - b) (:25) Performance of God's Commands = Righteousness for Us

5. (7:1-26) Chosen to be a Holy Treasured Possession –
 Election Defines Our Identity as God's Treasured Possession (Involving Countless Blessings) and Orients Us towards Holiness (Requiring the Purging of God's Enemies)

- a. (:1-5) The Battle of Election is for Holiness and Obedience
 - 1) (:1-2) Destroy (Cut off) the Occupying Idolatrous Nations
 - a) (:1) Mighty Activity of God in Clearing Away the Nations
 - b) (:2) Military Activity of the Israelites in Destroying the Nations
 - 2) (:3-4) Forbid the Seductive Temptation of Mixed Marriages
 - a) (:3) Categorical Prohibition
 - b) (:4a) Cause of Perversion and Idolatry
 - c) (:4b) Catastrophic Judgment Prevented
 - 3) (:5) Destroy (Cut Off) Everything Facilitating Idolatry
- (:6) Key Verse – Election Defines Our Identity as God's Treasured Possession and Orients Us towards Holiness
 - 1) Holiness
 - 2) Election
 - 3) Treasured Possession
- b. (:7-11) The Basis of Election is God's Choice and Faithfulness
 - 1) (:7-8) God's Choice of Israel

- a) (:7) Negatively Stated – Not Based on any Merit
 - b) (:8) Positively Stated – Based on God’s Love and Faithfulness
 - 2) (:9-10) God’s Faithfulness
 - a) (:9) Lovingkindness towards Those Who Keep His Covenant
 - b) (:10) Destruction towards Those Who Hate Him
 - 3) (:11) Exhortation to Obey
 - c. (:12-26) The Blessing of Election is a Transformed Identity as God’s Treasured Possession
 - 1) (:12-16) Provision of Blessing Conditioned on Obedience
 - a) (:12-13) General Summary of the Link between Obedience and Blessing
 - b) (:14-16) Extension of God’s Blessing
 - 2) (:17-26) Promises that Should Combat Doubts and Fears
 - a) (:17) Problem that Gives Rise to Doubts
 - b) (:18-24) Promises that Should Alleviate Fear
 - c) (:25-26) Prohibition that Should Protect Holiness
6. (8:1-20) Remember and Don’t Forget – Remembering God’s Faithfulness in Tough Times (The Wilderness) Should Guard against Forgetting God in Prosperous Times so that We Obey Rather than Perish
- a. (:1-10) Remember and Obey and Live in the Good Land
 - 1) (:1-6) God’s Faithfulness in Tough Times Should Prompt Obedience
 - a) (:1) Exhortation to Obedience
 - b) (:2-5) Remembering God’s Faithfulness in Tough Times
 - c) (:6) Exhortation to Obedience
 - 2) (:7-10) God’s Blessing of Prosperity Should Prompt Thanksgiving
 - a) (:7-9) Blessing of Prosperity
 - b) (:10) Response of Thanksgiving
 - b. (:11-20) Don’t Forget and Disobey and Perish
 - 1) (:11-17) Warning against Forgetting God
 - a) (:11) Forgetting God Manifests Itself in Disobeying His Commands
 - b) (:12-14) Forgetting God Responds to Prosperity with Pride Instead of Thanksgiving
 - c) (:15-17) Forgetting God Manifests Itself in Prideful Self Confidence Instead of Humble Dependence on God
 - 2) (:18) Exhortation to Remember God’s Faithfulness
 - 3) (:19-20) Warning against Forgetting God
7. (9:1 – 10:11) Refutation of Self Righteousness – Surprising Persistence of Covenant Privileges – Despite Israel’s History of Provoking the Lord to Anger Covenant Privileges Persist
- a. (9:1-6) Covenant Privileges Not Based on Israel’s Merit
 - 1) (:1-3) Guarantee of Conquering Superior Foes in the Land = Major Covenant Privilege
 - a) (9:1-2) Superior Foes Must be Defeated to Possess the Land
 - b) (9:3) Subdued by God in Order to be Defeated by Israel
 - 2) (:4-6) Gift of the Land Not Based on Israel’s Righteousness
 - a) (9:4-5a) Refutation of National Pride or Claiming Credit –

- Nations Deserve Defeat Due to Wickedness
 - b) (:5b) Reason for Giving Israel the Land
 - c) (9:6) Reality of Israel's Stubbornness in Provoking God – Israel Does Not Deserve Victory
- b. (9:7-24) Covenant Privileges Surprising in Light of Israel's History of Provoking the Lord
 - (:7) Introduction to Israel's History of Provoking the Lord
 - 1) (9:8-21) Provoking the Lord at Horeb – Requiring Intercession of Moses
 - a) (:8-14) Anger of the Lord
 - b) (:15-21) Actions of Moses in Response
 - 2) (:22) Provoking the Lord on Multiple Occasions
 - 3) (:23) Provoking the Lord at Kadesh-Barnea
 - (:24) Summary of Israel's History of Provoking the Lord – Requiring Intercession of Moses
- c. (9:25 - 10:11) Covenant Privileges and Conquest Mission Persist Due to God's Grace, Power and Faithfulness
 - 1) (9:25-29) Intercession of Moses to Maintain Covenant Privileges – Based on 4 Arguments
 - (:25-26a) Intercession of Moses Introduced
 - a) (:26b) Argument #1 – Redemption Cannot End in Destruction – Emphasis on God's Power
 - b) (:27) Argument #2 -- Remember the Believing Patriarchs – Emphasis on God's Mercy
 - c) (:28) Argument #3 -- Reputation of the Lord at Stake – Emphasis on God's Faithfulness
 - d) (:29) Argument #4 -- Relationship Commitment as God's Inheritance – Emphasis on God's Power
 - 2) (10:1-5) Covenant Renewed
 - a) (:1-3) Preparations Commanded and Completed
 - b) (:4) Ten Commandments Inscribed on the New Tablets
 - c) (:5) Two Tablets Placed in the Ark of the Covenant
 - 3) (10:6-9) Aside: Death of Aaron and Role of the Levites
 - a) (:6-7) Death of Aaron and Succession of Eleazar
 - b) (:8-9) Role of the Levites
 - 4) (:10:10-11) Conquest Mission Initiated
 - a) (:10) Destruction Averted
 - b) (:11) Destination Pursued
- 8. (10:12 – 11:1) Pledging Allegiance to the God of the Covenant – Times of Transition Require a Renewed Pledge to Total Allegiance to the God of the Covenant
 - (:10:12a) Covenant Question
 - a. (10:12b-13) Covenant Requirements – Comprehensive Nature of Our Allegiance to God
 - 1) Fear the Lord – Reverence
 - 2) Walk in All His Ways – Lifestyle
 - 3) Love Him – Priority
 - 4) Serve the Lord Wholeheartedly -- Worship
 - 5) Obey the Lord – Submission and Dependence

- b. (10:14-15) Covenant Motivation = Sovereign and Gracious Election – Privilege of Our Allegiance to God
 - 1) (:14) Transcendent Dominion of God
 - 2) (:15) Sovereign and Gracious Election of Israel
 - c. (10:16-19) Covenant Goal = Impartial Justice and Love – Radical Nature of Our Allegiance to God
 - 1) (:16) Transformation of the Heart Required
 - 2) (:17-18) Transcendent Attributes of the Supreme God Set the Standard
 - a) (:17a) Personal Majesty
 - b) (:17b-18) Practical Righteousness = Impartial Justice and Love
 - 3) (:19) Take Care of the Aliens
 - d. (10:20 – 11:1) Covenant Requirements Repeated – Comprehensive Nature of Our Allegiance to God
 - 1) (10:20a) Fear the Lord
 - 2) (10:20b) Serve Him
 - 3) (10:20c) Cling to Him
 - 4) (10:20d) Swear by His Name
 - (10:21-22) Motivation
 - a) (:21) Covenant Relationship
 - b) (:22) Covenant Blessing
 - 6) (11:1a) Love the Lord
 - 7) (:11:1b) Obey the Lord
9. (11:2-32) Loyalty Test = Key to Possessing the Promised Land – Choosing Obedience, Love and Loyalty to God Ensures the Blessing of Possessing the Promised Land
- a. (:2-7) Lessons from History – Reviewing the Mighty Acts of God
 - 1) (:2) Extolling the Personal Attributes of God
 - 2) (:3-6) Extolling the Powerful Actions of God
 - a) (:3) Deliverance from Pharaoh in the Exodus
 - b) (:4) Deliverance from Egypt’s Army in the Crossing of the Red Sea
 - c) (:5) Discipline of Israel in the Wilderness
 - d) (:6) Destruction of the Rebellious Ringleaders Dathan and Abiram
 - 3) (:7) Eyewitness Confirmation of the Mighty Acts of God
 - b. (:8-12) Land Assessment – Remarkable Land Watched Over by the Lord
 - 1) (:8-9) Charge to Obey and Possess the Land
 - a) (:8a) Priority of Absolute Obedience
 - b) (:8b) Possession of the Land Requires the Strength Derived from Obedience
 - c) (:9a) Prolonging Your Days is the Added Benefit
 - d) (:9b) Productivity of the Land is Unsurpassed
 - 2) (:10-12) Comparison of the Promised Land to the Land of Egypt
 - a) (:10) Land of Egypt Required Difficult Human Cultivation
 - b) (:11-12) Promised Land is Cultivated by the Lord
 - c. (:13-17) Loyalty Test Presented
 - 1) (:13-15) Promise of Blessing, Prosperity and Life
 - a) (:13) Response of Love and Loyalty

- b) (:14-15) Reward of Productivity and Prosperity in the Land
 - 2) (:16-17) Warning of Cursing, Adversity and Death
 - a) (:16) Perversion of Apostasy and Idolatry
 - b) (:17) Punishment of Adversity and Banishment from the Land
- d. (:18-25) Legacy of Faithful Propagation of God's Word Yields Victory in Conquesting the Land
 - 1) (:18-21) Legacy of Faithful Propagation of God's Word
 - a) (:18-20) Methodology of Faithfully Propagating God's Word
 - b) (:21) Benefits of Faithfully Propagating God's Word
 - 2) (:22-25) Yields Victory in Conquesting the Land
 - a) (:22) Condition of Obedience, Love and Loyalty
 - b) (:23-25) Claim to Victory in Possessing the Land
- e. (:26-32) Loyalty Test Finalized
 - 1) (:26-28) Decision Time Today -- Two Options: Blessing or Cursing
 - a) (:26) The Choice
 - b) (:27) The Blessing
 - c) (:28) The Curse
 - 2) (:29-32) Decision Time Restaged – Same Two Options: Blessing or Cursing
 - a) (:29) Symbolism of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal
 - b) (:30) Significant Location of the Two Mountains
 - c) (:31-32) Strategic Moment

B (12:1–26:19) Specific Covenant Stipulations

1. (12:1 – 16:17) Stipulations Regarding Worship and Religious Ceremony
 - a. (12:1-32) The Centralization of Worship – Entering the Promised Land Provides the Transition to Centralized Worship along with the Freedom to Eat Meat Locally
 - (:1) Prologue – Covenant Obedience = Key to Possessing the Land
 - 1) (:2-7) Mandate Centralized Worship for Offering Your Sacrifices and Celebrating Your Major Feasts
 - a) (:2-3) Destroy False Worship Sites and Objects
 - 1)) (:2) Destroy False Worship Sites
 - 2)) (:3) Destroy False Worship Objects
 - b) (:4-5) Centralize Your Worship at the One Place God Has Chosen
 - 1)) (:4) Reject the Idolatrous Worship Practices of the Canaanites
 - 2)) (:5) Embrace the Lord's Prescription for Worship
 - c) (:6-7) Offer Your Sacrifices and Celebrate the Feasts in the Presence of the Lord
 - 1)) (:6) Offer Your Sacrifices as Prescribed by the Lord
 - 2)) (:7) Celebrate Your Feasts with Joy and Thanksgiving
 - 2) (:8-12) Manage the Transition to Implementing Centralized Worship in the Promised Land
 - a) (:8-9) Inherit the Land with the Goal of Implementing God's Worship Plan

- 1)) (:8) Reject Any Human-Devised System of Worship
 - 2)) (:9) Embrace the Divinely Ordained System of Worship to be Practiced in the Promised Land
 - b) (:10-11) Implement God's Worship Plan Once You Live in the Land
 - 1)) (:10) God is Providing the Land for Your Rest and Security
 - 2)) (:11) God is Ordaining the Place for His Name to Dwell for the Focus of Worship
 - c) (:12) Include Your Entire Community in Your Joyful Worship Celebrations
- 3) (:13-14) Maintain God's Program of Centralized Worship
 - a) (:13) Stay on Track in Your Worship
 - b) (:14) Stick to the God-ordained Script
- 4) (:15-27) Meat Eating Allowed Locally
 - a) (:15-16) Freedom to Slaughter and Eat Meat Locally
 - 1)) (:15) Concession to Allow Local Slaughter and Eating of Meat
 - 2)) (:16) Caveat Regarding Not Eating the Blood
 - b) (:17-19) Forbidding of Local Consumption of Items Associated with Worship
 - 1)) (:17) Specification of Items Not Appropriate for Local Consumption
 - 2)) (:18) Sanctifying the Centralization of Worship
 - 3)) (:19) Special Focus on Providing for the Levites
 - c) (:20) Fondness for Eating Meat
 - d) (:21-25) Freedom of Eating Non-sacrificial Meat Locally
 - 1)) (:21) Accommodation for Distance from Worship Center
 - 2)) (:22) Authorization of Eating Gazelle or Deer
 - 3)) (:23-25) Prohibition of Eating the Blood
 - e) (:26-27) Offer Your Sacrifices at the Designated Centralized Worship Place
- 6) (:28-32) Closing Exhortation, Motivation and Warning to Obey
 - a) (:28a) Exhortation to Obey
 - b) (:28b) Motivation to Obey
 - 1)) Prospering Your Family
 - 2)) Pleasing the Lord
 - c) (:29-31) Warning to Obey
 - 1)) (:29-30a) Danger of Defeated Enemies Corrupting You
 - 2)) (:30b) Danger of Curious Investigation of Idolatrous Practices
 - 3)) (:31) Detestable Nature of Their Acts of Worship
- (:32) Epilogue – Comprehensive Covenant Obedience Commanded

b. (13:1-18) Warning against Spiritual Seduction – Three Hypothetical Attempts at Spiritual Seduction Denounced in Order to Maintain Covenant Loyalty

- 1) (:1-5) Denouncing Spiritual Seduction by a False Prophet or Dreamer of Dreams
 - a) (:1-2) Signs and Wonders Cannot Always Be Viewed as Authenticating
 - b) (:3) Spiritual Seduction Can Be a Test from God
 - c) (:4) Six Ways to Stay on Track Spiritually
 - d) (:5a) Spiritual Seduction is a Capital Offense because it Threatens to Negate the Freedom Secured by Redemption
 - e) (:5b) Spiritual Surgery Protects the Community from Apostasy
- 2) (:6-11) Denouncing Spiritual Seduction by a Close Relative or Friend
 - a) (:6-7) Secret Seduction by Loved Ones is Especially Pernicious
 - b) (:8) Secret Seduction Must be Resisted in 5 Ways
 - c) (:9-10) Secret Seduction Requires You Taking the Initiative in Execution
 - d) (:11) Swift Execution Serves as a Deterrent from Future Seduction
- 3) (:12-18) Denouncing Spiritual Seduction by Unidentified Urban Revolutionaries
 - a) (:12-13) Entire Cities Can be Susceptible to Spiritual Seduction
 - b) (:14a) Establishing the Truth Requires Thorough Investigation
 - c) (:14b-15) Entire City Would Then be Subject to Destruction if Found Guilty
 - d) (:16a) Elimination of the Booty by Means of a Fiery Sacrifice to the Lord
 - e) (:17-18) End Result of Obedience Will Be Renewed Mercy and Prosperity
- c. (14:1-21) Holiness Reflected in Eating Regulations – God’s People Must Manifest Their Distinctive of Holiness in Areas of Daily Living (e.g. Dietary Laws)
 - 1) (:1-2) Our Family Identity and Our Election Call Us to Holiness
 - a) (:1) Our Family Identity Calls Us to Holiness
 - 1)) Sons of God
 - 2)) Separate from Pagan Customs Regarding Mourning Rites
 - b) (:2) Our Election Calls Us to Holiness
 - 1)) Chosen Purposefully – to be Holy and Dedicated to the Lord
 - 2)) Chosen Personally
 - 3)) Chosen Possessively
 - 4)) Chosen Preferentially
 - 2) (:3-20) Holiness is Reflected in Dietary Laws – Clean vs Unclean Animals with Respect to Eating
 - a) (:3) Summary Prohibition
 - b) (:4-8) Clean and Unclean Land Animals
 - c) (:9-10) Clean and Unclean Sea Animals

- d) (:11-20) Clean and Unclean Sky Animals
 - 1)) (:11) Clean
 - 2)) (:12-19) Unclean
 - 3)) (:20) Clean
- 3) (:21) Maintain Your Distinctive Holy Status
 - a) Avoid Food from Animals that Died a Natural Death
 - 1)) Prohibition
 - 2)) Rationale
 - b) Avoid Certain Types of Preparation of Food
- d. (14:22-29) The Basics about the Annual Tithe of Crops and Livestock – Offering Tithes Affords the Opportunity to Joyfully Celebrate a Communal Feast in the Presence of the Lord
 - 1) (:22) Basic Requirement of Annual Tithing
 - a) Tithing is Essential for Every Family
 - b) Tithing is Proportional = Ten Percent
 - c) Tithing is a By-Product of Working Responsibly
 - d) Tithing is Based on Your Harvest Which God Has Provided
 - 2) (:23-27) Basic Regulations Governing Tithing
 - a) (:23) Standard Practice
 - 1)) Place of Celebration
 - 2)) Prescribed Offerings
 - 3)) Purpose of Celebration
 - b) (:24-26) Special Circumstances = Logistical Concessions Based on Geography
 - 1)) (:24) Determined by Distance from the Place of Worship
 - 2)) (:25-26) Designated Transaction Instructions
 - 3)) (:26b) Devoted Joyful Participation
 - c) (:27) Special Emphasis = Remember the Levites
 - 3) (:28-29) Blessing Provided Every Third Year to the Levites and the Disadvantaged
 - a) (:28) Local Target for the Tithe Every Third Year
 - b) (:29) Loving Target for the Tithe
- e. (15:1-18) Sabbatical Debt and Indentured Servant Releases – The Sabbatical Debt and Indentured Servant Releases Grant a New Start for Israelites Who Have Fallen on Hard Times
 - 1) (:1-11) The Sabbatical Debt Release
 - a) (:1) The Mandate
 - b) (:2-3) The Manner of Release
 - 1)) (:2a) Relates to the Full Obligation of the Loan
 - 2)) (:2b) Remission Demanded by the Lord
 - 3)) (:3) Restricted to the Israelite Community (not applicable to foreigners)
 - c) (:4-6) The Motivation for Obedience
 - 1)) (:4) Blessing without Poverty Is the Ideal Situation
 - 2)) (:5) Blessing Depends on Obedience
 - 3)) (:6) Blessing Results in the Power of Prosperity

- d) (:7-11) The Magnanimity of Providing Release
 - 1)) (:7-8) Instructions Regarding Generosity toward the Poor
 - 2)) (:9) Warning against Selfish Scheming to Beat the System
 - 3)) (:10-11) Instructions Regarding Generosity towards the Poor
- 2) (:12-18) The Sabbatical Indentured Servant Release
 - a) The Mandate
 - b) (:13-14) The Manner of Release
 - 1)) (:13) Release not Intended Repeat the Cycle of Poverty
 - 2)) (:14a) Release Provided with Generous Provision
 - 3)) (:14b) Release Proportionate to How the Lord Has Blessed You
 - c) (:15) The Memory Lesson
 - d) (:16-17) The Master-Servant Exceptional Case
 - 1)) (:16) Relationship Working Well
 - 2)) (:17) Relationship Made Permanent
 - e) (:18) The Motivation for Obedience
 - 1)) Appreciative of the Service You Have Enjoyed
 - 2)) Anticipating the Lord's Future Blessing
- f. (15:19 – 16:17) Consecration of Livestock and Celebration of Annual Feasts – The Jewish Religious Sacrifices and Annual Celebratory Feasts Reflected Their Joy in God's Deliverance, Provision and Abiding Presence
 - 1) (15:19-23) Consecrating the Firstborn Livestock
 - a) (:19) Consecration Commanded
 - 1)) Practice = Set the Animal Aside for the Lord
 - 2)) Prohibition = Don't Profit from the Animal
 - b) (:20) Celebration Commanded
 - c) (:21-23) Caveat: No Animal with Any Serious Defect
 - 1)) (:21) Prohibition = No Serious Defect
 - 2)) (:22) Permission = Local Consumption
 - 3)) (:23) Prohibition = Don't Eat the Blood
 - 2) (:16:1-8) Celebration of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (in Spring)
 - a) (:1) Charge to Keep the Passover
 - b) (:2-7) Instructions for Keeping the Passover
 - 1)) (:2) Summary Instructions
 - 2)) (:3-4) Specific Instructions Regarding Unleavened Bread
 - 3)) (:5-7) Specific Instructions Regarding Place of Sacrifice and Eating
 - c) (:8) Charge to Keep the Festival of Unleavened Bread
 - 3) (16:9-12) Celebration of the Feast of Weeks (in Summer)
 - a) (:9-10) Summary Instructions
 - 1)) (:9) Timing of the Festival
 - 2)) (:10) Tribute of the Festival
 - b) (:11) Synchronized Celebration

- 1)) Focused on Inclusive Celebration
 - 2)) Focused on the Centralized Sanctuary
 - c) (:12) Significance of the Celebration
 - 4) (16:13-15) Celebration of the Feast of Booths or Ingathering (in Fall)
 - a) (:13) Timing of the Celebration
 - b) (:14) Tone of Inclusive Celebration
 - c) (:15) Theme of God's Abundant Blessing
 - 1)) Duration and Location of the Feast
 - 2)) Joy from Celebrating God's Blessing of Productivity
 - (:16-17) Epilogue – Concluding Summary
 - a) (:16a) Presence Commanded at Three Annual Feasts
 - b) (:16b-17) Presentation of Offering Commanded
 - 1)) (:16b) Stated Negatively
 - 2)) (:17) Stated Positively
2. (16:18-18:22) Stipulations Regarding Leadership
- a. (16:18 – 17:13) Righteous Administration of Judgment – Purges the Evil from the Community to Maintain Righteousness
 - 1) (16:18-20) Pursuit of Righteousness – By Defining the Appointment, Character, Role and Reward of Righteous Local Judges
 - a) (:18) Appointment of Righteous Local Judges
 - 1)) Appointment According to Towns within Tribes
 - 2)) Appointment Designed for Righteous Judgment
 - b) (:19) Character of Righteous Judges
 - 1)) No Distorting of Justice
 - 2)) No Showing of Partiality
 - 3)) No Taking of Bribes
 - c) (:20a) Role of Righteous Judges = Pursuit of Justice
 - d) (:20b) Reward of Righteous Judges = Long Life and Possession of the Land
 - 2) (16:21 – 17:1) Prevention of Idolatry and Polluted Sacrifices
 - a) (16:21-22) Prevention of Idolatry
 - 1)) (:21) No Spiritual Syncretism
 - 2)) (:22) No Sacred Pillars
 - b) (17:1) Polluted Sacrifice Forbidden
 - 1)) Defective
 - 2)) Detestable
 - 3) (17:2-13) Purging of Evil to Protect the Community
 - a) (:17:2-7) Local Courts -- Purging of Idolaters at the Local Level
 - 1)) (:2-3) Exposure of Idolaters
 - 2)) (:4) Examination of the Charge
 - 3)) (:5) Execution of the Idolater
 - 4)) (:6-7a) Engagement by Multiple Witnesses
 - 5)) (:7b) Excising the Evil
 - b) (17:8-12) Central Courts -- Purging of a Wide Range of Evil by Referral to Centralized Judgment for More Difficult Cases
 - 1)) (:8-9) Difficult Cases Referred to Centralized

- Judgment
- 2)) (:10-11) Didactic Role of the Implementation of Righteous Law
- 3)) (:12) Death Sentence for Resisting Their Verdict (:13) Summary Conclusion: Deterrent against Future Evil
- b. (17:14-20) Anticipation of the Monarchy – Transition to a Monarchy Will Lead to Abuse of Power Unless the King Submits to the Supreme Authority of God’s Word
 - 1) (:14-15) Anticipating the Transition in Government away from the Theocracy to a Monarchy
 - a) (:14) Circumstances Feeding a Desire for a King
 - 1)) Security in the Promised Land by God’s Grace and Power
 - 2)) Syncretistic Compromise Based on a Preference for Visible Human Leadership over the Invisible Leadership of God
 - b) (:15) Choice of a King Must be Dictated by God
 - 1)) Limit Your Independent Self-Initiation
 - 2)) Limit Your Syncretistic Compromise
 - 2) (:16-17) Warning against the Almost Inevitable Dangers of a Monarchy = the Abuse of Power in Different Realms
 - a) (:16) Prohibition against Multiplying Horses – Military Sphere -- Kings Tend to Lust after More Power
 - b) (:17a) Prohibition against Multiplying Wives – Political Sphere -- Kings Tend to Lust after More Pleasure and Political Alliances and Status
 - c) (:17b) Prohibition against Multiplying Silver and Gold – Economic Sphere --Kings Tend to Lust after More Possessions
 - 3) (:18-20) Elevating the Word of God to the Highest Level of Authority to Protect the Integrity of the King and His Kingdom
 - a) (:18) Priority of the Word of God and the Worship of God
 - b) (:19a) Devotion to the Word of God
 - 1)) Keep it Close
 - 2)) Keep it Real
 - c) (:19b-20b) Value of the Word of God
 - 1)) (:19b) Promotes the Fear of the Lord
 - 2)) (:20a) Promotes Humility
 - 3)) (:20b) Promotes Obedience
 - d) (:20c) Blessing of the Word of God
- c. (18:1-22) Support of Priests and Discernment of Prophets – God’s People Must Respond to Divinely Appointed Leaders with Material Support and Spiritual Discernment
 - 1) (:1-8) Priests Require Material Support from God’s People
 - a) (:1-2) The Basis of the Levites’ Entitlements
 - b) (:3-5) The Substance of the Levites’ Entitlements
 - c) (:6-8) The Equality of the Levites’ Entitlements
 - 2) (:9-14) Pagan Prophetic Practices Must be Rejected as Detestable
 - a) (:9-12) Syncretism in Religion is Detestable to God

- 1)) (:9) Mimics Pagan Detestable Practices
 - 2)) (:10-11) Manifests Itself in a Variety of Occult Forms
 - 3)) (:12) Merits Expulsion from the Promised Land
 - b) (:13) Standard = Maintain Covenant Integrity
 - c) (:14) Separation from Pagan Occult Practices Commanded
 - 3) (:15-22) Prophets Claiming to Speak God's Word Must Be Authenticated and Obeyed
 - a) (:15) Announcement of Future Prophetic Voice
 - b) (:16-18) The Appointment by Human Request and Divine Authority
 - 1)) (:16) By Human Request
 - 2)) (:17-18) By Divine Authority
 - c) (:19-20) Accountability for Rebelling against God
 - 1)) (:19) Rebelling by Rejecting God's Revealed Prophetic Word
 - 2)) (:20) Rebelling by Prophecy Presumptuously in the Name of the Lord
 - d) (:21-22) Authentication of a Prophet
 - 1)) (:21) The Quest for Discernment
 - 2)) (:22) The Test of Historical Accuracy = Fulfillment of Prophecy
3. (19:1 – 22:12) Stipulations Regarding Civil Law
 - a. (19:1-13) Laws Regarding Manslaughter, Cities of Refuge and Murder – Refuge Must Be Made Available in Cases of Involuntary Manslaughter But Premeditated Murder Requires Capital Punishment
 - 1) (:1-10) Refuge Made Available for Involuntary Manslaughter via the Cities of Refuge
 - a) (:1-3) Provision of Three Cities of Refuge
 - 1)) (:1) Anticipation of Three Cities of Refuge
 - 2)) (:2) Allocation of Three Cities of Refuge
 - 3)) (:3) Access to Three Cities of Refuge
 - b) (:4-7) Procedure for Utilizing the Three Cities of Refuge
 - 1)) (:4b-5) Typical Type of Case that Would Apply
 - 2)) (:6) Typical Type of Vengeance that Would be Averted
 - 3)) (:7) The Command to Set Aside the Three Cities of Refuge
 - c) (:8-9) Potential for Additional Three Cities of Refuge
 - 1)) (:8) Expansion of Territory = the Contribution
 - 2)) (:9a) Exemplary Covenant Obedience = the Condition
 - 3)) (:9b) Extra Cities of Refuge = the Command
 - d) (:10) Rationale for the Policy
 - 2) (:11-13) Premeditated Murder Requires Capital Punishment
 - a) (:11) Different Circumstances for this Contrasting Case Study
 - 1)) Premeditated Hatred
 - 2)) Premeditated Murder
 - 3)) Presumptuous Flight to a City of Refuge
 - b) (:12) Deliverance to the Avenger of Blood for Execution

- c) (:13) Divine Directives Regarding Justice in the Case of Premeditated Murder
 - 1)) Justice Must Not be Subverted by Pity
 - 2)) Justice Requires Capital Punishment for the Shedding of Innocent Blood
 - 3)) Justice Restores Society to a Healthy State
- b. (19:14-21) Laws Regarding Personal Property and Judicial Witnesses – The Law Ensures Both Personal Property Rights and the Integrity of Judicial Witnesses
 - 1) (:14) Law Ensures Inviolable Personal Property Rights
 - 2) (:15-21) Law Ensures the Integrity of Judicial Witnesses
 - a) (:15) Integrity Requires Corroboration of Multiple Witnesses
 - 1)) Single Witness is Insufficient
 - 2)) Multiple Witnesses Required for Confirmation
 - b) (:16-21) Integrity Requires Proportionate Punishment of False Witnesses
 - 1)) (:16) Example of the Case of a False Witness
 - 2)) (:17-18a) Examination of All Parties Involved
 - 3)) (:18b-19a) Enforcement of Proportionate Justice
 - 4)) (:19b-20) Evil Both Purged in the Present and Deterred in the Future
 - 5)) (:21) Exclusion of Pity and Enforcement of Proportionate Justice
- c. (20:1-20) Laws Regarding Waging God’s Wars – God’s Wars Must Be Fought:
 - In Dependence Upon God’s Strength
 - With Courage and No Distractions
 - According to God’s Rules of Engagement and
 - Without Collateral Damage
 - 1) (:1-9) God’s Wars Must be Fought in Dependence upon God’s Strength and with Courage and No Distractions
 - a) (:1-4) Exhortation by the Priest Not to Fear Strong Enemies but Depend on God
 - 1)) (:1) Because of the Presence of the Lord with You
 - 2)) (:2-4) Because of the Power of the Lord to Fight for You
 - b) (:5-7) Exhortation by the Officers Not to be Distracted by Other Obligations but Be Fully Committed
 - 1)) (:5b) Military Deferment for Distraction over Material Possessions
 - 2)) (:6) Military Deferment for Distractions over Agricultural Pursuits
 - 3)) (:7) Military Deferment for Distractions over New Marriage Commitments
 - c) (:8-9) Final Preparations for Battle
 - 1)) (:8) Dismiss the Fearful

- 2)) (:9) Delegate Leadership under Appropriate Commanders
- 2) (:10-18) God's Wars Must be Fought According to God's Terms of Engagement
 - a) (:10-15) Terms of Engagement for Distant Cities – Goal of Dominion Rather than Total Extermination
 - 1)) (:10) War Must be a Last Resort
 - 2)) (:11) Dominion is the Goal
 - 3)) (:12-14) Conquest Must Also Demonstrate Restraint
 - 4)) (:15) Pattern Holds Only for Distant Cities
 - b) (:16-18) Terms of Engagement for Cities of the Promised Land – Goal of Total Extermination
 - 1)) (:16) Extermination of All Life is the Goal
 - 2)) (:17) Extermination of the Designated Idolatrous Nations is the Goal
 - 3)) (:18) Elimination of the Temptation of Idolatry is the Goal
- 3) (:19-20) God's Wars Must be Fought Without Collateral Damage – Protecting Valuable Resources during Siege Warfare
 - a) (:19) Spare the Fruit Trees
 - b) (:20) Construct Siege-works from the Non-Fruit Trees
- d. (21:1-9) Purging the Guilt of an Unsolved Murder – The Defilement of God's Holy Land by an Unsolved Murder Must be Addressed via Ritual Atonement
 - 1) (:1) Pollution of God's Land is the Consequence of Unsolved Murder
 - a) Discovery of a Slain Victim in Unoccupied Field in God's Land
 - b) Identity of Murderer Unknown
 - 2) (:2-8) Prescribed Ritual Provides the Atonement for Justice = Deliverance from the Guilt of Innocent Blood
 - a) (:2) Determination of Responsible Locality by the Legal Authorities
 - b) (:3-4) Death of Innocent Substitute (Young Heifer) in an Appropriate Place
 - 1)) (:3) Heifer Selected by the Elders of the Responsible City
 - 2)) (:4) Heifer Slaughtered in a Valley with Running Water
 - c) (:5) Delegation of Judicial Authority to the Local Priests
 - 1)) Approach of the Priests
 - 2)) Calling of the Priests
 - 3)) Role of the Priests Regarding Judicial Authority
 - d) (:6-8) Deliverance from the Guilt of Innocent Blood Sought by the Elders
 - 1)) (:6) Washing of Hands
 - 2)) (:7) Profession of Innocence
 - 3)) (:8a) Petition for Forgiveness

- 4)) (:8b) Acceptance of Forgiveness
- 3) (:9) Process of Atonement Removes Guilt from the Community
 - a) Removal of Guilt of Innocent Blood
 - b) Righteousness Reinforced
- e. (21:10-23) Maintaining Righteousness in Social and Judicial Contexts – Potentially Complex or Troublesome Situations Require the Application of God’s Wisdom to Maintain Righteousness in the Promised Land
 - 1) (:10-14) Righteous Treatment of Captured War Brides
 - a) (:10-11) The Situation Involving the Desire to Marry a War Captive
 - 1)) (:10) The Victory in Battle Resulting in Captives
 - 2)) (:11) The Vision of a Potential Beautiful Bride
 - b) (:12-13) The Sympathetic Transition from Foreign Captive to Fully Integrated Bride
 - 1)) (:12-13a) Period of Cultural Adjustment
 - 2)) (:13b) Passion of Marriage Consummation
 - c) (:14) The Severing of the Marriage without Exploitation or Abuse
 - 1)) Free Release
 - 2)) Fitting Respect
 - 2) (:15-17) Righteous Treatment of First-Born Son of the Unfavored Wife
 - a) (:15) The Situation Involving Relationship Complexity
 - b) (:16-17) The Standard for Protecting the Rights of the Actual First-Born
 - 1)) (:16) Negative Prohibition – Don’t Show Favoritism
 - 2)) (:17) Positive Practice – Give the Double Portion to the First-Born
 - 3) (:18-21) Righteous Treatment of a Rebellious Son
 - a) (:18) The Situation Involving an Insubordinate Son
 - 1)) Rebellious and Stubborn in a Life of Disobedience
 - 2)) Rejects All Attempts at Discipline
 - b) (:19-20) The Surrender of the Son to the Judgment of the Elders
 - 1)) (:19) The Inquisition
 - 2)) (:20) The Indictment
 - c) (:21) The Stoning of the Son to Purge the Evil and Deter Future Rebellion
 - 1)) Corporate Stoning of the Son to Death
 - 2)) Concern to Purge the Community of Evil
 - 3)) Communication of the Case Should Deter Future Rebellion
 - 4) (:22-23) Righteous Treatment of an Executed Corpse
 - a) (:22) The Situation Involving the Corpse of a Criminal Displayed on a Tree
 - 1)) Legitimate Capital Crime
 - 2)) Legal Execution

- 3)) Lifted Up for Humiliating Public Display on a Tree
 - b) (:23a) The Statute = Bury on the Same Day
 - c) (:23b) The Safeguard against Desecrating the Promised Land
- f. (22:1-12) Regulations Regarding Natural Acts Infused with Spiritual Significance –
 - The Covenant People of God Must Maintain Their Holy Distinctiveness and Function as Loving Neighbors as They Live Out God’s Practical Principles of Righteousness
 - 1) (:1-4) Provide Practical Assistance to Others in Need as the Way to Demonstrate Love for Your Neighbor
 - a) (:1-3) Return His Straying Animals and Lost Possessions
 - 1)) (:1-2) Return His Straying Ox or Sheep
 - 2)) (:3a) Return His Straying Donkey
 - 3)) (:3b) Return His Lost Possessions
 - 4)) (:3c) Responsibility Not to Neglect Your Neighbor’s Interests
 - b) (:4) Rescue His Fallen Animals
 - 2) (:5) Prohibit Confusing the Distinction between Man and Woman According to the Established Order of Creation
 - 3) (:6-7) Procure Food Resources without Compromising Future Production as an Example of Honoring the Mother = the Giver of Life
 - 4) (:8) Precautions in Construction to Protect Human Life and Safety
 - 5) (:9-11) Prohibition of Certain Mixtures to Emphasize the Need for a Life of Separation and Distinctiveness
 - a) (:9) Planting Vineyard with Two Kinds of Seed
 - b) (:10) Plowing with a Yoked Ox and Donkey
 - c) (:11) Putting Wool and Linen Together in the Same Garments
 - 6) (:12) Provide a Public Reminder to Yourself and Others of Your Covenant Relationship and Commitment to Obey the Law of God
- 4. (22:13 – 23:18) Stipulations Regarding Maintaining Purity
 - a. (22:13-30) Purity of Marriage and Improper Sexual Relations – The Examination of 5 Cases that Promote Sexual Fidelity and Protect against Abuse
 - 1) (:13-21) Case #1 – The Husband’s Charge of Premarital Sexual Impurity against His New Wife
 - a) (:13-14) The Charge
 - b) (:15-17) The Defense
 - c) (:18-21) The Judgment
 - 1)) (:18-19) Judgment if the Charge is Proven False
 - 2)) (:20-21) Judgment if the Charge is Proven True
 - 2) (:22) Case #2 – Adultery with a Married Woman
 - a) The Crime
 - b) The Consequences
 - c) The Cleansing
 - 3) (:23-27) Case #3 – Improper Sexual Relations with a Virgin Engaged to Another Man
 - a) (:23-24) Occurring in the City – Assumption is Consensual Sex

- 1)) (:23) The Circumstances
 - 2)) (:24a) The Consequences
 - 3)) (:24b) The Cleansing
 - b) (:25-27) Occurring in a Remote Field – Assumption is Rape
 - 1)) (:25a) The Circumstances
 - 2)) (:25b) The Consequences
 - 3)) (:26-27) The Caveat
 - 4) (:28-29) Case #4 – Improper Sexual Relations with a Virgin Who is Not Engaged
 - a) (:28) The Crime
 - b) (:29) The Consequences
 - 1)) Punitive Fine
 - 2)) Permanent Marriage
 - 5) (:30) Case #5 -- Improper Sexual Relations with a Step Mother
 - b. (23:1-14) Purity of the Worship Assembly and the Military Camp – The Presence and Favor of a Holy God Demand that Israel Guard the Purity of the Worship Assembly and the Military Camp
 - 1) (:1-8) Guarding the Purity of the Worship Assembly
 - a) (:1-6) Categories of Exclusion
 - 1)) (:1) Emasculated Men
 - 2)) (:2) Illegitimate Children
 - 3)) (:3-6) No Ammonites or Moabites or Their Descendants
 - b) (:7-8) Categories of Inclusion
 - 1)) (:7a) Edomites
 - 2)) (:7b) Egyptians
 - 3)) (:8) Generational Qualification
 - 2) (:9-14) Guarding the Purity of the Military Camp
 - a) (:9) Call to Maintain Purity in the Military Camp
 - b) (:10-14) Call to Avoid Uncleanness in the Military Camp
 - 1)) (:10-11) Avoid Uncleanness Due to Nocturnal Emissions
 - 2)) (:12-14) Avoid Uncleanness Due to Uncovered Excrement
 - c. (23:15-16) Purity in the Treatment of Escaped Foreign Slaves – Israel Must Remain Distinct from Her Surrounding Pagan Nations in the Treatment of the Disadvantaged
 - 1) (:15) Prohibition against Extraditing an Escaped Slave
 - 2) (:16a) Placement of the Escaped Slave
 - 3) (:16b) Protection of the Escaped Slave
 - d. (23:17-18) Purity in Prohibiting Cultic Prostitution – Israel Must Remain Distinct from Her Surrounding Pagan Nations in the Prohibition of Cultic Prostitution
 - 1) (:17) Prohibition of the Abominable Practice
 - 2) (:18) Prohibition of Payment of Vows with Such Dirty Money
5. (23:19 – 25:19) Stipulations Regarding Interpersonal Relationships
 - a. (23:19-25) Keep Your Vows and Don't Take Advantage of Others
 - 1) (:19-20) Forbidding the Charging of Interest to Fellow Countrymen
 - a) (:19-20b) The Prohibition of Charging Interest

- 1)) (:19) Applies to Fellow Countrymen
 - 2)) (:20a) Does Not Apply to Foreigners
 - 3)) (:20b) Applies to Fellow Countrymen
 - b) (:20c) The Promise of Future Blessing
 - 2) (:21-23) Forbidding the Delay or Breaking of Vows
 - a) (:21) Vows Must Be Kept on a Timely Basis
 - b) (:22) Vows (Before Being Made) Are Optional
 - c) (:23) Vows (Once Made) Are Obligatory
 - 3) (:24-25) Forbidding Unacceptable Aggressive Gleaning Practices
 - a) (:24) Regarding Harvesting Fruit on the Vineyard
 - b) (:25) Regarding Harvesting Standing Grain
- b. (24:1-4) Protecting Women from the Abuse of Remarriage in Certain Situations –
The Prohibition of Remarriage in Specific Situations Protects the Dignity of the Formerly Rejected Wife
 - 1) (:1-3) Description of the Conditions Prompting the Legislation (Protasis)
 - a) (:1a) Divorce Situation Due to Discovering Some Indecency in the Wife
 - b) (:1b) Divorce Procedure
 - c) (:2) Remarriage of the Divorced Woman to Another Man
 - d) (:3) Dissolution of the Second Marriage
 - 1)) Via Divorce Proceedings Initiated by the Second Husband
 - 2)) Via Death of the Second Husband
 - 2) (:4a) Actual Legislation (Apodosis)
 - 3) (:4B) Motive Clause (Rationale for the Legislation)
- c. (24:5-22) Demonstrate Righteousness to the Poor and Vulnerable –
Your History of Being Redeemed from Slavery in Egypt Should Motivate You to Show Compassion, Dignity and Righteousness to the Poor and Vulnerable
 - 1) (:5) Demonstrate Righteousness to Your New Wife = the Weaker Vessel
 - a) Free From Community Responsibilities (Like Warfare)
 - b) Free to Bring Joy to His Wife as He Establishes His New Household
 - 2) (:6-7) Demonstrate Righteousness in Support of the Sanctity of Life
 - a) (:6) Don't Deprive Someone of Their Ability to Subsist
 - b) (:7) Execute a Violent Kidnapper Who Has Stolen a Life
 - 3) (:8-9) Demonstrate Righteousness in Dealing with Infectious Skin Diseases
 - a) (:8) Obey the Levitical Regulations
 - b) (:9) Remember the Judgment on Miriam
 - 4) (:10-13) Demonstrate Righteousness to Poor Debtors
 - a) (:10-11) Don't Intimidate Debtors by Aggressive Behavior but Demonstrate Patience
 - b) (:12-13) Don't Exploit Debtors but Show Compassion
 - 5) (:14-15) Demonstrate Righteousness to Hired Servants
 - a) (:14) Don't Oppress Them

- b) (:15) Don't Delay Paying Their Wages
 - 6) (:16) Demonstrate Righteousness Regarding Individual Accountability for Sin
 - 7) (:17-22) Demonstrate Righteousness to the Vulnerable in Society (Aliens, Orphans, Widows)
 - a) (:17) General Principle
 - b) (:18) Rationale
 - c) (:19-21) Specific Examples Related to Gleaning Practices – Leave Something for the Poor to Harvest
 - 1)) (:19) Don't Harvest Every Sheaf
 - 2)) (:20) Don't Empty Your Olive Tree Completely
 - 3)) (:21) Don't Gather All the Grapes from Your Vineyard
 - d) (:22) Rationale Repeated
- d. (25:1-19) Enforcing God's Fair Standard of Righteousness – Miscellaneous Laws Require Israel to Enforce God's Fair Standard of Righteousness While Inflicting Shame on Those Who Offend
 - 1) (:1-3) Flogging Limitations – Humane Treatment of Convicted Criminals
 - a) (:1) Decision of the Court
 - b) (:2-3) Description of the Appropriate Punishment
 - 2) (:4) Prohibition against Muzzling the Threshing Oxen – Humane Treatment of Productive Animals
 - 3) (:5-10) Levirate Marriage – Humane Treatment of Widows Who Lack a Family Legacy
 - a) (:5-6) Consummation of the Levirate Marriage
 - b) (:7-10) Rejection of the Levirate Marriage
 - 4) (:11-12) Unfair Fighting Practices – Humane Treatment of Brawlers
 - a) (:11) Improper Intervention
 - b) (:12) Extreme Penalty
 - 5) (:13-16) Honest Weights – Integrity in Business Dealings
 - a) (:13-14) Don't Cheat
 - b) (:15) Practice Integrity
 - c) (:16) Take Sin Seriously
 - 6) (:17-19) Remember Amalek and Do Not Forget
 - a) (:17-18) Remember
 - b) (:19) Do Not Forget
- 6. (26:1-15) Two Initiation Tithes upon Entering the Promise Land – The Initial Presentation of First-Fruits and of the Third-Year Tithe Celebrated God's Past Faithfulness and Called for Continued Blessing as the People Fulfilled their Covenant Obligations
 - a. (:1-11) Presentation of First-Fruits – Celebrating the Lord's Past Covenant Faithfulness to the Nation of Israel
 - 1) (:1-2) Collection of Produce for Offering of First-Fruits
 - a) (:1) Timing of the Offering
 - b) (:2) Taking of the Offering
 - 2) (:3-4) Consecration of the Offering

- a) (:3) Presented by the Offerer to the Priest
 - b) (:4) Presented by the Priest to the Lord at the altar
 - 3) (:5-10a) Confession Recounting God's Faithfulness to the Nation
 - a) (:5b) Testimony of the Relative Insignificance of the Father of the Nation
 - b) (:5c-9) Testimony of God's Amazing Providence in Israel's History
 - c) (:10a) Testimony to Covenant Obedience in Response to God's Grace
 - 4) (:10b-11) Celebration of the Offering
 - a) (:10b) Celebration in Thankful Worship
 - b) (:11) Celebration in Communal Rejoicing
 - b. (:12-15) Presentation of Third-Year Tithes – Calling on the Lord for Future Blessing Based on Israel's Commitment to Covenant Faithfulness
 - 1) (:12) Application of the Tithe to Specific Classes of Needy People
 - 2) (:13-14) Affirmation of Obedience in Executing the Tithe
 - a) (:13b) Managed the Tithe in Appropriate Fashion
 - b) (:14) Maintained Ritual Purity
 - 3) (:15) Appeal for Future Blessing
7. (26:16-19) Conclusion to Moses' Second Address – Covenant Renewal Reinforces Israel's Commitment as God's Chosen People to Obey God's Laws
- a. (:16) Exhortation to Obey God's Law in the Context of Covenant Commitment
 - b. (:17) Declaration of Loyalty on the Part of God's People
 - c. (:18-19) Declaration of Loyalty on the Part of God
 - 1) (:18) God's Valuation of His Chosen People
 - a) (:18a) A Treasured Possession in Accordance with God's Promises
 - b) (:18b) Called to Obedience to God's Law
 - 2) (:19) God's Vision for His Chosen People
 - a) (:19a) Elevated above All Nations
 - b) (:19b) Consecrated to Holiness

(27:1-28:68) CENTRAL CHARGE: BLESSINGS AND CURSES

A. (27:1-26) Charge Issued to Israel –

Covenant Renewal Ceremony upon Entering the Promised Land to Charge Israel with Continued Obedience to God's Law While Reciting Specific Curses for Disobedience

1. (:1-8) Celebration of God's Faithfulness and Commitment to Future Obedience via a Commemorative Monument and Special Sacrificial Offerings
 - a. (:1b) Commanding Future Obedience
 - b. (:2-4) Constructing a Commemorative Monument
 - 1) (:2a) Marking the Occasion of Entering the Promised Land
 - 2) (:2b-3a) Memorializing the Law as the Key Covenant Document
 - 3) (:3b) Marveling at the Possession of God's Promised Blessing
 - 4) (:4) Marking the Occasion of Entering the Promised Land
 - c. (:5-8) Constructing an Altar for Special Offerings

- 1) (:5-6a) Building an Altar of Uncut Stones
- 2) (:6b-7) Burning Special Sacrificial Offerings in a Joyful Celebration
- 3) (:8) Blazoning the Words of the Law on the Stones
2. (:9-10) Charge to Listen and Obey in the Context of Covenant Renewal
 - a. (:9b) Charge to Listen
 - b. (:9c) Confession of Covenant Renewal as the People of God
 - c. (:10) Charge to Obey
3. (:11-26) Catalog of Curses Recited
 - a. (:12-13) Twelve Tribes Positioned on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal
 - 1) (:12) Six Tribes on Mount Gerizim to Bless the People
 - 2) (:13) Six Tribes on Mount Ebal to Curse the People
 - b. (:14-26) Twelve Specific Curses Connected to the Ten Commandments
 - 1) (:15) Private Household Idolatry
 - 2) (:16) Dishonoring Parents
 - 3) (:17) Moving a Boundary Marker
 - 4) (:18) Exploiting the Handicapped
 - 5) (:19) Perverting Justice for the Vulnerable
 - 6) (:20) Incest with One's Father's Wife
 - 7) (:21) Sexual Intercourse with Animals
 - 8) (:22) Sexual Intercourse with One's Half-Sister
 - 9) (:23) Sexual Intercourse with One's Mother-in-law
 - 10) (:24) Striking One's Neighbor in Secret
 - 11) (:25) Accepting a Bribe to Strike Down an Innocent Person
 - 12) (:26) General Transgression of the Torah

**B. (28:1-14) Catalog of Covenant Blessings for Israel –
Covenant Blessings Attach to the People of God Conditioned on Obedience**

1. (:1-2) Condition for Blessing = Obedience
 - a. (:1a) Condition Introduced
 - b. (:1b-2a) Promise
 - 1) (:1b) Elevation above the Nations
 - 2) (:2a) Enjoyment of Blessings
 - c. (:2b) Condition Repeated
2. (:3-6) Comprehensive Spheres of Blessing
 - a. (:3) Where You Live
 - b. (:4) What You Produce
 - 1) Children
 - 2) Crops
 - 3) Livestock
 - c. (:5) What You Eat
 - d. (:6) Where You Go – Daily Activities
3. (:7-13a) Characterization and Exposition of Blessings
 - a. (:7) Victory over Enemies
 - b. (:8) Prosperity in the Land
 - c. (:9-10) Holiness as the People of God
 - d. (:11) Productivity in Every Arena
 - e. (:12) Abundance of Provision by Virtue of God's Providential Blessing
 - f. (:13a) Dominance on the World Scene
4. (:13b-14) Condition for Blessing = Obedience

- a. (:13b) Stated Positively
- b. (:14) Stated Negatively

**C. (28:15-68) Catalog of Covenant Cursings for Israel –
Covenant Cursings (the Reversal of God’s Blessings) Attach to the People of God
Conditioned on Disobedience**

- 1. (:15-19) Damnation Overview
 - a. (:15) Condition for Cursing = Disobedience
 - 1) Condition Introduced
 - 2) Consequences of Disobedience
 - b. (:16-19) Comprehensive Spheres of Cursing
 - 1) (:16) Where You Live
 - 2) (:17) What You Eat
 - 3) (:18) What You Produce
 - 4) (:19) Where You Go – Daily Activities
- 2. (:20-46) Detailed Curses Due to Disobedience
 - a. (:20) Summary Introduction –
Variety of Curses Leading to Destruction Due to Wicked Covenant Disloyalty
 - b. (:21) Pestilence
 - c. (:22-23) Overwhelming Difficulties
 - 1) (:22) Seven Destructive Afflictions
 - 2) (:23) Cosmic Opposition
 - d. (:24) Crop Failure
 - e. (:25-26) Military Defeat
 - f. (:27) Incurable Skin Ailments
 - g. (:28-34) Psychological Attacks
 - 1) (:28-29a) Psychosomatic Afflictions
 - 2) (:29b) Material Deprivation and Physical Danger
 - 3) (:30-33) Emotional Frustration Due to Violated Expectations =
Futility Curses
 - 4) (:34) Unhinged Mental State
 - h. (:35) Incurable Boils
 - i. (:36-44) Relentless Opposition
 - 1) (:36) Physical Opposition -- Oppressive Captivity
 - 2) (:37) Psychological Opposition -- Humiliating Disgrace
 - 3) (:38-44) Productivity Opposition -- Futility Curses
 - j. (:45-46) Summary Conclusion
 - 1) (:45) Inescapable Destruction Due to Disobedience
 - 2) (:46) Shocking and Shameful Legacy
- 3. (:47-57) Destructive Consequences of a Siege by Foreign Enemies
 - a. (:47-48) Root Causes and Summary Consequences
 - 1) (:47) Root Causes
 - 2) (:48) Summary Consequences
 - b. (:49-52) Relentless Tactics of the Lord’s Agents of Destruction
 - 1) (:49-50) Ruthless Resolve of the Attacking Enemy
 - 2) (:51) Comprehensive Consumption by the Attacking Enemy
 - 3) (:52) Suffocating Siege by the Attacking Enemy
 - c. (:53-57) Radical Cannibalism in Desperate Times
 - 1) (:53) Monstrous Cannibalism Described

- 2) (:54-55) Monstrous Cannibalism by Even the Most Refined Man
- 3) (:56-57) Monstrous Cannibalism by Even the Most Refined Woman
- 4. (:58-68) Doubleback on Curses that Reverse Israel's Previous Blessings
 - a. (:58-62) Final Warning – What Will Happen If You Disobey God's Law?
 - 1) (:58) Obligation to Obey and Fear God
 - 2) (:59-62) Overturning of Previous Blessings into Extraordinary Curses
 - b. (:63-68) Hopeless Condition -- How Bad Will It Get?
 - 1) (:63) Torn from the Promised Land
 - 2) (:64) Scattered and Subjected to Foreign Bondage
 - 3) (:65-68) Destined to Despair of Soul

III. (29:1-30:20) MOSES' THIRD SPEECH: FINAL CHARGE

A. (29:1-29) Appeal for Covenant Loyalty –

The Perspective of History Should Motivate Covenant Loyalty

- (:1) Transition – Covenant Renewal
- 1. (:2-13) Understanding the Provision of God's Faithfulness in the Past Should Motivate Covenant Loyalty
 - a. (:2-9) Review of God's Faithfulness in the Past
 - 1) (:2-3) Acknowledgement of God's Mighty Works of Deliverance
 - 2) (:4) Absence of Spiritual Perception
 - 3) (:5-6) Apologetic Value of God's Gracious Provision in the Wilderness
 - 4) (:7-8) Appropriation of the Land of Sihon and Og
 - 5) (:9) Appeal for Covenant Loyalty
 - b. (:10-15) Renewal of the Covenant Revitalizes the Relationship between God and His People
 - 1) (:10-11) Present Scope of the Covenant
 - 2) (:12-13) Substance and Significance of the Covenant
 - 3) (:14-15) Future Scope of the Covenant
- 2. (:16-29) Understanding the Painful Consequences of Unfaithfulness Should Motivate Covenant Loyalty
 - a. (:16-21) Present Perspective on the Future – Unfaithfulness by Any Individual, Family Unit or Tribe Will Bring Divine Cursing
 - 1) (:16-17) Familiarity with the Temptation of Idolatry
 - 2) (:18-21) Inescapable Judgment for Idolatry
 - b. (:22-29) Future Perspective on the Past – The Disloyal Generation Has Been Shockingly Devastated and Uprooted from the Land
 - 1) (:22-23) Future Devastation Of Israel Will Shock the Next Generation
 - 2) (:24-28) Forsaking the Covenant Brings Angry Divine Judgment
 - 3) (:29) Focus on Your Responsibility for Covenant Loyalty

B. (30:1-20) Choose Life –

The Two Constrasting Choices are Clear

- 1. (:1-10) Future Restoration and Prosperity Should Cause Israel to Reflect on the Need for Covenant Loyalty Now
 - a. (:1-5) Promise of Future Restoration and Prosperity

- 1) (:1-2) Corporate Repentance
- 2) (:3-5) Corporate Restoration, Possession of the Land and Prosperity
- b. (:6-10) Process of Appropriating God's Promised Blessings
 - 1) (:6-8) Divine Initiative to Secure Covenant Loyalty
 - 2) (:9-10) Delight of the Lord in Responding to Obedience with Blessing
2. (:11-14) Revelation Makes God's Word Accessible, Understandable and Doable
 - a. (:11) Accessibility of God's Requirements
 - b. (:12-13) Nearness of God's Requirements
 - 1) (:12) Not in Heaven
 - 2) (:13) Not beyond the Sea
 - c. (:14) Accessibility Should Lead to Performance
3. (:15-20) Choices Have Consequences
 - a. (:15-16) Two Clear and Contrasting Choices
 - 1) (:15) Presentation of the Two Choices
 - 2) (:16a) The Essence of the Right Choice
 - 3) (:16b) The Consequences of Making the Right Choice
 - b. (:17-18) Warning against Choosing Disobedience and Idolatry
 - 1) (:17) The Essence of the Wrong Choice
 - 2) (:18) The Consequences of Making the Wrong Choice
 - c. (:19-20) Advocating for the Right Choice
 - 1) (:19a) Two Clear and Contrasting Choices
 - 2) (:19b) The Only Choice that Makes Sense – "*So CHOOSE LIFE*"
 - 3) (:19c-20) The Consequences of Making the Right Choice

(31:1–34:12) EPILOGUE: SUCCESSION OF LEADERSHIP

A. (31:1-29) Continuity of Leadership in the Transition from Moses to Joshua – During Any Crisis Transition Time, We Need Assurance of God's Ongoing Presence and Ultimate Leadership

1. (:1-8) Leadership Transition Maintains a Strong Continuity Based on God's Ultimate Role as Commander-In-Chief
 - a. (:1-6) Address to All the People: Divine Leadership Remains Undiminished
 - 1) (:2) Time for New Human Leadership
 - 2) (:3-5) The Commander-in-Chief Remains the Same
 - 3) (:6) Trust in the Lord's Presence with You
 - b. (:7-8) Address to Joshua: Charge to Lead with Courage and Confidence
 - 1) (:7b) Exhortation to Embrace Courage
 - 2) (:7c) Assurance of Victory
 - 3) (:8a) Assurance of the Lord's Personal Presence and Persistent Power
 - 4) (:8b) Exhortation to Banish Fear
2. (:9-13) Leadership Transition Maintains a Strong Continuity Based on the Authority of God's Law
 - a. (:9) The Foundation of the Law was Established by the Mediation of Moses
 - 1) Moses Received and Inscribed the Law
 - 2) Moses Delegated its Preservation and Exposition to the Priests and Elders
 - b. (:10-13) The Faithful Perpetuation of the Law Requires Systematic Reading

and Instruction with the Goal of Obedience

- 1) (:10b-11a) Renewed Focus at the Feast of Booths Every 7 Years
 - 2) (:11b) Reading of the Law in Public
 - 3) (:12-13) Response to the Law
3. (:14-23) Leadership Transition Maintains a Strong Continuity Based on Divine Commissioning and Lessons from History
- a. (:14-15) Theophany of Divine Commissioning of Joshua
 - 1) (:14) Presence of Moses and Joshua Awaits the Commissioning
 - 2) (:15) Presence of the Lord Authenticates the Commissioning
 - b. (:16-22) Treachery of Spiritual Adultery Requires Reminders of God's Faithfulness
 - 1) (:16b-18) Anticipating Future Spiritual Adultery
 - 2) (:19-22) Addressing Failure with a Memorable National Anthem – Reminding the People of God's Faithfulness and Their Culpability
 - c. (:23) Charge of Divine Commissioning
4. (:24-29) Leadership Transition Opens the Door for Increased Rebellion and Disloyalty
- a. (:24-25) Prepping the Levites for their Future Role
 - b. (:26-27) Prosecution of Israel Initiated
 - 1) (:26) Testimony of the Standards of the Law
 - 2) (:27) Tendency towards Rebellion and Disloyalty
 - c. (:28-29) Prosecution of Israel Concluded with Convicting National Anthem
 - 1) (:28) Calling Witnesses to Hear the Case against Israel
 - 2) (:29) Charging Israel with Corruption Resulting in Judgment

B. (31:30 – 32:43) Israel's National Anthem Extols God's Justice and Mercy – Rejecting the Rock of Israel Results in God Forsaking His People – But Not Utterly

- (31:30) Initial Recitation of the Song
1. (:1-4) Introduction to the Song – Relevance, Value, Theme and Focus
 - a. (:1) Universal Relevance
 - b. (:2) Life-Giving Value
 - c. (:3) Majestic Theme = Great Name of the Lord
 - d. (:4) Faithful Focus = the Righteous Rock
 2. (:5-18) Forsaking God Contradicts Israel's Family Privileges
 - a. (:5-6) Unnatural Perversion of the Children of God
 - 1) (:5) History of Perversion
 - 2) (:6) Contrasted with History of the Father's Gracious Dealings
 - b. (:7-14) Unsurpassed Provision and Protection from the Supreme God
 - 1) (:7) Testimony of Preceding Generations
 - 2) (:8-9) Treasured Status of Israel among the Nations
 - 3) (:10-12) Tenderly Caring for and Guiding the Young Nation
 - 4) (:13-14) Tremendous Provision of Food and Drink
 - c. (:15-18) Unimaginable Provocation of Israel's Divine Creator and Savior
 - 1) (:15) Forsaking God Due to Prosperity
 - 2) (:16) Provoking God to Anger and Jealousy with Idolatry
 - 3) (:17) Sacrificing to False Gods
 - 4) (:18) Abandoning their Creator
 3. (:19-35) Forsaking Israel is Consistent with God's Demand for Covenant Loyalty
 - a. (:19-25) Description of God Forsaking Israel

- 1) (:19) Rejecting Israel Due to Provocation
- 2) (:20) Turning Away from Israel Due to Perverse Unfaithfulness
- 3) (:21-22) Unleashing Consuming Fire of Jealousy Due to Israel's Idolatry
- 4) (:23-25) Heaping Calamities on Israel
- b. (:26-35) Determination of God Executing Vengeance but not Removing Israel
 - 1) (:26-27) Forbearance of God in Not Utterly Forsaking Israel
 - 2) (:28-29) Foolishness of Israel in Not Discerning Sin's Consequences
 - 3) (:30-33) Fruit of Paganism is Poisonous
 - 4) (:34-35) Future of Israel Destined for Certain Retribution
4. (:36-42) Divine Mercy Operates in Conjunction with Divine Vengeance
 - a. (:36) Divine Compassion Will Rescue Once God's People Hit Rock Bottom
 - b. (:37-38) Divine Sarcasm Will Expose False Gods as Futile Saviors
 - c. (:39) Divine Testimony Affirms God's Unique Ability
 - d. (:40-42) Divine Vengeance Will Devour All Adversaries
- (:43) Epilogue – Celebrate Divine Vengeance and Atonement

**C. (32:44-52) Testimony of Moses' Song and Death –
God's Judgment (as Reflected in Moses' Song and His Own Death) Is Designed to Promote the Spiritual Life of Future Generations**

1. (:44-47) Testimony of Moses' Song –
Application of the Law is Critical and Must Extend to Succeeding Generations
 - a. (:44) Recitation of the Song
 - b. (:45-46) Exhortation to Obey and Indoctrinate Future Generations
 - c. (:47) Obligation to Obey
 - 1) Essential Value
 - 2) Enduring Legacy
2. (:48-52) Testimony of Moses' Death –
Appropriation of God's Promises Depends on Obedience
 - a. (:49) Vision of the Promised Land from Mount Nebo
 - 1) Vantage Point -- Go Up
 - 2) View -- Look
 - 3) Victory by God's Grace
 - b. (:50-51) Vindication of God's Judgment on Moses
 - 1) (:50) Denial of Entrance into the Promised Land
 - 2) (:51) Disqualifying Sins
 - c. (:52) Verdict of God's Judgment Reiterated
 - 1) Remote View
 - 2) Rejected Entrance

**D. (33:1-29) Tribal Blessings Communicated by Moses –
Tribal Blessings as the Last Words of Moses Provide Encouragement in Covenant Renewal and Conquest Preparation**

1. (:1-5) Divine Authority Infuses the Tribal Blessings
 - (:1) Divine Source of Authority for the Blessings Issued by Moses
 - a. (:2) Divine Theophany in Historical Reflection
 - b. (:3) Divine Relationship in Covenant Commitment
 - 1) God's Love for His People

- 2) God's Guidance and Israel's Submission
- 3) God's Revelation to His People
- c. (:4) Divine Law as Unique Authority for Governance
- d. (:5) Divine Kingship in Celebration of Sovereign Dominion
- 2. (:6-25) Listing of Tribal Blessings
 - a. (:6) Blessing of Reuben
 - b. (:7) Blessing of Judah
 - c. (:8-11) Blessing of Levi
 - 1) (:8-9) Reflection on Key Historical Events
 - 2) (:10) Role of the Levites
 - 3) (:11) Reward of the Levites
 - d. (:12) Blessing of Benjamin
 - e. (:13-17) Blessing of Joseph
 - 1) (:13-16) Material Blessings of Joseph
 - 2) (:17) Majesty of Joseph
 - f. (:18-19) Blessing of Zebulun and Issachar
 - g. (:20-21) Blessing of Gad
 - 1) (:20) Characterization of Gad – Aggressive and Expansive
 - 2) (:21) Conduct of Gad – Governing in Justice
 - h. (:22) Blessing of Dan
 - i. (:23) Blessing of Naphtali
 - j. (:24-25) Blessing of Asher
- 3. (:26-29) Incomparable Standing of Both God and Israel as Seen in Deliverance from Enemies
 - a. (:26-27) Deliverance from Enemies Secured by the Incomparable God
 - 1) (:26) Incomparable God
 - 2) (:27) Deliverance from Enemies
 - b. (:28) Results of Deliverance from Enemies: Security and Prosperity of Israel
 - 1) Security
 - 2) Prosperity
 - c. (:29) Deliverance from Enemies Enjoyed by Incomparable Israel
 - 1) Incomparable Israel
 - 2) Deliverance from Enemies

**E. (34:1-12) The End of the Road for Moses –
Despite the Unique Significance of Moses' Ministry, He Must Designate Joshua as His
Successor and Die without Entering the Promised Land**

- 1. (:1-8) Termination of the Life of Moses
 - a. (:1-4) Moses' Vision of the Promised Land and Denial of Entry
 - 1) (:1-3) Vision of the Promised Land
 - 2) (:4) Denial of Entry
 - b. (:5-8) Moses' Death and Burial
 - 1) (:5) Death of Moses
 - 2) (:6) Burial of Moses
 - 3) (:7) Vitality of Moses
 - 4) (:8) Mourning over Death of Moses
- 2. (:9) Transition to the Leadership of Joshua
 - a. Empowering of Joshua by Laying on of Hands by Moses

- b. Effective Leadership of Joshua
- 3. (:10-12) Testimony to the Unique Significance of the Ministry of Moses by Virtue of
 - a. (:10) His Intimate Relationship with the Lord
 - b. (:11-12) His Performance of God's Special Works before both the Egyptians and the Israelites
 - 1) (:11) Special by Virtue of Signs and Wonders before the Egyptians
 - 2) (:12) Special by Virtue of Power and Terror before the Israelites

TEXT: Deuteronomy 1:1-8

TITLE: INTRODUCTION AND INITIAL CHARGE

BIG IDEA:

AN UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S COVENANT REQUIREMENTS PREPARES ISRAEL TO CROSS THE JORDAN AND TAKE POSSESSION OF THE PROMISED LAND

INTRODUCTION:

Duane Christensen: The long sojourn in the wilderness has ended. The conquest of the two Amorite kings in the Jordan Valley has set the stage for a new phase in the epic journey of faith. Moses is about to pass the torch of leadership to his successor Joshua, who will bring them into the Promised Land (see also **Deut 3:23–28; 31:1–8; 34:5–9**). This moment of transition forms an inclusion around each section of the outermost frame (**Deut 1–3** and **31–34**). The exodus is now past history. The eisodus is both a present reality and the hope of the future.

MacArthur: Like Leviticus, Deuteronomy does not advance historically, but takes place entirely in one location over about one month of time (cf. **Deut. 1:3** and **34:8** with **Josh. 5:6–12**). Israel was encamped in the central rift valley to the E of the Jordan River (**Deut. 1:1**). This location was referred to in **Num. 36:13** as “*the plains of Moab*,” an area N of the Arnon River across the Jordan River from Jericho. It had been almost 40 years since the Israelites had exited Egypt.

Peter Craigie: These verses form a **preamble** to the entire book and serve a function similar to that of the preamble in the Near Eastern treaties. The great covenant, which was made at Sinai between the Lord and his people, is to be renewed prior to the transference of the leadership from Moses to Joshua and the Israelites' entry into the Promised Land. In this renewal of the covenant, the persons involved, the place, and the time are all specified explicitly. . .

The importance of **history** has two focal points: (a) there is the covenant tradition of promise, from Abraham to Moses; (b) there is the experience of God in history working out in deed the content of the promise. Thus, for the renewal of the covenant described in Deuteronomy, the prologue recalls not only the covenant's history, but also the ability of the Lord of the covenant to fulfill his promise. What God had done in the past, he could continue to do in the future. There is thus a presentation of a faithful God, whose demand was for a faithful people.

Patrick Miller: These verses [**1-5**] introduce the book as a whole. Two things stand out as one reads this section: the degree of geographical and temporal detail and the impression of repeated introductions (vv. **1, 3, and 5**) with a clear focus on Moses. Both aspects merit attention.

The precise information about time and place serves two purposes. One is **transitional** and **introductory**. It connects the Book of Deuteronomy with the preceding books and with the narrative of the journey through the wilderness, and it anticipates in very concise fashion the salient features of the opening chapters. Here is an indication that Deuteronomy does not stand alone; it is meant to be read with and out of the preceding books, thus creating that body of literature known as the Torah, or Pentateuch (see Introduction).

The second purpose is to root this book in very specific ways in **history**. It does not stand before us as a general statement about human conduct but has grown out of the life and experience of a people in their journey with God. That experience impinges upon, affects, and shapes the words and the instruction that follow.

David Guzik: Moses' heart was passionate because he knew that if this new generation – a generation of faith, unlike the generation which perished in the wilderness – if this new generation did not obey the Law of God, then God's covenant would work against them and curse them. So, the LORD passionately pled through a passionate Moses in Deuteronomy, pleading for Israel to choose life! (**Deuteronomy 30:19**).

Deuteronomy is therefore a book of **reminding** and a book of **preparation**.

I. (:1-5) INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

David Malick: Setting (1:1-5): Through a historical setting of Israel in the transjordan of Moab after wandering for forty years since their exodus from Egypt, the context is provided for the unfolding of a necessary renewal of the covenant for the nation to experience blessing in the land.

A. (:1-2) Geographical Setting for the Final Messages of Moses

1. (:1) The Staging Area for Entering the Promised Land

“These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel and Laban and Hazeroth and Dizahab.”

Duane Christensen: Moses is described as speaking before the assembly of leaders, elders, priests, men, women, children, and resident aliens in a covenant assembly, such as those that were convened regularly in the festivals of ancient Israel.

Daniel Block: The syntax of **verse 1b** creates the impression that Moses delivered these addresses in the desert, somewhere in the Arabah. The following list of place names supposedly clarifies the location: “*opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth and Dizahab.*” Since those places that can be identified are located south of the Dead Sea, this list seems to refer to a series of way stations along the route the

Israelites took from Sinai/Horeb to Kadesh Barnea. **Verse 2** notes that under normal circumstances the journey could be completed in eleven days. However, because the people had rebelled at Kadesh Barnea—the point of entering the Promised Land (**Num. 13–14**)—their entrance into Canaan had been delayed almost forty years.

Eugene Merrill: Moses, the covenant mediator, was the spokesman here. His role as such is clear from the fact that he spoke “*to all Israel*” (**v. 1**) “*all that the LORD had commanded him*” (**v. 3**). That is, he provided the prophetic linkage between the initiator of the covenant (i.e., Yahweh) and all its demands and the recipient of that gracious overture, Moses' own people Israel. . .

Moses' audience, “*all Israel*,” is not to be taken literally as though the entire population of the nation was assembled in one place and at one time to hear his address. Given a postexodus population of over 600,000 men of twenty years and older (**Num 26:51**; cf. **26:4**), the nation as a whole must be numbered in the several of millions. Moses therefore was speaking to **representatives** of “*all Israel*,” probably the elders (cf. **Num 11:16-30**; **Deut 27:1**; **31:9, 28**), though obviously the message was intended for all and would become accessible to all when it finally was committed to writing.

In establishing the setting, the historian focused first on the **geographical arena** in which the message of covenant renewal took place. It was “*in the desert east of the Jordan*” (**v. 1**) in what is now the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. More particularly it is the **Arabah**, a word for desert that usually refers to the section of the Great Rift Valley between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Elath (or Aqabah) but occasionally to the Jordan River valley itself. Here the section immediately **north of the Dead Sea** is in view, for elsewhere the place of assembly is designated as “*the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho*” (**Num 35:1**; **36:13**).

John Maxwell: This sermon is delivered at a place where God's people had previously failed (**Nu 25:1-3ff**). They are surrounded by reminders of their earlier disobedience to God. Imagine the emotional war raging within their minds. Moses continues to exhort the people because they need assistance in making their decision to cross over into the Promised Land.

2. (:2) The Shameful Delay of 40 Years for an 11 Day Journey
“*It is eleven days' journey from Horeb
by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea.*”

Michael Grisanti: “*Horeb*” is an alternative term for “*Sinai*” favored by the book of Deuteronomy, in which “*Horeb*” occurs nine times (**1:2, 6, 19**; **4:10, 15**; **5:2**; **9:8**; **18:16**; **29:1**), compared with a single instance of “*Sinai*” (**33:2**).

Patrick Miller: At Kadesh-barnea (**1:2**) the redeemed people failed to trust in their redeeming God. There they found that the promise would not come to those who were afraid and did not trust in the power of their God to keep the promise made. That story is told in the latter part of this chapter to indicate that if there is a relation between law

and land, as Deuteronomy surely seeks to declare, there is also a direct connection between trust and promise. In both cases, one cannot expect the latter without the former. Reference to the fortieth year anticipates the fate of the fearful generation that was not allowed to enter the land; forty years is the approximate length of a generation (cf. **2:14–15**). That period is described in **chapter 8** as a time when the Lord humbled Israel, testing them (**v. 2**) but also providing for them (**v. 4**).

B. (:3-4) Historical Setting for the Final Messages of Moses

1. (:3) Marked by Specific Calendar Reference

*“And it came about in the fortieth year,
on the first day of the eleventh month,
that Moses spoke to the children of Israel,
according to all that the LORD had commanded him to give to them,”*

Peter Craigie: Now the date of the address of Moses and the renewal of the covenant is added: the beginning of the eleventh month of the fortieth year of wilderness wandering since the Exodus. It is the only exact date given in the book and presumably it was the only date that was necessary, since it specifies the starting point of all the words and events contained in the book.

Michael Grisanti: Moses begins addressing the Israelites slightly less than forty years (thirty-nine years, nine months, sixteen days) after they departed from Egypt (first year, first month, and fifteenth day—the day after their first Passover celebration; **Ex 12:18**), ca. 1406 BC.

Constable: The name "*Yahweh*" appears for the first time in **verse 3**, in Deuteronomy, and it occurs more than 220 times. This name is most expressive of **God's covenant role** with Israel. Its frequent appearance helps the reader remember that Deuteronomy presents God in His role as sovereign suzerain and covenant-keeper. In contrast, the name "*Elohim*" occurs only 38 times in this book.

2. (:4) Marked by Encouraging Military Accomplishments

*“after he had defeated Sihon the king of the Amorites,
who lived in Heshbon,
and Og the king of Bashan,
who lived in Ashtaroth and Edrei.”*

Daniel Block: **Verse 4** adds a second chronological marker: Moses delivers these addresses after the defeat of the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan. The victories over Sihon and Og provide concrete proof that when Israel is faithful to Yahweh, he will fight for them.

Bruce Hurt: This is an important historical milestone, for these past fulfilled promises were somewhat like a pledge or down payment assuring that God would fulfill His promises to enable Israel to conquer the Canaanites. Israel had to do the fighting, but God provided the power and victory. They were 100% responsible and at the same time

were 100% on God's sovereign power and provision to attain the victory. This is the same pattern we see in the victorious Christian life in the New Testament.

C. (:5) Thematic Focus of the Final Messages of Moses: Explaining and Applying God's Revealed Covenant Requirements in Preparation for Taking Possession of the Land

*“Across the Jordan in the land of Moab,
Moses undertook to expound this law, saying,”*

Daniel Block: The expression “*this Torah*” (*hattôrâ hazzô`t*) characterizes what follows as **instruction** rather than legislation. This interpretation is confirmed by the way the book depicts Moses. He “*teaches*” (*limmēd*) the people (4:5, 14; 5:31; 6:1; 31:19) and they “*learn*” the Torah (4:10; 5:1; 17:19; 31:12–13). The bulk of the book consists of pastoral instruction and exhortation, and even when earlier laws are cited, they are surrounded with hortatory appeals.

Peter Craigie: The word **expound** (*bē`ēr*) has the sense of making something absolutely clear or plain; the same verb is used in 27:8 to indicate the clarity or legibility with which the words of the law were to be inscribed in stone. . . It is important to stress that the content of Deuteronomy is an exposition of the law; the book does not simply contain a repetition of the earlier legal material known in Exodus and Numbers, to which a few new laws have been added. It is true that there is a common core of law with the earlier books, but here the law is to be **explained** and **applied** by Moses to the particular situation of the Israelites. They were about to enter the Promised Land, and the law of the covenant could not lie as a dead letter. It had to be expounded and emphasized to all the Israelites, for the success of the events lying ahead of them depended on this critical point. Success in possessing the Promised Land lay not in military prowess and strength, but in an unbroken covenant relationship with the Lord, who alone could bring further victories like those over Sihon and Og (1:4).

Gerald Gerbrandt: Chiastic structure of vv. 1-5

A1 *These Are the Words That Moses Spoke.*, 1:1a

B1 Place: *Beyond the Jordan* ..., 1:1b

C1 Time: *Eleven Days* ..., 1:2

D *Moses Spoke ... as the LORD Had Commanded*, 1:3

C2 Time: *After He Had Defeated* ..., 1:4

B2 Place: *Beyond the Jordan* ..., 1:5a

A2 *Moses Undertook to Expound This Law* ..., 1:5b

II. (:6-8) INITIAL CHARGE TO TAKE POSSESSION OF THE LAND

(:6a) Authority of Divine Revelation

“The LORD our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying,”

A. (:6b-7) Finish the Journey

1. (:6b) No More Delay

“You have stayed long enough at this mountain.”

Eugene Carpenter: Israel camped at Sinai (“*this mountain*”) for about **eleven months**. They arrived at Sinai three months after exiting Egypt (**Ex. 19:1**) and departed from Sinai one year and two months after leaving Egypt (**Num. 10:11**).

Gerald Gerbrandt: The story opens with God instructing Israel to leave Horeb and resume the journey (**v. 6**). Each of the vignettes in the **Retrospect [1:6-18]** opens in a similar manner, with God directing Israel to move forward (**1:19; 2:2-3, 24**). Israel is a **people on the move**, on a journey directed by God. At each point in the journey, Israel faces **challenges** (administrative overload, entering the land, opposition from hostile kings), with each challenge raising the question: **how will Israel respond?**

2. (:7) Time to Move Out and Engage with the Inhabitants of the Promised Land

“Turn and set your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negev and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.”

Duane Christensen: Moses begins his address by quoting the words of YHWH, commanding the people to enter the Promised Land. The dimensions given for that land are enormous, an area far larger than Israel ever possessed, even during the Davidic empire.

Eugene Merrill: The following description of the land (**v. 7**) is remarkably comprehensive in its scope and in its precision in marking out regional and topographical features. The “*hill country of the Amorites*” refers to the interior of Canaan and the Transjordan, an area inhabited by the Amorites since at least 1800 B.C. The “*neighboring peoples in the Arabah*” (lit., “*all its neighboring [places] in the Arabah and elsewhere*”) no doubt refers to settlements in the Jordan Valley and in the eastern deserts that adjoined the hill country. The “*mountains*” describes hill country outside that of Samaria and Judah, most likely that of the Galilee area and the upper Negev; the “*western foothills*” are the lowlands between the Mediterranean coastal plain and the hills of Judah; the Negev was the vast desert south of Judah; and the seacoast obviously the Mediterranean littoral that has always formed Israel's western border. The “*land of the Canaanites*” speaks of the valleys and plains, especially those of Jezreel to the north, that remained in Canaanite control well into the time of the Israelite judges (**Judg 4:1-3**).

B. (:8) Fulfil the Divine Mission to Take Possession of the Promised Land

1. Casting the Vision

“See, I have placed the land before you;”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The NIV more helpfully translates **verse 8**, *I have given you this land* (similarly NABRE, NJB). The expression likely has a **legal background**, as property is transferred from one party to another. The verse thus not only announces what will happen but already reflects the official transfer (**Mayes: 120**).

2. Command to Take Possession of the Promised Land

“go in and possess the land”

Eugene Merrill: That it was theirs by right and not by might is clear from the verb “*take possession*” (**v. 8**), for in context of the covenant promise the Heb. *y ra* (“*take possession of*”) connotes **inheritance**. Yahweh the Great King owns all the earth, and it is his to bestow upon his peoples as he wishes. His people, therefore, were not about to take the land of other people but to receive the land as a gift from its divine owner, coming into their own rightful claim as vassals who work the royal estate of the Lord their God (cf. **1:39; 3:20; 10:11; Josh 1:15; 21:43**).

Peter Craigie: The **charge** the Lord gives to his people is one that requires **vision**, but now it must be vision that prompts **action**: *Go and take possession of the land*. In **1:7**, the land was described according to its geographical divisions. Here it is described as a part of the plan and promise of the Lord: *the land which I promised by oath to your fathers*. The vision required of the people of the Lord is one that sees more than the mundane, physical regions of the land; it is the **significance** of the land in the promise, soon to be realized, that provides the strength necessary for commitment and obedience.

3. Covenant Promise

“which the LORD swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to them and their descendants after them.”

Michael Grisanti: Moses presents both sides of the conquest endeavor: **God’s part** and **Israel’s part**. God “*set before*” Israel this land of promise. The unique combination of the verb “*to give*” (*ntn*) and the preposition “*before*” (*lipnê*) highlights God’s action of placing the land of promise before the nation of Israel. Yahweh first promised this land to Abraham (as a pledge) in **Genesis 12:7**. His reaffirmation of this promise to Abraham (**Ge 15:18**) and Jacob (**28:13–15**) regarded this promise as a reality (“*I have given/I gave*”). In his reaffirmation to Jacob (**Ge 35:12**), the Lord affirmed that the land he gave to Abraham and Isaac he will give to Jacob and his descendants. The Lord promised this land to Abraham and his descendants by oath (**1:8**—“*the land that the LORD swore he would give*”).

In Moses’ day, God is placing the land of promise at the disposal of the Israelites, the anticipated descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In conjunction with the interjection “*See,*” Yahweh is declaring: “*I hereby give/place . . .*” (**Weinfeld, Deuteronomy 1–11, 134**).

God required that Israel “*take possession*” of this land of promise. Although this verb can signify a peaceful occupation of land (cf. **Pss 25:13; 37:9**), in covenantal contexts it

highlights taking possession of a land by dispossessing the former inhabitants (**Dt 4:14, 26; 6:1; 7:1; 8:1; 11:8** et al.). Just as God directed other nations to “*possess*” certain lands (**2:12, 21–22**), God demands that Israel take possession of what he has allotted to them.

Paul Barker: This is the **land of promise**, promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (**1:8**). It is where Abram and Sarai went in **Genesis 12:5**. A crucial feature of Deuteronomy is illustrated here. Land “*sworn to your ancestors*” is a recurring theme (e.g. **1:35; 6:10, 18, 23; 7:13; 8:1; 9:5; 10:11**; etc.). It is not any land that Israel is about to enter. It is **Promised Land**. It is **sworn land**. God, indeed Yahweh, the covenant name for God (**1:6**), has promised this land. This appeal to Yahweh’s promise is meant to encourage Israel to enter and conquer the land. The dilemma is, can God’s promise be trusted?

Gerald Gerbrandt: The first two qualities reflect a **paradox** consistent in Deuteronomy. On the one hand, Deuteronomy affirms that **God has given Israel the land**—Israel cannot earn it. God freely and graciously gives it to Israel. The land never loses this gift quality. In fact, a critical question will be whether Israel will remember that the land is a gift and not a commodity it can do with what it wants. But on the other hand, it is not a gift forced upon Israel. Israel will only receive the land if it **steps out in trust to take possession of it**. The next story in this chapter (1:19–2:1) demonstrates what happens when Israel fails to do this. A **cooperation** or **synergism** between God and the human is expected. The passage giving journey instructions already sets the tone for the whole book.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What would God’s people find encouraging as they prepared to set out on the last stage of their journey?
- 2) What role would a proper understanding of the law have in the successful appropriation of God’s gift of the Promised Land?
- 3) What types of challenges did Moses face in exhorting this new generation to move out and advance across the Jordan River?
- 4) How would you describe the synergy between God’s gift of the land and the requirement of the people to trust God and take the Promised Land?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: Like the structure of the book of Deuteronomy as a whole, **1:1**—

3:22 is shaped concentrically in seven parts, a bit like a Jewish candelabrum (menorah):

A Summons to enter the Promised Land (**1:1–8**)

B Organization of the people for life in the land (**1:9–18**)

C Israel's unholy war—failure to enter the promised land (**1:19—2:1**)

X The march of conquest from Mount Seir to the Promised Land (**2:2–25**)

C' YHWH's Holy War—conquest of Sihon and Og in Transjordan (**2:26—3:11**)

B' Distribution of the land in Transjordan (**3:12–17**)

A' Summons to take possession of the Promised Land in Cisjordan (**3:18–22**)

The book of Deuteronomy forms a bridge between the Tetrateuch (Genesis through Numbers) and the books of the Former Prophets (Joshua through 2 Kings in the Hebrew canon), which are sometimes called the Deuteronomistic (or Deuteronomistic) History. One of the ways of constructing such a “bridge” in the literary world of ancient Israel was what some have described as “ring composition.” At the center stands the central concern: the word of God, which in this case is mediated through his servant Moses. What follows is much more than the mere words of Moses. Moses spoke what YHWH commanded him to say. In fact, as **vv 5–6a** make clear, Moses is quoting and expounding the very words of YHWH himself. The author “nests” this primary revelation in both time (**vv 2–3a** and **4**) and space (**vv 1** and **5**) in a carefully balanced structure.

Daniel Block: At the same time, in the book we catch a glimpse of pastoral ministry at its finest. The speeches represent the farewell address of a man who had pastored this congregation for forty years, guiding them in exciting times and caring for them when circumstances were difficult. We will hear reminiscences of Moses' frustrations with his own people (**1:37; 3:26; 4:21**), of Yahweh's rebuke for his own sins (**32:48–52**), and of his refusal to grant a personal request (**3:24–26**), but in many respects Moses functions as a model pastor. He knows his audience well; they have been rebellious from the day he first knew them (**9:24**), and as soon as he has exited from the stage they will apostasize (**31:27–29**).

Unlike many pastors today, Moses also knows his role as their teacher (**Deut. 4:1, 5, 10, 14**). He challenges them to keep alive the memory of Yahweh's gracious acts and instructs them in the dimensions of covenant life. He also pleads with them to guard their very beings against spiritual lethargy and defection. But most important, Moses introduces them to God. Fulfilling the ideals of Malachi, the last in the train of prophets that he heads, Moses worked tirelessly as pastor to bring about his parishioners' life and

peace; he stood in awe of the name of Yahweh; he taught truth; he walked with Yahweh in shalom and uprightness; and he turned many from iniquity (**Mal. 2:5–6**).

But Moses also knew his role in relation to Yahweh. He was a voice, crying in the desert, “*Prepare the way of the LORD*” (**Isa. 40:3; John 1:23**). But he was also a righteous intercessor through whose prayers much was accomplished (**9:19–20**; cf. **James 5:16**). And as he faced his own death, he was not preoccupied with personal legacy; his energies were focused on his flock. Here was a man who pastored “*according to God*” (*kata theon*), that is, as God would have done were he physically present (**1 Peter 5:2**).

Michael Grisanti: Note the chiasmic structure of **verse 5** per **Craigie**:

A *These are the words Moses spoke*

B *In the desert east of the Jordan*

C *Kadesh Barnea—a place of judgment because of Israel’s rejection of God’s intervention*

D *The time of Moses’ address: fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month*

C’ *Sihon and Og—victory because of Israel’s reliance on God’s intervention*

B’ *East of the Jordan in the territory of Moab*

A’ *Moses began to expound this law, saying:*

It is essential for any reader of Deuteronomy to understand that this book represents an **exposition of the law**, which God had already given at Sinai, and not a second giving of the law. It does not serve as a simple repetition of the law, nor does it constitute a contradiction of those divine standards. Moses provides an exposition of God’s law as a means of preparing God’s children for the daunting task that lay before them.

Patrick Miller: Deuteronomy was meant to be—and was received as—instruction about God’s way. That way was rooted in, grew out of, and was consonant with the covenant stipulations and divine activity that created Israel as a people. While traditions and statutes were updated, they were regarded as part and parcel of the primary formulation of relationship between God and Israel. One assumed that this instruction that grew out of the Mosaic instruction belonged with it. Fresh explication of the law of God in a new time does not mean that it is new law. Rather, it is a part of the whole and properly carries the authority of Moses. The introduction, therefore, says in effect to readers of any time: Read these words as being God’s instruction taught and explained by Moses, and you will know what force and authority they are to have. Read these words as guidance for people moving from slavery and wilderness and wandering into a land of opportunity, blessing, and life under God’s rule, and you will know where and how they are to be heard. . .

When one looks at how land and home are to come to Israel, three things immediately stand out. The land is **promised, given, and taken**.

It is **promised**, which means that there is a history to this transaction. The homeland arises out of the sworn purposes of God. It is not an accident or a casual and unexpected event. It has been at the heart of God's intention to bring blessing to the families of the earth from the beginning (**Gen. 12:1–3**; cf. **Wolff**). Because the reality of the land was for much of the time only promise, its realization assumed a history of trust as well as of promise. Deuteronomy will reiterate that word time and time again, beginning with these chapters: There is no promised land without trusting folk. For those who trust in the promise and are willing to act upon it, even the mountain of God is only a stage on the journey to the promised rest.

The land promised is also by definition **given**. Israel is to receive and conceive of the land as a gift from God. No more than any other gift of salvation or experience of blessing is the land deserved or to be claimed by a people. Deuteronomy continually reminds the people that no merit (**ch. 9**) or power (**ch. 7**) on their part ensures or provides the place for life. Whatever complex historical processes led to Israel's settlement in the land, they are there only because a gracious God has provided for their life.

Those complex processes, however, are reflected in the fact that the land given is also **taken**. This too is in the divine purpose and out of the divine command. As **Robert Frost** expressed it in his poem "*The Gift Outright*" about another land at a much later time, "The deed of gift was many deeds of war." So Israel is told to go in and take possession, to conquer the land. **Divine gift and human act are parts of a whole**. The human process of occupation was surely more complicated than the biblical story indicates on the surface, but the heightening of the acts of military conquest is a way of underscoring the divine-human interaction. The land is seen as quickly taken, and so the power and intention of God to give the land are affirmed. The deed of gift is realized and dramatized in the many deeds of war. This juxtaposition of divine gift and human act, especially reflected in the pairing of words having to do with "*giving*" (Heb. *natan*) and "*possessing*" (Heb. *yaraš*), will be found repeatedly in Deuteronomy (e.g., **2:31, 33; 3:3, 12, 18; 7:1–3; 9:1–3**). It reflects the typically synergistic character of biblical expression that insists on the unity and interrelatedness of the initiating and accompanying activity of the sovereign God and the effective action of the human creatures in response.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 1:9-18

TITLE: PREPARING FOR CONQUEST BY ESTABLISHING DELEGATED LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

BIG IDEA:
QUALIFIED LEADERS SHARE THE LOAD AND ADJUDICATE JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION:

Gerald Gerbrandt: The Old Testament relates this story three times—here, in **Exodus 18:13–27**, and in **Numbers 11:11–17**. . .

The phrase *at that time* serves as a structuring device in the story (**vv. 9, 16, 18**). It opens the narrative, placing the story at Horeb, after the receipt of the commandments but before leaving the mountain as instructed in **verse 7**. Then, after the main story (a problem is introduced, a solution is proposed, the proposed solution is accepted, and the judges are selected, **vv. 9–15**), it introduces Moses' charge to the newly named judges (**v. 16**), and concludes the narrative (**v. 18**).

Duane Christensen: The opening rubric of **v 9** forms an **inclusion** with the first half of **v 18** to frame the pericope as a whole:

And I said to you, AT THAT TIME (v 9)

And I commanded you, AT THAT TIME (v 18)

Daniel Block: Those who lead God's people must be committed fundamentally to the promotion of righteousness. Righteous (*šedeq*) administration demands uncompromising fairness for all, without respect to the social standing of the persons involved. As **Leviticus 19:15** recognizes, the righteous administration of justice may easily be derailed by showing either deference to the rich and powerful or sentimentality toward the poor (cf. **Deut. 10:17; 16:19; 24:17**). Moses' inclusion of aliens reminds us that those who adjudicate on covenantal matters must be blind to status, race, and citizenship. It may be too much to expect that the world will operate this way, but the current climate of hatred toward specific people groups offers the church a glorious opportunity to display the compassion of God himself (**10:17**).

Michael Grisanti: Although some scholars view this section as a digression (because **1:8** flows into 1:19 seamlessly), it does prepare the reader (and Moses' audience) for the reality before them. The breadth of the land into which they are about to enter (the wilderness initially and the land of Canaan in Deuteronomy) and the growing population of Israel (a fulfillment of Yahweh's promise to them) provide the occasion for this appointment of leaders to serve as Moses' assistants. It will also pave the way for a smoother transition once Moses passes off the scene.

Patrick Miller: It is precisely the intention of Deuteronomy to say that receipt of the salvation gift opens up marvelous possibilities, but things do not end there. The blessing brings with it demands and responsibilities, indeed in a way not true before the promise was accomplished. From here on, Deuteronomy stresses that blessing, gifts, and prosperity, by their very existence, place burdens, require leadership, and demand shared responsibilities and work. When the promise is realized is, in some sense, only the beginning. Life now becomes more complex, requiring leadership, wisdom, structure, order, and fairness to an even greater degree than before.

I. (:9-12) CALLING ATTENTION TO HIS UNSUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP BURDEN – THE NEED FOR ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND SHARED LEADERSHIP

A. (:9) Leadership In Isolation Can Become Especially Burdensome

*“And I spoke to you **at that time**, saying,
‘I am not able to bear the burden of you alone.’”*

B. (:10-11) Growth Creates the Need for Shared Leadership

1. (:10) Evaluating the Blessing of Past Growth

“The LORD your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude.”

Eugene Merrill: This burgeoning growth had come about, of course, as a direct fulfillment of promise to the fathers (**Gen 15:5; 17:2**; cf. Exod 1:7; Deut 10:22; 26:5). Moses therefore saw this state of affairs not as a problem but as a sign of the blessing of the Lord. In fact, he reported that his innermost desire was that God make them not just as numerous as the stars but a thousand times more so. The language of hyperbole — “*as many as the stars*” and “*increase you a thousand times*” (vv. **10-11**)—is not, of course, to be taken literally. In fact, however, the descendants of Abraham have become many more than the stars the patriarch could have counted with the naked eye.

Jack Deere: If the nation had any doubt about God’s intention or ability to fulfill His ancient covenant with Abraham she had only to look at here present condition. Israel had become so numerous that they were like *the stars in the sky* (v. **10**). This, of course, was one thing God had promised Abraham and Isaac (**Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; Ex. 32:13**). The nation’s growth thus proved both God’s intention and ability to fulfill His original promises to Abraham.

Bruce Hurt: *Behold* (02009) *hinneh* is an interjection meaning behold, look. . . "It is used often and expresses strong feelings, surprise, hope, expectation, certainty, thus giving vividness depending on its surrounding context." (**Baker**) *Hinneh* generally directs our mind to the text, imploring the reader to give it special attention. In short, the Spirit is trying to arrest our attention! **Spurgeon** reminds us that "Behold is a word of **wonder**; it is intended to excite admiration. Wherever you see it hung out in Scripture, it is like an **ancient sign-board**, signifying that there are rich wares within, or like the hands which solid readers have observed in the margin of the older Puritanic

books, drawing attention to something particularly worthy of observation." I would add, behold is like a **divine highlighter**, a divine underlining of an especially striking or important text. It says in effect "Listen up, all ye who would be wise in the ways of Jehovah!"

2. (:11) Anticipating the Compounding of Future Growth

*“May the LORD, the God of your fathers,
increase you a thousand-fold more than you are,
and bless you, just as He has promised you!”*

C. (:12) People Problems Contribute to the Burden of Isolated Leadership

*“How can I alone bear the load and burden
of you and your strife?”*

Daniel Block: Moses’ plea to God to multiply them a thousand-fold suggests that numbers was not the real problem (v. 11). The problem lay with the character and conduct of the people; to Moses they were a pain and a burden, and their bickering was intolerable (v. 12).

II. (:13-15) CHOOSING QUALIFIED LEADERS – THE PROCESS OF APPOINTING CAPABLE LEADERS TO PUT THAT STRUCTURE IN PLACE

A. (:13) Essential Leadership Qualifications

*“Choose wise and discerning and experienced men
from your tribes, and I will appoint them as your heads.”*

Daniel Block: Moses emphasizes the leaders’ maturity and intellectual qualifications, in contrast to Jethro’s focus on their spiritual and moral qualities in **Exodus 18:21**.

Peter Craigie: they were to have the benefit of acquired knowledge (wisdom), and the ability of discernment, together with the knowledge that can come only with experience. Their task was a difficult one, and the required qualifications were high.

Michael Grisanti: These appointees must also have a good reputation (“*known*”); they had to be recognized by the community and be people in whom others had confidence. These leaders had to have passed the test of close scrutiny and enjoy respect by their peers.

Patrick Miller: **Verse 13** gives three necessary characteristics: wisdom, understanding or discernment, and reputation (“*reputable*,” NRSV). “*Wisdom*” in this case probably has to do with intelligence and knowledge acquired by experience that is assimilated and brought to bear on cases and new situations. “*Understanding*” refers to the ability to discern, to distinguish between matters of right and wrong, good and bad. “*Reputable*” (being known) means just what the text suggests. Leaders expected to make judgments acceptable to the persons involved and the whole community should be respected and of good repute.

John Maxwell: The inability of some leaders to **delegate work** is often a big stumbling block to progress. Many leaders fail to delegate because they have an exaggerated estimate of their own ability—the “no-one-can-do-it-as-well-as-I-can” attitude. Unfortunately, they fail to recognize the abilities of their subordinates. (*Preacher's Commentary*)

David Thompson: Being a leader has nothing to do with seniority, popularity, charisma or natural ability. What is needed are wise men of God who can govern themselves. This is the kind of person who will be able to also govern others.

The word “*wise*” (*hokma*) is a word often used in Proverbs. It describes one who is very skilled and crafty in his ability to judge things in light of God’s word (**William Gesenius**, Hebrew Lexicon, p. 277). p. 21

The word “*discerning*” (*bin*) is a word that refers to one who can understand things and distinguish things and separate things perceptively and in an intelligent way (Ibid., p. 113). God did not want His people governed by a bunch of gullible buffoons. They needed to be led by men who could sort out things from God’s word in a very God-honoring, intelligent way.

The word “*experienced*” (*yada*) refers to discerning and knowledgeable men who know how to analyze things with their minds to discover what is true and right (Ibid., pp. 333-334). This word is found some 873 times in the Old Testament in various contexts. It certainly implies that one has a reputation for having a discerning mind.

Moses said these were the kinds of men that God’s people needed to select and then they were to bring those men to Moses for his approval.

B. (:14) Endorsement of Shared Leadership

*“And you answered me and said,
‘The thing which you have said to do is good.’”*

C. (:15) Elevation of Qualified Leaders

*“So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men,
and appointed them heads over you,
leaders of thousands, and of hundreds, of fifties and of tens,
and officers for your tribes.”*

Duane Christensen: The leaders whom Moses chooses (**vv 9–13**) and instructs (**vv 16–17**) clearly have a **judicial function**. But in **v 15b** the leaders are called “*heads over you—commanders of thousands, and commanders of hundreds, and commanders of fifties, and commanders of tens . . . officers throughout your tribes.*” This focus on **military language** anticipates the subsequent discussions of “The March of Conquest” (**2:2–25**), “Israel’s Unholy War” and “YHWH’s Holy War” (**Deut 2:26–3:11**). Continued life in the Promised Land is dependent on prior conquest of that land; and

Moses' successors must exercise both judicial and military roles in the life of YHWH's people. The tension inherent in the demand for both **justice** and **power** in Moses' successors will be a dominant theme. . .

Moses' organization of Israel down to "*commanders of ten*" has some application to small groups in the church today. The **cell-group concept** that has led to remarkable church growth suggests that ten persons may be the ideal maximum for involvement of each person in the dynamics of group life. When cell groups have grown to twelve to fifteen persons, it is best to divide them under trained leadership. The two new groups often increase quickly to the optimum number of ten. If a pastor today would heed the example of Moses, he or she will organize the church body into subgroups—down to ten persons in each group, as leadership responsibility is concerned.

Patrick Miller: The functions of the officials described here are not easy to determine or distinguish. There may be military functions central to the role of "*commander*" (especially in light of the breakdown into units of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens), administrative responsibilities assumed for the "*officers*," and judicial functions for the "*judges*." It is likely that there are only two officials here (commander-judges and officers) or possibly only one, described with three terms that may in fact reflect a combination of military, administrative, and judicial responsibilities. Certainly the context, as well as **Exodus 18**, indicates that the **primary function is judicial** and the primary assignment the maintenance of justice and equity, reminding us of the centrality of the proper maintenance of justice for the social fabric.

III. (:16-18) CHARGING JUDGES – THE KEY FACTORS IN ADMINISTERING JUSTICE

(:16a) Charge to the Judges Introduced

*"Then I charged your judges **at that time**, saying,"*

A. (:16b) Judge Righteously

"Hear the cases between your fellow countrymen, and judge righteously between a man and his fellow countryman, or the alien who is with him."

Peter Pett: The constant reference that we find to '*resident aliens, sojourners*', that is foreigners who lived among them without actually joining the covenant, although expected to keep the ordinances and statutes and not to openly worship other gods, is a reminder of the conglomerate make-up of the camp. Most present at Sinai appear to have responded to the covenant and become 'true' children of Israel, but there would always be the odd one or two who did not, and others may well later have joined them later in the journey through the wilderness once they had left Sinai and have partly held aloof. There would probably be a small but constant stream of people who liked the idea of joining with them as they journeyed through the wilderness, and who seemingly were welcomed. Israel were ever to remember that they had been in bondage in Egypt and were on the whole to refrain from doing the same to others, and were to show

hospitality to strangers. They were to treat all fairly, as they would have liked to be treated in Egypt.

B. (:17a) Judge without Partiality

*“You shall not show partiality in judgment;
you shall hear the small and the great alike.”*

Jack Deere: The concern shown in the choice of **wise and respected men** (v. 15; cf. v. 13) and the command for **fairness** (*judge fairly*, v. 16) and absolute **impartiality** in judgment (v. 17; cf. 16:19; Prov. 18:5; 24:23) made it clear that the point of the Conquest was for Israel to establish righteousness and holiness in the Promised Land and ultimately in the entire world (cf. Deut. 28:1, 9-10, 13). It took faith for Israel to conquer the land, but it also took faith for them to administer justice in the land, for here too they would encounter opposition.

C. (:17b) Judge without Pressure or Intimidation

“You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God's.”

Patrick Miller: Justice shall not be compromised by **fear**. This is the other side of the word about impartiality. Not only shall the weak be treated as well and fairly as the strong, but judges should not let fear of power and wealth compromise their insistence on equity and the right. An intimidated judge can never deal justly; nor is there any place to turn for redress when the court is intimidated. **Martin Luther** said of this instruction, “This is the highest and most difficult virtue of rulers, namely, justice and integrity of judgment. For it is easy to pronounce judgment on poor and common people; but to condemn the powerful, the wealthy, and the friendly, to disregard blood, honor, fear, favor, and gain and simply to consider the issue—this is a divine virtue” (p. 19).

Duane Christensen: The judge administers the law on behalf of God, which is no easy task as the reference to cases “*too hard*” for the judges bears witness.

Daniel Block: The last clause seems intentionally vague. It could mean:

- (i) God’s judgment will support the official’s verdict;
- (ii) the official judges by divine authority;
- (iii) the official receives wisdom for rendering a just decision from God;
- (iv) the law by which the official renders judgment is administered on behalf of God, from whom it derives; or
- (v) the judge will ultimately answer to God for how he has administered justice.

Eugene Merrill: Since he is absolutely sovereign and furthermore knows the true guilt or innocence of parties in judgment, he, not human litigants, is to be feared.

Bruce Hurt: The buck stops with God, not the judge. Judge boldly and with courage, doing so in dependence on and in the authority of God. They were not to be afraid of the consequences of their judgment including threats against them (as powerful people

are prone to do!). Moses explains that the reason is because it is not their judgment but God's so the parties could take their case to Yahweh if they were not satisfied! And mark it down that judges are accountable to God and God alone! America is filled with judges that seem to seek advancement of their political agenda instead of seeking God's justice, and as a famous pastor once said in a sermon there will be Pay Day, Some Day! And as someone else has said "Without fair and equal justice, a people cannot long survive!" Woe!

D. (:17c) Judge within the Scope of Your Limitations

“And the case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.”

(:18) Charge to the Judges

*“And I commanded you **at that time** all the things that you should do.”*

Peter Craigie: The section closes with a summary statement referring to all the legislation given at Horeb; the function of the historical prologue is such that only selected recollections were described, insofar as they fitted into the purpose of Moses' address.

John Maxwell: What more could the people ask than a God who is faithful and a leader who is responsible? Now the people must be obedient. (*Preacher's Commentary*)

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What heaps the most stress on spiritual leaders?
- 2) Why do so many leaders with strong personalities and great giftedness have difficulty in sharing the leadership burden with other gifted and qualified men?
- 3) How can these principles of righteous judgment help us to evaluate our present-day culture?
- 4) What type of behavior will characterize judges who fear men instead of fearing God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gerald Gerbrandt: Moses is the great, unparalleled leader of Israel, and yet he will die before the book ends. This story already begins the movement to his death. Moses recognizes the limits of what he alone can do and dies to an exclusive claim on

authority and the hoarding of power. He begins to share and trust others with it (Olson: 24). Moses recognizes that in changed circumstances (increased people, movement into the land) the old administrative structure that placed all power in his hands is no longer adequate. New structures are required, and so Moses institutes them. Preparations begin for the time when God's living voice will no longer be with the people. Implicitly the story suggests to its audience that new times, even when the result of blessing, may require adaptation and adjustment. Freedom, indeed encouragement, is given to the people to continue this direction.

Duane Christensen: In a lecture on Deuteronomy, Luther notes that the question of persons and government comes before the exposition of Law, since laws are useless without persons to administer and enforce them.

Wiersbe: The charge Moses gave to the newly appointed leaders is one that ought to be heeded by everybody who serves in a place of authority, whether religious or civil (Deut. 1:16-18). The emphasis is on character and justice and the realization that God is the judge and the final authority. If all officials made their decisions on basis of nationality, race, social position, or wealth, they would sin against God and pervert justice. Throughout the Law of Moses, there's an emphasis on justice and showing kindness and fairness to the poor, especially widows, orphans, and aliens in the land.

Donald Ackland: The importance of law and order –

Moses was aware of his impending death. Naturally, he was concerned for the future of his people, who had repeatedly shown a tendency toward lawlessness. That his anxieties were reasonable is demonstrated by subsequent events. Within comparatively few years after the settlement in Canaan, it was said of Israel that “*every man did that which was right in his own eyes*” (Judg. 21:25). Moses reminded his people that they had already seen the need for establishing a system of community government. The need would be even greater as they entered the land. War quickly spawns anarchy, and with a campaign of conquest before them, Israel needed to make a strong commitment to the principles of law and order. No state or nation can survive without such commitment.

John Currid: Moses now recounts the process for selecting leaders for Israel. First, he directs the people to participate in the process — the part the people play in this incident is not mentioned in either Exodus 18 or Numbers 11. The people are to nominate leaders who have high qualities of character. The stress here is on wisdom, discernment, experience and knowledge. The emphasis in Exodus 18:21 is primarily on the moral virtue of the leaders: they are to be ‘*men of truth*’ and they are to hate ‘*dishonest gain*’. The qualifications set out in the two texts, although different, are not antithetical — rather, they complement one another and they are all qualities that mark a person of upright and sterling character. Moses then appoints the elected leaders to positions of authority in Israel. Various kinds of authority are involved. The appointments are clearly of a military nature: the separation of the people into divisions according to numbers is a military enrolment. But these are also civil functionaries, as is confirmed by the duties enumerated in the subsequent verses (1:16-18).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 1:19 - 2:1

TITLE: *HISTORY LESSON: ISRAEL'S EARLIER DISOBEDIENCE REGARDING TAKING POSSESSION OF THE LAND*

BIG IDEA:

ISRAEL'S DISOBEDIENCE FLIES IN THE FACE OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AND ASSURANCES

INTRODUCTION:

Michael Grisanti: After arriving in Kadesh Barnea (**1:19**), Moses commissioned twelve spies to survey the Promised Land, but ten of them brought back a discouraging report, which caused the children of Israel to reject the Lord's promise of a victorious conquest. Consequently, God's punishment on these rebels was that no adult from that generation (except Joshua and Caleb) would enter the land. Their rebellious attempt to enter Canaan on their own strength was thwarted by the Amorites.

Gerald Gerbrandt: A boundary location presents opportunity and risk. Beginning a new job, leaving home to start university studies, entering a marriage covenant—all these are contemporary examples. The opportunity is to enter the future in trust and receive that which God is giving. The risk is more complex. Too little faith in God may lead to overly cautious action; too much confidence in one's own ability may lead to reckless decisions. The story of Israel's first arrival at the Promised Land exhibits both possibilities in dramatic fashion.

Paul Barker: As Israel obeys, it goes towards its goal, realizing God's promise. As it disobeys, it goes away, or at best remains stationary. Israel's obedience is to be a means of bringing about the fulfilment of God's promises. Israel is not to sit down and await God's fulfilment but is to be the means for bringing that about. Israel is therefore to cooperate with God in bringing about his purposes.

Though **1:19** simply recounts an episode of obedience, the focus of the rest of **chapter 1** is on a stationary Israel in Kadesh (**1:20–46**). Moses gives this incident a great deal of attention because it is so important for teaching a crucial lesson. Israel at Kadesh is essentially in the same position as the next generation in the Plains of Moab forty years later, now being addressed by Moses in Deuteronomy. Though Kadesh is to the south of the Promised Land and the Plains of Moab are to the east, both are on the border. Moses is most concerned to see that Israel does not repeat the mistakes of Kadesh, for if it does, the people may well be back in the wilderness for yet another generation.

I. (:19-33) HISTORY LESSONS CAN BE PAINFUL BUT NECESSARY

A. (:19-21) The Historical Challenge to Trust God and Possess the Land

1. (:19) Command to Journey to Kadesh-barnea Obeyed

a. Departure from Horeb

“Then we set out from Horeb,”

b. Journey Through the Wilderness

“and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw, on the way to the hill country of the Amorites, just as the LORD our God had commanded us;”

c. Arrival at Kadesh-barnea

“and we came to Kadesh-barnea.”

Duane Christensen: The opening verse of this section, with its statement *“we set out from Horeb,”* is a direct response to YHWH’s command in **1:6–7**. It is also a connecting link to the next of the travel notices in **2:1** with which it functions as a frame around the episode of Israel’s “Unholy War.” The journey took the Israelites more than a hundred miles through an arid and barren wilderness, *“that great and fearful desert,”* in response to YHWH’s command to enter the Promised Land, *“the hill country of the Amorites.”* The journey from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea was mentioned in **1:2** as a journey of eleven days. In **8:15** we learn that the wilderness (el-Tih) was a place of *“fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there is no water.”* **Num 13:26** describes the location of Kadesh-barnea as *“the wilderness of Paran.”* According to **Num 34:4** it is on the southern border of the Promised Land. It is likely that the Israelites spent virtually the entire period of their wilderness sojourn in this general vicinity.

2. (:20-21) Charge to Take the Promised Land

a. (:20) Encouraging Vision of God’s Good Gift of the Land

“And I said to you, ‘You have come to the hill country of the Amorites which the LORD our God is about to give us.’”

b. (:21a) Entreaty to Appropriate God’s Good Gift

“See, the LORD your God has placed the land before you;”

c. (:21b) Exhortation to Possess the Land by Stepping Out in Faith

*“go up, take possession,
as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you.”*

Eugene Merrill: There could not be any hesitation in order that Israel might capitalize on the element of surprise but, more importantly, because the Lord, *“the God of your fathers,”* had thus commanded.

d. (:21c) Essential Prohibition Against the Show-Stopper of Fear

“Do not fear or be dismayed.”

Eugene Merrill: These two verbs, *“afraid”* and *“discouraged,”* occur commonly in parallel or are juxtaposed to create a stock expression conveying the idea, in the

positive, of **complete confidence** in the Lord and his ability to save (**Deut 31:8; Josh 8:1; 10:25; 1 Sam 17:11; 1 Chr 22:13; 28:20; 2 Chr 20:15,17; 32:7; Jer 23:4; 30:10; 46:27; Ezek 2:6; 3:9**).

B. (:22-33) The Historical Failure of Disbelief and Fear

1. (:22-25) Reconnaissance Mission

a. (:22) Mission Proposed

“Then all of you approached me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, that they may search out the land for us, and bring back to us word of the way by which we should go up, and the cities which we shall enter.’”

Daniel Block: Under normal circumstances such a reconnaissance mission might have made good sense (**Josh. 2:1; 7:2; Judg. 18:2**), but coming immediately after God’s command, the proposal itself seemed to betray a lack of faith (cf. **9:23**). The outcome of the mission reinforced this conclusion.

Eugene Merrill: The account in **Num 13** suggests that it was the Lord who prompted Moses to send out the advance party (**Num 13:1-2**). This apparently conflicting view of events is by no means antithetical to Moses’ recollection in Deuteronomy, for clearly the idea originated with the people, was sanctioned, and then ordered by the Lord and implemented by Moses (**Num 13:17**). . .

Though the plan to send spies may have bespoken a lack of total trust in God and, in fact, resulted in an undermining of Israel’s resolve to enter Canaan at all (**vv. 26-28**), one can hardly criticize it as imprudent or impractical in such circumstances. In fact, the command (or at least permission) of the Lord in the first place (**Num 13:1-2**) is sufficient to show that the procedure was not totally lacking of divine support.

b. (:23) Mission Embraced

“And the thing pleased me and I took twelve of your men, one man for each tribe.”

c. (:24) Mission Executed

“And they turned and went up into the hill country, and came to the valley of Eshcol, and spied it out.”

d. (:25) Mission Reported

“Then they took some of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought it down to us; and they brought us back a report and said, ‘It is a good land which the LORD our God is about to give us.’”

Daniel Block: His recollection illuminates the **ironies** of the situation.

(1) They went out to gain information to be used to determine military strategy, but their report focused on fruit, concrete evidence of the fertility of the land.

(2) They reported that the land was good, but promptly demonstrated they did not think it worth the risk of an invasion.

(3) They referred to the land as “*a good land that the LORD our God is giving us,*” but they refused to accept it from his hand. God’s promises concerning the land were true, but the obstacles loomed too large in their minds.

2. (:26-28) Rebellion Resulted

a. (:26) Fearful Rebellion – Choosing Fear over Faith

*“Yet you were not willing to go up,
but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God;”*

Michael Grisanti: This refusal to move forward toward Canaan represented nothing less than covenantal treachery, an abhorrent offense against their loving covenantal Lord.

b. (:27) Irrational Grumbling – Denying the Goodness and Love of God

*“and you grumbled in your tents and said,
‘Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of
Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us.’”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: The people’s perspective leads them to a distorted picture of God’s nature. For them God becomes an enemy rather than a friend (1:27). They interpret God’s leading them out of Egypt as an action motivated by hate rather than by love. The people’s words are countered directly a few chapters later (4:34–37). Fear and sin blind the people to the truth, leading to the ultimate distortion.

Patrick Miller: God has given the land plus words of assurance plus a report of the goodness of the land—these do not add up to a negative and fearful reaction. But the people are fearful, immediately and dramatically contrasting the power and promise of God with the weakness and lack of trust of the people. The story builds as Moses characterizes several components of the response of the people: they are unwilling; they rebel against the Lord’s command; they murmur in their tents; they impugn the Lord’s motives.

c. (:28) Defeated Disputing – Focusing on the Obstacles

*“Where can we go up?
Our brethren have made our hearts melt, saying,
‘The people are bigger and taller than we;
the cities are large and fortified to heaven.
And besides, we saw the sons of the Anakim there.’”*

Peter Craigie: In contrast, the people’s vision had been not on the goodness of the land, but on the difficulty they would experience in possessing it. Hence they were rebellious and unwilling to go up and possess the land. As they saw the land, its conquest was full of difficulty—as Moses saw it, it was the promised land that the Lord was about to give them as he had promised. The “facts” were the same for both, but Moses, the man of vision and faith, could minimize the difficulties because of his strong conviction in the

Lord's promise; the people, with little vision, could not lift their sight above the formidableness of their opponents.

3. (:29-31) Reassurance Attempted

a. (:29) 2 Pastoral Exhortations

"Then I said to you, 'Do not be shocked, nor fear them.'"

Duane Christensen: *"Do not be in dread and do not be afraid."* Deuteronomy has an extensive vocabulary of words connoting *"fear"* for encouraging military courage (as here), for warning as to the consequences of disobedience to God (cf. **28:66**), and for proper worship with the meaning *"to love (God)"* (**10:12**). Moses encouraged the people by repeating words from the tradition of Holy War, urging them not to be afraid. What YHWH did for them in Egypt in times past will be repeated in the future as he continues to wage Holy War on their behalf (**v 30**).

b. (:30-31) 4 Arguments of Reassurance

1) Your Leader Goes Before You into Battle –

Divine Guide

"The LORD your God who goes before you"

2) Your God Will Fight on Your Behalf --

Divine Fighter

"will Himself fight on your behalf,"

3) Your God Proved His Faithfulness in the Exodus –

Divine Savior

"just as He did for you in Egypt before your eyes,"

4) Your God Proved His Faithfulness in the Wilderness --

Divine Father

"and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you have walked, until you came to this place."

These verses [:29-31] lie at the heart of the passage and represent the key lesson.

Eugene Merrill: The reference to Israel as God's son is also covenantally significant, for when the Lord instructed Moses to return to Egypt from Midian to lead Israel from bondage, he referred to the slave people as his *"firstborn son"* (**Exod 4:22**). Such familial language was common in ancient Near Eastern treaty texts where the maker of the covenant would be "father" and the receiver "son."

Duane Christensen: At the structural center of **Deut 1:19—2:1** stands a *"summons not to fear"* (**vv 29–31**). YHWH, as Divine Warrior, protects his people and wages war in their behalf. As we become aware of the reality of evil in the spiritual realm, we also

become aware of our need for God's power to cope with forces of darkness. The human response is that of fear. Like the spies, we conclude that the enemy is too strong for us; and that is precisely the point. If we are to prevail over the forces of evil, we must wage battle with a power greater than our own. Therefore, in the words of Paul, we must "*Put on the whole armor of God . . . for we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against . . . spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*" (**Eph 6:10–12**). It is this spiritual battle to which this text speaks.

To enter the "*promised land*," one must trust God to defeat the forces of evil. If we fear the enemy, that very foe will increase in stature before our eyes to become "*giants in the land*." As we engage the foe in spiritual battle, we must constantly be aware that it is God who fights in our behalf. The moment we step forth in our own strength alone we will be smitten "*as far as Hormah*" (i.e., back to the outskirts of our own camp from which we set out to engage the enemy in combat).

Daniel Block: Trying to correct the people's flawed perspective, Moses' response focused entirely on Yahweh. After an opening call for calm and confidence (v. 29), he tried to encourage them with three arguments (vv. 30–31):

- (1) Yahweh was present with them and going before them;
- (2) Yahweh, the divine Warrior and Captain of his hosts (cf. **Josh. 5:13–15**), would fight for them;
- (3) Yahweh had taken care of them in the past by defeating the Egyptians before their very eyes and sustaining them through the great and terrifying desert (v. 19).

With sensitive pastoral touch, Moses compared Yahweh's care to that of a father who carries his son through danger to safety.

Patrick Miller: The combination of the saving, fighting activity of God with the caring, supporting relationship conveyed by the parental image is a fundamental paradigm of Scripture for portraying God vis-à-vis the human community, both individual and corporate. It is intended to declare that in the deepest of troubles and in the face of the largest of threats you do not have to be afraid, for God is there with you to watch over you and will be at work to deliver you from trouble and threat. In this instance, Moses underscores the exemplary character of this promise of salvation by identifying God's saving activity here with what the Lord did in the exodus and God's caring protection with the way God bore Israel through the wilderness. In other words, the primal events and experiences of the people demonstrated the dual grounds for assurance in the future. Moses says, in effect, As God redeemed you at the beginning and was with you along the way, so it will be in the future; therefore, you need not fear.

4. (:32-33) Rejection of the Lord Despite His Demonstrated Faithfulness, Guidance and Power

"But for all this, you did not trust the LORD your God, 33 who goes before you on your way, to seek out a place for you to encamp, in fire by night and cloud by day, to show you the way in which you should go."

II. (:36-40) DISBELIEF AND REBELLION HAVE CONSEQUENCES

A. (:34-36) Evil Generation Judged Except for Caleb

“Then the LORD heard the sound of your words, and He was angry and took an oath, saying, 35 ‘Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land which I swore to give your fathers, 36 except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and to his sons I will give the land on which he has set foot, because he has followed the LORD fully.’”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The willingness to punish is part of the nature of God in Deuteronomy. The reference to God’s wrath (v. 34) reminds one of Israel’s earlier accusation that God hated Israel (v. 27). But the two are very different. Whereas hate and love may be opposites, anger and love are not. Israel’s loss of faith leads to God’s anger, but the love of God that lies behind the original election of Israel is not lost. The very next verse (1:35) again includes a reference to the ancestral covenant and the promise of land (v. 35). The purpose of the punishment is to make fulfillment of the promise possible.

B. (:37-38) Moses Judged but Joshua Elevated

1. (:37) Moses Judged

“The LORD was angry with me also on your account, saying, ‘Not even you shall enter there.’”

2. (:38) Joshua Elevated

“Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter there; encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.”

C. (:39) Younger Generation Promised Possession of the Land

“Moreover, your little ones who you said would become a prey, and your sons, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall enter there, and I will give it to them, and they shall possess it.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Perhaps there is even a subtle reminder that just as God carried Israel like a child in the wilderness, so God will continue to carry and protect Israel’s little ones, ... your children, or perhaps that in order to receive that protection, Israel must become trustful like children (cf. v. 31; cf. **Matt 19:14; Luke 18:16**). Again, words of hope for an exilic audience.

D. (:40) Moses Dispatched to Wilderness Delay

“But as for you, turn around and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea.”

III. (1:41 – 2:1) PRESUMPTION AND SELF-CONFIDENCE CAN NEVER BE SUBSTITUTED FOR GENUINE FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

A. (:41) Presumption and Self Confidence

“Then you answered and said to me, 'We have sinned against the LORD; we will indeed go up and fight, just as the LORD our God commanded us.' And every man of you girded on his weapons of war, and regarded it as easy to go up into the hill country.”

Eugene Merrill: True to human nature, as soon as access to Canaan was denied that early rebellious generation (vv. 35, 40), they decided that that precisely was what they would do. To justify their decision they donned a cloak of hypocritical repentance (“we have sinned against the LORD,” v. 41; cf. Num 14:40) and announced that what they were about to do was in compliance with the perfect and explicit will of God. But they had completely misread the mind of the Lord, for he had closed that window of opportunity once and for all.

B. (:42-44) Defeat and Retreat

1. (:42) Clear Warning

“And the LORD said to me, 'Say to them, 'Do not go up, nor fight, for I am not among you; lest you be defeated before your enemies.’”

2. (:43) Costly Rebellious Presumption

“So I spoke to you, but you would not listen. Instead you rebelled against the command of the LORD, and acted presumptuously and went up into the hill country.”

Michael Grisanti: Their actions in the face of God’s explicit statement represented the epitome of presumption and arrogance. Just as their refusal to march in battle against Canaan after hearing the report of the spies signified treacherous rebellion against their covenantal Lord (1:26), their refusal to heed his warning and their decision to march against Canaan after God’s announcement of judgment also demonstrated their rebellious spirit. (The same wording occurs in both places.)

Patrick Miller: Thus while seeming at this point to obey the Lord, they are again disobeying. The divine command is no longer to fight but to leave. The people, however, decide not to leave but to fight. Three times, with increasing intensity (vv. 22, 26–28, and 32–33), the people have refused to go up into the land. Then when God announces punishment and Moses says turn and journey, implying that this unhappy episode is over and it is time to move on, the people disobey again. So obedience became disobedience and the weeping and penitential rites of a faithless generation were not heard by the faithful Lord (v. 45).

3. (:44) Crushing Defeat

“And the Amorites who lived in that hill country came out against you, and chased you as bees do, and crushed you from Seir to Hormah.”

Daniel Block: From a military standpoint this misadventure was a fiasco (vv. 44–45). The Amorites of the hill country¹¹ responded like wild bees in a disturbed hive. The Israelites discovered that the land “*flowing with milk and honey*” also produced stinging bees, which swarmed around them, chased them off, and struck them down at Hormah in Seir. The spiritual consequences of this event were more tragic than the physical. Having swung emotionally from despair to self-confidence, the people returned to the base camp and wept before Yahweh. But Yahweh’s ears were stopped; he refused to listen. God demanded obedience, not tears.

C. (:45-46) Remorse and Stagnation

1. (:45) Remorse

*“Then you returned and wept before the LORD;
but the LORD did not listen to your voice, nor give ear to you.”*

2. (:46) Stagnation

*“So you remained in Kadesh many days,
the days that you spent there.”*

Peter Craigie: Like spoiled children, whose insolence had achieved nothing for them, the Israelites returned to Kadesh and wept before the Lord, to no avail. In the recollections of Kadesh-barnea, it would have been very easy for those listening to Moses’ address (and for the modern reader!) to be astonished and critical at the sheer perversity of the Israelites; in a sense, such a reaction is called for in Moses’ address. But the words of Moses held out warning, for the events at Kadesh-barnea typified man’s natural tendency to perversity. It was easy looking back to see the errors and failures, but at that time and in those circumstances it was not so easy. And it was just because the Israelites, gathered in the plains of Moab, would soon be faced with similar temptations to rebellion that now—before crossing the Jordan—it was important to warn them of the dangers lying ahead.

D. (2:1) Transition – Aimless Wandering of Delay Due to God’s Judgment

*“Then we turned and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea,
as the LORD spoke to me, and circled Mount Seir for many days.”*

Eugene Merrill: Finally after thirty-eight years the people of the Lord were ready to do what he had commanded them to do long before, “*turn around and set out toward the desert*” (Deut 1:40). Thus Moses said, “*We turned back and set out toward the desert*” (2:1), clearly a literary way of establishing a connection between the original instruction and its greatly postponed fulfillment. The Hebrew formula is exactly the same in both passages (except for verb forms), one consisting of the juxtaposition of the verbs “turn” and “set out.” Once this is recognized, the statement that Israel “turned back” (better, “turned about”) makes good sense inasmuch as it imitates a command that long since should have been obeyed.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The story of the spies begins and ends with a travel narrative, but what happens in between changes everything (1:19; 1:46–2:1). The opening verse is

full of hope and anticipation. Israel arrives at the land, ready to take possession. In the concluding verses Israel is headed back into the wilderness and the Red Sea, to wander around Mount Seir (southeast of the Dead Sea). God still dictates Israel's travel plan, but now it is a "journey in reverse" (McConville 2002: 82), or an "Anti-Exodus" (Moran 1969). Israel's loss of faith at the border results in Israel traveling again, but with no place to go. The awkward language (*You stayed at Kadesh as many days as you did, 1:46*), and the absence of any destination despite the reference to a lengthy journey (*we journeyed back into the wilderness ... and skirted Mount Seir for many days, 2:1*) highlight the **aimlessness** of the wandering. For the next thirty-eight years Israel wanders in the wilderness, not too far from Kadesh-barnea and the Promised Land (cf. **2:14**). **The land remains in sight but is lost to this generation.**

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How slow are we to learn the lessons from history regarding our failures?
- 2) Why doesn't the demonstration of God's faithfulness in our lives prompt greater faith and love and obedience?
- 3) The next time we are tempted to focus on the great obstacles to our Christian ministry, how can we reject the paralysis of fear and embrace faith in moving forward since God both fights on our behalf and cares for us as a father?
- 4) What comfort and assurance do we take from God's promise that He will never leave us or forsake us?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: Chiastic Structure

A Travel notice: We went from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea (**1:19**)

B Report: You have reached the Promised Land (**1:20**)

C Summons to possess the land (**1:21**)

D Israel's sin: They request spies (**1:22**)

E Report: I sent the spies (**1:23–24**)

F Report of the spies and Israel's rebellion (**1:25–28**)

- (1) Spies: It is a good land
- (2) Israel's murmuring and rebellion
- (3) Spies: The people are too strong for us

X Summons not to fear (1:29–31)

F' Israel's rebellion and YHWH's judgment
(1:32–36)

- (1) Report of Moses: Israel's lack of trust
- (2) YHWH's judgment: Postponement of conquest
- (3) Report of Moses: The exception of Caleb

E' Report: YHWH was angry with me (1:37–39)

- (1) Joshua is to lead the conquest
- (2) The land is to be possessed by your children

D' Israel's sin: They confess but act presumptuously (1:40–41)

C' Summons not to fight for the land (1:42)

B' Report: You failed to enter the land (1:43–44)

A' Travel notice: We went from Kadesh to Mount Seir (1:45—2:1)

Patrick Miller: This lengthy narrative opens the Book of Deuteronomy with a **history lesson** whose focus is primarily on the persistent fearfulness and disobedience of a people in the face of an experience of the gracious love of God. Over and over, Israel received the divine promise and assurances (vv. 8, 21, 25, 29–31), but they were fearful and refused to act. The problem and disobedience of the people in **Deuteronomy 1** is not pride and self-assertion (as, e.g., in **Gen. 3**) but sloth, fearfulness, and anxiety. They fear the future and its difficulties even when the past has demonstrated they can trust in the promises of God. The themes of this chapter, the Anakim and their cities, the seeing motif, and the holy-war language, all underscore the focus of Moses' speech on trust in the power and promise of God. This manual of instruction for life in that new land can be of no use if one is unwilling to risk the future. Fearfulness and anxiety about future large and real problems will not get one across the border into the new land. The issue is not whether the Anakim are there, mighty and tall. They are indeed. If one doubts that, one has only to view King Og's fourteen-foot bed! The issue, however, is whether the people will "*see*" that God has brought them safely by the Amalekites to this point (**Exod. 17**) and can and will give them victory over the Anakim they see ahead.

In that sense, **chapter 1** sets up what Deuteronomy is about. It will echo and anticipate disobedience and unwillingness to live by promise and instruction. Further, the chapter gives us clues about the purpose and context of Deuteronomy. It is a word of instruction

about how to live in the land, addressed to a people whose history reflects persistent faithlessness and disobedience.

Daniel Block: Nevertheless, despite the pervasive unbelief of Israel, every age knows a faithful remnant. We may contrast Caleb and the rest of the Israelites by juxtaposing his response as described in **Numbers 13–14** with the characteristics of Israel as illustrated in Moses’ recollections:

Characteristics of the Israelites as a Whole	Characteristics of Caleb
- unwilling to go up (v. 26)	- eager to go up (cf. Num. 13:30)
- rebellious against Yahweh’s command (v. 26)	- encouraging people not to rebel against Yahweh (cf. Num. 13:30)
- sulking in their tents (v. 27; Ps. 106:25)	- calming the people (cf. Num. 13:30)
- accusing Yahweh of hatred and betrayal (v. 27)	- assuring the people of Yahweh’s favor and presence (Num. 14:9)
- melting hearts (v. 28)	
- terrified and fearful (v. 29)	- challenging the people not to fear (cf. Num. 14:9)
- refusing to trust Yahweh their God (v. 32)	- fully confident in Yahweh (cf. Num. 13:30; 14:8–9)

Michael Grisanti: How can one resolve the tension between Moses’ statement here (**1:36**; cf. **3:26**; **4:21**) and the statement at the end of Deuteronomy (**32:51**) that connects his exclusion from the land to his striking the rock at Meribah (cf. **Nu 20:11–12**)? As many have pointed out, Israel’s rebellion at Meribah occurred over three decades after their rebellion at Kadesh Barnea. Briefly put, Israel’s rebellion at Meribah and Moses’ sinful striking of the rock never would have happened if Israel had entered the Promised Land when Yahweh told them to do so (**Raymond Brown**, *The Message of Deuteronomy* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993], 43). Sadly, sin always reproduces itself. One act of rebellion quickly leads to another.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 2:2-23

TITLE: TRAVEL INSTRUCTIONS

BIG IDEA:

IN THEIR JOURNEY TO THEIR OWN PROMISED LAND, ISRAEL MUST RESPECT THE SOVEREIGN LANDS OF EDOM, MOAB AND AMMON

INTRODUCTION:

Michael Grisanti: Toward the end of Israel’s wilderness wanderings the Lord commanded the children of Israel to begin their journey to the Promised Land, thus causing them to leave the region surrounding Kadesh Barnea and to pass near the territory held by the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites. Although the ensuing narrative (2:1–3:11) shares the basic details of the parallel account in **Numbers 20–24**, the present narrative demonstrates greater interest in theology than in the details of geography and chronology.

With regard to the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites, Yahweh prohibited Israel from taking any land from these peoples (2:1–25). Yahweh is the owner of the entire “estate” of the world. He allocates his properties to those he desires. God was orchestrating all these events for the Israelites. At this point in time in biblical history, the blood relationship of these three peoples with Israel protected them from the destruction that God promised to bring on the Amorites, Bashanites, and Canaanites.

Daniel Block: After thirty–eight years of aimlessly circling the desert, Israel was on the march, passing successively through the territorial possessions of Edom, Moab, and Ammon.

Moses does not explain why Yahweh had the Israelites enter Canaan from the east across the Jordan rather than relaunching the campaign from Kadesh Barnea in the south. But to get to the eastern shore of the Jordan, the Israelites needed to negotiate their way carefully through a series of states, all of which were related to the Israelites by blood and were themselves just coming into their own. The Edomites living in Seir were the closest relatives, being descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob (cf. **Gen. 36**). The Moabites and Ammonites were descendants of Abraham’s nephew Lot by his two daughters (**Gen. 19:30–38**; cf. **Deut. 2:9, 19**).

Gerald Gerbrandt: Edom, Moab, and Ammon were three recently established nation-states east of the Jordan River. Surprisingly, in its description of Israel’s encounters with them, Deuteronomy announces loud and clear: these nations have a right to exist. The God of Israel and the exodus has given them their land; Israel must not try to take it away from them. Each subsection (2:2–8, 9–15, 16–23) has at its center a pronouncement of God: *I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession (2:5); I have given Ar as a possession to the descendants of Lot (2:9); I have given it to the*

descendants of Lot (2:19). Since animosity and tension existed between Israel and each of these states at various times throughout their history, these are unexpected and radical announcements.

Duane Christensen: **Travel notices** are a key to the structure of **Deut 2:2–25** since the unit as a whole is framed by such notices, which take the Israelites from the wilderness of Mount Seir (Edom) to the Arnon Valley (Wadi Mujib) and the edge of the Promised Land. A similar pair of travel notices frames the center of the whole unit (**vv 9–12**), with the journey from Elath to the southern border of Moab (**v 8**) set over against the crossing of the Zered Valley (Wadi el-Hasa) into Moab (**vv 13–14**).

I. (:2-8) CROSSING THE LAND OF EDOM

(:2) Divine Revelation

“And the LORD spoke to me, saying,”

A. (:3-5) Travel Instructions and Warning

1. (:3-4a) Travel Instructions

“You have circled this mountain long enough. Now turn north, 4 and command the people, saying, ‘You will pass through the territory of your brothers the sons of Esau who live in Seir;’”

2. (:4b-5) Warning

“and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful; 5 do not provoke them, for I will not give you any of their land, even as little as a footstep because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession.”

Duane Christensen: The command to “*turn yourselves northward*” marks the beginning of the march of conquest which brought Israel into the Promised Land.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The opening directive includes no rebuke or hint of anger for the earlier failure at Kadesh-barnea. God even selects an alternative route to the land. God and Israel are ready for a new beginning, a new chance at taking possession of the land.

Peter Craigie: The exact route the Israelites took is uncertain, but it may have been around the southern border of Edom (i.e., the land occupied by the sons of Esau) and then up the eastern border following the caravan route alongside the desert.

Michael Grisanti: Although the narrative mentions Israel was about to “*pass through*” Edomite territory, the Numbers account makes clear that the Edomites prohibited Israel from taking the customary route through their region (the King’s Highway) and required that they skirt the borders of Edom (**Nu 20:14–21**). As predicted in **Exodus 15:14–16**, the Edomites (among others) had heard of Yahweh’s great deeds in Israel’s behalf and feared the Israelites as a result. This fear explains the Edomites’ refusal of safe passage through the midst of their territory and the need for Israel to be extra careful in their relations with the Edomites during their time in the area.

B. (:6-7) Providential Provision

1. (:6) Acquisition of Food and Water

“You shall buy food from them with money so that you may eat, and you shall also purchase water from them with money so that you may drink.”

2. (:7) Acknowledgment of God’s Provision

“For the LORD your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing.”

C. (:8) Travel Report

“So we passed beyond our brothers the sons of Esau, who live in Seir, away from the Arabah road, away from Elath and from Ezion-geber. And we turned and passed through by the way of the wilderness of Moab.”

Eugene Merrill: In summary Moses repeated that he and his people bypassed their brother nation, Edom, by leaving the Arabah Road (that is, the Red Sea route of **2:1**) at Elath and Ezion Geber and then taking the desert route east of Edom that connected Moab with the Gulf of Elath and pointed south (**v. 8**).

II. (:9-15) CROSSING THE LAND OF MOAB

(:9a) Divine Revelation

“Then the LORD said to me,”

A. (:9b) Warning

“Do not harass Moab, nor provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land as a possession, because I have given Ar to the sons of Lot as a possession.”

Eugene Merrill: The reference to this territory as Ar (**v. 9**) is a case of synecdoche, a figure of speech in which a part stands for the whole. That is, the city Ar (el-Misna?), perhaps the capital of Late Bronze Moab, is just another way of speaking of the whole nation.

B. (:10-12) Historical Background

“(The Emim lived there formerly, a people as great, numerous, and tall as the Anakim. 11 Like the Anakim, they are also regarded as Rephaim, but the Moabites call them Emim. 12 The Horites formerly lived in Seir, but the sons of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them from before them and settled in their place, just as Israel did to the land of their possession which the LORD gave to them.)”

MacArthur: The *Emim* – Apparently a Moabite term (see v. 11) meaning “terrible ones.” This people, numerous and tall, were the pre-Moabite occupants of the land of Moab.

Duane Christensen: A series of explanatory notes inserted into the text provide comments of historical interest about legendary matters of the distant past. The prosodic analysis suggests that these notes are not secondary additions, but are essential parts of the original poetic (or even musical) composition. In epic poetry, blocks of traditional material are sometimes inserted for various reasons.

Daniel Block: Verses 10–12 function as a footnote (cf. vv. 20–22; 3:9, 11, 13), clarifying ethnographic and geographic issues raised in Moses’ speech. As noted earlier, the relatives of the Israelites in the Transjordan (Edom, Moab, Bene Ammon) were not indigenous to the region. While the circumstances of the displacement of populations is unknown, in verse 21 Moses credits Yahweh with destroying them and delivering the territories into the hands of the newcomers, even as he would do for Israel in Canaan. Verse 10 suggests that the earlier inhabitants of Moab, the Emites, were as fearsome as the Anakites, their counterparts west of the Dead Sea, for they too were great, numerous, and tall. Whereas the Moabites identified these gigantic races of people as Emites, the Israelites called them Rephaites (cf. vv. 20–21).

Eugene Merrill: The Bible is clear in its witness to the universal sovereignty of God and to his allocation to the nations of their territorial jurisdictions (cf. Deut 32:8; Acts 17:26), but nowhere is the point more clearly made than here, especially with regard to the allotments to Israel’s “brother” nations (Deut 2:5,9,19). Esau and the Edomites therefore had as much right to expel the Horites from Seir as Israel did to expel the Canaanites, Amorites, and others from the land of promise, a point that is at least implied in the comparison “just as Israel did in the land the LORD gave them as their possession” (v. 12).

C. (:13) Travel Instructions and Report

1. Travel Instructions

“Now arise and cross over the brook Zered yourselves.”

2. Travel Report

“So we crossed over the brook Zered.”

MacArthur: A brook that ran into the Dead Sea from the SE. It seems to have constituted the southern boundary of Moab. In contrast to the disobedience associated with Kadesh, the people obeying the command to cross over the brook Zered. There was a new spirit of obedience toward the Lord among the people.

D. (:14-15) Review of Wilderness Period

1. (:14a) Duration

“Now the time that it took for us to come from Kadesh-barnea, until we crossed over the brook Zered, was thirty-eight years;”

2. (:14b-15) Disciplinary Purpose

“until all the generation of the men of war perished from within the camp, as the LORD had sworn to them.

Moreover the hand of the LORD was against them, to destroy them from within the camp, until they all perished.”

Daniel Block: Syntactically **verses 14–15** also function as a parenthetical footnote. It seems that for Moses, crossing the Wadi Zered was a significant milestone. The recollection of Yahweh’s charge to cross the Zered (**v. 13**) triggered a reflective glance backward. The generation that had been lost in the desert perished not for lack of water or food, but because Yahweh had become their enemy and had taken action against them, just as he had sworn.

Peter Craigie: The crossing of the Zered marked an important point in the history of the wilderness wanderings. Thirty-eight years had elapsed since the departure of the Israelites from Kadesh-barnea, and during that time the rebellious generation, who had been debarred from the promised land by the oath of the Lord (see **1:35**), had all died. The language with which they are described is slightly sarcastic; they are called *the men of war*, which is just what they should have been, had they not failed to obey the command of the Lord. The crossing of the Zered here seems to mark a new beginning. Just as the crossing of the Reed Sea had marked a new beginning of freedom from Egyptian bondage, so the crossing of the Zered marked freedom from the oath of the Lord against the “*men of war*.” And beyond the plain of Moab, where Moses addressed the people, the crossing of the Jordan would mark the beginning of a new era in the freedom of the Promised Land.

Jack Deere: Thus because of their rebellion against the Lord this first generation of Israelite warriors actually found **themselves** objects of God’s “holy war.” They left the protective care of His hand in their arrogant rebellion only to find that hand turned against them as they endured painful deaths outside the Promised Land. By reminding the people of this, Moses said in effect that God is faithful to His promises and His threats, and has the power to execute both.

III. (:16-25) BYPASSING THE LAND OF AMMON

(:16-17) Generational Transition

“So it came about when all the men of war had finally perished from among the people, 17 that the LORD spoke to me, saying,”

Eugene Merrill: **Deuteronomy 2:16** marks a major turning point in the book thus far in several different respects. It divides between desert sojourn and permanent settlement, between the old rebel generation and the new, obedient one, and between defensive warfare and noninvolvement and a policy of aggressive conquest led by the Lord against hostile powers destined to defeat and displacement. The line of demarcation is particularly evident in the emphatic repetition of **vv. 14** and **16**, “*that entire generation*

*of fighting men had perished from the camp” and “when the last of these fighting men among the people had died.” This is an unmistakable sign that **something new and better is about to begin.***

A. (:18-19) Travel Instructions and Warning

1. (:18) Travel Instructions

“You shall cross over Ar, the border of Moab, today.”

2. (:19) Warning

“And when you come opposite the sons of Ammon, do not harass them nor provoke them, for I will not give you any of the land of the sons of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot as a possession.”

B. (:20-23) Historical Background

“(It is also regarded as the land of the Rephaim, for Rephaim formerly lived in it, but the Ammonites call them Zamzummin, 21 a people as great, numerous, and tall as the Anakim, but the LORD destroyed them before them. And they dispossessed them and settled in their place, 22 just as He did for the sons of Esau, who live in Seir, when He destroyed the Horites from before them; and they dispossessed them, and settled in their place even to this day. 23 And the Avvim, who lived in villages as far as Gaza, the Caphtorim who came from Caphtor, destroyed them and lived in their place.)”

MacArthur: *Zamzummin* – Apparently an Ammonite term used to describe their precursors in their land. They were characterized as being as tall as the Anakim. But the Lord had destroyed them and given their land to the Ammonites. This was an encouragement to the Israelites that God could also defeat the Anakim in the land of Canaan and give that land to Israel.

Eugene Merrill: The perspective from which the past is viewed in Deuteronomy is clearly that of remote times. Moses reached way back to describe the native peoples of the various lands he mentioned and then spoke of the ethnic, cultural, and political changes that took place long before his time thanks to the coming of these newer elements. It is not unrealistic at all that here he reflected back on the coming of the Caphtorites, known to the patriarchs as Philistines, who eventually expelled and replaced the Avvites.

Michael Grisanti: As with the Moabites and Edomites (**2:10–12**), the Ammonites and the Caphtorites had gained their territory by dispossessing peoples who had earlier inhabited this region.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What lessons should Israel have learned from their lengthy period of discipline and death in the wilderness?
- 2) Why did God instruct His people to purchase their necessary food and water (as opposed to seizing provisions by force) when He claims to have providentially provided for them?
- 3) How do you explain God's interest in the protection of the sovereign borders of these three lands when He is commanding Israel to root out and destroy the inhabitants of Canaan?
- 4) What was the purpose of these historical interludes into this travel guide narrative?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: In **verses 2–7** he simply recalls verbatim the divinely prescribed policy for dealing with Edom: the Israelites were simply to pass through, treating the Edomites with respect and not provoking them in any way.

This policy appears to have been based on five considerations.

- (1) The Edomites were the Israelites' relatives (Heb. *'āhîm*, "brothers," v. 4a).
- (2) The Edomites were fearful of the Israelites (v. 4); apparently the story of their escape from Egypt and defeat of the Amalekites (**Ex. 17:8–16**) forty years ago had reached them (cf. **Num. 22:3–4**).
- (3) Just as Yahweh had allocated the land of Canaan to Israel, so he allocated Seir as the rightful possession of Esau and his descendants. Whereas ancient Near Easterners tended to perceive patron deities as having jurisdiction only over their own territories, Yahweh, the God of Israel, exercises supranational authority and providential care over other nations. As Yahweh's vassal, Israel was not to claim territory given by him to another.
- (4) Yahweh prohibited the Israelites from looting or stealing from the Edomites; instead, they were to pay for any food or water that they would need with silver.
- (5) Israel was to continue relying entirely on the direct provision of Yahweh (v. 7). In typical Mosaic style, he grounds this point in three facts.
 - (a) Yahweh had blessed every activity to which the people had put their hands.
 - (b) Yahweh had watched over the Israelites during their travels through the vast and dreadful desert (cf. **8:3–5**).
 - (c) Yahweh had been with his people for the past forty years, providing everything they needed.

Michael Grisanti: Israel's **covenantal relationship** with Yahweh, and not only her possession of some land, distinguished Israel from all other nations of the world. This

reality does not diminish the significance of Yahweh’s allocating the Land of Promise to Israel or its role in yet future events; rather, it places the primary focus where it needs to be, namely, on Israel’s relationship with Yahweh as the key to her distinct identity and destiny.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Notice the systematic pattern into which the peaceful encounters are placed. The structure of the pattern draws attention to the central interests of the passage. Its regularity suggests that details have all been made subservient to those central concerns.

Esau, 2:2-8	Moab, 2:9-15	Ammon, 2:16-23
<i>Then the LORD said to me (v. 2)</i>	<i>The LORD said to me (v. 9)</i>	<i>The LORD spoke to me (v. 17)</i>
God’s instructions (vv. 3–6)	God’s instructions (vv. 9b, 13a)	God’s instructions (vv. 18–19)
<i>Be very careful not to engage in battle with them (vv. 4–5)</i>	<i>Do not harass Moab or engage them in battle (v. 9)</i>	<i>Do not harass them or engage them in battle (v. 19)</i>
<i>I will not give you ... of their land (v. 5)</i>	<i>I will not give you any of its land as a possession (v. 9)</i>	<i>I will not give the land ... to you as a possession (v. 19)</i>
<i>I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession (v. 5)</i>	<i>I have given Ar as a possession to the descendants of Lot (v. 9)</i>	<i>I have given it to the descendants of Lot (v. 19)</i>
wilderness review (v. 7)	wilderness review (vv. 14–15)	wilderness review (v. 16)
travel report (v. 8a)	travel report (v. 13b)	
	historical interruption (vv. 10–12)	historical interruption (vv. 20–23)

The reason Israel is not to confront or fight these Transjordan states is simple yet striking. God has not given their land to Israel: **Yahweh, the God of Israel, has given these people their own land.** We may have a hard time grasping the radical nature of

this confession. Remember that this comes from a time when monotheism was not the norm. Each people or land was understood to have its own national god. At points Deuteronomy itself appears to recognize the existence of gods other than the God of Israel [*Biblical Monotheism*, p. 539]. Yet here Deuteronomy makes the unexpected and radical claim that the peoples of Edom, Moab, and Ammon have received their land from the same God who was in the process of giving Israel its land. Frequently Deuteronomy uses some form of the root “*to possess/inherit*” for the manner in which Israel receives its land. The first chapter alone uses it three times. But now, in the space of twenty-two verses, it is used nine times (**2:5, 9** [twice], **12** [twice], **19** [twice], **21, 22**), not of Israel but of these other nations. Just as Israel is to take possession of its land (**1:8, 21**), so God has given possession of their lands to the descendants of Esau and Lot.

Paul Barker: Take a look at **2:10–12** and **20–23**. These little asides are often overlooked. They look rather dull being full of strange names. These verses serve an important function. They emphasize that it is God’s prerogative to move nations around. The two incidents recorded here involve two powerful, numerous and large, giant-like nations who are defeated under God’s sovereignty. Do you remember Israel’s fear at Kadesh in **1:28**? “*The people are stronger and taller than we . . . We actually saw there the offspring of the Anakim!*” (see vv. **11** and **21**). The Anakim are mentioned again. These asides are directly addressing Israel’s fear expressed at Kadesh. Israel is concerned about a giant people. Then Israel should remember that God has defeated giants before, for Moab and Ammon. What God did for those nations he has promised to do for Israel. So, Israel, do not fear! **God can be trusted**. He is powerful to keep his promises. He is more powerful than giants and he has demonstrated that in the past!

It is worth noticing in passing **2:14** and **15**. The Lord had sworn that the Israelite adult generation which disobeyed at Kadesh would perish before entering the land of promise. Even that promise, God has kept. **Verse 15** shows God actively working to fulfil that oath: “*Indeed, the Lord’s own hand was against them, to root them out from the camp, until all had perished.*” God is completely trustworthy, even to the point of carrying out the punishment he vowed against the earlier generation.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 2:24 – 3:11

TITLE: CONQUEST OF TRANSJORDANIAN AMORITE KINGS (SIHON & OG)

BIG IDEA:

GOD GRANTS VICTORY AS HIS PEOPLE FIGHT THE BATTLES TO POSSESS THE PROMISED LAND

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: This section consists of three parts: two battle reports, the first describing Israel's defeat of Sihon king of Heshbon (2:24–37), and the second recounting the victory over Og king of Bashan (3:1–7), followed by a summary statement and footnote (3:8–11).

Gerald Gerbrandt: So far so good. But what if the indigenous population is not as accommodating, comes across as fearsome, or threatens violence? The struggle to obtain or to defend a homeland echoes down the millennia of recorded human history. People desperate for resources are willing to kill to accomplish their needs. For the people of Israel, the Wadi Arnon marks the transition from peaceful encounters with distant relatives to violent confrontations with kings whom they totally destroy (2:2–3:11). Within the larger story of Israel, this passage depicts the beginning of an important new stage in its history with God. The long history without land, beginning with Abraham and Sarah, and continuing through the period of Egyptian bondage and wilderness wandering, is finally over. Israel has returned to the Promised Land and now begins to receive it. The lands of Sihon and Og become the first installment, or first-fruits, of the land promised to Israel's ancestors. The language—the rhetoric of Yahweh war—underscores that it is God giving the land. For Israel of the Old Testament, the story of these two encounters draws attention to the faithfulness and generosity of Yahweh [*Yahweh War*, p. 566]. . .

Deuteronomy opens the section on the hostile confrontations by drawing attention to Israel's offer of peace, by noting Sihon's arrogant rejection of this offer, and by placing the whole under **God's sovereignty**.

Paul Barker: Moses is teaching that the fears at Kadesh about a tall and strong people with heavily fortified towns are not valid fears. Moses never downplays the strength of the opposition. Rather the strength of the opposition highlights the power of Yahweh. The conquests of Sihon and Og demonstrate that size, number and strength are no obstacle when Israel acts with faith and obedience. God is faithful. God is sovereign.

Earl Kalland: While Israel was not to disturb the Edomites, Moabites, or Ammonites, such prohibition did not extend to the Amorites. The Lord declared that he had put Sihon and his kingdom into Israel's hands (v. 24). The conquest was certain; it was only for Israel to accomplish it.

I. (2:24-37) DEFEAT OF SIHON, KING OF HESHBON

A. (:24-25) Commissioning to Target Sihon, King of Heshbon, and His Land

1. (:24a) Divine Travel Instructions

“Arise, set out, and pass through the valley of Arnon.”

Daniel Block: Yahweh’s command to the Israelites consists of six imperatives (the first is not represented in the NIV): *“Arise! Set out! Cross the Wadi Arnon! Begin! Take possession! Engage him in battle!”* This charge is accompanied by two significant promises: Yahweh had already given Sihon into the Israelites’ hands, and from this day on, he would send shockwaves throughout the earth, causing people to tremble in fright when they heard of Israel’s triumphs. Remarkably the statement highlights Israel’s actions and places Yahweh in the background.

Gerald Gerbrandt: *“Get up! Get going! Cross the Wadi Arnon!”* With these words Deuteronomy ushers in a new, exciting era in Israel’s story. The Hebrew of the verse opens with three consecutive imperatives, giving the verse an abrupt start, an element that is lost in the smooth translation of the NRSV, *Proceed on your journey and cross the Wadi Arnon* (v. 24).

The tendency of translations not to begin a new paragraph at this point hides the fact that this verse represents a **key juncture** in the narrative. The period of wilderness wandering is over. The report of the death of all the warriors who had lost faith at the first arrival at the land signals the end of the previous generation (**2:16**). Now Israel is to get going. Finally, after hundreds of years of waiting, according to the logic of the story, Israel will receive the land. **The new era begins now!**

2. (:24b) Divine Gift that Must be Seized

“Look! I have given Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land into your hand; begin to take possession and contend with him in battle.”

3. (:25) Divine Intimidation that Weakens the Opposition

“This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you upon the peoples everywhere under the heavens, who, when they hear the report of you, shall tremble and be in anguish because of you.”

Michael Grisanti: Once the Israelites crossed the Arnon River, they entered the region controlled by the Amorites (and part of the Promised Land). The Lord commissioned the Israelites to engage the Amorites in battle, who served King Sihon of Heshbon, and promised to bring fear to the enemies’ hearts and to give victory to Israel. . .

“all the nations under heaven” -- is a hyperbolic statement; it emphasizes that Israel has no need to fear since their God is the ultimate sovereign of the world. Any nation that Israel encountered would not be able to resist their advance (cf. **11:25; 28:10; Ex 23:27–29; Jos 2:8–11**), and all other nations who heard this report would tremble in fear.

B. (:26-31) Conflict with Sihon Escalates

1. (:26-29) Attempt at Peaceful Diplomacy

“So I sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon king of Heshbon with words of peace, saying, 27 'Let me pass through your land, I will travel only on the highway; I will not turn aside to the right or to the left. 28 You will sell me food for money so that I may eat, and give me water for money so that I may drink, only let me pass through on foot, 29 just as the sons of Esau who live in Seir and the Moabites who live in Ar did for me, until I cross over the Jordan into the land which the LORD our God is giving to us.”

Peter Craigie: The main body of the people remained in the wilderness of Kedemoth while the ambassadors took the message of peace to Sihon. Kedemoth was probably a few miles inside Sihon’s territory, north of the Arnon and quite near to the eastern border of the Amorite state.

Eugene Merrill: Moses apparently used Kedemoth as a base of operations, for it was from there that he sent his envoys to Sihon's capital city, Heshbon, twenty miles north. Like Dibon, Heshbon occupies a place of prominence in the Old Testament (**Num 21:25-34; 32:3, 37; Deut 29:7; Josh 12:2, 5; 13:10-27**) and in extrabiblical literature as well as in archaeology. It was one of the forty-eight Levitical cities (**1 Chr 6:81**), claimed first by Reuben (**Num 32:37**) and later by Gad (**Josh 13:26**). Prior to Sihon's rise to power Heshbon and everything south had belonged to Moab. The energetic Amorite had then destroyed Heshbon, made the site his own capital, and pushed Moab's border all the way to the Arnon (**Num 21:26-30**). The Israelites under Moses were therefore asking to traverse territory that had recently fallen to Sihon's control. This may in part explain his sensitivity about allowing this to happen (**v. 30**).

2. (:30) Antagonism from Stubborn Sihon

“But Sihon king of Heshbon was not willing for us to pass through his land; for the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, in order to deliver him into your hand, as he is today.”

Peter Craigie: Whether his unwillingness stemmed from fear, or whether it was confidence in his own military strength, is uncertain. It may well have been confidence, for he had already experienced military successes against the Moabites. The spirit (*rûah*) and heart (*lēbāb*), in this context, probably refer respectively to the “will” and “mind” of Sihon. It should be noted that the words here express an understanding of Sihon’s action in retrospect. In the account in Numbers (**21:23**), Sihon’s actions are attributed to unfriendliness. But beyond the event, it was possible to look back and see the event in the context of the plan of God. Thus the statements about Sihon (*the Lord your God had made his spirit stubborn ...*) do not reflect a view of determinism, but reflect rather a part of the Hebrew theology of history. Man is free and responsible in action, but the actions of all men are set within the sphere of history, and God was the Lord of history.

Duane Christensen: God works in history, but he also works in and through the unconscious mind—what the ancient Hebrews called the “heart.” When the text insists that YHWH “*hardened*” *Sihon’s spirit* and “*made obstinate his heart*” (2:30), the author is describing profound spiritual truth. Like the pharaoh of the exodus, Sihon was not free to act in simple logic and follow his own best interest. Instead, with reckless abandon he acted so as to bring about his own demise. If we had eyes to see, most of us could see ourselves in the person of Sihon. All too often we are our own worst enemies, because we are not in fact free to act on our conscious desires.

The ancient Greeks explored this phenomenon in depth in their literature and mythology. Oedipus could not escape killing his own father, which the gods had said must happen. The forces of “history” worked relentlessly to bring about his destiny. Is the case any different with Sihon, or with any of us who glory in our apparent freedom? We are never truly free until our conscious minds are brought into alignment with our “hearts” (the unconscious mind), where God is to be found. Like the little train of the children’s story, which wanted so much to be free that it jumped the tracks, our pursuit of freedom is often self-destructive.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The text presents the hostile confrontations as beginning in a manner similar to the peaceful encounters, with Israel offering to pass through the land without any hostile intentions, wishing only to buy food and water.

The two requests are explicitly compared (v. 29), with Israel’s offer to Sihon characterized as terms of peace (v. 26). The difference between the two sets is not in how Israel initiates the meeting but in the **response** of the other side. Whereas Edom and Moab accept Israel’s peaceful proposal, Sihon (and by implication, Og) rejects it. Indeed, both kings take the initiative in coming out to meet Israel in battle (2:32; 3:1). The opening paragraph defends Israel against the possible accusation that it initiates the battles or that it enters the lands of Sihon and Og with unfriendly intentions. **Israel is not the aggressor.**

3. (:31) Advance Towards Occupation and Conquest

“And the LORD said to me, ‘See, I have begun to deliver Sihon and his land over to you. Begin to occupy, that you may possess his land.’”

Daniel Block: In **verses 31–37** Moses describes the battle against Sihon. The narrative provides few details, but in its general structure it provides a model for how the Israelites would engage the Canaanites in their battles for the Promised Land. As Commander-in-Chief Yahweh ordered the attack, offering words of encouragement and promises of victory, to which Israel responded by defeating the enemy forces, utterly destroying the population, and claiming the territory promised. The sevenfold repetition of “*all*” in **verses 32–37** emphasizes the completeness of Israel’s obedience and the totality of victory. This pattern continues in the sequel (3:3–10).

Michael Grisanti: God had set everything in place. Now Israel had to believe God had given the victory and engage Sihon and his army on the battlefield.

C. (:32-37) Conquest of Sihon Accomplished

1. (:32-36) Scope of the Conquest

a. (:32-33) Scope of the Conquest Summarized

*“Then Sihon with **all** his people came out to meet us in battle at Jahaz. 33 And the LORD our God delivered him over to us; and we defeated him with his sons and **all** his people.”*

Daniel Block: In **verses 33–34** Moses summarizes the outcome of the battle. His description reflects two key principles involved in the biblical perspective on historical events.

- (1) As Sovereign over all nations and over all historical events, Yahweh delivered Sihon into Israel’s hands. It is assumed that Sihon’s gods could not defend him.
- (2) The victory was achieved by concentrated human effort.

Moses notes three specific actions:

- they captured every one of Sihon’s fortifications,
- they completely annihilated the populations of every town,
- but they excluded the animals and the property from the law of ḥērem and claimed them as booty.

b. (:34-35) Scope of the Conquest in Destruction and Booty

*“So we captured **all** his cities at that time, and utterly destroyed the men, women and children of every city. We left no survivor. 35 We took only the animals as our booty and the spoil of the cities which we had captured.”*

Eugene Merrill: This outcome is, of course, in line with Moses' own policy outlined later in Deuteronomy, a code of conduct that specified that cities, houses, wells, vineyards, and olive groves—all would become Israel's without their expending any labor at all in their construction (**Deut 6:10-11**; cf. **19:1**). Following the conquest, Joshua was able to report that the Lord had given Israel “*a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build, and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant*” (**Josh 24:13**). In the absence of evidence to the contrary, one must assume that this included the cities of the Transjordan as well. Their populations were exterminated according to the canons of holy war, but the physical facilities themselves remained intact for later Israelite occupation. Subsequent allotment of these areas to the two and a half eastern tribes includes reference to their having received the cities and towns scattered throughout (cf. **Josh 13:8-33**), a rather meaningless prize if the urban structures no longer existed.

c. (:36) Scope of the Conquest Geographically

“From Aroer which is on the edge of the valley of Arnon and

*from the city which is in the valley, even to Gilead, there was no city that was too high for us; the LORD our God delivered **all** over to us.”*

Duane Christensen: That none of the towns was “*inaccessibly high for us*” (v 36) is to be contrasted with the response of the rebellious generation at Kadesh-barnea when they heard from the spies that the cities of Canaan were “*fortified to the heavens*” (1:28).

2. (:37) Sheltered from the Conquest -- Restraint Shown to the Ammonites
*“Only you did not go near to the land of the sons of Ammon, **all** along the river Jabbok and the cities of the hill country, and wherever the LORD our God had commanded us.”*

Peter Craigie: The theme of **obedience** is reiterated in this concluding verse. The Israelites did not, in the elation of victory, exceed their orders and grasp more territory for themselves than had been permitted by the Lord, The territory described in this verse is that of the Ammonites; the Israelites had already been commanded not to attack it (**Deut. 2:19**).

II. (3:1-7) DEFEAT OF OG, KING OF BASHAN

A. (:1) Conflict Engaged with Og, King of Bashan

“Then we turned and went up the road to Bashan, and Og, king of Bashan, with all his people came out to meet us in battle at Edrei.”

Eugene Merrill: The campaign of offensive holy war continued with Israel's penetration of Gilead, the territory to the north of the Jabbok River, all the way to the land of Bashan. This heavily forested and productive high plateau was famous in ancient times for its oaks (**Isa 2:13**) and livestock (**Deut 32:14; Amos 4:1**). It lay north of Gilead, whose southern border was the Jabbok and with whom it shared a common border, the Yarmuk River.

Peter Craigie: The conquest of Bashan took the Israelites off their route slightly, in that the land lay considerably to the north of the point at which they would cross the Jordan for the conquest of western Palestine. From a military point of view, the conquest of Bashan was wise, for it meant that the right flank of the Israelites would be protected when they prepared to cross the Jordan for the main assault. The battle took place in the vicinity of Edrei, a city located on one of the tributaries of the Yarmuk, and apparently one of the royal residences of Og (**Deut. 1:4**).

B. (:2) Confidence Based on Prior Conquest

“But the LORD said to me, ‘Do not fear him, for I have delivered him and all his people and his land into your hand; and you shall do to him just as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon.’”

C. (:3-7) Comprehensive Conquest

1. (:3) All the People

“So the LORD our God delivered Og also, king of Bashan, with all his people into our hand, and we smote them until no survivor was left.”

Peter Craigie: In the concise nature of this recollection, the entire battle is virtually reduced to this one verse. The Lord our God delivered into our power even Og. The theology is important; there is no doubt that the people were involved in the reality of the battle, but in the recollection of military success, that success was seen as the Lord’s doing. Hence in this verse, God’s action is referred to first; he delivered Og into the Israelites’ power. Man’s action is stated second: and we smote him until not a single survivor was left to him.

2. (:4-6) All the Cities

“And we captured all his cities at that time; there was not a city which we did not take from them: sixty cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. 5 All these were cities fortified with high walls, gates and bars, besides a great many unwalled towns. 6 And we utterly destroyed them, as we did to Sihon king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women and children of every city.”

3. (:7) All the Booty

“But all the animals and the spoil of the cities we took as our booty.”

(:8-11) SUMMARY AND ANECDOTAL FOOTNOTE

A. (:8-10) Summary of Both Conquests

“Thus we took the land at that time from the hand of the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, from the valley of Arnon to Mount Hermon 9 (Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, and the Amorites call it Senir): 10 all the cities of the tableland and all Gilead and all Bashan, as far as Salecah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan.”

Daniel Block: Moses concludes his recollections of the battles against Sihon and Og with a summary statement of the Israelites’ conquests (v. 8). They took the Amorite region east of the Jordan from the Wadi Arnon in the south to Mount Hermon in the north (cf. **Josh 12:5; 13:11**). **Verse 9** interrupts the review with another parenthetical comment, this time clarifying the reference to Mount Hermon. Apparently Mount Hermon was the Israelite name for a mountain that the Sidonians (representing the Phoenicians) called Hermon Sirion, and one that the Amorites (who previously controlled it) called Senir.

Michael Grisanti: The victory over Sihon and Og gave Israel control over the territory in Transjordan that extended from the Arnon River as far as Mount Hermon (also called Sirion or Senir by the Sidonians and Amorites, respectively, and spanning a distance of

ca. 140 miles). The Israelites captured and were able to inhabit all the cities in this region.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The land is first described in terms of its natural boundaries (v. 8), and then largely in terms of political regions (v. 10). The Transjordan is divided into three traditional parts:

- the central plateau, or tableland;
- Gilead, the region north of the plateau up to the Wadi Yarmuk;
- and Bashan, a rich agricultural area north of the Wadi Yarmuk.

Jack Deere: These verses summarize the conquest of the territory controlled by the two Transjordanian Amorite kings, Sihon and Og. The Israelites needed the encouragement of repeated reminders of God’s past faithfulness to them. Two aspects of this summary particularly heartened the Israelites. First, these verses stress the extensive nature of the Israelite conquest: *from the Arnon Gorge to Mount Hermon (called Sirion by the Phoenicians of Sidon and called Senir by the Amorites)*. Second, Og was one of the last of the Rephaites the Israelites would face in battle.

B. (:11) Anecdotal Footnote

“(For only Og king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim. Behold, his bedstead was an iron bedstead; it is in Rabbah of the sons of Ammon. Its length was nine cubits and its width four cubits by ordinary cubit.)”

Daniel Block: A final footnote at the end of Moses’ recollection of the defeat of Sihon and Og notes that as a Rephaite, Og was one of the last survivors of the gigantic pre-Amorite aboriginal peoples in this region. As concrete evidence of his size Moses refers to Og’s bed, which apparently was on display in Rabbah of Bene Ammon (the Ammonite capital) at the time this note was written. Og’s bed was impressive. It was huge: nine cubits long by four cubits wide (13.5 feet by 6 feet). And it was made of iron. Since iron was a precious metal in the Late Bronze Age, this was probably a bed made of wood and adorned with iron, similar to Solomon’s great throne, which **1 Kings 10:18** describes as (lit.) “*a throne of ivory*.” This note invites the ancient reader to check the narrator’s veracity and to confirm the magnitude of Israel’s victory.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How would you define the **Promised Land** that the Lord wants you to fight for and take possession of?
- 2) How do you see **divine sovereignty** synchronized and working in harmony with **human responsibility** in this passage?

3) Why do we find ourselves **intimidated** in witnessing situations when the Scriptures speak of how the Lord intimidates our enemies and emboldens us for victory?

4) What type of **major obstacles** did the Israelites overcome in these two campaigns in contrast to their prior defeats?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Patrick Miller: Why are some peoples destroyed in the process of God’s provision for others? There are probably no easy or ultimately satisfying answers to such a question. One must acknowledge the partially ideological character of this material as a human justification for human goals and acts (see **Miller**, “*Faith and Ideology*”). But to acknowledge this does not by definition invalidate the claims of the text. We, at least, can recognize some concern within Deuteronomy for **justification** of the violent destruction, and some reasons are given. Apart from the Lord’s intention to provide a home and land for God’s people, there are two criteria for the destruction of inhabitants of the land: (1) those who oppose God’s purpose and promise to Israel—that is, Sihon and Og; and (2) those who seem to pose in a special way the problem of religious contamination and syncretism—that is, the Canaanites and Amorites.

Gerald Gerbrandt: **Land** is at the center of this passage, and indeed, all of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy as a speech of Moses is placed at the edge of the Jordan, at the boundary of the main body of land promised Israel. Israel has already received a structure for the administration of justice in the land (**1:9–18**). After a disastrous first arrival at the land (**1:19–2:1**), the three peaceful encounters bring Israel to the land once again, even as they signify that there is land that has not been given to Israel but to other peoples (**2:2–23**). The two hostile confrontations begin the process of giving the land (**2:24–3:11**). After the travel reports of this passage cease, there is no more physical movement of Israel in the book of Deuteronomy. The history has been brought up to date: the Promised Land has been reached, with the remainder of Deuteronomy giving Moses’ final charge to the people. The focus of that charge is **life on the land**, or more accurately, **how to live in the land so as to enjoy its blessings**.

One peculiarity about Deuteronomy’s understanding of the Promised Land is that it includes the **Transjordan**. In most Old Testament traditions (e.g., boundary list of **Num 34**), the Promised Land is the land west of the Jordan River. The crossing of the Jordan, then, becomes the critical, almost cultic entrance into the Promised Land (cf. **Josh 3–4**). In those traditions the Transjordan is settled by Israel, but it does not hold the same status as the land west of the Jordan. For Deuteronomy, however, it is the **crossing of the Wadi Arnon (2:24)** that symbolizes the entrance into the land. Moab and Edom south of the Arnon are not part of the land; Ammon to the east of the kingdoms of Sihon and Og is not part of the land. But the Amorite kingdoms of Sihon and Og, located north of the Arnon in the Transjordan region and just east of the Jordan,

are part of the land. The command to cross the Arnon thus is immediately followed by *I have handed over to you King Sihon the Amorite of Heshbon, and his land. . .*

2:31–3:7 Two Kings Defeated – Note the Parallel Language used --

Deuteronomy 2:31-36	Deuteronomy 3:1-7
<i>See, I have begun to give Sihon and his land over to you. (2:31)</i>	<i>For I have handed him over to you, along with his people and his land. (3:2)</i>
<i>Sihon came out against us, he and all his people, (2:32)</i>	<i>Og of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, (3:1)</i>
<i>for battle at Jahaz. (2:32)</i>	<i>for battle at Edrei. (3:1)</i>
<i>The LORD our God gave him over to us; (2:33)</i>	<i>The LORD our God also handed over to us King Og. (3:3)</i>
<i>we struck him down. (2:33)</i>	<i>We struck him down (3:3)</i>
<i>At that time we captured all his towns; (2:34)</i>	<i>At that time we captured all his towns, (3:4)</i>
<i>in each town we utterly destroyed men, women, and children. (2:34)</i>	<i>We utterly destroyed them, ... in each city utterly destroying men, women and children, (3:6)</i>
<i>We left not a single survivor (2:34)</i>	<i>until not a single survivor was left. (3:3)</i>
<i>Only the livestock we kept as spoil for ourselves, as well as the plunder of the towns. (2:35)</i>	<i>But all the livestock and the plunder of the towns we kept as spoil for ourselves. (3:7)</i>
<i>Reference to height of walls (2:36)</i>	<i>Reference to the height of the walls (3:5)</i>

First, the account highlights **God’s faithfulness to his promises**. God had been ready to give the land to the previous generation, but that generation lost faith. By

implication, Deuteronomy is reminding its audience that they can continue to have confidence in God's promises.

Second, through the use of Yahweh war language, Deuteronomy underscores the **sovereignty and power** of its God. The kings and powers of the land, strong as they may be (e.g., *fortress towns with high walls, double gates and bars*, **3:5**), are quite unable to obstruct God's will. The Israel of the eighth century BCE, facing Assyrian threat, as well as the Israel of the exile—both are reminded that they can trust in God: neither Assyria nor Babylon can thwart God.

Third, later Deuteronomy uses the **tradition of herem** in support of its call for the exclusive worship of God (**7:1–6**). The ancient Near Eastern custom of the ban, the total devotion of the enemy to God, is adapted so that its cultic connotations fade into the background and it becomes a way of warning Israel to resist the temptation of serving the gods of the land. It is these concerns that are at the center of our passage, not the actual defeat of two early Amorite kings called Sihon and Og.

Duane Christensen: It should be noted that it is not correct to limit discussion of the conquest of Canaan to Joshua and his successors through the establishment of the Davidic Empire, as a growing number of recent historians do. According to the biblical story, Moses not only brought the people out of Egypt, he led the conquest of Transjordan. It is this first phase of YHWH's Holy War that is in focus here. The defeat of the two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og, sets the stage for the death of Moses and the transfer of leadership to Joshua, who led the conquest of Cisjordan. Though Joshua appears in both parts of the outer frame of Deuteronomy (**chaps. 1, 3, 31, 34**), he is a subordinate figure in Deuteronomy and assumes leadership in the midst of YHWH's Holy War.

Daniel Block: Although the **theology of warfare** reflected in Deuteronomy shares many features with perceptions of war among the surrounding nations, it also offers a distinctly Israelite perspective.

1. As the divine Commander-in-Chief, Yahweh identifies the military target. He excludes Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites, and he zeroes in on the Amorite kings and their people in the Transjordan, presumably because they stood in the way of his people's manifest destiny.
2. Yahweh initiates the war, telling the Israelites when to engage the enemy.
3. Yahweh determines the strategy for the war—in this instance, telling Israel to cross the Jordan, possess the land, and contend with him in battle (**2:24**), capturing the cities, annihilating the population, and claiming the property as booty (**2:34–37**).
4. Yahweh accompanies Israel into battle. Although there is no explicit reference here to Yahweh's presence within the Israelite military camp, with an eye on **1:42**, we may conclude that this is the case here as well.

5. Yahweh engages in psychological warfare, controlling the disposition of the enemy toward himself and toward Israel, so that ultimately his objectives are achieved. Specifically, Yahweh hardened the heart of the enemy king so he would reject overtures of peace (**2:30**), and he put the fear and dread of Israel on the peoples everywhere, demoralizing them totally (**2:25**).

6. Yahweh delivered the enemies and their lands into Israel's hand (**2:30–31, 33, 36; 3:3**).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 3:12-29

TITLE: FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR CROSSING THE JORDAN

BIG IDEA:

RESOLVING ISSUES OF REWARD, RESPONSIBILITY, RULERSHIP, AND RATIONALIZATION PREPARED GOD'S PEOPLE TO MOVE FORWARD IN THEIR MISSION OF CONQUEST

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: Moses' recollections here divide into four parts, each of which is signaled by the chronological marker "*at that time*" and is controlled by a specific verb cast in the first person. In these episodes Moses' focus shifts from the conquered land (vv. 12–17), to the two and one-half tribes of Israel (vv. 18–22), to Joshua (vv. 21–22), and to himself (vv. 23–28). **Verse 29** provides an epilogic conclusion.

Peter Craigie: With the completion of the conquest east of the Jordan, the newly captured land was divided among some of the tribes. In these verses, there is first a description of the division of the land between the tribes (vv. 12–17) and then a reminder to those tribes that, although they had already come into possession of their land, nevertheless their responsibilities had not ceased until the conquest was complete.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Sometimes, just before we head out on an important trip or other venture, we pause to **review**. We may feel ready to move forward but then discover that a few things still need to be taken care of. Likewise for the people of Israel. This Retrospect (1:6–3:29) concludes with four brief paragraphs tying together loose ends, each set off and introduced by the phrase *at that time* (3:12, 18, 21, 23). Unfortunately, most translations do not follow the signal of this key phrase and divide the section into fewer than four paragraphs. A verse situating Israel geographically concludes the section.

The four paragraphs:

- (1) allocate the Transjordan to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh;
- (2) challenge these three tribes to represent their unity with the other tribes by sending their warriors across the Jordan to assist their kin in taking possession of the land west of the Jordan;
- (3) portray Moses encouraging Joshua as he prepares to lead the tribes across the Jordan; and
- (4) report one more futile appeal to God by Moses to be allowed to cross the Jordan with the people. The chapter concludes with Israel camped in the valley opposite Bethpeor, ready to cross the Jordan. But according to the logic of Deuteronomy, first it must hear the final instructions, or testament, of Moses.

I. (:12-17) ISSUE OF REWARD (INHERITANCE) – DISTRIBUTION OF THE POSSESSED LAND IN TRANSJORDAN

(:12a) Possession of the Land

*“So we took possession of this land **at that time.**”*

Daniel Block: In the short run, the request of the two and one-half tribes to retain this land seems both logical and reasonable. This was a fertile region, especially suitable for grazing herds and flocks, as the two tribes recognized. Moreover, the Israelites’ elimination of the Amorites had created a power vacuum in the region. Nevertheless, this land had previously never been envisaged as part of the Promised Land, and one may assume that if the Israelites had entered from the south thirty-eight years earlier, it would never have become part of the land of Israel. Although Moses declared that these lands were Yahweh’s gift to the two and one-half tribes (**3:18**), the accounts here and in Numbers are strangely silent on the involvement of God in the process. Assuming Moses’ had access to God’s will on this matter, we are still surprised that God would allow the expansion of the territory of Israel in response to the people’s desires.

Nevertheless, in long-range terms, granting the people’s request yielded disastrous consequences. Whereas God’s original plan envisaged the Jordan as a barrier between Israel and the Transjordanian nations, in a matter of months it would divide the nation itself. The theological implications of their request dawned on the two and one-half tribes immediately after the backbone of Canaanite resistance had been broken (**Josh. 22**). Fearing the western Israelites would treat their descendants as second-class citizens, excluded from the people of Yahweh, they built an altar on the west bank of the Jordan to memorialize their membership in the people of Yahweh (**vv. 24–25**). Had cool heads not prevailed, this decision would have resulted in a civil war within Joshua’s own lifetime.

Peter Craigie: This block of land allocated to the two tribes was approximately (perhaps exactly) the territory that had formerly been Sihon’s kingdom (see **Deut. 2:36**).

DISTRIBUTION OF THE LAND

A. (:12b) To the Reubenites and Gadites

“From Aroer, which is by the valley of Arnon, and half the hill country of Gilead and its cities, I gave to the Reubenites and to the Gadites.”

Daniel Block: **Numbers 32** tells the full story. Observing that the hills of Gilead and Bashan were ideal for raising livestock, the tribes of Reuben and Gad approached Moses for permission to claim this land as their possession (**32:5**). At first Moses interpreted the request as an act of rebellion against Yahweh (**32:14–15**), but when they assured him they would cross the Jordan with the rest of the tribes and assist them in the conquest of Canaan, he granted their request.

B. (:13) To Manasseh

“And the rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, the kingdom of Og, I gave to the half-tribe of Manasseh, all the region of Argob (concerning all Bashan, it is called the land of Rephaim.”

C. (:14) To Jair, the Son of Manasseh

“Jair the son of Manasseh took all the region of Argob as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and called it, that is, Bashan, after his own name, Havvoth-jair, as it is to this day.)”

Duane Christensen: Jair and Machir took the initiative in their violence of dispossessing the Amorites of Bashan and Gilead. For their obedience they were awarded the opportunity to integrate that land into the larger “promised land” of Israel as a whole, along with the tribes of Reuben and Gad. But first they must cross over the Jordan with their brothers to complete the conquest on the other side in Cisjordan.

D. (:15) To Machir

“And to Machir I gave Gilead.”

Peter Craigie: The term Machir refers to the descendants of Machir, the son of Manasseh, and came to be used as virtually synonymous with Manasseh. The allocation of this territory to Machir was because the descendants of Machir had been the ones directly responsible for capturing it from the Amorites (**Num. 32:39**).

E. (:16-17) To the Reubenites and Gadites

“And to the Reubenites and to the Gadites, I gave from Gilead even as far as the valley of Arnon, the middle of the valley as a border and as far as the river Jabbok, the border of the sons of Ammon; 17 the Arabah also, with the Jordan as a border, from Chinnereth even as far as the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, at the foot of the slopes of Pisgah on the east.”

**II. (:18-20) ISSUE OF RESPONSIBILITY (UNITY) –
CROSSING OVER THE JORDAN IN SOLIDARITY TO CONQUEST THE
PROMISED LAND**

A. (:18a) Realized Possession of the Land West of the Jordan

*“Then I commanded you **at that time**, saying,
'The LORD your God has given you this land to possess it;”*

B. (:18b-20) Responsibility for Fighting for Anticipated Possession of the Land East of the Jordan

1. (:18b) Leading the Charge

*“all you valiant men shall cross over armed before your brothers,
the sons of Israel.”*

Michael Grisanti: At the heart of this section is the reality that God seeks to maintain the solidarity and unity of the children of Israel. They need to conquer the entire region of Canaan and enjoy their new possession as one people.

This was an essential emphasis since the topographical barrier represented by the Jordan River could become an obstacle to national unity. Unfortunately, later on in Israelite history the tribes on the eastern side of the Jordan River became less interested in the affairs on the other side of the Jordan. In **Judges 5**, when Deborah and Barak led Israel against the Canaanites from Hazor, the tribes from Transjordan offered no assistance.

David Thompson: It has been often observed that God does not call His people to a playground but a **battleground**. Moses said that the men who were living on the east side, still needed to go fight for the rest of the Promised Land on the west side of the Jordan. Then he said after they had taken all the land they could return home.

2. (:19-20) Securing Your Women, Children and Livestock

“But your wives and your little ones and your livestock (I know that you have much livestock), shall remain in your cities which I have given you, 20 until the LORD gives rest to your fellow countrymen as to you, and they also possess the land which the LORD your God will give them beyond the Jordan. Then you may return every man to his possession, which I have given you.”

Peter Craigie: the many cattle were the spoil from the initial campaigns (**Deut. 2:35 and 3:7**). There were many of them because the land east of the Jordan, and particularly Bashan, was ideal cattle country. The emphasis here is on the new wealth of the inheritance of the eastern tribes, for cattle were a far more significant sign of prosperity in the ancient Near East than a healthy bank balance would be in the modern age.

Eugene Merrill: To further measure their resolve, the fighting men must leave their wives, children, and livestock in the Transjordan (**v. 19**). Only after the task of conquest in the west was over could they return (**v. 20**). As it turned out, this appears to have taken at least seven long years (**Josh 14:6-15**; cf. **22:1-4**), far longer, no doubt, than the most pessimistic would have thought. As to the matter of the security and maintenance of the families left behind, one must assume that the youth and the men over the normal maximum age for military service could more than meet these needs. Of course, it would also have been possible for troops from the west to recross the Jordan to take up arms on behalf of their loved ones should the need arise, particularly in light of the fact that Gilgal, just five miles west of the Jordan, was Joshua's headquarters during the early years of the conquest (**Josh 4:19; 10:6-7,15,43; 14:6**).

III. (:21-22) ISSUE OF RULERSHIP (LEADERSHIP) – CHARGE TO JOSHUA TO MAINTAIN CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD WHO FIGHTS FOR ISRAEL

A. (:21) Confidence Based on Past Experience of Conquests Directed by the Lord
*“And I commanded Joshua **at that time**, saying, 'Your eyes have seen all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings; so the LORD shall do to all the kingdoms into which you are about to cross.’”*

David Thompson: It is critical that God’s people move forward for God, and one of the keys to doing that is not being afraid of the future; and one of the keys to not being afraid of the future is remembering that as long as we have obeyed God, we have seen God give us victory.

B. (:22) Confidence Based on the Lord’s Continuing Presence and Dominion
“Do not fear them, for the LORD your God is the one fighting for you.”

Daniel Block: Moses’ charge to Joshua consisted of three elements.

- (1) He reminded Joshua of his own past experience of Yahweh’s intervention on Israel’s behalf, which Joshua had seen with his own eyes.
- (2) Moses declared that Yahweh’s triumph over Sihon and Og was paradigmatic for what he would do against the kingdoms on the other side of the Jordan.
- (3) Moses promised the continued presence of Yahweh, for Yahweh is the divine Warrior fighting for them.

Peter Craigie: Moses employs here the now familiar technique of eliciting courage for the future on the basis of the experience of the past. Joshua had a formidable task before him, but he was called upon to undertake it in the sure knowledge of a God who had already shown himself faithful. As the Lord had done in the past, just so will the Lord do to all the kingdoms to which you are about to cross over.

The words to Joshua are completed by a charge not to fear man, the visible and tangible enemy, for the Lord, though invisible and intangible, he is the one fighting for you.

IV. (:23-28) ISSUE OF RATIONALIZATION (REQUEST) -- DENIAL OF MOSES’ PETITION TO CROSS THE JORDAN RIVER AND SEE THE GOOD LAND

A. (:23-25) Prayer of Moses

1. (:23) Intensity of His Prayer

*“I also pleaded with the LORD **at that time**, saying,”*

David Guzik: We can appreciate what a painful thing this was for Moses. He lived the first 40 years of his life confident in his own ability to deliver Israel. He spent the next 40 years of his life having that confidence demolished as he tended his father-in-law’s sheep. He spent the last 40 years of his life being used of God to do what he was called to do. Now, he was not allowed to see the end result. No wonder Moses pleaded with the Lord.

2. (:24a) Invocation
“O Lord God,”

Peter Craigie: *Lord God*—the Hebrew is *ʾādōnāy yhw̄h*. This name or title for God is used only twice in Deuteronomy and on both occasions it appears in a prayer of Moses (here and at **9:26**). It is indicative of the deeply personal tone of the request Moses brings to the Lord.

3. (:24b) Praise for God’s Demonstrated Power
“Thou hast begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness and Thy strong hand; for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as Thine?”

Daniel Block: In prayers imbedded in Old Testament narratives, the opening invocation is often followed by a description of the divine addressee, proclaiming his power and uniqueness. This particular declaration consists of a statement followed by a rhetorical question.

Michael Grisanti: Although Moses was the great lawgiver and the ruler of Israel, he addresses his God as the “*Sovereign LORD*” and regards himself as his “*servant*.” Moses realized that he had only begun to comprehend his great God’s majesty because God had only begun to manifest himself to Moses and his people. The phrase “your greatness and your strong hand” refers to Yahweh’s awe-inspiring character and his impressive interventions in Israel’s behalf.

4. (:25) Petition
“Let me, I pray, cross over and see the fair land that is beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and Lebanon.”

Peter Craigie: The prayer began with a recollection of God’s activity in the past, which was followed by words praising the incomparable character of the Lord. Now Moses voices his request to be permitted to pass over the Jordan. The words of the request are related directly to the earlier part of the prayer; Moses wished to cross over so that he could see the good land. He desired the completion of the vision that had grown toward fulfilment over more than forty years. Though he would have been too old to savor for long the experience of the land, just to set foot on it would have been sufficient reward for the years of struggle and anticipation.

B. (:26-28) Denial by the Lord

1. (:26) Response of Anger
“But the LORD was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me; and the LORD said to me, ‘Enough! Speak to Me no more of this matter.’”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The expression used for God’s anger is strong (v. 26). In **Psalm 78** it is used twice, first as in “*he was full of wrath*” (v. 59), and then again in **verse 62**: “*He*

gave his people to the sword, and vented his wrath on his heritage.” Simply inserting that sense into our passage may be too harsh since the specific word choice may well have been influenced by the immediate context. The term itself is based on the same Hebrew root as the verb “*to cross*.” These verses thus involve a **wordplay**, or a pun, on the term “*cross*.” The passage begins with Moses requesting permission to “*cross the Jordan*.” The response then could be translated, *but the Lord was cross with me* (v. 26 AT), with the continuation, *for you shall not cross the Jordan* (v. 27).

2. (:27) Response of Consolation

*“Go up to the top of Pisgah and lift up your eyes to the west and north and south and east, and see it with your eyes,
for you shall not cross over this Jordan.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: Behind this language lies the story of Abraham and Lot (Gen 13). After Abraham and Lot separate, with Lot settling in the cities of the plains and Abraham in Canaan, God says to Abraham, “*Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever*” (Gen 13:14–15). At that time Abraham was promised the land, but he could only behold it and sojourn in it. Similarly, now Moses is asked to survey the land. Like Abraham, he is unable to settle down on it, but he is able to see the land. In ancient legal custom, a formal seeing the land was a form of accepting the grant (cf. 1:8). The land had been promised to the ancestors, and it was given formally at the beginning of Deuteronomy (1:8); in viewing the land, Moses now accepts it. All that remains is the actual taking possession of that which has been given.

3. (:28) Response of Leadership Transition

*“But charge Joshua and encourage him and strengthen him;
for he shall go across at the head of this people,
and he shall give them as an inheritance the land which you will see.”*

Peter Craigie: The response of the Lord introduces Joshua again (see also vv. 21–22), thus returning to one of the most important themes in the book, the succession of the leadership from Moses to Joshua.

(:29) EPILOGUE – GEOGRAPHICAL MARKER

“So we remained in the valley opposite Beth-peor.”

Daniel Block: Moses concludes his recollections of this painful episode abruptly by noting simply that he and the people remained in the valley opposite Beth Peor on the plains of Moab (34:1), the place where he delivered this address. The valley in question was probably Wadi ‘Ayn Musa, “The Valley of Moses’ Well,” at the foot of Pisgah. Beth Peor is probably an abbreviation for the fuller name, Beth Baal Peor, “the house of Baal of Peor,” which suggests the location of a shrine to Baal (cf. 4:3). The Israelites

are still at the place where they had recently engaged in spiritual prostitution and physical harlotry (**Num. 25:1–9**).

Gerald Gerbrandt: Across the Jordan from Beth-peor is Shittim, the place where Numbers reports, “*Israel yoked itself to the Baal of Peor*” (**Num 25:1–5**). Is Deuteronomy subtly warning the audience that Israel is ready to cross the Jordan, but that the crossing is fraught with danger and temptation (**Brueggemann 2001: 46**)? In order to survive the crossing and life in the land, Israel will need to heed the instructions it will receive from Moses in the remainder of the book.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What were the positives and negatives of the allocation of this Trans-Jordanian land to several of the Israelite tribes?
- 2) How can you tie together the concepts of **privilege** and **responsibility** and **solidarity** when it comes to brethren ministering together in the context of your local church?
- 3) How does God encourage you **not to fear** but to step out in faith in serving Him?
- 4) How do you avoid bitterness and discouragement when God says “No” to your specific prayer requests?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: Here Moses introduces the notion of “*rest, resting place*” for the first time. In this book, “rest” results from eliminating all outside threats, possessing the grant of land (*naḥalâ*) as their “the resting place” (*hammenûhâ*), and living in security (*beṭaḥ*, **12:9–10**). This “rest” is always portrayed as a gift from Yahweh (**3:20; 12:10; 25:19**; cf. **Josh. 1:13; 11:23**), and is a prerequisite to Yahweh’s choosing a permanent place for his name to dwell (**12:10**).

Gerald Gerbrandt: For Deuteronomy, the term **rest** basically means salvation. It cannot be spiritualized as referring to a vague peace of mind, but as **Gerhard von Rad** suggested in an important study years ago, it is the “tangible peace granted to a nation plagued by enemies and weary of wandering” (note **12:10**). It can only be a gift from God. “The life of the chosen people in the ‘pleasant land,’ at rest from all enemies round about, the people owning their love for God and God blessing his people—this is the epitome of the state of the redeemed nation as Deuteronomy sees it” (**Rad 1933: 95**).

The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh have received their rest, or at least the first stage of it; the remaining tribes still look forward to it. Only after all the tribes have received their share of the land and are at peace will Israel truly have its rest.

Wiersbe: All that Moses said in the first part of his farewell address prepared the way for his exposition and application of God's law, for **history** and **responsibility** go together. God had done mighty things for the people, both in blessing them and in chastening them, and the people of Israel had a responsibility to love God and obey His Word. Throughout this address, Moses will frequently remind the Jews that they were a privileged people, the people of God, separated unto the Lord from all the nations of the earth. It's when we forget our high calling that we descend into low living.

Adam Clarke: The prayer of Moses recorded in these two verses, and his own reflections on it are very affecting. He had suffered much both in body and mind in bringing the people to the borders of the Promised Land; and it was natural enough for him to wish to see them established in it, and to enjoy a portion of that inheritance himself, which he knew was a type of the heavenly country. But notwithstanding his very earnest prayer, and God's especial favour toward him, he was not permitted to go over Jordan! He had grieved the Spirit of God, and he passed a sentence against him of exclusion from the Promised Land. Yet he permitted him to see it, and gave him the fullest assurances that the people whom he had brought out of Egypt should possess it. Thus God may choose to deprive those of earthly possessions to whom he is nevertheless determined to give a heavenly inheritance....

It is very likely that what God speaks here, both concerning Moses and Joshua, was designed to be **typical** of the procedure of his justice and grace in the **salvation of man**:

1. The land of Canaan was a type of the kingdom of heaven.
2. The law, which shows the holiness of God and the exceeding sinfulness of sin, could not bring the people to the possession of that kingdom.
3. Moses may probably be considered here as the emblem of that law by which is the knowledge of sin, but not redemption from it.
4. Joshua, the same as Jesus, the name signifying a Saviour, is appointed to bring the people into the rest which God had provided for them; thus it is by Jesus Christ alone that the soul is saved-- fitted for and brought into the possession of the heavenly inheritance, for he is the end of the law-- the great scope and design of the law, for righteousness-- for justification, to them that believe.

Such a use as this every pious reader may make of the circumstances recorded here, without the danger of pushing analogy or metaphor beyond their reasonable limits.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 4:1-40

TITLE: COVENANT FAITHFULNESS -- OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S REVELATION

BIG IDEA:

LIFE IN THE LAND DEPENDS ON COVENANT FAITHFULNESS AS THE UNIQUENESS OF ISRAEL RESPONDS TO THE UNIQUENESS OF THEIR GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: In **Chapter 4** Moses' first address reaches its climax. Although the chapter exhibits numerous links with the preceding, it is obviously a literary sub-section in its own right.

(1) **Verse 1** opens with (lit.) "*and now*" (*we 'attâ*), which signals a turning point in the address.

(2) For the first time Moses appeals to his specific audience to "*hear*."

(3) This chapter displays a significant change in style—from basically historical reminiscences to explicitly **hortatory** proclamation.

(4) At the same time in this chapter Moses recalls several additional events—Yahweh's judgment at Baal Peor, the revelation of the Torah and the establishment of the covenant at Horeb, and the exodus from Egypt—with each place symbolizing greater spiritual realities.

(5) The chapter is characterized by a perplexing alternation between singular and plural second person forms. This alternation serves a rhetorical/sermonic goal. When Moses views Israel as a collective, he uses the **singular**; when he uses the **plural**, he recognizes that ethics and faith must be applied individually. By shifting to a more obviously sermonic style, Moses seeks to recapture in his audience the effect that the original theophany at Horeb should have had on the previous generation—**wholehearted devotion to Yahweh**.

Eugene Merrill: the exhortation is not delivered in a vacuum but finds its orientation in the historical review. What has already transpired is gone forever, but the lessons of history must not be forgotten and, in fact, must serve as the springboard for future thought and action.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Moses' teaching is directed at Israel, that people chosen by God for a special mission (cf. **Gen 12:3**). More than most books of the Old Testament, Deuteronomy emphasizes the uniqueness of Israel and the special relationship it has with God (cf. **4:4-8; 7:7-11; 33:26-29**). Israel receives the teaching not because it only applies to Israel—God's torah given to Israel reflects a righteousness that pertains to all

peoples (4:4–8)—but because through Israel’s obedience to it other peoples may come to recognize its God.

(:1) OPENING CHALLENGE – LISTEN / LIVE / LOCATE

[Main outline points adapted from Daniel Block and Gerald Gerbrandt]

1. Listen to God’s Revealed Code of Laws

“And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The next phrase sets the tone for the whole chapter: *Give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe*. Exhortations of this sort govern the spirit and structure of the discourse. They function as key markers of the six main units (1–4, 5–8, 9–14, 15–22, 23–31, 32–39), as each unit begins with summoning Israel to specific action: *Give heed* (v. 1). *See* (v. 5). *But take care and watch yourselves closely* (vv. 9, 15). *So be careful not to forget the covenant* (v. 23). *For ask now about former ages* (v. 32). And finally, *Keep his statutes and commandments* (v. 40). . .

The book does distinguish between the Ten Commandments and this whole torah, but all is designated by the phrase *statutes and ordinances*, along with its parallel terms in the book.

2. Live According to Moses’ Teaching of God’s Commands

“which I am teaching you to perform, in order that you may live”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Since Moses is the **teacher**, Deuteronomy may be called teaching. A recent book on Deuteronomy suggests that the most helpful category within which to understand Deuteronomy is **catechesis**, “the process of education in faith from one generation to another based on a distillation of essential tradition” (Olson: 11). In Deuteronomy Moses the great teacher shares the essentials of Yahwism with the next generation just before he dies.

Paul Barker: This life which is held out and promised is not mere physical existence. In Deuteronomy life is always life “*in the land,*” that is in God’s place, and **life lived under God’s care and rule**. Life is **quality relationship** to God, full of blessings because of that relationship. True life, life to the full, always has God at its centre. That is the life which Deuteronomy anticipates. It is the same sort of life Jesus came to bring (e.g. **John 10:10; 14:6; 17:3**).

David Thompson: God’s word is not given for mystical contemplation or academic postulations; it is given for real life application in real life situations. . . These instructions are not for the purpose of bogging down God’s people with a bunch of unnecessary rules so they cannot enjoy life. It is just the opposite. These instructions are that which lay out teachings to help govern all areas of life so people may live a happy and successful life. This is a great formula for successes in any area of life—hear the word of God and obey it.

3. Locate in the Promised Land which God has Gifted to You to Conquest

*“and go in and take possession of the land
which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.”*

Daniel Block: By “teaching” (*limmēd*) the “decrees and laws,” Moses functions as a pastor-teacher (**Eph. 4:11**), reiterating earlier revelation, applying that revelation specifically to life in the land, declaring the essence of covenant relationship, and highlighting the importance of a correct response to the revealed will of God.

Peter Craigie: The life of the Hebrews as a nation would depend on the law, not in a totally legalistic sense, but in that the law was the basis of the covenant, and in the covenant rested their close relationship to their God. (In contrast to so that you may live, see Moses’ words in **4:22**, “*I am about to die.*”) For the immediate future, Moses was expounding the law, because only by obedience to the law would the Israelites take possession of the land after they had crossed the Jordan.

Michael Grisanti: In the ultimate sense, whether or not Israel remained in the Land of Promise was determined by fidelity to the covenant made between them and God. The key observation to make from this interdependence is that “life” in the truest sense was only to be enjoyed when an Israelite lived in conformity with God’s expectations. Living in the land God gave them provided Israel with an international platform to demonstrate his character to the surrounding nations.

(:2-8) PROLOGUE – THE UNIQUENESS OF ISRAEL

A. (:2-4) Israel’s Unique Privileges Heighten Her Responsibility

1. (:2) Responsible to Maintain the Integrity of God’s Revealed Law

“You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.”

Peter Craigie: It was the **law**, the gift of God at Horeb, that could not be supplemented or reduced. This did not mean, however, that there could be no further revelation from God; the promise of a prophet like Moses (**Deut. 18:15–18**) pointed forward beyond the present situation.

Cf. **Matt. 5:17-18**

2. (:3-4) Responsible to Maintain Covenant Loyalty

a. (:3) Historical Example of Infidelity and Judgment

“Your eyes have seen what the LORD has done in the case of Baal-peor, for all the men who followed Baal-peor, the LORD your God has destroyed them from among you.”

Duane Christensen: One of the great lessons we can learn from the experience of ancient Israel in the religious life is that memory serves to lead to the continuing experience of the presence and activity of God. It is forgetfulness that opens the door to tragic failure on the part of the community of faith.

Peter Craigie: Certain Israelites had indulged in sexual relationships with Moabite women; it is possible that this took place in the context of a religious ceremony in honor of the god Baal. The behavior was quite contrary to the law of the Israelites and as a result the offenders were executed. The penalty was harsh, but implicit in the offense was a denial of a basic tenet of the Hebrew faith.

- b. (:4) Present Experience of Loyalty and Blessing
“But you who held fast to the LORD your God are alive today, every one of you.”

Donald Ackland: The word “*cleave*” is significant. In **Genesis 2:24** it describes the marriage relationship. It belongs to Deuteronomy’s vocabulary of tenderness as describing man’s response to the goodness of God. (See **10:20; 11:22; 13:4**).

B. (:5-8) Israel’s Unique Privileges Should Motivate Obedience

1. (:5-6) Resolve to Obey

- a. (:5) Absorb the Teaching and Possess the Land
“See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it.”
- b. (:6) Apply the Truth and Proclaim God’s Wisdom to the Nations
“So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”

Eugene Merrill: These statutes (and those about to be promulgated, **v. 8**) would do more than merely provide guidelines for successful life in the land. By obeying them, God’s people would also display before the nations what it means to be the people of the Lord and to have him in their midst (**vv. 6-7**). In a clear linkage with wisdom thought, Moses argued that keeping and doing the commandments of the Lord is in itself a definition of wisdom and understanding. That is, **the very essence of wisdom is conformity with the will of God**. Even the pagan nations—by whom wisdom was prized and highly sought after—would see in Israel’s covenant provisions a wisdom of a higher order, one to be eagerly emulated. This, of course, was part of the attraction of Israel by which they were to become a means of blessing the whole earth (cf. **1 Kgs 10:4, 7, 23-24**).

Michael Grisanti: Israel’s faithful observation of God’s lofty expectations will uniquely affect those nations (cf. **Ex 19:1-6**). They will recognize Israel’s “*greatness*” (mentioned three times) by seeing Israel as a wise and understanding people, having a

God who is near, and having righteous laws. Respect for Israel implies respect for Yahweh, the one from whom Israel has received these laws.

David Thompson: By obeying the word of God, God's people make a powerful, attractive statement to the world. When God's people purpose to truly and accurately know and obey the word of God, they make a statement to the world that this is the best way to live life and the best way to blessings. Living life according to God's word is the key to blessing.

2. (:7-8) Reminder of Israel's Unique Privileges

a. (:7) Intimate Access to God's Responsiveness

"For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him?"

Gerald Gerbrandt: Israel is a **great nation**, a phrase used three times (vv. 6–8). But it is an unusual greatness. Just as today, the tendency then was to consider a nation great if it had immense size or massive military or economic power. But none of those apply to Israel (cf. 1:28; 4:38; 7:7). The grounds for Israel's greatness are twofold:

- (1) the nearness of its God (v. 7) and
- (2) the justness of its torah (v. 8).

Daniel Block: The Israelites are uniquely privileged because their God is near to them and he answers their prayers. When other peoples pray to their gods, they remain both aloof and silent. Craftsmen may design them with big ears, but they do not hear (cf. 4:28; Ps. 115:4–8).

b. (:8) Incomparable Code of Laws Promoting Righteousness

"Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?"

Patrick Miller: The statutes and ordinances from the Lord through Moses are themselves **righteous**. What is probably being identified here is the social righteousness of these laws, their concern for the weak, the poor, and the slave. In that the law is humane, even with regard to treatment of the natural order, in that it seeks justice and impartiality in all cases, and in that it makes concern for the powerless and the disadvantaged the primary criterion of a just society, Israel's law as set forth in Deuteronomy demonstrated indeed a higher righteousness.

I. (:9-14) THE GRACE OF COVENANT PAST: THE ORIGINS OF YAHWEH'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

A. (:9) Historical Experience of God's Faithfulness

- **Must Keep You Anchored and**
- **Must Inform Succeeding Generations**

“Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons.”

Daniel Block: Verses 9–14 involve one long sentence governed by the twofold appeal to absolute vigilance in **verse 9a**, and a twofold warning (lit.), *“lest you forget,”* and (lit.) *“lest they leave your minds.”* The verb “forget” does not mean simply a loss of memory, but failure to take into account what the memory recalls—the special relationship Yahweh had established with his people.

Jack Deere: The solemn admonition to *be careful* (an admonition that occurs numerous times in **Deut.**) and *to watch* implies that the Israelites constantly faced the danger of falling into a sin which would have brought them to the brink of annihilation as a nation. That sin was idolatry (**vv. 15-31**).

Eugene Merrill: It was on the basis of what Israel saw and heard forty years earlier that Moses' offer of covenant renewal could be made. Only as they remembered the past and the commitments they made could they expect to receive and abide by the covenant revelation and expectation that was about to be disclosed to them. Thus Moses urged that his people take utmost care (double use of *mar*, plus adv. *m ra d*) lest they forget what they had seen with the result that the whole episode and its meaning completely escaped their memory. And this must be an ongoing reflection, one that remains part and parcel of the experience of that generation and every one to follow. What is implied is that such an experience with the living God must be rooted and grounded in a **historical event**, an event that must be recalled and celebrated regularly and faithfully by all who participate in it and benefit from it. There is no room in Old Testament theology for existential encounters without historical and spatial points of reference.

B. (:10-13) Historical Revelation of the Fundamental Covenant Principles

1. (:10) Epic Experience at Horeb

“Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, ‘Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.’”

2. (:11) Visual Experience of Seeing the Fire and Cloud of God’s Presence

“And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom.”

Eugene Merrill: The apparently contradictory elements of fire and cloud symbolize respectively the epiphanic self-disclosure and self-obscurity of the God who simultaneously is immanent and transcendent.

3. (:12) Auditory Experience of Hearing God’ Voice

“Then the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form-- only a voice.”

MacArthur: Israel was to remember that when God revealed Himself at Sinai, His presence came through His voice, i.e. the sound of His words. They did not see Him. God is Spirit (**Jn 4:24**), which rules out any idolatrous representation of God in any physical form (**vv. 16-18**) or any worship of the created order (**v. 19**).

4. (:13) Declared and Recorded Revelation of the Covenant

“So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.”

Daniel Block: Contrary to most translations and to pervasive popular usage, the Old Testament never refers to this document as the “Ten Commandments”; these are “*ten words*” (cf. **10:4; Ex. 34:28**). Given the semantic range of the term *debārīm*, we should follow the early Greek translation and refer to this document as the Decalogue, that is, “the ten words/declarations,” or even “the ten principles of covenant relationship.” While the Old Testament never explains why there were ten words or explicitly numbers them, the number ten seems to have been selected to correspond to the fingers on our hands and to facilitate memorization.

Patrick Miller: The heart of the matter is the “*ten words*”, which are identified as the sum and substance of the covenant. These ten words are the basic stipulations that declare the response and responsibility of the people of God. Further, it is indicated here and becomes increasingly clear in succeeding chapters that there is a kind of foundational, primary word beneath all the other words. That foundational word is embodied in the prologue to the Decalogue, together with the first and second commandments. The prohibition against images is the focus of this section, but the prologue and first commandment, the prohibition of the worship of other gods, are here also.

Earl Kalland: The “*two stone tablets*” (**v. 13**) are two tablets rather than one tablet having two lists of commands inscribed on them. This coincides with the two copies of a suzerain-vassal treaty. Each participant was to have a copy (see **Kline**, *Biblical Authority*, pp. 189-24).

John Schultz: This teaches us an important lesson regarding the importance of the **written word**. It is a known fact that orally transmitted stories tend to change, sometimes beyond recognition. An old Chinese proverb says: “the weakest ink is stronger than the strongest memory.” We need the written word in order to correct our course through life; it is our compass and direction finder. It corrects and supersedes even our spiritual experiences. In the story of Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus emphasizes, among other points, the importance of the written Word of God. At one point the rich man pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus to his father’s house. He says:

“ I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

C. (:14) Historical Commission to Teach Covenant Faithfulness

“And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might perform them in the land where you are going over to possess it.”

II. (:15-24) THE GRACE OF COVENANT PRESENT: THE ESSENCE OF YAHWEH’S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

A. (:15-19) Avoid Idolatry

1. (:15-18) The Covenant Relationship Must Not Attempt to Contain or Limit God (No Graven Images)

“So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, 17 the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, 18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth.”

Peter Craigie: We may not be tempted to represent God in wood or stone, but like the Israelites we are constantly tempted to think that we can contain and limit God. The representation of God in wood or stone, even though it is acknowledged as only representative and not divine per se, is in effect a human attempt to **contain** and **limit** God. To contain or limit God, whether in material form or in theological proposition, is to fail to be aware of his transcendence and infinitude.

Michael Grisanti: He employs four relatively synonymous terms that are part of idolatry: **idol, image, shape, form**. Most idolatrous religions do not technically regard the image or pattern as the god itself, rather, as a representation of the god. But in almost every case the image or pattern takes on divine qualities in the minds of its worshipers. In other words, the idol replaces the god it supposedly represents. Israel must not replace God with any human creation. The other danger of idolatry is that the worshiper ends up repudiating the true God.

2. (:19) The Covenant Relationship Must Not Worship the Creation

“And beware, lest you lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.”

B. (:20) Appreciate Redemption

“But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today.”

C. (:21-24) Appropriate the Promised Land

1. (:21-22a) Blessing Withheld from Moses

*“Now the LORD was angry with me on your account, and swore that I should not cross the Jordan, and that I should not enter the good land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance. 22 **For I shall die in this land, I shall not cross the Jordan,**”*

Eugene Merrill: His mention of the land reminded Moses once more that his intemperate act of smiting the rock on behalf of his people had disqualified him from entering it (v. 21). This is the third time in Deuteronomy that he made this point (cf. 1:37; 3:26), and each time it is in connection with the “good land” they were about to possess. It is most understandable that his reflection on the good land would trigger an automatic reaction of sorrow and regret that he would be unable to enjoy its benefits firsthand. Instead, he must die in the Transjordan while his countrymen passed over the river to their reward on the other side (v. 22).

Michael Grisanti: The fact that Israel is Yahweh’s special possession (inheritance) leads to the need for that special people to have a land of its own. Not only is the land Israel’s inheritance, but Israel is Yahweh’s inheritance. Moses mentions once again his exclusion from the landed inheritance as a reminder to God’s people that they too can fail to enjoy this inheritance if they commit covenantal treachery (McConville, 109).

2. (:22) Blessing Realized by Present Generation

“but you shall cross and take possession of this good land.

3. (:23) Beware Not to Fall into Idolatry

“So watch yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything against which the LORD your God has commanded you.”

4. (:24) Beware of Offending God’s Jealousy

“For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.”

Eugene Merrill: Perhaps the clearest explanation of the connection between idolatry and God as jealous is found in **Deut 6:15**, where disloyalty to the only God brings forth a holy wrath that destroys the sinner from off the earth. He himself becomes a consuming fire that accomplishes that task (cf. **Lev 10:2; Num 16:35**).

Peter Craigie: The language is stern, but it is closely related to the theme of the love of God in Deuteronomy. The covenant relationship was one of love, initiated in the

covenant of God and demanding a response of love from the Israelites (see **6:5**). To construct images would be to indicate that the first love of the Israelites had been forgotten, and to this the response of the Lord would be jealousy. Jealousy, however, does not represent a change in God, but is, as it were, the reverse of the coin of love; it was the people who were prone to change and forgetfulness, and from outside the relationship of love, God was indeed awesome like a consuming fire.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Two themes, or aspects of God's character, are presented in dialogue with each other. On the one hand, there is Yahweh, the **jealous** God who is like a devouring fire. On the other hand, there is Yahweh, the **merciful** God who does not forget the covenant he swore to Israel's ancestors. The passage begins by putting all weight on the first quality but by the end the emphasis has shifted, and the jealous God has been superseded by the merciful God. The language and images emphasize this exchange and contribute to the blended picture.

III. (:25-31) THE GRACE OF COVENANT FUTURE: THE PERMANENCE OF THE COVENANT

A. (:25) Future Covenant Breaking

“When you become the father of children and children's children and have remained long in the land, and act corruptly, and make an idol in the form of anything, and do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD your God so as to provoke Him to anger,”

B. (:26-28) Future Land Banishment

1. (:26) Slaughter

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you shall surely perish quickly from the land where you are going over the Jordan to possess it. You shall not live long on it, but shall be utterly destroyed.”

2. (:27) Scattering

“And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you shall be left few in number among the nations, where the LORD shall drive you.”

Peter Craigie: If the Israelites were scattered among the Canaanites, they would have no option but to serve gods, the fabrication of human hands. This principle is at the core of the covenant promise and the necessity of the conquest. The religion of the Israelites was so closely bound by the nature of the covenant to the people as a whole that it was inconceivable to think of somehow maintaining a purely individual faith in the land. The whole of Canaanite society, even that which would nowadays be called secular, was permeated by the belief structure and world view of the Canaanites. Simply to live among the Canaanites would involve concessions on the part of individual Israelites. The covenant promise anticipated a state, a theocracy, but the fulfilment of that vision depended on the unity of the people, by which alone such a state could be brought into being.

3. (:28) Servitude

*“And there you will serve gods, the work of man's hands,
wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell.”*

Daniel Block: Moses’ last threat drips with irony and poetic justice as he promises the people exactly what their insatiable lust demanded. Exposing the folly of idolatry, Moses observes sarcastically how roles have reversed.

- (1) Instead of the creature worshiping the Creator, the creator worships creature: idols are the work of human hands.
- (2) Idolatry directly contradicts Yahweh’s self-revelation (vv. **12, 15**): lifeless and physical material replaces what is formless but living and spiritual.
- (3) These images have organs of perception and communication, but they are blind, deaf, and dumb.

C. (:29-31) Faithfulness of God Persists When You Repent

1. (:29) Seeking and Finding God

“But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul.”

2. (:30) Returning to God and Obeying Him

“When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice.”

Eugene Merrill: “*To return*” translates the Hebrew verb *ûb*, which means “*to repent*” in situations like the one described here. Together with “*obey*” the idea is one of repudiation of the idolatry and other sins that brought about the dispersion and a total acceptance of the claims of sovereignty of the God against whom they had rebelled. Not to be overlooked here is the absence of any conditionality. The text is clear that it is not a matter of **if** Israel returns and obeys but **when**. Repentance is obviously a matter of free will, but the biblical witness is unanimous that the **impetus** to repent is something God himself will plant within his people in order to encourage and enable them to return to him and to the land (cf. **Lev 26:40-45; Deut 30:1-10; Jer 31:27-34; Ezek 36:22-31**).

3. (:31) 3 Evidences of God’s Enduring Compassion

*“For the LORD your God is a compassionate God;
He will not fail you
nor destroy you
nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them.”*

Peter Craigie: His **compassion** lay in his continuing readiness to receive his people back to himself, despite the fact that a breach of the covenant dissolved, in a legal sense, the commitment of God to his people. The positive note contrasts sharply the different characters of the two “partners” in the covenant. The Israelites were prone to

be forgetful of the covenant and their experience of God; forgetfulness led to acts of disobedience, such as idolatry, contrary to the stipulations of the covenant. In contrast, God will not forget the covenant of your fathers, which he swore to them by oath.

(:32-39) EPILOGUE – UNIQUENESS OF ISRAEL’S GOD

Daniel Block: On the basis of style and content this paragraph divides into five parts:

- A The History Lesson Part I (vv. 32–34)
 - B The Theology Lesson Part I (v. 35)
- A’ The History Lesson Part II (vv. 36–38)
 - B’ The Theology Lesson Part II (v. 39)
 - C The Practical Lesson (v. 40)

Three dominant imperatives trace the logic of the passage: “ask” (v. 32); “acknowledge [know]” (v. 39); “keep” (v. 40). With keen homiletical sense, Moses challenges his hearers to reflect on the historical facts (vv. 32–34), to draw the right theological conclusions from those facts (vv. 35–39), and to order their lives according to the theology that derives from those facts (v. 40).

A. (:32-35) Investigation of God’s Uniqueness

1. (:32a) Historical and Universal Investigation of God’s Uniqueness

“Indeed, ask now concerning the former days which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and inquire from one end of the heavens to the other.”

2. (:32b-34) 4 Rhetorical Questions Investigating God’s Uniqueness

a. (:32b) What Have You Seen?

“Has anything been done like this great thing,”

b. (:32c) What Have You Heart?

“or has anything been heard like it?”

c. (:33) What Have You Experienced? Revelation from Mt. Horeb

“Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it, and survived?”

d. (:34) Uniqueness of the Exodus Event – Redemption from Egypt

“Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?”

Donald Ackland: The doctrine of **election** is woven deeply into the fabric of Deuteronomy.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The rhetorical questions zero in on the two primary pieces of evidence for the affirmation: an experience of **revelation** (Mount Horeb, v. 33) and an experience of **redemption** (exodus and the gift of land, v. 34). The rest of the passage refers back to these events (vv. 36, 37, 38). Israel heard God’s voice at the mountain and yet lived (cf. vv. 9–14). Israel has been taken by its God from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power (v. 34). The piling up of images and terms emphasizes the greatness and power of God in delivering a people. Although each term or phrase is used of God’s work of redemption in other parts of Deuteronomy and the Old Testament, this is an unusual concentration of exodus images.

3. (:35) Intent of the Investigation of God’s Uniqueness

“To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him.”

Daniel Block: The God of Israel is *sui generis*—in a class all his own.

Peter Craigie: The **knowledge of God** for the Israelites sprang from God’s revelation of himself in **word** and in **deed**. Thus right from the beginning, the Bible presupposes the existence of the living God. The question “Does God exist?”—though a legitimate question per se—was nevertheless an irrelevant question in the light of a knowledge of God, of which the source was revelation and in which the conviction was provided by experience. Thus, for the Israelites, the two primary sources of the knowledge of God were **Sinai** and the **Exodus**, which together formed the framework of their belief. These two themes, both presupposing the activity of God in history, are a paradigm for the Christian faith. The incarnation, providing a new and intimate knowledge of the presence of God in human history, is the prerequisite for the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Christ. Thus for the Christian, while the Exodus and Sinai remain important, it is of the death and resurrection that it can be said, in the words of Moses’ address: *you were shown this in order to know that the Lord, he is God. There is none of her apart from him*—the faith of Israel was monotheistic; that is to say, it was a faith in which the existence of one God was affirmed and the reality of all other gods was denied. This did not mean, of course, that the Israelites were unaware that there were believed, by others, to be many gods, and the viewpoint of Deuteronomy toward other gods, in the faith of other nations, was remarkably tolerant (see v. 19). But a major thrust of the whole book was to warn Israel against the dangers of serving other gods. The reason was that though there were many gods in the religions of Israel’s neighbors, only the Lord was a true and living God. And the proof of the reality of the Lord their God lay not in any philosophical argument, but in the **acts** and **words** of God in history, principally in the Exodus and at Sinai.

B. (:36-38) Demonstration of God’s Uniqueness

1. (:36) Personally Experiencing -- Hearing and Seeing

“Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire.”

2. (:37-38) Personally Benefiting

“Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power, 38 driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in and to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is today.”

C. (:39) Assurance of God’s Uniqueness

“Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.”

Eugene Merrill: Yahweh, God of Israel, is the omnipresent and only God, the sovereign one who has redeemed his people and who now was about to reveal a magnificent covenant arrangement that would, in its keeping, guarantee them long and prosperous life in the land they were about to enter.

Michael Grisanti: Based on all the marvelous things the Lord has done for them already, God’s children are exhorted to acknowledge his utter uniqueness and obey his commands with the result that this generation and all future generations will experience God’s abundant blessings. Moses challenges his fellow Israelites to “*take to heart*” or internalize the fact that Yahweh is the universal sovereign (“*in heaven above and on the earth below*”) and the only sovereign (“*there is no other*”). In the light of that theological reality, they should gladly obey his commands. Moses affirms that Israel’s genuine obedience to God’s commands will occasion long tenure in the land (and continued enjoyment of covenantal blessings).

(:40) CLOSING CHALLENGE – OBEY / PROSPER / PERSEVERE

A. Obey

“So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today,”

Patrick Miller: Moses’ **call to obedience** is a laying out for the people of the conditions and requirements for making it across the border. Obedience to the instruction of God is both the implication of their past history with God and the necessity for their future life with God.

B. Prosper

“that it may go well with you and with your children after you,”

C. Persevere

“and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time.”

Daniel Block: A single practical fact drives the final verse: awareness of the history of Yahweh's actions on Israel's behalf and knowledge of his status as supreme over all must inspire behavior in line with the will of this gracious God. Moses appeals to his people to obey the will of Yahweh for their own good and for the good of their descendants. If they will keep alive the memory of Yahweh's gracious actions, if their theology remains pure, and if their response is right, God's mission for them will be fulfilled. The land has indeed been promised them as an eternal possession, but enjoyment of the promise is conditional. Each generation must commit itself anew to being the people of God in God's land for God's glory.

Michael Grisanti: vv. 1, 40 -- These verses form an inclusio that encompasses the entire section, thus drawing attention to the section's key theme: wholeheartedly obeying Yahweh's commands.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some ways we are tempted to try to control or limit God?
- 2) How should looking back and remembering our initial salvation experience help us to trust in the Lord in the present?
- 3) What does God's attribute of jealousy say about the importance of loyalty to the Lord?
- 4) How has God demonstrated His compassion and faithfulness in your life in times when you have struggled with your own faithfulness to Him?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: Chiastic structure of 4:1-40 –

- A Keep YHWH's commandments that you may live in the land (4:1-4)
- B Israel's uniqueness is shown in its Torah (4:5-8)
- C Be careful not to forget what happened at Horeb (4:9-10)
- D Covenant stipulation issued at Horeb (the Ten Words) (4:11-14)
- E No graven images in any form are allowed (4:15-18)

F No astral deities; God has allotted them to other peoples (4:19)

G The exodus made the people YHWH's "family property" (4:20)

X Moses is not permitted to enter the Promised Land (4:21a)

G' The exodus will make the land Israel's "family property" (4:21b–22a)

F' No images allowed, for YHWH is a jealous God (4:22b–24)

E' If you make an image, you will be scattered among the nations (4:25–28)

D' When you seek YHWH and return, he will forgive (4:29–31)

C' Remember what YHWH did for you in bringing you out of Egypt (4:32–34)

B' YHWH's uniqueness is shown in the exodus-exodus (4:35–38)

A' Keep YHWH's commandments that you may live in the land (4:39–40)

Patrick Miller: Within the speech itself (vv. 1–40) one may discern a prologue (vv. 1–8) and an epilogue (vv. 32–40), bracketing the core of the chapter in verses 9–31. Their character as brackets is demonstrated by the way in which they mirror each other and share certain formal and thematic elements:

(1) Verses 1–8 begin with an injunction to keep the commandments and motivational clauses for doing so (v. 1), while verses 32–40 end in the same way (v. 40);

(2) both introduction and conclusion share a reflection on the incomparability of Israel among the nations vis-à-vis Israel's law (vv. 1–8) and their God (vv. 32–40); and

(3) both also use the device of rhetorical questions, a not uncommon feature of incomparability statements.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The message is simple, yet complex. The simple side is reflected in the repeated and consistent correlation of obedience with long life in the land (cf. 4:1, 5, 23–24, 40). Israel may be unique (vv. 4–8), and Yahweh, the God of Israel, may be unique (vv. 32–39), but a blessed life for Israel in the land is contingent upon

remembering and obeying. Disobedience will lead to exile, with Israel scattered among the peoples (e.g., 4:26). The second commandment, the prohibition of images, takes center stage in the discourse (vv. 9–31). Obey, or else!

Yet it is not that simple. Even as the address warns Israel that its fate will be determined by the people's response to the torah, it raises questions about that very emphasis. Disobedience does lead to exile, but that is not the last word. God's determination is more powerful. God will not forget the ancestral covenant; life will overcome death. A fascinating interplay between God's mercy and God's judgment results (4:23–31).

Patrick Miller: The **key symbol** in the chapter is the fire, referred to seven times (vv. 11, 12, 15, 24, 33, 36 [twice]). This powerful image appears frequently in the Old Testament (Miller, "Fire"). Its symbolism in this context appears to be dual: **illuminating** and **consuming**. It is bright light, revealing, a radiance like the *kabod*, or "glory" of God, and thus appropriate for indicating the presence of God. But it is also mysterious. Fire repels as much as it draws. One is unable to touch it and is destroyed in touching it. It can be seen clearly but not approached and touched (cf. II Sam. 6:6–7). This point is explicitly indicated in the other references. **Verse 24** speaks of the Lord as *a devouring fire*. **Verse 33** asks if any people ever heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of a fire and still lived, implying that fire representing the divine presence is threatening and dangerous. The force of the symbol in conveying both the **transcendence** and **immanence** of God is seen in **verse 11**, where the mountain is spoken of as *burning with fire to the heart of heaven*. . .

MacArthur: One purpose of the law was to make Israel morally and spiritually unique among all the nations and, therefore, draw those nations to the true and living God. They were from their beginnings to be a **witness nation**. Though they failed and have been temporarily set aside, the prophets revealed that in the future kingdom of Messiah they will be a nation of faithful witnesses (cf. Is. 45:14; Zec 8:23).

The nations would see 3 things in Israel (vv. 6-8).

First, the Israelites would know how to apply God's knowledge so as to have discernment and to be able to judge matters accurately.

Second, faithfulness to the Lord would allow the nations to see that the Lord had established intimacy with Israel.

Third, the nations would see that Israel's law was distinctive, for its source was the Lord indicating its character was righteous.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 4:41-43

TITLE: *HISTORICAL INTERLUDE -- 3 TRANSJORDANIAN CITIES OF REFUGE*

BIG IDEA:

MOSES IMPLEMENTS A LEGAL SYSTEM IN THE NEWLY ACQUIRED TRANSJORDANIAN TERRITORY THAT COMBINES MERCY AND JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION:

Duane Christensen: The reader cannot help but feel the jarring effect of encountering a totally different type of content as one moves from v 40 to v 41. A narrator suddenly appears, without introduction, to describe the establishment of three cities of refuge for the tribes in Transjordan.

Peter Craigie: These verses, which are not a part of the address of Moses, describe an action undertaken between the preliminary address (the Historical Prologue) and the subsequent address in which the Law is presented and expounded. They describe the allocation of three eastern cities of refuge, and the appointment of them at this point in the course of the narrative seems suitable. The historical prologue had described the experiences of the Israelites up to the present moment on the plains of Moab; that part of the address which follows has its specific focus on the future. Yet there was one bit of unfinished business relating to the past, the setting aside of cities of refuge for the two and a half tribes who had already been allocated land east of the Jordan.

Michael Grisanti: Moses addresses this issue here (an interlude of sorts) because these cities are likely chosen for this function at this time (while Israel is camped in the plains of Moab). The conquest of Transjordan has been accomplished, and there is no need to delay the fulfillment of the divine requirement for these locations (cf. **Nu 35**).

Brian Bell: This is an appropriate place for this list, as his 1st sermon dealt with the conquest & settlement of **Transjordan** by Israel. Joshua will designate 3 more cities of refuge in the land of Canaan (totaling 6). By providing cities of refuge God showed Himself to be both gracious & just.

Holman Bible Dictionary: A safe place to flee for a person who had accidentally killed another. The city provided asylum to the fugitive by sheltering and protecting him until a trial could be held to determine his guilt or innocence. If, in the judgment of the city elders, the death had occurred accidentally and without intent, the man was allowed to stay there without fear of harm or revenge by the dead man's relatives (**Joshua 20:2-6**).

I. (:41) DESIGNATION OF THE TRANSJORDANIAN CITIES OF REFUGE

A. Designated Cities

“Then Moses set apart three cities”

B. Designated Territory

“across the Jordan to the east,”

II. (:42) PURPOSE OF THE TRANSJORDANIAN CITIES OF REFUGE

A. Destination for a Manslayer

“that a manslayer might flee there,”

B. Definition of a Manslayer

*“who unintentionally slew his neighbor
without having enmity toward him in time past;”*

C. Destiny of a Manslayer

“and by fleeing to one of these cities he might live:”

David Thompson: Moses really develops this idea in **Deuteronomy 19:2-13**.

Sometimes accidents do happen and sometimes someone dies because of an accident. The illustration given in **Deuteronomy 19** is that a man went into the woods to cut wood and the iron head of the axe flew off and hit his friend and he dies. This certainly was not an intentional homicide. It was an accident. These cities were provided by God as a place of refuge for the person who did it.

A family member avenger of blood had a right to track down the person and even the score. These cities prevented him from killing one who was innocent.

III. (:43) LOCATION OF THE TRANSJORDANIAN CITIES OF REFUGE

A. Bezer

“Bezer in the wilderness on the plateau for the Reubenites,”

Eugene Merrill: If Bezer is the same as Bozrah (Umm el-'Amad) as some scholars maintain, the place in view was some six miles east of Heshbon, well within the territory that had already been assigned to the tribe of Reuben (cf. **3:16-17**).

B. Ramoth

“and Ramoth in Gilead for the Gadites,”

Eugene Merrill: The second city is the well known “*Ramoth in Gilead*” (modern Tell Ramith) so named as to distinguish it from other places with the same name. It lay some thirty-five miles east of the Jordan River and southeast of the Sea of Galilee, high up in the Gilead plateau. It was conveniently located for the Gadites who had settled there.

Bruce Hurt: Ramoth was a celebrated city in the mountains of Gilead, placed by Eusebius fifteen miles east from Philadelphia or Ammon, and by Jerome in the neighbourhood of Jabbok, and consequently north of Philadelphia. (**Jos 21:38; 1Ki 4:13; 22:3, 4; 1Ch 6:80**)

C. Golan

“and Golan in Bashan for the Manassites.”

Eugene Merrill: It was only forty miles north of Ramoth-Gilead and about the same distance due east of the Sea of Galilee.

Bruce Hurt: This city gave name to the district of Gaulonitis, now called Djolan, which comprises the plain to south of Djedour or Iturea, and to the west of Haouran: its southern frontier is the Nahar Aweired, by which it is separated from the district of Erbad, and the Sheriat el Mandhour, which separates it from the district of El Kefarat: on the west it is limited by the territory of Feik, and on the north-west by Djebel Heish, or mount Hermon. (**Jos 21:27; 1Ch 6:71**)

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why was this account inserted into the text at this point between the first two addresses of Moses?
- 2) What is the significance of this legislative action on the part of Moses in terms of defining the ownership of this Transjordanian area?
- 3) How should our own legal system protect against unbridled revenge and a lust for vengeance?
- 4) What does this passage teach us about the grace and mercy and justice of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: Why the editor of Moses’ speeches closed his first address with this account is unclear. However, in its present location this episode reminds readers that as the Israelites approached the time for crossing the Jordan, the tribes who remained east of the river were subject to the same ethical standards as those who would cross over into the actual Promised Land. Furthermore, these cities of refuge served as memorials to the faithfulness of Yahweh. If the Israelites will conduct their campaign west of the Jordan the way they had fought Sihon and Og in the east, they will soon have their own cities of refuge to memorialize God’s faithfulness. . .

Whereas this provision presupposes that the Israelites will execute murderers, it recognizes the danger of potentially escalating cycles of revenge. It also recognizes that whenever one person accidentally or inadvertently causes another's death, there are actually two victims: the one whose physical life was taken and the one deprived of social life. This policy illustrates the need for all judicial systems to take into account the lives of potential secondary victims. Even as it grieves over accidental loss of life, a just society will guard against unwarranted violent responses to innocent acts.

Duane Christensen: One of the problems of legal justice in relation to criminal law in ancient Israel involved the "*avenger of blood*" (see **19:6**), who was apparently the nearest male kinsman of the deceased in instances of violent death. His responsibility was not simply to kill the person responsible for the death of his relative (whether manslayer or murderer), but to bring that person before the established courts of law in his hometown, which would determine the case in the proper manner. Nonetheless, the institution was inherently open to abuse by distraught individuals who thought it was their responsibility to take matters into their own hands, seeking revenge. To protect the rights of the manslayer in such circumstances, Moses set apart three "*cities of refuge*" in Transjordan for the two and a half tribes who settled there (**4:41–43**), and made provision for three more in Cisjordan after Israel entered and settled there (**19:8–10**).

John Schultz: It seems that the appointment of the three cities was Moses' last legislative act. It was also the ruling that confirmed the allotments of the trans-Jordanic territory to tribes of Reuben, half the tribe of Manasseh, and the tribe of Gad. Bezer was specifically set aside for the Reubenites; Ramoth in Gilead, for the Gadites; and Golan in Bashan, for the Manassites. The fact that a provision of grace was made among each of those tribes, not only made it safe for the people to live in those places, but it also confirmed their ownership. All three of these cities were eventually assigned to the Levites as places to live, and as a compensation for the lack of physical inheritance that was withheld from them.

Andrew Webb: A Place of Refuge

Now one of the many ways that the Law of the Lord was superior to the Laws of the surrounding peoples was in its provisions for these cities of refuge. There is no evidence, for instance, that any other nation in or around Canaan had any provision like this, for providing protection for those who had accidentally killed another man without malice aforethought.

God wants us to understand how precious human life is. People are made in his image, the alone in all creation have been given an immortal soul, this spark of divine life that never dies. They alone have been created for communion with their creator. As wonderful as the other parts of creation are, as beautiful as eagles and dolphins are, none of them has the ability to pray, or to receive and understand God's self-revelation, and Jesus did not come into the world as a dolphin or an eagle to redeem them. He took on human flesh that he might die for his people, not the animals or even the fallen angels. So when we murder another person, we are destroying the only thing in creation

created in the image of God. So the Lord had commanded, when an animal kills a person, that animal is to be put to death, and when a person murders a person, the murderer's life is forfeit. This follows what was known as the Lex Talionis, or law of retribution. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or in the case of murder, a life for a life. This was a proportionate response that stressed retributive justice not vendetta, you didn't put a man's entire tribe to death for something he alone had done. Rather he alone bore the penalty for his crime. Now that was a considerable improvement over the way justice was administered in other nations and even over some of our laws today that allow murderers to escape justice.

But just as wrong as allowing a murderer to go free, would be putting someone who hadn't intended to kill someone to death. For instance, in **Numbers 35** and **Deuteronomy 19** God gave a whole list of circumstances in which someone who killed another person wasn't guilty of murder. If for instance I shove someone without intending to harm them and they fall and die, or if I throw a stone not seeing someone and they are struck and die, or if we are chopping wood and the axe-head flies off and hits them and they die, this is manslaughter and in these cases I must flee to the city of refuge, and there await judgment by the Levites. If they decided that I was guilty, I was expelled from the city and the avenger was free to execute the sentence. If they were to decide I am innocent of murder, then I must wait in that city until the death of the current high priest, which made atonement for the shedding of blood, and then I might be free to leave. However, if I left the city of refuge before that time and the avenger of blood found me he was allowed to put me to death.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/1025071141511.pdf>

A. W. Pink: The dispensation of the Gospel may be compared to the cities of refuge in Israel. It was a privilege and honor to the nation in general that they had such sanctuaries of Divine appointment, but the real value of them was known and felt by only a few. Those alone who found themselves in that case for which they were provided could rightly prize them. Thus it is with the Gospel of Christ: it is the highest privilege and honor of which a professing nation can boast, but it can be truly understood and esteemed by none except weary and heavy laden souls, who have felt their misery by nature, are tired of the drudgery of sin, and have seen the broken Law pursuing them like the avenger of blood of old. This is the only consideration which keeps them from sinking into abject despair, in that God has graciously provided a remedy by the Gospel and that Christ bids them "*Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.*"

TEXT: Deuteronomy 4:44-49

TITLE: INTRODUCTION TO MOSES' SECOND ADDRESS

BIG IDEA:

PROCLAMATION OF THE LAW IN PREPARATION TO CROSS THE JORDAN

INTRODUCTION:

Meredith Kline: This passage is **transitional**. As a summary of the Trans-Jordanian conquests (vv. **46b-49**; cf. **2:32-36**; **3:1-17**), it serves as a **conclusion** to the historical prologue. But it is also immediately **introductory** to the stipulations (vv. **44-46a**).

Duane Christensen: **Deut 4:44-49** reads like a **second introduction** to the book, which duplicates much of the information in **1:1-5**.

David Guzik: This initial introduction in **Deuteronomy 4:45-49** may well indicate the beginning of a new tablet, providing an explanation of what is on it.

Daniel Block: The boundaries of Moses' long second address (**4:44-26:19**; **28:1-29:1**[**28:69**]) are fixed by the narrative prologue (**4:44-5:1a**) and the narrative colophon in **29:1**[**28:69**].

Peter Craigie: The law about to be presented is then clearly identified as the same law (testimonies, statutes, and judgments) that was proclaimed to the Israelites at Horeb/Sinai after the Exodus from Egypt (v. **45**); it is not a new covenant in Deuteronomy, but the renewing of an old covenant. But while the law is the same as that given earlier, its form is slightly different in this context, since it is presented and expounded in Moses' address. The place and time are then specified (vv. **46-49**) in a summary section gathering together briefly many of the themes already dealt with at length in **chs. 1-3**.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The narrator introduces the second major speech with an introduction similar to the first, situating what follows in space and time (cf. **1:1-5**)—beyond the Jordan and after the defeat of Kings Sihon and Og (**4:46-49**). The reference to the defeat of the two Amorite kings is expanded to highlight that their lands now have been occupied (cf. **1:4**; **2:23-3:17**). A foretaste of the fulfillment of the promise to the ancestors has been received. The two references to Egypt (**4:45, 46**) remind the audience of God's past actions on their behalf. And yet the concern of the second speech is not the past but the future, when Israel has received the full land. Israel is at the border of that land, at a critical juncture in the story, where all action pauses as Moses addresses the people.

I. (:44-45) SUBSTANCE OF THE MESSAGE

A. (:44) Summarized as the Law

“Now this is the law which Moses set before the sons of Israel;”

Eugene Merrill: What is about to be disclosed is “*the law*” (v. 44). The term here is *tôrâ*, a noun that, with the definite article (as here), usually refers to the entire body of Mosaic literature, that is, the Pentateuch. At this point, however, that literature was still in process as the very appearance of the noun in Deuteronomy makes obvious. Thus *tôrâ* as used here must be synonymous with the covenant text itself, the full collection of principles and stipulations about to be promulgated by Moses. This, of course, is a common usage (cf. **Exod 24:12; Deut 1:5; 4:8; 17:18-20; 31:9, 11**).

B. (:45) Detailed as the Testimonies, Statutes and Ordinances

“these are the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances which Moses spoke to the sons of Israel, when they came out from Egypt,”

Gerald Gerbrandt: These terms are largely synonyms within Deuteronomy even though originally they may have had distinct connotations.

MacArthur: God’s instruction to Israel was set forth in:

- 1) the **testimonies**, the basic covenant stipulations (**5:6-21**);
- 2) **statutes**, words that were inscribed and therefore fixed; and
- 3) **ordinances**, the decisions made by a judge on the merits of the situation.

This law was given to Israel when they came out of Egypt. Moses is not giving further law, he is now explaining that which has already been given.

John Schultz: Four different words are used to describe the content of Moses’ address: “*the law*,” “*the stipulations*,” “*decrees*,” and “*laws*.” The Hebrew words are: *towrah*, or *torah*, meaning “a precept or statute,” *’edah*, which means “testimony,” *choq*, “an enactment,” and *mishpat*, “a verdict.” A people’s vocabulary demonstrates the emphases that are put on things that are important in their lives and thinking. The Mè tribe in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, for instances, does not have a single word for wood or timber, but a variety of names for the wood that is derived from different kinds of trees. The riches of the Israelite vocabulary for the single word “*law*” we have in the English language indicates the **important position** the law of God occupied in their society.

Michael Grisanti: Moses asserts that the laws he is about to present have been given to the children of Israel encamped on the brink of the Jordan River. They have been given in the wake of God’s impressive intervention in their behalf and in preparation for their conquest of the long-anticipated Land of Promise. . .

Moses reminds his fellow Israelites of the immediate historical context, namely, their coming out of Egypt and their conquest of the land formerly occupied by the Amorites (under Sihon [**2:26–37**] and Og [**3:1–11**]). God’s intervention in their behalf in both

events (and repeatedly during the years between them) positions Yahweh as the one with the prerogative to demand their unqualified loyalty to his covenantal expectations.

II. (:46-49) SETTING OF THE MESSAGE

A. (:46a) General Location

“across the Jordan, in the valley opposite Beth-peor,”

Bruce Hurt: Beth-peor was a city which was situated, according to Eusebius, opposite Jericho, and six miles above Livias. As the name signifies "*the house of Peor*," it is probable that there was a temple to Peor, situated in this place, full in view of the people, while Moses was pressing upon them the worship of Jehovah alone; and perhaps the very temple where so many had sinned to their own destruction.

B. (:46b-47) Great Initial Victories

“in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites who lived at Heshbon, whom Moses and the sons of Israel defeated when they came out from Egypt. 47 And they took possession of his land and the land of Og king of Bashan, the two kings of the Amorites, who were across the Jordan to the east,”

Bruce Hurt: This truth that **our God is able to defeat all enemies** is repeatedly stated. My favorite phrase describing our Great God is "*He is able!*" What is there in your life that you think is too difficult for Him?

C. (:48-49) Geographic Boundaries

“from Aroer, which is on the edge of the valley of Arnon, even as far as Mount Sion (that is, Hermon), 49 with all the Arabah across the Jordan to the east, even as far as the sea of the Arabah, at the foot of the slopes of Pisgah.”

Michael Grisanti: The topographical reference (*śî ’ōn*, “*Mount Sion*”) should be rendered “*Mount Sirion*” (cf. **3:9**), which is another name for Mount Hermon. The reading of the Hebrew text represents a variant of the original (cf. **Craigie**, 147, for an explanation of this problem).

Gerald Gerbrandt: **Pisgah** has earlier been used as a boundary marker for the Transjordan region (**3:17**), but in Deuteronomy it is also the place from which Moses surveys the Promised Land and where he dies (cf. **3:27; 34:1**). By concluding this passage with a reference to Pisgah in **verse 49**, the narrator subtly reminds us: Moses, the one here teaching on behalf of God (though God is not named in vv. **44–45**; cf. **1:1–5**), will die shortly. **Accountability** for response to the torah thus resides with the people.

Matthew Henry: The **place** where Moses gave them these laws in charge is here particularly described.

(1.) it was over-against Beth-Peor, an idol-temple of the Moabites, which perhaps Moses sometimes looked towards, with a particular caution to them against the infection of that and other such like dangerous places.

(2.) it was upon their new conquests, in the very land which they had got out of the hands of Sihon and Og, and were now actually in possession of, v. 47. Their present triumphs herein were a powerful argument for obedience.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is **repetition** so essential in teaching and preaching the Word of God?
- 2) How does this passage serve as a **transitional link** – both looking backwards in summary fashion and looking forward to what Moses will teach in his second address?
- 3) How has God proven His faithfulness and power in your life by **transforming former defeats into triumphs**?
- 4) What was so significant about this geographical setting described here?

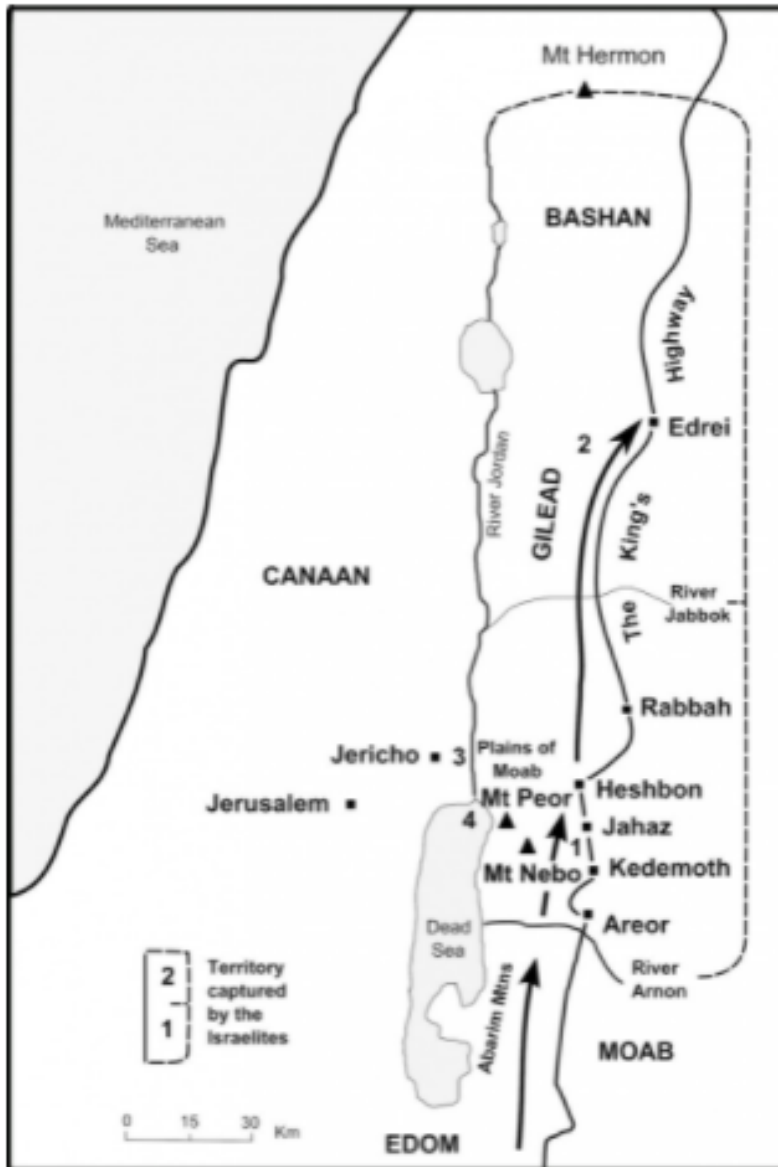
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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: In **Deut 1–3** Moses began to expound the Torah (see **1:5**) by looking back at the events that prepared the people of Israel for the eisodus (entry) into the promised land, including the first phase of what we have called here Yahweh’s Holy War—the defeat of the two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og, in Transjordan. After presenting the necessary transfer of leadership to Joshua, who will lead the people in the second phase of Yahweh’s Holy War in Cisjordan (**3:23–29**), Moses turned his attention to an exhortation to keep the Torah, with particular attention on the commandment forbidding idolatry (**4:1–40**). He now begins the process of setting that Torah before the people in **detail** within the context of the covenant, which was established with God at Mount Horeb. This Torah, which is described as “*the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments that Moses set before the children of Israel*” (**4:44–45**), is placed in time and space—“*in the land taken from Sihon, king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon*” (**4:46**).

David Guzik: The deliverance from Egypt together with the taking of these lands was to be seen as proof positive that soon Canaan would be theirs. Yahweh, the great Deliverer from Egypt and conqueror of the Amorite kings, was fighting for them in a holy war, a war which was to fulfil His judgment on the Canaanites/Amorites, and would establish a righteous theocracy in the land. But they had to notice the righteous bit!

Bruce Hurt: Map of the Land



From Aroer to Hermon

TEXT: Deuteronomy 5:1-33

TITLE: *THE FOUNDATIONAL TEN COMMANDMENTS*

BIG IDEA:

THE EXPOSITION OF ISRAEL'S COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP BEGINS WITH THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

INTRODUCTION:

Michael Grisanti: The Ten Commandments, distinct from most of the rest of the law, entail terse, divine demands, called “apodictic” law. Apodictic law normally begins with the second person (“you shall/shall not”), involves statements of principle or general commands without qualifications, and leaves unstated any consequences of nonobservance. Most of Mosaic law is “casuistic” or “case law.” This latter legal form normally begins with “if” or “when” and is usually in the third person. A specific situation receives attention, and the law often contains long explanatory comments or qualifications. It normally identifies the consequences of nonobservance.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Practical factors contribute to this prominence: the Decalogue has concise formulations (making it easy to memorize), it has a nice round number (ten—one command for each finger of the two hands), it is applicable to all Israelites, and it is absolute yet general in format. The Decalogue symbolizes the covenant and special relationship between God and Israel.

David Thompson: It does not matter what the field of study or occupation, but new students need to learn the basic fundamentals. If you are going to study a language, you will need to start by learning the alphabet. If you are going to join the military, you will have to go through basic training. You will need to learn the basics. If you are going to fly a plane, you will have to go through some basic instruction. If you are going to work at a job, you will need some type of indoctrination concerning that job. No matter what the field of study, new students need to learn the basic fundamentals.

This was certainly true when it came to this new generation of Israel who were just about to go into the Promised Land. This was a new generation of believers and they were about to go on a new amazing adventure. They were about to cross the Jordan River and go into the Promised Land and this new generation needed to be reminded of some basics.

Siew Kion Tham: The book of Deuteronomy has a **long preamble**. The first four chapters set the framework of the book – failure and grace. Before getting on to the Ten Words, Moses had another preface as if to summarize the first four chapters. We will see that again and again in Deuteronomy, Moses referred to the exodus from Egypt because **the law is set in the context of God's grace and deliverance**. So whenever

the law is given, there will always be reference to what God has done in His covenant grace to His people.

We can see that the Decalogue occupies a large part of Moses speech. He was not simply telling the Israelites what the commandments were, but he was keen in putting the commandments in the context of the covenant of God. What is happening to us today is that we take the commandments and put that in our legal framework. That distorts the whole message.

I am sure we are all aware of the importance of putting the law in the context of the **covenant relationship**. It is to establish in our minds and hearts the covenant of God to Israel and to us through Jesus Christ. A defect in our evangelical understanding has been to treat Jesus Christ as a means to an end, the end being our salvation. In a sense that is so, but there is something more than just being saved, and that is the covenant relationship. We are saved to be re-united with the Father and that is to be restored into the covenantal relationship. And it is only within the covenantal relationship that the commandments make sense.

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(:1-5) PROLOGUE – SUMMONS TO OBEY THE LAW BASED ON THE HISTORICAL ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COVENANT

A. (:1) Responsibility to Obey the Law

“Then Moses summoned all Israel, and said to them, ‘Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully.’”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The text makes it clear that to hear means more than merely to listen; it includes learning and observing (**5:2**).

Eugene Merrill: At last the time arrived for Moses actually to articulate the great covenant principles by which Israel was to live in the land of Canaan as the servant people of Yahweh. He therefore convened them in the valley near Beth Peor (cf. **4:46**) and, in strong hortatory language, commanded them to *hear* (i.e., obey) the “*decrees and laws*” (the *uqqîm* and *mi p îm*), the very elements of covenant requirement he was about to deliver to them. The meaning of obedience is expanded by the second set of commands: “*Learn them and be careful to do them*” (v. 1).

B. (:2-3) Reflection on the Establishment of the Covenant

*“The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb.
3 “The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers,
but with us, with all those of us alive here today.”*

Bruce Hurt: This covenant resulted in God establishing Israel as a theocratic nation. The LORD initiated the covenant, not Israel. This was God's idea! It was a covenant between the infinite, holy God and finite, unholy men! That alone tells you how great is

the covenant mercy of God. **Made a covenant** is literally "*cut a covenant*". With us is interesting because only Moses, Joshua and Caleb were at the original covenant cutting ceremony at Sinai, but Moses' point is that even though the first generation had perished, the covenant was with the nation of Israel as a whole. And it was the second generation who constituted the nation of Israel as this time.

Eugene Merrill: "*It was not with our fathers,*" Moses said, "*that the LORD made this covenant, but with us*" (v. 3). This rules out the identification of the Deuteronomic covenant with the patriarchal and, in fact, draws a clear line of demarcation between the two. This is in line with the generally recognized theological fact that the Horeb-Deuteronomy covenant is by both form and function different from the so-called Abrahamic. The latter is in the nature of an irrevocable and unconditional grant made by the Lord to the patriarchs, one containing promises of land, seed, and blessing. The former is a suzerain-vassal arrangement between the Lord and Israel designed to regulate Israel's life as the promised nation within the framework of the Abrahamic covenant. The existence of Israel is unconditional, but its enjoyment of the blessing of God and its successful accomplishment of the purposes of God are dependent on its faithful obedience to the covenant made at Horeb. Thus the covenant in view here is not the same as that made with the fathers (i.e., the patriarchal ancestors), but it (and that at Horeb) finds its roots there and is related to it in a subsidiary way.

Michael Grisanti: By means of overstatement, Moses makes clear that his presentation of God's expectations to Israel does not represent something unrelated to the events at Horeb, but is a renewal of the existing covenantal relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Further, Moses emphasizes that this covenant into which Israel entered at Horeb is just as much for the present generation as it had been for their forefathers.

Earl Kalland: The "*fathers*" were not the people's immediate fathers who had died in the desert and who were recipients of the covenant but their more distant ancestors, the patriarchs (see 4:31, 37; 7:8, 12; 8:18).

C. (:4-5) Reinforcement by the Fearsome Experience of God's Glorious Presence

"The LORD spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire, while I was standing between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain. He said,"

Eugene Merrill: Moses was on the mountain, surrounded by the theophanic glory of God, in order to serve as a conduit of divine revelation, the "*word of the LORD*" delivered then and about to be repeated now.

I. (:6-21) TEN COMMANDMENTS (TEN WORDS)

(:6) Foundation: You Owe Exclusive Loyalty to the God of Your Redemption

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

Duane Christensen: The demand for **exclusive loyalty** to YHWH is paralleled in the ancient Near Eastern treaty texts by the necessary pledge of fidelity on the part of a vassal to the suzerain. As was often the case in these other texts, the **demand for fidelity** is based on a summation of the suzerain’s benevolent deeds in behalf of the vassal. That YHWH brought the people from bondage in Egypt is sufficient cause for obedience to his commandments.

David Thompson: I don’t want to gloss over this because it is critical chronology.

Before God gave us His word and before God challenged us to obey, He saved us. Do not miss this. Any relationship with God starts with God’s salvation and election and not our obedience. God chose this nation, God saved and delivered this nation and then He gave the people His word to obey.

A. (:7) #1 – No Other Gods

“You shall have no other gods before Me.”

Peter Craigie: the first commandment is concerned primarily with a direct relationship to the living God, whose reality had already been experienced. . .

Thus the implications and obligations of the first commandment are far-reaching in their significance. The commandment calls for a **style of life** dominated by a relationship to God. The commandment was not merely “theology,” nor was it concerned simply with the proper form of worship. It affected the whole life of the whole covenant community. Its implications remain the same today; the relationship to one God must dominate every sphere of life, whether the life of action, of thought, or of emotion. There can be no area of life in which a person or thing comes before the commitment to the one God. The other gods may take on forms more subtle than wooden images or stone idols; indeed anything that relegates the relationship with God to second place functions in effect as “another god.”

B. (:8-10) #2 – No Idolatry

“You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 9 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 10 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

Daniel Block: The final clause (v. 10) declares that like divine love, human love is not merely an emotion; it is commitment demonstrated in action, in this instance by keeping Yahweh’s commands.

Peter Craigie: Thus the second commandment guards against two possible dangers:

- (a) that while maintaining the faith and worship of the one Lord, the expression of that faith and worship might adapt itself to the forms (viz., imagery) of the Near Eastern religions;
- (b) that thereby the Israelite faith and worship might implicitly confine the greatness and transcendence of God.

David Guzik: The second commandment doesn't forbid making an image of something for artistic purposes; God Himself commanded Israel make images of cherubim (**Exodus 25:18, 26:31**). It forbids the making of images as an aid or help to worship....In **John 4:24** Jesus explained the rationale behind the second commandment: *God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*. The use of images and other material things as a focus or help to worship denies who God is (Spirit) and how we must worship Him (in spirit and truth).

Phillip Ryken: This commandment is about worshiping the right God in the right way. God refuses to be worshiped by means of images. This shows that he is spirit, that he does not have a physical form. The mention of the heavens and the earth also shows that he is the Creator. One problem with idols is that they confuse the Creator with his creation.

C. (:11) #3 – Don't Take the Name of the Lord in Vain

*“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain,
for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.”*

Daniel Block: The idiom derives from the ancient practice of **branding slaves** with the name of their owner. To bear the name of Yahweh means to claim him as one's owner and to accept the role of representing him (cf. **Isa 44:5**). At issue is Israel's status and function as the people of Yahweh. They may not claim Yahweh as their covenant Lord and then live as if they belonged to Baal.

Eugene Merrill: The prohibition says, literally, *“You shall not lift up the name of Yahweh your God without reason.”* The meaning clearly is that one must not view the name as a counterpart of Yahweh and then proceed to take it in hand (or in mouth) as a means of accomplishing some kind of ill-advised or unworthy objective. This was typical of ancient Near Eastern sorcery or incantation where the names of the gods were invoked as part of the act of conjuration or of prophylaxis. Whoever violates the sanctity of the name will not be left unpunished.

Peter Craigie: Any attempt to manipulate God for personal ends comes under the prohibition. Thus, the name of God may be called on in prayer, and prayer is a right and proper form of communication in the covenant community. But prayer too may be misused and may result in an attempt to channel God's power toward some worthless purpose. And in more evident and overt terms, to link God's name to some purely selfish human purpose, whether it be the conduct of war or the undertaking of some human enterprise, may be to use God's name in vain.

David Guzik: There are at least three ways this command is commonly disobeyed.

- (1) Profanity: Using the name of God in blasphemy and cursing.
- (2) Frivolity: Using the name of God in a superficial, stupid way.
- (3) Hypocrisy: Claiming the name of God but acting in a way that disgraces Him.

D. (:12-15) #4 – Observe the Sabbath

1. (:12) Statement of the Command

*“Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy,
as the LORD your God commanded you.”*

Eugene Merrill: Obviously, a day cannot be holy in the moral sense, so the meaning of keeping the seventh day holy is that of the normal meaning of the verb, to set it apart for a particular purpose. In this instance it is to withhold that day from profane use so that it may be used for other purposes such as reflection on the Lord and his works of creation and redemption.

Steven Cole: In my experience, sincere Christians who attempt to impose this command (KEEP THE SABBATH) on the church invariably end up mired in **legalism**. They come up with lists of what you can and cannot do on Sundays. Some even say that you have sinned if you talk or even think about anything other than spiritual matters on Sunday! I believe that we are not under the Old Testament Sabbath commandment. It was fulfilled in Christ, who is our true rest (**Col. 2:16–17; Heb. 3–4**). At the same time, there is a **valid principle** that carries over to New Testament believers: Set aside the Lord’s Day to rest from your normal work and to gather with God’s people for worship, instruction, fellowship, and prayer.

2. (:13-14) Explanation of the Command

“Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.”

Duane Christensen: On the one hand, one should refrain from working on the Sabbath. On the other, the Sabbath itself is a time of celebration. It was a time for public worship (see **2 Kgs 4:23; Isa 66:23**), special offerings (**Lev 24:8**), and the recitation of special psalms (**Ps 92**).

3. (:15) Motivation for the Command

“And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.”

Duane Christensen: The central commandment in terms of elaboration and detail is the fourth commandment, “*to keep the Sabbath*” (vv 12–15). This commandment contains an elaborate motivation clause (v 15) and is the first commandment to be stated positively. . .

The **motive** behind the fourth commandment, as given here, differs markedly from its parallel in **Exod 20:11**. In Exodus the doctrine of **creation** dominates, whereas in Deuteronomy it is the doctrine of **redemption**.

E. (:16) #5 – Honor Father and Mother

“Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you.”

Duane Christensen: The command to honor one’s parents is extended in the **central core** to include all persons in **authority**: judges and officers in general (**16:18–20; 17:8–13**), the king (**17:14–20**), the Levites (**18:1–8**), and the prophet (**18:9–22**). . .

The fifth commandment functions as a **bridge** connecting the obligations toward God in the first four with those toward fellow human beings in the last five.

Peter Craigie: The first four commandments were concerned with the man/ God relationship; without a proper relationship to God, a proper relationship to fellow man was impossible. The last five commandments deal specifically with man/man relationships (within the covenant); the proper relationship to God was dependent on a proper man/man relationship. The fifth commandment, falling between these two poles and dealing specifically with the family situation, is in a sense the sphere of the most intimate relationship and is at the core of the covenant community.

Steven Cole: Parents should teach their children when they are very young that they are not permitted to defy their parents, hit their parents, or say that they hate them. The command also applies to adult children showing honor and taking care of their elderly parents. It establishes the family as the foundation of society. I recognize that it is extremely difficult to apply this command if your parents have been emotionally, physically, or sexually abusive. It is difficult for a believing young person to honor parents who attack his or her faith in Christ. In such cases, get godly counsel on how to show respect while protecting yourself from abuse.

F. (:17) #6 – Don’t Murder

“You shall not murder.”

Peter Craigie: This commandment deals specifically with murder and not with all forms of taking life. Thus it does not eliminate the possibility of capital punishment, which was present in Israelite legislation (see **Deut. 17:2–7** and **19:12**), nor does it prohibit war (see **Deut. 20–21** for the legislation on war). . .

Since each individual Israelite was bound to the Lord in the covenant, his life lay in God's hands. God alone, who had made man in his own image, had the right to terminate life. Thus an act of murder involved the abrogation of divine power, the taking away of that which God had given and which God alone could give, namely life itself.

David Thompson: Homicidal murder is condemned in the Church Age (**Rom. 13:9; James 2:11; I Pet. 4:15**).

G. (:18) #7 – Don't Commit Adultery

"You shall not commit adultery."

Peter Craigie: The reason why **adultery** is singled out for attention in the Decalog is because adultery, more than other illicit sexual behavior, has to do with unfaithfulness in a relationship of commitment. Marriage was a binding commitment of faithfulness between two persons and it was in principle similar to the covenant relationship itself. The crime of adultery was the social equivalent to the religious crime of having other gods (**5:5**); both offenses involved unfaithfulness and both were therefore reprehensible to the God of the covenant, whose character it was to be totally faithful. It is this emphasis, that faithfulness (expressed in obedience) must permeate every sphere of life, both the religious and the secular, that gives a distinctive character to the Israelite law on adultery. Adultery of one partner in a marriage involved not only unfaithfulness to the other partner, but also unfaithfulness to God.

H. (:19) #8 – Don't Steal

"You shall not steal."

Daniel Block: Since the verb *gānab* is sometimes used of stealing persons (**Ex. 21:15; Deut. 24:7**), in Jewish tradition some have interpreted this command as a prohibition on kidnapping. However, it should not be restricted to stealing people. This is a categorical prohibition of all theft, particularly of items one is tempted to covet, as listed in the last principle (**v. 21b**).

Michael Grisanti: What God gave belonged to the recipient and what God gave was enough. At a fundamental level, theft manifests dissatisfaction with what God has provided. The person who steals tries to gain more than God has given to him by taking it from others.

I. (:20) #9 – Don't Bear False Witness

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

Peter Craigie: The focus of the commandment is thus again on the matter of personal human relationships, and it emphasizes the integrity and honesty required within the community of God. Though the immediate context of the commandment was in the sphere of legal process, the implications applied to the activities of daily life. A God of

faithfulness, who did not deal deceitfully with his people, required of his people the same transparency and honesty in personal relationships.

Michael Grisanti: Yahweh abhors the giving of false testimony to the detriment of an innocent person for at least three reasons.

- First, as the God of truth (**Isa 65:16; Ps 119:142, 151**) who hates a “*lying tongue*” (**Pr 6:17, 19**), he demands that his chosen people speak the truth.
- Second, at various junctures of the Mosaic law the Lord establishes guidelines that are intended to ensure the practice of justice and equity among God’s people. Consequently, giving false testimony represents a direct violation of God’s required justice.
- Finally, in all human relationships false testimony represents a betrayal of trust; it strikes at the heart of any society, especially one that God intends will demonstrate his character to the surrounding nations.

John Currid: Several of the Hebrew words in this commandment are legal terms reflecting a **judicial setting**. Thus, it is forbidden to bear false witness against one’s neighbour in a court of law. **Perjury** is condemned. The Torah takes this law so seriously that it requires at least two witnesses for evidence to be considered valid (**Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15**). In addition, in capital punishment cases, ‘*The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people*’ (**Deut. 17:7**)....The Hebrew word *shāqer* means ‘to give an empty promise’. To promise, to give one’s word, to covenant with one’s neighbour—all come within the scope of this law. To speak falsely about one’s neighbour, to the prejudice of his or her character and reputation, is also forbidden. Such things as gossip, slander and unwarranted flattery are to be shunned.

J. (:21) #10 – Don’t Covet

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor’s house, his field or his male servant or his female servant, his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

II. (:22-27) REVELATION DEMANDS A RESPONSE – DESIRE FOR MOSES TO SERVE AS MEDIATOR

A. (:22) Revelation from God

1. Spoken Word of God

“These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain from the midst of the fire, of the cloud and of the thick gloom, with a great voice,”

2. Sufficient Word of God

“and He added no more.”

3. Written Word of God

“And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.”

Paul Barker: These tablets were to be placed in the ark of the covenant, a place which symbolized the presence of God (**Exod 40:20**).

Earl Kalland: They constitute the basic behavioral code that was to determine not only their allegiance and life-style but also that of all succeeding generations as well. No other such short list of commands begins to compare with the effect that these have had in world history. In spite of being constantly broken, they stand as the moral code par excellence.

Jack Deere: This verse emphasizes the divine origin of the Ten Commandments and the awe-inspiring setting in which they were given (**fire . . . cloud, and deep darkness**; cf. **Ex. 19:18; 20:21**).

B. (:23-27) Response of the People

1. (:23) Motivated by Fear

“And it came about, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, that you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders.”

2. (:24) Overwhelmed by God’s Presence

“And you said, ‘Behold, the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire; we have seen today that God speaks with man, yet he lives.’”

Peter Craigie: The words give some insight into the people’s concept of the **reality** and **awesomeness** of their God. Though he could not literally be seen, God could be known, but to see the phenomena surrounding his presence was exceptional rather than normal. It was the exceptional occurrence that terrified the people and reminded them of their mortality. It is easy to have too small a view of God in the mind, but the experience of the presence of God may shatter the inadequacy of such a view and impress rather the awesomeness of the living God (**v. 26**).

3. (:25-26) Afraid of Being Consumed

“Now then why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer, then we shall die. 26 For who is there of all flesh, who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?”

4. (:27) Requesting that Moses Serve as a Mediating Buffer

a. You Go and Hear

“Go near and hear all that the LORD our God says;”

b. You Communicate to Us

“then speak to us all that the LORD our God will speak to you,”

- c. We Will Hear and Obey
“and we will hear and do it.”

III. (:28-33) MEDIATORIAL ROLE OF MOSES

A. (:28-29) Recognition of the Response of the People

“And the LORD heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me, ‘I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They have done well in all that they have spoken. 29 Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!’”

Donald Ackland: There is a note of **heartbreak** in God’s response to his people’s vow of allegiance . . . In the pathos of these words we recognize God’s **anguish** over the weakness of will and instability of heart which were to mark Israel’s spiritual history. We also sense his reluctance to abandon his people even when they repudiated their solemn pledge by breaking his laws and adding iniquity to iniquity. If only God could devise some way to bind them to himself by unbreakable cords!

B. (:30-31) Reinforcement of the Mediatorial Role of Moses

1. (:30) Dismissing the People

“Go, say to them, ‘Return to your tents.’”

2. (:31) Delivering Instructions to Moses to Communicate to the People

a. Mediator of the Instruction

“But as for you, stand here by Me,”

b. Communication of the Instruction

“that I may speak to you all the commandments and the statutes and the judgments which you shall teach them,”

c. Purpose of the Instruction

“that they may observe them in the land which I give them to possess.”

C. (:32-33) Reiterated Exhortation

1. (:32-33a) Charge to Obey God’s Law

a. (:32a) Complete Compliance

“So you shall observe to do just as the LORD your God has commanded you;”

b. (:32b) No Deviation

“you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left.”

c. (:33a) Complete Compliance

*“You shall walk in all the way
which the LORD your God has commanded you,”*

2. (:33b) Consequences of Obedience

- a. Quality of Life
“that you may live,”
- b. Prosperity of Life
“and that it may be well with you,”
- c. Length of Life
*“and that you may prolong your days
in the land which you shall possess.”*

Bruce Hurt: Fear of God motivates **obedience to God** which yields the **blessing of God** from one generation to the next.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When you see how much emphasis the OT places on the Redemption story of the Exodus from Egypt, how does that elevate the importance of remembering your initial salvation experience?
- 2) What have been some of the consequences of disobedient decisions in your life?
- 3) What role do the Ten Commandments play in the church today?
- 4) Is the fear of the Lord (such as the reaction we see here to the glorious theophany of the Lord’s presence) still a proper response of believers today?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: Structure of vv.6-21:

A Monotheism—the first three commandments **5:6–11**

B Observe the Sabbath **5:12–15**

B’ Honor your parents **5:16**

A’ Morality—the last five commandments **5:17–21**

The design of the whole may be outlined as follows:

A Introduction: “*This is the Torah*” **4:44–49**

B YHWH’s covenant and theophany **5:1–5**

C Monotheism—the first three commandments **5:6–11**

D Fourth commandment: Observe the Sabbath **5:12–14**

**X Remember your deliverance from slavery in Egypt
5:15**

D’ Fifth commandment: “*Honor your father and your mother*”
5:16

C’ Morality—the last five commandments **5:17–21**

B’ YHWH’s theophany and covenant **5:22**

A’ Conclusion of the matter: The commandments are for all time **5:23—6:3**

Peter Craigie: The Decalog is at the heart of the message of Deuteronomy. It is the divinely given foundation of the covenant relationship, the standard set by the suzerain God as a basis for the continuing relationship with his vassal people. In one sense, the Decalog is the legal basis of the covenant relationship, but to stress its nature as law would be to fail to appreciate its true role. It was the legal aspect of the covenant relationship in a sense similar to the role a legal wedding contract plays in a marriage. A marriage may be legalized by a marriage license, but it is a true marriage only when the legal terms of the contract are representative of a love leading to and maintaining the marital relationship. Thus, too, the law was legally binding, but not in a restrictive sense; it was representative of God’s love for men and it called in turn for a response of love (**6:4–5**). The Decalog was representative of God’s love in that its injunctions, both negative and positive, led not to restriction of life, but to fullness of life. It demanded a response of love, not because obedience would somehow accumulate credit in the sight of God, but because the grace of God, experienced already in the liberation from Egypt and in the divine initiative in the covenant promise, elicited such a response from man in gratitude.

Warren Wiersbe: Many churches today have lost the biblical concept of the majesty and authority of God as expressed in His law. This deficiency has cheapened our worship, turned evangelism into religious salesmanship, and converted the Bible into a self-help book that’s guaranteed to make you a success. **A.W. Tozer** was right when he said that “no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God.” He also said, “The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him.” If that’s true, and I believe it is, then many evangelical Christians are guilty of idol worship. . .

Even though God’s children live under grace and not under the Mosaic Law (**Rom. 6:14; Gal. 5:1**), it’s important for us to know the Law of God so that we might better know the God of the Law and please Him. Christ has fulfilled the types and symbols found in the Law, so we no longer practice the Old Testament rituals as Israel did. Christ bore the curse of the Law on the cross (**Gal. 3:10-13**) so that we need not fear judgment (**Rom. 8:1**). But the moral law still stands and God still judges sin. It’s as wrong today to lie, steal, commit adultery, and murder as it was when Moses received

the tables of the Law at Mount Sinai. In fact, it's worse, because we have today the full revelation of God's will through Jesus Christ, and we sin against a flood of light.

David Whitcomb: God gave the covenant accompanied with fearsome signs in order to help the people understand His omnipotence. He showed that He is powerful enough to do whatever He chooses to do. Fear of this God helps us understand why we need to believe His commands and seek to keep them.

But there is a very important truth here. While God reveals His character in His commands, He also reveals over time that no one is able to keep them. Therefore, we cannot enjoy intimate fellowship with our Creator, because His commands (and therefore character) are beyond us. We need something or Someone to bring us into the circle of fellowship with God. If we could be made righteous by some other means than keeping commands, we could then have an inborn desire to keep God's commands and work toward becoming like Him. That is the work of Jesus Christ providing the means, through His sacrifice, of making us righteous.

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TEXT: Deuteronomy 6:1-9

TITLE: *FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH AND EXPRESSION OF THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP*

BIG IDEA:

COVENANT COMMITMENT MUST BE WHOLEHEARTEDLY LIVED OUT AND PROPAGATED TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

INTRODUCTION:

Duane Christensen: The continuity of faith within the context of a religious community depends on the observance of that faith within the context of individual families. Though it is probable that parents carried a greater responsibility in general for the education of their children in ancient Israel than is the case today, the principle remains true. If parents cannot embody that faith and inculcate it responsibly to their children, the very existence of that faith community is in jeopardy.

Peter Craigie: **Verses 4–9**, known in the Jewish tradition as the Shema, contain what have been called “the fundamental truth of Israel’s religion” and “the fundamental duty founded upon it.” The fundamental truth has to do with the nature of God as one (v. 4); the fundamental duty is the response of love which God requires of man (v. 5). Both themes are taken up in the teaching of Jesus (**Mark 12:29–30**; see also **Matt. 22:37** and **Luke 10:27**). The relationship of the two themes to the law and their importance to the Israelite are examined in vv. 6–9.

David Whitcomb: Moses expressed the important conclusion that obedience by the LORD’S people results in the LORD fulfilling His promise to them. God’s plan was for the people to hear and do His commands so that it would go well with them . . . as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey (v.3b). The LORD had promised from the outset that He was delivering His people from the bondage of Egypt to deliver them to this special land of blessings. The first generation did not believe God, did not obey Him, and forfeited the blessings. The same principle still applies as God blesses His people with love, joy, peace, goodness, gentleness, etc. as we know His truth and live accordingly.

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MacArthur: Moses’ concern is that successive generations maintain the obedience to God’s laws that insures life and prosperity.

J. Sidlow Baxter: Israel’s God, the alone true God, is one, indivisible, and incommunicable, the absolute and infinite One, on whom all depend, whom all must ultimately obey, and who alone is the true Object of the creature’s worship. To Jehovah, therefore, Israel’s undivided devotion and love are due; so that the natural accompaniment of the basic affirmation is the “*first and greatest commandment*” –

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” Oh that Israel had hearkened! – for then would her peace have been as a river, and her prosperity as the immovable mountains. Oh that we ourselves, God’s people by a dearer covenant than that in Abraham, may truly love this glorious and gracious God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength!

(:1-3) PROLOGUE – THE INTENT OF THE COVENANT COMMITMENT

Duane Christensen: **6:1–3** -- These three verses function as a bridge, to conclude the larger section on the “Ten Words” (**4:44—6:3**) and to introduce the next major section (**6:4—7:11**), which contains what Jesus called the “*first and greatest commandment*,” to love God (**Matt 22:37–38**).

A. (:1) Obedience Ensures Possession of the Land

“Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it,”

B. (:2) Fear of the Lord Ensures Prosperity and Long Life in the Land

“so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.”

C. (:3) Obedience Ensures Multiplication in the Promised Land of Prosperity

“O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.”

I. (:4) FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH OF THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Judaism and Christianity agree in designating this passage, commonly called the Shema (on the basis of the Hebrew of the first word, *Hear!*), the most important text in the whole of the Old Testament. . . . The significance of the Shema for Deuteronomy is clear from its location at the head of Moses’ teaching after the account of the covenant at Horeb, and by the regular references to it in other parts of Deuteronomy (e.g., **10:12; 11:1, 13, 18–22; 13:3; 30:6**). In this passage we are at the center of Deuteronomy’s theology and at the heart of biblical faith.

Daniel Block: The **shema** is one of the most important symbols of Judaism. To this day, orthodox Jews recite **verses 4–5** twice daily as part of their prayers (cf. **v. 7**). . . .

Moses’ concern here is whether God’s people would remain devoted exclusively to Yahweh or be seduced by the gods of Canaan. His exposition of the Shema in the

remainder of **6:5–19** confirms this interpretation. Answering to the Supreme Command, by uttering the Shema the Israelites were declaring their complete, undivided, and unqualified devotion to Yahweh. This is not strictly a monotheistic confession (cf. **4:35, 39**) but a cry of **allegiance**, an affirmation of **covenant commitment** that defines the boundaries of the covenant community. It consists of those who claim this utterance as a verbal badge of identity and who demonstrate this identity with uncompromising covenant commitment, a subject to which Moses now turns.

Michael Grisanti: Scholars have often debated whether **v.4** teaches the singularity (one as opposed to many) or unity (internal consistency) of Yahweh or his uniqueness (incomparability) or exclusivity (the only one for Israel). A key interpretive problem is the unparalleled nature of this line in Hebrew. After the summons, “*Hear, O Israel,*” four Hebrew words occur without any verbs. Although verbless clauses occur throughout the Hebrew Bible, the construction found here has no counterpart. . .

at least three truths arise from the divine names used in these verses.

(1) This God is Yahweh, the faithful, covenant-making, and covenant-keeping God. He is God, the sovereign Creator.

(2) He is also “*our God,*” the God who entered into an intimate and special covenantal relationship with his nation, Israel.

(3) Although the OT makes it clear that Israel’s God is singular, in stark contrast to the pagan gods, another idea seems prominent in this context (cf. **4:35, 39; 5:7**) and in this verse. One of the realities that sets Israel apart from the world is the exclusive relationship they have with this remarkable God. **He is Yahweh alone!** Not only is he incomparable, but he is the only God for the Israelites and they are the people on whom he has set his love. Yahweh and only Yahweh is to be the object of Israel’s wholehearted and undivided loyalty. A potential translation of **v.4** is, “*Hear, O Israel: Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone!*”

Eugene Merrill: It is possible to understand **v. 4** in several ways, but the two most common renderings of the last clause are:

(1) “*The LORD our God, the LORD is one*” (so NIV) or

(2) “*The LORD our God is one LORD.*”

The former stresses the **uniqueness or exclusivity of Yahweh** as Israel’s God and so may be paraphrased, “*Yahweh our God is the one and only Yahweh*” or the like. This takes the noun (“one”) in the sense of “unique” or “solitary,” a meaning that is certainly well attested. The latter translation focuses on the **unity or wholeness of the Lord**. This is not in opposition to the later Christian doctrine of the Trinity but rather functions here as a witness to the self-consistency of the Lord, who is not ambivalent and who has a single purpose or objective for creation and history. The ideas clearly overlap to provide an unmistakable basis for monotheistic faith. The Lord is indeed a unity, but beyond that he is the only God. For this reason the exhortation of **v. 5** has practical significance.

MacArthur: The intent of these words was to give a clear statement of the truth of **monotheism**, that there is only one God. . . The word used for “*one*” in this passage

does not mean “singleness,” but “unity.” The same word is used in **Ge 2:24**, where the husband and wife were said to be “*one flesh*.” Thus, while this verse was intended as a clear and concise statement of monotheism, it does not exclude the concept of the Trinity.

Jack Deere: The statement in this verse is the basic confession of faith in Judaism. The verse means that the Lord (Yahweh) is totally unique. He alone is God. The Israelites could therefore have a sense of security that was totally impossible for their polytheistic neighbors. The "gods" of the ancient Near East rarely were thought of as acting in harmony. Each god was unpredictable and morally capricious. So a pagan worshiper could never be sure that his loyalty to one god would serve to protect him from the capricious wrath of another. The monotheistic doctrine of the Israelites lifted them out of this insecurity since they had to deal with only one God, who dealt with them by a revealed consistent righteous standard.

II. (:5) FUNDAMENTAL EXPRESSION OF THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

“And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

Daniel Block: Few texts in the Old Testament are as pregnant with significance as this passage.

(1) The **Shema** functioned as Israel’s pledge of allegiance. Whenever Israelites recited this pledge, they acknowledged that the God who redeemed them was not some amorphous and unknowable deity. He is Yahweh, who intervenes in history on behalf of his chosen people and calls them to covenant relationship with himself. No other god, ancient or modern, has done this. . .

(2) Whereas elsewhere the Old Testament in general and Deuteronomy in particular spoke of commitment to Yahweh in terms of “fear” and “clinging to Yahweh,” here for the first time in the Pentateuch, Moses picks up on a notion expressed in the Decalogue and speaks of the proper response to God as “love” (*’āhab*). In the Decalogue Yahweh promised covenant faithfulness (*hesed*) to those who demonstrate love for him by keeping his commands (**5:10; Ex. 20:6; cf. Deut. 7:9**), but from this point in Deuteronomy, this word will become increasingly important as an expression of the human disposition toward God.

Patrick Miller: To love God is to be loyal to the Lord, to keep the Lord’s commandments (**10:12–13; 11:1, 22**), to walk in the way of the Lord (**19:9; 30:16**), to do or heed the commandments, statutes, and ordinances. It was never left unclear how Israel was to manifest love toward the Lord. In worship and in obedience to the requirements of the covenant, the love of the Lord was to be demonstrated.

Peter Craigie: The command to love is central because the whole book is concerned with the renewing of the covenant with God, and although the renewal demanded obedience, that obedience would be possible only when it was a response of love to the God who had brought the people out of Egypt and was leading them into the Promised Land. The language of love is reminiscent both of treaty language in the Near East and also of the analogy of the father/son relationship which has already been employed in Deuteronomy. The language of loving God, however, is not drawn directly from the treaty terminology; rather it is one of the features of the Hebrew relationship to God which made possible the use of the treaty terminology in the first place, and also the use of the father/son analogy.

Michael Grisanti: Moses piles up relatively synonymous terms to emphasize the **totality** of this allegiance. The task of expressing this love for Yahweh (in loyalty) encompasses one's entire person. These three phrases do not express three precise modes of expressing love or refer to three distinct spheres of life. They combine together to serve as an intense affirmation of **absolute commitment**.

III. (:6-9) FAITHFUL PROPAGATION OF THE COVENANT COMMITMENT TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

A. (:6) Internal Appropriation

“And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart;”

Duane Christensen: The focus on teaching your children “*these words*” diligently within the context of the family—at all conceivable times and places—illustrates once again the pedagogical purpose of Deuteronomy. The content of this book was the primary curriculum in an ongoing program of religious education in ancient Israel. Phylacteries and mezuzot are essentially pedagogical tools, designed to keep the great summary statements of the “Words of YHWH” central in the experience of each individual member of the covenant community.

Michael Grisanti: Building on God's incomparable identity and his demand for absolute loyalty from Israel, Moses addresses how to live out this divine expectation. How will a recognition of Yahweh's exclusive relationship with Israel and Israel's total allegiance manifest itself? Those who live in the light of these realities will have transformed lives and invest themselves in passing on those life-changing beliefs to the next generation. They will not be content with leading lives for God's glory but will earnestly desire to help give to their children a life-changing awareness of their great and mighty God.

B. (:7) Family Indoctrination

“and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”

Eugene Merrill: The image is that of the engraver of a monument who takes hammer and chisel in hand and with painstaking care etches the text into the face of a solid slab of granite. The sheer labour of such a task is daunting indeed, but once done the message is there to stay. Thus it is that the generations of Israelites to come must receive and transmit the words of the Lord's everlasting covenant revelation. . .

As noted already (4:9-10; 6:2), an important demand of the covenant relationship was that it be **perpetuated beyond the immediate generation** of those with whom the Lord made it, for its promises and provisions were for generations yet unborn (4:25, 40; 5:9-10, 29). In practical terms this necessitated a regular routine of instruction. Father must educate son and son the grandson so that the fact and features of the covenant might never be forgotten.

Maxwell: This commandment is not automatically transferred from one generation to another. Deuteronomy attaches the importance and responsibility of teaching to the family (Dt 4:9; 6:7, 20–25; 11:19). This educating must be done in a diligent manner. The home is to be the center for conserving and propagating truth. Home is where life makes up its mind. Moses understood that the greatness of the nation Israel depended upon the teaching of the commandments in the home. As a nation, we need desperately to apply this truth ourselves.

Kristopher Adams: Moses invites God's people to find ways of ensuring that their children see and hear the Word of the Lord as often as possible so that the command and story of God become a part of their identity.

C. (:8) Public Representation

“And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.”

Peter Craigie: The frontlet, or phylactery, came into use as a small container enclosing a parchment on which a number of biblical verses were written.

D. (:9) Entranceway Representation

“And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Daniel Block: In so doing Israelites will remind themselves that their primary allegiance is to Yahweh whenever they leave from or return to their homes, and that love for Yahweh must govern all activities inside and outside the house. Furthermore, it will declare to guests and all who pass by that in this household Yahweh is not only the unseen guest but also the supreme head. The inscription on the gates extends this commitment to the entire community, reminding citizens and visitors alike of Yahweh's rule over the town and the nation as a whole. Since city gates also functioned as courthouses, these inscriptions will also remind those participating in legal or administrative proceedings that all must be done in honor and on behalf of the divine ruler.

Peter Craigie: Whether taken literally or metaphorically, the signs described in vv. 8–9 indicate that the individual (v. 8), his home, and his community (v. 9) were to be distinguished in their character by obedience to the commandments as a response of love for God.

Chuck Musselwhite: How the Word can make us Holy:

- Internalize the Word (vs. 6)
- Teach the Word (vs. 7a)
- Discuss the Word (vs 7b)
- Keep It in Front of You (vs. 8)
- Mark Your Home with It (vs. 9)

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How is the Shema quoted and used by Jesus in the NT?
- 2) What is the relationship between law, obedience and love?
- 3) How can parents more effectively disciple and indoctrinate their children in the faith?
- 4) What's the connection between accurate theology and our personal relationship with the Lord?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Chris Mueller: Discipleship is in the Family from the Beginning

After a brief introduction, Moses launches into sermon number one, reminding God's people of the importance of obeying God's Law and highlighting the top ten laws in **chapter 5**. Then undergirding all the Law is the most important commandment, highlighted in **Deuteronomy 6**, which is to **love the Lord**—love the God of the Word.

In the process of describing God's love for them and their love for Him, Moses calls this new generation to make certain they aggressively train the next generation in order to prevent a repeat of the failure of the old generation. This passage displays the essence of training and the foundation of true discipleship. Here is where God lets you know how to impact others. And what you find is this—training is a gritty, labor-intensive process, requiring God-empowered faithfulness.

Impacting others is not for the fainthearted. **Discipleship is hard work.** Parenting is just another word for discipleship, and parenting is a demanding toil. Impacting

students for Christ, discipling that young couple or older saint isn't a picnic. Discipleship is grueling, strenuous, challenging, even exhausting labor. . .

#1 The EXHORTATION to obey the God of the Word (Verses 1 to 3)

The starting place of growth for you and maturity for those you hope to influence is to embrace God's Word as the absolute, final authority for everything. . .

To fear God does not mean to cringe as you consider Him, living as if you are expecting to be struck down or be given a bad day cause you sinned in thought. To fear God is to reverence God in your heart, to exalt God in the highest because of who He is. Israel knew God—they saw their God send plagues upon the Egyptians, while at the very same time they were spared from judgment. If they feared God, then they'd obey Him and teach their family to fear the Lord. So now every generation following can enjoy the blessings of long life and more. . .

God motivates obedience by promising blessing. God wants Israel to succeed. Obedience brings blessing. This blessing is God's desire for them to do well. And all of His commands are the result of His love, which has as its source . . . which comes from, the loving character of God Himself. . .

#2 The EMBRACING of God's character and loving relationship (Verses 4 to 5)

Moses declares two mighty truths. Verse 4, "*Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!*"

First -- Embrace an accurate [healthy] THEOLOGY

Verse 4, The Lord is Israel's God, He is one God and He is the only God. One God is the true God, the faithful God, the worthy God, the one true God. The only true God with a consistent, unchanging character you can trust. He is not many capricious gods, but the one true God—the one who loves you. To train others, especially your children, you must have a healthy theology—an accurate theology. Without it, you can't help them grow to be like Christ.

Second -- Embrace a Loving [genuine] RELATIONSHIP

Verse 5, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*" God is worthy of your entire life given in loving obedience. God Himself freely loves His people, so Moses says God's people should reciprocate. Love God with all your emotional volition, all your personality and all your mental and physical vigor. Your commitment to your God is to be all in.

#3 The ESSENTIAL commitment to train children to obey God's Word (Vs. 6 to 9)

First -- Constant pre-occupation with and SATURATION in God's Word [MODEL/training] Vs 6

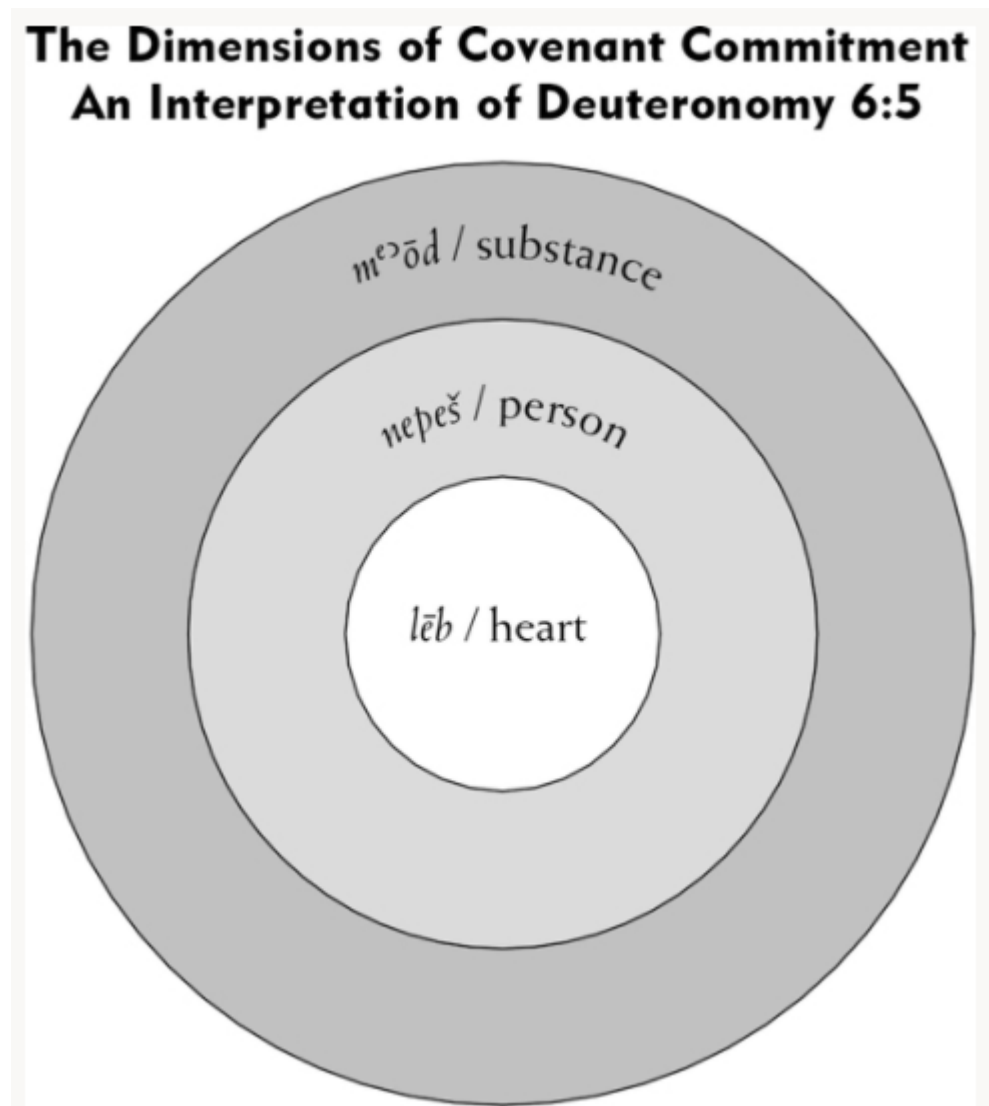
Second -- Diligent formal INSTRUCTION of God's Word [TEACH/training] Vs 7

Third -- Repetitive, informal APPLICATION of God's Word [TALK/training]
Vs 7b

Fourth -- Conforming EVERY aspect of life to God's Word [HABIT/training]
Vv. 8 and 9

<https://media.faith-bible.net/series/making-a-difference/discipleship-is-in-the-family-from-the-beginning>

Daniel Block: Vs. 5 --



The Hebrew word *lēb* (“heart”) often functions metaphorically for the seat of the emotions and will, but equally often it refers to the “mind” or the seat of thought. Here the word serves comprehensively for **one’s inner being**, including the “heart” and

“mind.” Concretely *nepes̄* means “throat, gullet,” but the word is used in a variety of derived metaphorical senses: “appetite/desire” (**Prov. 23:2; Eccl. 6:7**); “life” (**Gen. 9:5; 2 Sam. 23:17; Jonah 2:5[6]**); a person as a “living being” (**Ezek. 4:14**; etc.); the whole self (**Lev. 26:11**); even a corpse, that is, a body without life/breath (**Lev. 21:11**). Here the word refers to **one’s entire person**. The NIV’s rendering of *me’ôd* as “strength” follows the LXX, which reads *dynamis*, “power” (cf. *ischys* in **Mark 12:30**), but this flattens the sense required by the Hebrew. Except for this text and **2 Kings 23:25**, which echoes this statement, elsewhere *me’ôd* always functions adverbially, meaning “greatly, exceedingly.” Here its meaning is best captured by a word like “**resources**,” which includes physical strength, but also economic or social strength, and it may extend to the physical things an Israelite owned: tools, livestock, a house, and the like.

The progression and concentricity in Moses’ vocabulary now become apparent. Calling all Israelites to love God without reservation or qualification, Moses begins with the inner being, then moves to the whole person, and ends with all that one claims as one’s own. This is the “yoke of the kingdom”—covenant commitment rooted in the heart, but extending to every level of one’s being.

Patrick Miller: With this chapter we come to the **pivot** around which everything else in Deuteronomy revolves—the Shema or Great Commandment, as it has also come to be known (**6:4–5**). The centrality of these words in Deuteronomy is illustrated in two ways. **One of these is its location**. It is the first word of Moses’ instruction to the people after the Ten Commandments have come as direct word of God to them and they have requested Moses to stand between them and God, to receive the divine word, and then to teach. That teaching begins here with the command to hear (**v. 4**) and love (**v. 5**). The location of the Shema also points to its character as a **bridge** between the Commandments and the other instructions given in the statutes and ordinances (**chs. 12–26**). In turn, the statutes and ordinances explicate in specific and concrete ways the meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4–5 for the life of Israel. That is why Jesus can later say that all the law and the prophets hang on this commandment (**Matt. 22:40**). One may speak of these verses as a **summary of the law** or of the Ten Commandments. More specifically, they are a summary of what Israel heard commanded of them in the prologue and in the first and second commandments. The commandment against worshiping other gods is in every sense the first commandment, the first word, and the Shema is a positive restatement of that primary commandment. The Shema was the **touchstone** for Israel’s faith and life, the **plumb line** by which their relationship to the Lord of history was constantly being measured. For this reason later Judaism set these words to be recited by every Jew each morning and evening. This was not a legalistic or merely pious gesture. It was a true apprehension that those who live under the rule of the Lord of Israel are to set their lives and shape their daily conduct and their interior direction by these most important and primary words. The struggle of faith was and is a constant effort to discover afresh in each situation the experience of the confession that is made in the Shema and the requirements of the demand imposed by it.

The centrality and primacy of the Shema are also indicated by its repetition in the following chapters. The language of the Shema as well as the prologue to the Ten Commandments and the first two commandments appears frequently (e.g., **6:12–15; 7:8–10, 16b, 19b; 8:11, 15, 19; 9:1; 10:12–13; 11:1, 13, 16, 18–22, 28b; 13:2–5, 6, 10, 13: 18:9; 26:16–17; 29:26; 30:2b, 6, 8, 10, 16–17**). Moses’ speech, in **chapters 5–11** especially but also to some extent in later chapters, is in effect a kind of sermon on the primary commandment in its positive (**6:4–5**) and negative (**5:6–10**) formulations, explicating and elaborating it, shaping Israel’s identity as a people defined by this confession, “*Our God is the Lord, the Lord alone,*” and this demand, “*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.*”

GotQuestions.org: Land flowing with milk and honey –

Repeatedly in the Old Testament, God describes the Promised Land as “*a land flowing with milk and honey*” (**Exodus 3:8; Numbers 14:8; Deuteronomy 31:20; Ezekiel 20:15**). This poetic description of Israel’s land emphasizes the fertility of the soil and bounty that awaited God’s chosen people. The reference to “milk” suggests that many livestock could find pasture there; the mention of “honey” suggests the vast farmland available—the bees had plenty of plants to draw nectar from.

In **Exodus 3:8**, God says to Moses, “*I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.*” A couple things to note about this verse:

First, before the plagues, the land of Egypt supported Israel and the Egyptians quite well, yet God called the new land “*good and spacious.*” The Hebrew word translated “good” means “pleasant, beautiful, and fruitful, with economic benefits.”

Second, simultaneously with promoting the goodness of the land, God mentions the enemies in the land that must be overcome. The nations displaced by Israel from the land “*flowing with milk and honey*” were significant in number, and they valued that land enough to fight and die for it.

Later, we have the record of the ten faithless spies who were sent into the Promised Land by Moses. The ten spies disagreed that Israel was able to conquer the inhabitants of the land, but they did agree on this: it was a land of flowing with milk and honey. “*They gave Moses this account: ‘We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit’*” (**Numbers 13:27**). The “fruit” the spies showed Moses was a single cluster of grapes that had to be carried on a pole between two men (**Nu 13:23**). They also brought some pomegranates and the figs from Canaan.

It is true that there are areas of very arid land in Israel, but this does not negate the fact that, overall, it is a land flowing with milk and honey. There are many areas of Israel that are extremely fertile and produce many types of fruits and vegetables. The area north of present-day Israel is biblical Mesopotamia, also known as the “Fertile Crescent,” which is just that—fertile (and crescent-shaped). It is also true that the Bible

records severe drought and famine in the land of Israel, but those times were connected to God's judgment on the sinful people (**Deuteronomy 11:16–17; 1 Kings 18:1–2, 18**).

God's description of the Promised Land as "*a land flowing with milk and honey*" is a beautifully graphic way of highlighting the agricultural richness of the land. God brought His people out of slavery in Egypt to a prosperous land of freedom and blessing and the knowledge of the Lord.

Phil Winfield: The Commandment is Clear

Opening thought: Love is actually an obligation, not merely an emotion.

Obeying the Great Commandment:

1. Preachers have a great command to preach it (**v.1-3**). Notice:
 - a. Moses was told to teach "*these statutes and judgments*" (**v.1**).
 - b. Moses was to teach the fear of the Lord in relation to His commandments (**v.2**).
 - c. Moses was to teach them that the commands were for their benefit, not for their limitation and confinement (**v.3**).

2. Believers have a great commandment to obey (**v.4-5**).
 - a. There is one and only one God, unique and unified.
 - b. The command is to love God with every aspect of your being.

3. Parents have a great responsibility to communicate (**v.6-9**).
 - a. The primary location for teaching the law of God is in the home, not the church.
 - b. The primary teachers of God's Word are the parents, not the pastor.
 - c. The principal teaching method is by word and example.
 - d. The perfect time to teach is while they are listening.
 - e. The practical qualifier for you to teach your kids – you have the love of God and the law of God in your own heart (**v.6**).

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/618171142431.pdf>

TEXT: Deuteronomy 6:10-25

TITLE: *PROTECTING FUTURE GENERATIONS AGAINST ABANDONING DEVOTION TO GOD*

BIG IDEA:

BOTH PROSPERITY AND HARDSHIP CAN TEMPT GOD'S PEOPLE TO FORGET THE HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE OF REDEMPTION – SO PROTECT FUTURE GENERATIONS WITH HISTORICAL INSTRUCTION

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: While **6:4–5** embodies the central idea, in the rest of **chapters 6–8** Moses' concretizes his understanding of unreserved love for Yahweh with a series of **tests of devotion** that life in the Promised Land will present.

Peter Craigie: In the days ahead, the Lord was going to lead his people into the land that had been anticipated since the promise given to Abraham. There is here an explicit identification of that ancient promise to the patriarchs with the generation now present before Moses on the plains of Moab: the land which he promised to your fathers ... to give to you. That the ancient promise was so close to being fulfilled gave cause not only for joy, but also for solemnity in view of the responsibility that the promise imposed.

Gerald Gerbrandt: After restating the foundational commandment in the Shema, Deuteronomy turns its attention to the land that Israel is about to enter, and to the danger of forgetting God in the land. Israel is about to receive a land with cities and vineyards ready for use. In the land, Israel will be tempted to forget God and God's directions for them. In the Shema, Israel is charged to recite its words to the children; now the children ask, **What is the meaning?** The answer lies in the story, the story of God's deliverance from Pharaoh, along with God's gift of Torah.

Constable: In view of God's grace to His people, believers should respond with love for God. We should express that love in obedience to His revealed will, and we should perpetuate the knowledge of God in the next generation.

David Guzik: This cycle would be repeated through the history of Israel, especially in the time of the Judges. God would bless an obedient Israel, and they would prosper; they would begin to set their heart on the blessings instead of the LORD who blessed them; God would allow chastisement to turn Israel's focus back upon Him; Israel would repent and obey again, and God would again bless an obedient Israel and they would prosper.

I. (:10-19) PREPARATION FOR FACING FUTURE TEMPTATION

A. (:10-11) Delight in God's Grace –

Description of the Rich Blessing of the Promised Land

1. (:10a) Fulfillment of the Covenant Promise to the Patriarchs

“Then it shall come about when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you,”

Gerald Gerbrandt: the people can never treat the land and what it provides for them as their own possession: it always remains a **gift** from God.

2. (:10b-11a) Facilitated by God's Grace Rather than Israel's Labors

a. Cities

“great and splendid cities which you did not build,”

b. Houses

“and houses full of all good things which you did not fill,”

c. Cisterns of Water

“and hewn cisterns which you did not dig,”

d. Vineyards and Olive Trees

“vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant,”

Patrick Miller: The **rich blessing** of God's provision is articulated in the description of the land—large and fine cities, houses full of *“everything good,”* hewn cisterns, vineyards, and olive groves. God's **grace** is expressed in the repeated emphasis on the fact that all of this is not the result of Israel's arduous labors but is the gift of God.

Paul Barker: It all sounds like a holiday brochure! This is grace abounding for God does not give any land but gives a **great land**. All the work is done. When we remember that the supply of water in a land like Israel was always critical, we realize how great this promise is. Huge amounts of effort were needed to dig wells and underground cisterns, cut into rock, to preserve safe water. Today visitors to the Holy Land can still see the massive cisterns at Masada, the wells at Arad and the tunnels in Jerusalem which show how wonderful was the promise of ready-made cisterns. It is ready for living. Its **abundance** is indicated by the end of **verse 11**, *“and when you have eaten your fill . . .”* We can imagine the five star hotel!

3. (:11b) Fulfillment of Your Appetites

“and you shall eat and be satisfied,”

B. (:12-15) Deal with the Danger of Forgetting God = Tempted by Prosperity

1. (:12) Guard Yourself

“then watch yourself, lest you forget the LORD who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

Duane Christensen: The focus of attention here is on the realization that the material wealth the people are about to possess is a gift from God. The implicit warning is clear: the people are to guard against the danger of taking on the attitude of self-sufficiency that property so often brings.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Forgetting that the land and its blessings come as a gift is the first step away from fearing God and beginning to go after other gods. The very land that God gives them thus can become that which tempts them to **forget God**. Forgetting will result in the reversal of the gift, expressed as perishing from earth, or land.

Michael Grisanti: In the wake of the completed conquest of Canaan, Moses gives Israel a stern warning not to forget Yahweh, their Redeemer (**6:12**). The two titles Moses uses highlight the very reason God's covenantal people should not forget him (i.e., live as though he does not exist). Their God is **Yahweh**, the ever-faithful, covenant-keeping God, and their **Redeemer**, the one who had just extricated them from bondage in Egypt and made them his chosen nation. There is absolutely no justification for God's people then (and now) to conduct their lives like practical atheists.

Maxwell: Perils of Prosperity -- Forgetting the Lord is the first peril to which prosperity leads us. It was at the height of David's prosperity that he committed his greatest act of unfaithfulness (**2 Sam. 11**). Nothing dulls our sensitivity to God like independence. There is much truth in the thought that adversity has more benefits than prosperity. Adversity introduces a person to himself; prosperity intoxicates him. The story of the Prodigal Son is an excellent illustration of the effects of prosperity and adversity on a person. During his prosperity the son did not think of father and home; he was consumed with the pleasures of the flesh. When he lost all his wealth and friends, he "*came to himself*" and remembered what was important. Moses, knowing the **perils of prosperity**, warns the children of Israel not to forget God.

2. (:13-14) Fear God Alone

- a. (:13) Stated Positively – Worship only the Lord your God
*“You shall fear only the LORD your God;
and you shall worship Him, and swear by His name.”*

Michael Grisanti: In other words, the only way for them to function as God's servant-nation (cf. **Ex 19:5–6; Dt 26:16–19**) is to maintain a fervent commitment to their covenantal relationship with Yahweh. Yahweh has delivered them from the house of slaves (**v.12**) and now demands that they serve him instead (**v.13**). . .

Swearing by Yahweh's name is an expression of loyalty to him and recognition of him as the supreme authority. A true worshiper of Yahweh is one who swore by his name (**Ps 63:11; Isa 48:1; Jer 4:2; 5:2; 12:16**). To swear by other gods will represent a betrayal of his authority (**Jos 23:7; Jer 12:16**). The corollary of serving Yahweh exclusively and wholeheartedly is the absolute refusal to worship any pagan gods

(v.14). To “*follow after*” a ruler or a god implies wholehearted commitment of one’s entire life.

Eugene Merrill: But it was this very goodness of God that would lead to Israel's sense of **self-sufficiency**, a feeling that all that had been done was by human hand. The inevitable result would be to forget him, the very one who not only would achieve such an unparalleled conquest but who had effected Israel's redemption from bondage in the first place (v. 12). The only remedy for such memory lapse was **renewed commitment** to the covenant that lay at the heart of the Lord's relationship to the nation Israel. Moses thus enjoined upon his people that they fear, serve, and swear by the Lord only (v. 13), commands that are permeated with covenant language (cf. **Deut 10:12, 20; 31:12-13**). Lingering doubt about the covenant focus here is dispelled in vv. 14-15, which recall unmistakably the first two commandments of the Decalogue (**Deut 5:7-10**). The “*do not follow other gods*” of v. 14 is clearly a rephrasing of the first commandment—“*You shall have no other gods before me*”—and the reference to the “*jealous God*” who judges and punishes covenant violation (v. 15) harks back to the second commandment that describes the Lord as such and speaks of his punishment of sin. To sin in such a way as to forget the source of Israel's blessing was to invite the ultimate covenant curse, removal from the land (v. 15; cf. **28:63; Lev 26:43**).

b. (:14) Stated Negatively – Don’t worship other gods
“*You shall not follow other gods,
any of the gods of the peoples who surround you,*”

3. (:15a) Don’t Provoke God to Jealousy
“*for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a jealous God;*”

4. (:15b) Don’t Stir Up God’s Anger
“*otherwise the anger of the LORD your God
will be kindled against you,
and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.*”

C. (:16) Deal with the Danger of Testing God = Tempted by Hardship

“*You shall not put the LORD your God to the test,
as you tested Him at Massah.*”

Jack Deere: This implies that at times the people would face hardship as they did at Massah (cf. Ex. 17:1-7) where they lacked water and thought they would die of thirst. Rather than trusting God in this trial they tested Him by complaining and quarreling. In the future the Israelites were to remember this embarrassing incident.

Michael Grisanti: Moses warns Israel against questioning Yahweh’s ability to keep his promise to them. Rather than concerning themselves with his capacity to do what he said, the Israelites need to commit themselves to unreserved submission to his requirements. Their ability to enjoy continued existence in the Promised Land is at stake. Moses begins by alluding to Israel’s “rebellion” at Massah (this place name

deriving from the verb *nsh*, “to test”; GK 5814), where they questioned whether God was really in their midst (as he had promised to be) and demanded that he demonstrate his presence to them (cf. **Ex 17:7**; **Ps 95:8–9**). “Testing” of this kind involves a question about the capacity of the one being tested (**McConville**, 144). Instead of demanding something of God, Moses exhorts God’s people to live in the light of the covenantal stipulations as a whole (“*commands*,” “*stipulations*,” and “*decrees*”; **v.17**).

Eugene Merrill: To **test God** (not “tempt” as in AV and other older versions) is to make upon him demands or requirements that are inappropriate either to his nature and character or to the circumstances. Jesus quoted this text in responding to Satan's overtures that he cast himself from the pinnacle of the temple (**Matt 4:7**; **Luke 4:12**). The point is not that God could not have rescued him but that such an act would trivialize the power of God and his care for those he loves. Moses reminded his own contemporaries of their violation of this principle, when on the way to Sinai from Egypt they had questioned whether or not God was with them (**Exod 17:7**). The evidence they demanded was a miraculous supply of water (**Exod 17:2**). Rather than trusting God to provide it in his own way, probably through natural springs and wells (cf. **Exod 15:23–27**), they insisted on a supernatural intervention, one designed not so much to provide physical nourishment as to satisfy spiritual curiosity. Though displeased with their carnality, God nevertheless allowed water to issue from a rock, a miracle that gave rise to the place name Massah (“*testing*”). They must never resort to such tactics in the land of promise, Moses warned.

Wiersbe: We tempt the Lord when we openly and unbelievably question His ability or defy His authority by what we say or do. After He delivered Israel from Egypt, the Lord deliberately led them through difficulties so He could teach them to trust Him. The Lord tests our faith, not just in the great crises of life, but even more in the small unexpected events, such as a travel delay, an irritating interruption, a sudden sickness, or a lost wallet. The way we respond in these situations will indicate what's in our hearts, because what life does to us depends on what life finds in us. If we love and trust the Lord, we'll leave the matter with Him and do what He tells us; but if we question the Lord and rebel because we're not getting our own way, then we're in danger of tempting Him. One of the best protections against tempting the Lord is a **grateful heart**.

John Schultz: They had, several times, voiced feelings that the whole exodus, and the promise of entering Canaan had been a ploy to lead the nation to a deserted place where God could kill them without the presence of witnesses. They had attributed to God motives that were baser than those found in the darkest recesses of an evil human soul. “*Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah*” means: “Never doubt God’s goodness again.” God cannot be a mixture of good and evil, as human beings are. If He is good, He is perfectly good, because if He were not perfect, He would not be God. And if He is not perfectly good, He is perfectly evil, which would make Him like Satan.

D. (:17-19) Direct Subsequent Generations to Keep Obeying God

1. (:17-18a) Obedience Pleases the Lord

“You should diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God,

*and His testimonies and His statutes which He has commanded you.
18 And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD,”*

Eugene Merrill: Put succinctly, they must **do what is right and good** according to God's standard. **Right** connotes the idea of measuring up to something that is straight—something construed as a norm of proper behavior. In context, this suggests adherence to the divine standard of Torah. If and when this is done, blessing inevitably follows. They would conquer and occupy the Land of Promise.

2. (:18b-19) Obedience Prospers the Nation

*“that it may be well with you
and that you may go in and possess the good land
which the LORD swore to give your fathers,
19 by driving out all your enemies from before you,
as the LORD has spoken.”*

Eugene Merrill: Failure to meet the conditions would result in judgment and even defeat and deportation, but it could never cancel out the eternal purposes of God for his chosen nation (cf. Lev 26:27-45; Jer 31:31-37; 32:36-40; Ezek 36:22-31; 37:1-14).

II. (:20-25) PROPAGATION OF COVENANT RESPONSIBILITY TO SUCCEEDING GENERATIONS

A. (:20-23) Testify to the Historical Rationale for Obedience

1. (:20) Capitalize on Teaching Moments with Your Children

*“When your son asks you in time to come, saying,
‘What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean
which the LORD our God commanded you?’”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: a question from a child instigates the teaching moment. Children naturally ask questions. Unusual expectations (the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances) inevitably raise questions. Israel’s daily life provided countless teaching opportunities. This was true when Israel was in the land, yet even more so during the exile, when Israel’s ways and customs distinguished it from its Babylonian neighbors. Such a context naturally raises the questions “Why are we different from everyone else? Why do we have to follow all these rules when others don’t?” Judaism formalized this approach by incorporating the questions of children into the ritual of its festivals.

Eugene Merrill: Moses' reference to the covenant stipulations as a precondition to success in the land (v. 17) gives rise to his exhortation to the people to remember them in time to come and to transmit them to succeeding generations. . .

It is crucial with the passing of time that descendants of people who have participated in or witnessed events that have been fundamental to their origin and that explain their unique destiny should be continually reminded of those events lest they lose their sense of history and meaning. This is all the more true of ancient Israel, for no other people

had been called to such a significant mission, one that enveloped within it the very salvation of humankind. Israel must therefore recall its history and pass along its facts and value to generations yet to come. The way this was to be done was through the recitation of God's saving deeds in the past, a "sacred narrative" underlying the more formal and legal embodiment in the covenant texts.

Jack Deere: Near the beginning of this chapter, Moses stressed the need of parents to love Him with their total being. Now as the chapter closes Moses indicated that one aspect of loving (and thus obeying) God is to pass that same love for Him on to their children.

2. (:21-23) Connect the Experience of Past Redemption to Present Prosperity

a. (:21a) Past Bondage

*"then you shall say to your son,
'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt;'"*

b. (:21b-22) Process of Redemption Demonstrated God's Awesome Power

*"and the LORD brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand.
Moreover, the LORD showed great and distressing signs and
wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his
household;"*

c. (:23) Present Prosperity

*"and He brought us out from there in order to bring us in,
to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers."*

Peter Pett: Here once again we have repeated the important theological lessons on which the covenant was based. It is a partial covenant in brief.

- Firstly they were bound to Pharaoh, and under his rule and in bondage, enslaved and enchained, and in his kingdom.
- Then they were delivered with a mighty hand, the hand of Yahweh, Who had come against Egypt with signs and wonders and stricken it. Yahweh as their redeemer brought them out of Egypt.
- This was then followed by Him bringing them to the good land promised to their fathers, and establishing them there. Yahweh as their sovereign was constant, faithful and gracious, revealing further His mighty power, and bringing them into the Promised Land.
- And then finally He established Himself as their Lord so that they might obey His laws. Yahweh became their righteous ruler and sovereign, and they under His kingly rule, free and unchained, were in His kingdom.

Peter Craigie: Outline vv. 21-24

Introduction

1. The previous situation: vassals of the Egyptian pharaoh (v 21)

The Revelation of God in History

2. The experience of God: the deliverance of the exodus (v 21)
3. The judgment of God: God's dealing with Egypt (v 22)
4. The purpose of God: to grant his people the promised land (v 23)

The Revelation of the Word of God

5. The word of God: the giving of the law (v 24)
6. The conditions given: obedience and reverence (v 24)

Gerald Gerbrandt: It is too simple to distinguish the two parts of the answer as revelation in history and revelation of word, or as salvation and response, although such a distinction contains some truth. The story shaping the child is the story of **salvation**; but for Israel, **salvation includes both deliverance and direction for life.**

B. (:24-25) Teach Obedience as the Privileged Response of Redemption

1. (:24) Purpose of God's Commands = Our Good

“So the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God for our good always and for our survival, as it is today.”

2. (:25) Performance of God's Commands = Righteousness for Us

“And it will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us.”

Meredith Kline: This verse does not present a works principle of salvation. The stress falls on the function of law as disclosing the standard of conduct which is righteous in God's sight, a love for which is prerequisite to beatitude but not the meritorious ground of such a state.

Patrick Miller: So Deuteronomy as a **book of instruction** is concerned about instruction—its necessity, its processes, its aims, and its results. It is concerned about learning (4:10b) and teaching (4:9–10). What the people learn from Moses and the Lord is to be passed on to the children so that each new generation shall be prepared to stand before God and “*fear the LORD your God.*” The fear of the Lord is clearly the aim of educating the next generation in Israel, as several passages indicate explicitly. “*Fear of the LORD*” catches up all that is meant by loving the Lord and not having or serving other gods, other objects of one's ultimate allegiance. Reverence, obedience, total commitment are the ingredients of the fear of the Lord. In 6:13 the positive form of the first commandment is “*You shall fear the LORD your God.*” To this end, all education among the people of God is set.

Eugene Merrill: Then in strongly evangelical terms Moses equated faithful compliance with the covenant to righteousness (v. 25). The word used here is *šēdāqâ*, the very one applied to Abraham as a result of his having believed in the Lord (Gen 15:6). Later Judaism wrongly concluded that covenant keeping was the basis for righteousness

rather than an expression of faithful devotion. But true covenant keeping in the final analysis is a matter of faith, not merely of works and ritual. Thus the central feature of the covenant stipulations is their providing a vehicle by which genuine saving faith might be displayed (cf. **Deut 24:13; Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; 4:1–5; Gal 3:6–7**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How easy is it to imagine that our own efforts and good works led to whatever success we find ourselves enjoying?
- 2) Under what circumstances are we tempted to forget God and go our own way?
- 3) Under what circumstances are we tempted to put God to the test?
- 4) How can we better capitalize on teaching moments with our children?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: If the Shema introduces the theme of covenant commitment, the rest of this chapter and chapters 7–8 answer the question, “What does it mean to be totally committed to Yahweh?” Moses answers the question by challenging his audience to be prepared for three tests of that commitment. These tests are arranged in an ABA order, with the first (**6:10–25**) and last (**8:1–20**) involving internal tests—Israel’s response to prosperity in the land—and the center test (**7:1–26**) involving an external challenge—Israel’s response to enemies who stand in their way. Deuteronomy **6:10–25** divides into two major parts: future challenges to Israel’s commitment (**vv. 10–19**), and the importance of that commitment (**vv. 20–25**).

Michael Grisanti: What is the connection between the conduct of God’s covenantal people, the fulfillment of God’s promise to give them the land, and their continued enjoyment of it? Could Israel’s disobedience prevent God’s promise from becoming a reality? The ultimate fulfillment of God’s promises to the patriarchs was beyond question (**Ge 13:14–17; 15:18; 17:8**) because Israel’s receipt of the Land of Promise was integrally connected to God’s character. What was “conditional” was which generation would enjoy the fulfillment of that promise (cf. the Kadesh Barnea generation that died in the wilderness; **Nu 13–14**) and how many generations would continue to benefit from that divine provision. The presence of conditions did not affect whether or not God would fulfill his promises, but their presence did affect when and to whom those promises would be fulfilled (cf. **Jer 31:31–37; 32:36–40; Eze 36:22–31**;

37:1–14). As Moses said in **v.18**, this is a reality that Yahweh has “*promised on oath to your forefathers.*”

In **vv.16–19** Moses demonstrates that Yahweh is fully capable of bringing to pass his promise that Israel will inherit the land of Canaan. The issue is whether Israel will enjoy long tenure in that land as the result of wholeheartedly embracing Yahweh’s demands.

Duane Christensen: The **continuity of faith** within the context of a religious community depends on the observance of that faith within the context of individual families. Though it is probable that parents carried a greater responsibility in general for the education of their children in ancient Israel than is the case today, the principle remains true. If parents cannot embody that faith and inculcate it responsibly to their children, the very existence of that faith community is in jeopardy.

John Schultz: The **verses 10-12** explain the **dangers of affluence**. Being rich is a very dangerous position in life. The Bible gives ample warnings to the rich. The Apostle Paul writes to Timothy: “*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*” In the Book of Proverbs, Agur, son of Jakeh, prays this profound prayer: “*Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.*” Agur put poverty and riches under the same heading, as things that can endanger our fellowship with God. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus represents both extremes with the same image of “*thorns.*” We read: “*The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.*” The big difference between poverty and riches is not the amount of property involved, but the credit given. Poor people will seldom blame themselves for their condition, but the rich tend to take all the credit for themselves.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 7:1-26

TITLE: CHOSEN TO BE A HOLY TREASURED POSSESSION

BIG IDEA:

ELECTION DEFINES OUR IDENTITY AS GOD’S TREASURED POSSESSION (INVOLVING COUNTLESS BLESSINGS) AND ORIENTS US TOWARDS HOLINESS (REQUIRING THE PURGING OF GOD’S ENEMIES)

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: Deuteronomy 7 opens with series of temporal clauses that set the stage for the presentation of the test of Israel’s love for Yahweh (v. 2b). The policy of *ḥērem* is to be implemented when

- (1) Yahweh has brought the Israelites into the Promised Land,
- (2) he has cleared away the opposition,
- (3) he has delivered the Canaanites into the hands of the Israelites, and
- (4) the Israelites have defeated them.

As in 6:10, the test of Israel’s love for Yahweh will come when God’s promises have been fulfilled.

Peter Craigie: In summary, when the Israelites conquered their new land, they were to destroy the old inhabitants, refusing to enter into any kind of treaty with them, either political or marital. Any kind of treaty would be a compromise and would lead to disaster; therefore the Israelites were to destroy systematically the physical religious “furniture” of their enemies, indicating thereby their complete lack of recognition for the gods of their enemies.

Michael Grisanti: Scholars have suggested variously that the focus of **ch. 7**

- (1) warns against making an alliance with the Canaanites (Weinfeld, Deuteronomy 1–11, 357, 77),
- (2) exhorts holy and obedient conduct (Christensen, Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9, 152, 159),
- (3) centers on some aspect of the extermination of the Canaanites, i.e., holy war (Craigie, 177; Merrill, Deuteronomy, 176; Thompson, 127; Tigay, Deuteronomy, 84), or
- (4) highlights God’s faithfulness to his promises (Hall, 149).

Although **ch. 7** relates to all those issues, the following thematic statement more completely summarizes the heart of the chapter. God’s choice of Israel as his special nation (and his continued faithfulness to them) must always be central to their identity. As a result, God demands the extermination of the Canaanites. God’s choice of Israel should be a treasured reality, and Israel’s identity must be guarded against corruption.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The key for unlocking the content of the chapter, the window through which one must view it, is **verse 6**. It presents the central premise of the chapter, **election** (God has *chosen* [elected] you), and proclaims its implications: on the one hand, separation (You are a people *holy*); and on the other hand, abundance and safety (to be his people, his *treasured possession*).

The three principal words of the verse (*holy, chosen, and treasured possession*) thus provide the **structure** for the chapter. The opening verses spell out what it means to be *holy*: to live as a holy people requires separation from the neighboring peoples and their religious ways (**vv. 1–5**). The central portion of the chapter declares that Israel has been *chosen*, or elected, yet clarifies that that this relationship was initiated by God and is based not on merit but solely on God’s undeserved love (**vv. 7–11**). If Israel remains true to its election, it will be blessed beyond all measure (**vv. 12–16**), it will be God’s *treasured possession* in the land that God is giving (**vv. 17–26**).

I. (:1-5) THE BATTLE OF ELECTION IS FOR HOLINESS AND OBEDIENCE

A. (:1-2) Destroy (Cut off) the Occupying Idolatrous Nations

1. (:1) Mighty Activity of God in Clearing Away the Nations

“When the LORD your God shall bring you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and shall clear away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you,”

Daniel Block: Moses’ introduction of the antagonists makes it clear that the challenges a previous generation of Israelites faced have not diminished in the intervening thirty-eight years (**1:28**). He highlights the **strength** of the enemy with five expressions:

- (1) the nations are many;
- (2) they are the same nations that had faced their ancestors;
- (3) they are seven nations (a literary figure representing the totality of the population);
- (4) they are more numerous;
- (5) and they are stronger than Israel. This is a frank assessment of the challenge facing his people (cf. v. 17).

2. (:2) Military Activity of the Israelites in Destroying the Nations

“and when the LORD your God shall deliver them before you, and you shall defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them.”

Daniel Block: Based on a recently published Hittite text describing the ritual, the emphatic verbal expression *haḥarēm taḥarîm* (“to destroy totally”) seems to serve as shorthand for a complex series of actions:

- (1) defeating the military forces of a city;
- (2) slaughtering the population;
- (3) burning the town;
- (4) sowing it with salt (**Judg. 9:45**);
- (5) pronouncing a curse on it (**Josh. 6:26**);
- (6) consecrating it to Yahweh.

Most of these elements are featured in **Deuteronomy 13:15–16[16–17]**, which provides the fullest description of the policy.

Eugene Merrill: However all these peoples came to be in the land, they were trespassers in the eyes of the Lord, for he already had promised Abraham to give the land to him and his descendants (**Gen 12:1,7; 13:17; 15:18**). The Lord himself would therefore drive them out and deliver them over (*n tan*) to Israel, who would defeat them. But Israel must follow this up by subjecting these hopelessly unrepentant idolaters to the *rem* that is, to total and unexceptional destruction. The verb “*destroy them totally*” used to describe this act occurs only in the causative stem (*he rîm*) and means “*to devote someone or something to the Lord by exterminating it.*” This drastic action was taken as a form of immediate divine judgment upon those who had sinned away their day of grace (cf. **Gen 15:16; Lev 18:24-30**). It also was to preclude their wicked influence on God's covenant people who would otherwise tend to make covenant and intermarry with them (**Deut 7:3**) and adopt their idolatry (v. 4), something that, in fact, did take place because of Israel's failure to obey the *rem* decree. The net result was violation of the first two commandments (v. 4; cf. **5:7-10; 6:13-15**).

Peter Craigie: You shall not make a treaty with them (v. 2)—the word translated treaty here is *berît*, the same word employed for “*covenant.*” The word gives a clue to the reason for the harsh policy of war to be employed by the Israelites. The Israelites were bound primarily by their *berît* (covenant, treaty) with the Lord, and though this was a religious bond, it was also a political bond, for it set aside Israel as a distinctive nation among other nations. To make a treaty with other nations would indicate a lack of faithfulness on the part of the Israelites to their suzerain God. Likewise, the Israelites were forbidden to undertake a marriage alliance with them; although there may be a prohibition of mixed marriages between Israelites and non-Israelites implicit here, the specific prohibition probably has in mind the forging of political treaties by means of marriage. This course of action, as with the making of a treaty (v. 2), would be an indication of compromise and could lead to a disruption of the covenant faithfulness to the one God: he would turn your son aside from following after the Lord and they would serve other gods. Thus both prohibitions (vv. 2–3) have in mind the **preservation of the covenant relationship** with the Lord by forbidding any relationship that would bring that first and most important relationship into danger. The covenant relationship was to be guarded further by positive action, namely the total destruction of the various types of religious equipment employed in Canaanite religion (v. 5).

B. (:3-4) Forbid the Seductive Temptation of Mixed Marriages

1. (:3) Categorical Prohibition

“Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons.”

Michael Grisanti: Socially, the Israelites are forbidden to allow their sons or daughters to intermarry with Canaanite men and women (7:3); such marital alliances would result from making treaties with these peoples. Marriages between Israelites would strengthen the fabric of God’s people; marriages made with non-Israelites would weaken that fabric (McConville, 153). Israel’s history is replete with examples of idolatry that followed Israelite intermarriage with pagan peoples (cf. Solomon [1Ki 11:3] and Ahab [1Ki 16:30–33]). Though “mixed” marriages were not prohibited across the board (Nu 12:1; Dt 21:10–14), intermarriage would generally lead to idolatry, which would in turn occasion the wrath of Yahweh.

2. (:4a) Cause of Perversion and Idolatry

“For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods;”

3. (:4b) Catastrophic Judgment Prevented

“then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will quickly destroy you.”

C. (:5) Destroy (Cut Off) Everything Facilitating Idolatry

“But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire.”

Daniel Block: Altars were viewed as the tables of the gods, on which worshipers presented offerings of food and beverage. In pagan cultic contexts, “pillars” (*maṣṣēbôt*) were upright stones often engraved with religious symbols, symbolic of the male deity. Asherah poles were wooden symbols representing the female principle in the Canaanite fertility religion. They were probably carved in the form of a woman with exaggerated sexual features. *Pesilîm* is a generic term for carved images, though sacred images were often plated with gold or silver.

Eugene Merrill: The “sacred stones” represented the male procreative aspect of the Canaanite fertility religion; and the Asherah, the female. Asherah was also the name of the mother goddess of the Canaanite pantheon, the deity responsible for fertility and the productivity of soil, animals, and humankind. She was represented by either an evergreen tree or by a pole that also spoke of perpetual life. The cult carried on in their name was of the most sensual and sordid type, one practiced in the temples and also under the open sky at high places and in groves of trees. Prominent in its services was sacred prostitution involving priests and priestesses who represented the male and female deities.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Israel's election calls forth a holy people, a people committed to exclusive worship of God as proclaimed by the first commandment and the Shema (6:4–9). As **Moberly** suggests, with a metaphoric use of the term *herem*, Deuteronomy calls for total loyalty to the Shema, a loyalty that requires complete separation. Disregard of this holiness is most explicitly represented by covenants with other peoples, intermarriage, and the cult of the Canaanites.

(:6) KEY VERSE – ELECTION DEFINES OUR IDENTITY AS GOD'S TREASURED POSSESSION AND ORIENTS US TOWARDS HOLINESS

A. Holiness

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God;”

B. Election

“the LORD your God has chosen you”

C. Treasured Possession

*“to be a people for His own possession
out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”*

Peter Craigie: The reason for Israel's policy of war lay in her **election** and **holiness**, two important religious themes which are related directly to the covenant. The Israelites were a holy people because of their relationship to God, which separated them, or cut them off (apparently the original sense of the root *qdš*, “*holy*”), from other peoples and practices. Their holy character does not indicate inherent merit, but rather **divine choice**; God had chosen Israel to be a people prized more highly than all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The Heb. *seḡullāh*, translated prized ... highly, describes the special relationship between the Lord and his people; the cognate Akkadian word (*sikiltu*) is used in a treaty seal from Alalāḫ to describe the king as a “treasured possession” of his god. Thus Israel's character as a holy people gave them no ground for pride, but imposed on them the responsibility of their calling.

Michael Grisanti: The noun (*seḡullā*; GK 6035), “*treasured possession*,” also occurs in five other passages to describe Israel's privileged status (**Ex 19:5; Dt 14:2; 26:18; Ps 135:4; Mal 3:17**) and Yahweh's affection for his chosen people. Elsewhere it refers to a king's private fortune (**1Ch 29:3; Ecc 2:8**). In an Akkadian text a king is depicted as the special possession (*sikiltum*) of a god, and in a Ugaritic letter a Hittite king (the suzerain) reminds a Ugaritic king (the vassal) that he is the Hittite king's servant and *sḡlt* (**Weinfeld**, Deuteronomy 1–11, 368). In language reminiscent of **Exodus 19:4–6** (where Moses lays before the covenantal nation God's primary expectations of them, so that they are a “*banner nation*” before the nations of the world), Moses explains the theological foundation for this demand to exterminate the Canaanites and all of their religious utensils. Because of their identity (**chosen, holy people, treasured possession**), Israel must avoid idolatry and clearly manifest their God-given identity to all surrounding nations (cf. Dt 14:2; 26:18; Ps 135:4; Mal 3:17; Tit 2:14; 1Pe 2:9).

John Schultz: “*treasured possession*” -- The Hebrew word is *cegullah*, which means something that is kept under lock and key because of its great value. The KJV translates it sometimes: “jewel.” Israel was God’s “treasure hidden in a field,” and “the pearl of great value” in Jesus’ parables.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Through this election, Israel becomes God’s **treasured possession** (one word in Hebrew). The term emphasizes that Israel belongs to God—it is not free or independent—even as it underscores the special status of Israel.

Chapter 7 is an exposition of this verse and its three key terms:

verses 1–5 -- Israel as a holy people

verses 7–11 -- Israel as a chosen people

verses 12–26 -- Israel as a treasured possession.

Deuteronomy’s concern is to confront and reject any misunderstanding of election that might ground it in Israel’s merit. Election is simply based in God’s undeserved love. The gracious basis of this love is incomprehensible: it remains a mystery, indeed must remain a mystery. But its reality is fundamental. Israel is bound to God through God’s love. The question before Israel is whether it will return that love to God (cf. v. 11; 6:4–9).

McIntosh: Perhaps more than any other chapter of Scripture, **Deuteronomy 7** flies in the face of the modern passion for political correctness. In this chapter Israel is given property at the expense of a group of resident ethnic groups and told to eradicate them from the land. It was not because of their moral superiority, however, that they were chosen for such elevation. Israel was simply regarded as a people holy or separate by virtue of their relationship with God. It was God's choice, and not their superior behavior, that made them special in his sight, his treasured possession. (Holman Old Testament Commentary)

II. (:7-11) THE BASIS OF ELECTION IS GOD’S CHOICE AND FAITHFULNESS

A. (:7-8) God’s Choice of Israel

1. (:7) Negatively Stated – Not Based on any Merit

“The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,”

2. (:8) Positively Stated – Based on God’s Love and Faithfulness

“but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

Michael Grisanti: God’s choice to set his love on Israel was **based in God alone**. . . Yahweh’s decision to love Israel and his fixed commitment to his oath provided the theological foundation for his delivering them from bondage in Egypt.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The consequence of election is a **relationship**—or in the language of Deuteronomy, a **covenant** (e.g., **5:2**)—with a redeeming God. To know (**7:9**) is much more than merely intellectual awareness: it includes making the reality fully part of one’s total being, both thought and action. The phrase *your God*, used more than 240 times in Deuteronomy, highlights the relationship in this passage and is a reminder of it whenever used in the book. God’s faithfulness to the covenant means that Israel can count on God. If Israel responds faithfully by loving God and keeping the commandments (not two different responses but one and the same), its blessings will be endless (cf. **vv. 12–16**). Disobedience is not merely disregard of regulations but basically a personal rejection of God. And rejection has consequences. The language here recalls that of the second commandment (**5:9–10**), which contrasts the infinitely greater effect of God’s love with God’s discipline. The twice-used phrase repays in their own person, with its use of the singular noun, also suggests that the punishment is more limited than God’s covenant loyalty, which applies to a thousand generations. The only appropriate response thus is diligent observance of the Torah (**v. 11**).

B. (:9-10) God’s Faithfulness

1. (:9) Lovingkindness Towards Those Who Keep His Covenant

*“Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God,
the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness
to a thousandth generation
with those who love Him and keep His commandments;”*

Michael Grisanti: What does Yahweh expect from his redeemed people in light of the undeserved and miraculous demonstration of his great power in their behalf? He wants them to have a life-transforming knowledge of their covenantal Lord (**7:9–10**) and devote their entire beings to living in accordance with his demands (**7:11**).

2. (:10) Destruction Towards Those Who Hate Him

*“but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them;
He will not delay with him who hates Him,
He will repay him to his face.”*

Michael Grisanti: Moses uses a chiasmic structure (evident in the Hebrew; cf. **McConville**, 158) to focus on the fact that God will destroy these covenantal rebels, and none will escape (**7:10**):

- A Repay
 - B Those who hate him
 - C Destroy
 - C’ Do Not Delay
 - B’ Those who hate him
- A’ Repay

Eugene Merrill: On the contrary, those who hate him will quickly experience his destruction. Again, “*to hate*,” in the context of covenant terminology, means “*to reject, to repudiate as a covenant partner*” (cf. **5:9; 9:28**). Such covenant disloyalty deserves recompense, one described here (literally) as “*repay to their face*.” This expression occurs only here and probably means that the judgment would not be reserved for unborn generations but would fall immediately upon those who had sinned in this manner, right there and then. This view finds support in the fact that God “*will not be slow*” to repay (lit., “*will not be afterward*” in doing so).

C. (:11) Exhortation to Obey

“Therefore, you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them.”

Eugene Merrill: Moses concluded this section of his command to dispossess the Canaanite nations by once more appealing to the “*commands, decrees and laws*,” meaning, of course, the covenant as a whole. By now it is clear that use of these terms not only constitutes a covenant reminder but serves to mark out significant divisions in the text (cf. **4:1,40; 5:1; 6:1,20; 8:11; 10:12-13; 11:1,32; 12:1; 26:16; 30:15-16**). The exhortation resumes after this **pivot point** in a somewhat chiasmic pattern in which vv. **12-16** reflect much of the sentiment of vv. **7-11** and vv. **17-26** match vv. **1-6**.

Peter Craigie: On the basis of this divine love and choice, the Israelites are therefore persuaded to be obedient to the whole law (the commandment, and the statutes and the judgments, v. **11**) which Moses was about to set before them.

III. (:12-26) THE BLESSING OF ELECTION IS A TRANSFORMED IDENTITY AS GOD’S TREASURED POSSESSION

A. (:12-16) Provision of Blessing Conditioned on Obedience

1. (:12-13) General Summary of the Link between Obedience and Blessing

a. (:12) Obedience

“Then it shall come about, because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you His covenant and His lovingkindness which He swore to your forefathers.”

Peter Craigie: The prosperity, health, and success of the Israelites would be contingent upon **obedience**; only as they heard and were careful to obey God’s word would they continue to experience God’s faithfulness and loving kindness. It is this note of contingency that adds such solemnity to Moses’ discourse, for although God’s faithfulness and ability were beyond question, the course of the future would be dependent very largely on the people responding to their covenant obligations. This did not mean that obedience merited divine blessing, but rather that **obedience maintained the proper covenant relationship with God**; and his people could experience the blessing of God only when the covenant relationship, which involved reciprocal

responsibilities, was properly maintained. Contingent upon this obedience would be their prosperity and fruitfulness in the land (vv. 13–14), their good health (v. 15), and their military success in the conquest (v. 16).

Gerald Gerbrandt: Election leads to Israel as God’s treasured possession. To be a treasured possession implies both that Israel is bound to God and that Israel has a special status.

b. (:13) Blessing

*“And He will love you and bless you and multiply you;
He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your
ground, your grain and your new wine and your oil,
the increase of your herd and the young of your flock,
in the land which He swore to your forefathers to give you.”*

Peter Craigie: The ground would be fruitful and produce grain, new wine, and fresh oil; these three terms, denoting the substances in their simple or unmanufactured states, encompass the three principal food products of Palestine.

Daniel Block: All the expressions in **verse 13b** are linked with the **Canaanite pantheon**. *Dāgān* (“*grain*”) recalls Dagon, later the primary god of the Philistines (**Judg. 16:23; 1 Sam. 5:2–7**), though worship of this deity was widespread among the Canaanites. For “*wine*,” Moses substitutes the common word *yayin* (cf. **14:26**) with *tîrôš*, which is cognate to the name of the god Tirshu/Tirash, attested in the El-Amarna letters and in Ugaritic texts. For olive “*oil*,” Moses substitutes the common word *šemen* (cf. **8:8**) with *yîšhār*, from a root meaning “*shiny*.” Some speculate that *Yîšhar* is the name of the god of olive oil. The rare expression for “*calves of your herds*” (lit., “*the increase of your cattle*”) occurs elsewhere only in **28:4, 18, 51**, and in **Ex. 13:12**. Replacing the more common *‘ēgel* (cf. **9:16, 21**), *šgr* seems to be linked to the name of the deity Shaggar/Sheger, whose veneration has been attested in Ugaritic, Emar, Deir ‘Alla, and Punic texts.

However, the mythological connection is most transparent in the designation for “*lambs of your flocks*” (*‘ašterôt šō’nekā*), which substitutes for the more common *kebeš* (cf. **Ex. 29:39**) or *kešeb* (**Deut. 14:4**). The veneration of Ishtar/Astarte, the goddess of fertility, was among the most widespread of any divinity in the ancient Near East. Moses’ preference for these rare expressions seems a deliberate stab at the jugular of Canaanite religion. In the land that Yahweh promised on oath to the ancestors, he alone guarantees the fertility of crops and herds. The pastor of Israel ends this promise of blessing in **verse 14a** with a final comprehensive promise: **Israel will be blessed more than all the peoples.**

2. (:14-16) Extension of God’s Blessing

a. (:14) Fruitfulness in Child Bearing

“You shall be blessed above all peoples;

there shall be no male or female barren among you or among your cattle.”

b. (:15) Good Health

“And the LORD will remove from you all sickness; and He will not put on you any of the harmful diseases of Egypt which you have known, but He will lay them on all who hate you.”

Peter Craigie: In ancient Egypt, such diseases as elephantiasis, various types of boils, and afflictions of the eyes and bowels were particularly common and unpleasant. The Israelites would no longer be plagued with such sickness, but God would inflict it upon their enemies.

c. (:16) Military Success

“And you shall consume all the peoples whom the LORD your God will deliver to you; your eye shall not pity them, neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.”

Michael Grisanti: Making a transition to the next paragraph, Moses reminds the Israelites of their God-given task, the extermination of the Canaanites. Moses warns them against the natural sympathy they will feel for these pagans and presses them to carry out God’s bidding. If they spare the Canaanites and then worship their pagan gods, it may lead to Israel’s own ruin.

B. (:17-26) Promises that Should Combat Doubts and Fears

1. (:17) Problem that Gives Rise to Doubts

“If you should say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?’”

Peter Craigie: There was a danger that they might let their minds reflect on the strength of their enemy (v. 17), rather than upon the strength of their God.

Michael Grisanti: Verses 17–19 look back at the ways Yahweh had already demonstrated his great power, and vv.20–24 look forward to his enabling Israel for the task God has set before his people, the extermination of the Canaanites. Moses concludes his exhortation by warning the Israelites about the danger of worshipping false gods (vv.25–26).

2. (:18-24) Promises that Should Alleviate Fear

Daniel Block: His word of promise divides into two parts, in Hebrew each being introduced by a three-word admonition: “Do not be afraid of them” (v. 18a); and “Do not be terrified by them” (v. 21). Exhibiting remarkable proportion, the words of encouragement that follow these exhortations are virtually identical in length: the first consists of forty-five words, the second of forty-seven.

a. (:18-20) Promise of the **Invincible Power** of the Lord

“You shall not be afraid of them; you shall well remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt: 19 the great trials which your eyes saw and the signs and the wonders and the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the LORD your God brought you out. So shall the LORD your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. 20 Moreover, the LORD your God will send the hornet against them, until those who are left and hide themselves from you perish.”

Michael Grisanti: The word pair “*miraculous signs and wonders*” (*hā`ōtōt wehammōpetīm*) occurs twelve times in the OT to refer to Yahweh’s unparalleled deliverance of Israel from Egypt (**Ex 7:3; Dt 4:34; 7:19; 26:8; 29:2; 34:11; Ne 9:10; Pss 105:27; 135:9; Jer 32:20–21**).

Duane Christensen: **Deut 7:17–26** is transitional in nature, continuing the discussion of the holy war that the people are about to wage in the Promised Land (the focus of **7:12–16**), and setting the stage for the grand summary of Deuteronomic theology contained in **8:1–20**. The people are urged not to be concerned with the strength of their enemy (**7:17–18**), but rather to recall the mighty acts of God in their behalf during the exodus from Egypt. On an earlier occasion it was failure to trust YHWH that led to defeat (cf. **1:27–28**). Moses urges them this time not to fear.

The remedy for fear is **memory**. This is why each generation is called to experience the exodus from Egypt anew in cultic drama each year in the Feast of Passover. The mighty acts of God are not to be seen as mere actions in history, accomplished once and for all time at particular moments in the past. The exodus from Egypt is a paradigm. It is to be the personal reality of each member of the community, part of their own experience (see **D. Christensen**, ed., *Experiencing the Exodus* [1988] 3–40). When this becomes a reality, the individual has the inner resources to indeed “*remember what YHWH your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt*” (**7:18**) and to trust God to do it again (cf. **Hab 3:2**).

Eugene Merrill: A major difference this time, however, was that Israel was not leaving a land but entering one and would not flee from a pursuer but would instead chase others. One of God's agents would be “*the hornet*” (**v. 20**), a terror so powerful and persistent that it would search out and destroy even those who hid themselves. Whether this should be understood as the insect, either literally or metaphorically, or as depression or discouragement, the fact remains that it was some instrument used by the Lord to assist Israel in conflict (cf. **Exod 23:28; Josh 24:12**).

Indeed, the hornet possibly could have been the Lord himself, for Moses went on to say that the Lord would be among his people as an awesome God and that he would drive the enemy from Canaan little by little (**vv. 21–22**; cf. **v. 1**, where the same verb, *n al*, occurs).

- b. (:21-24) Promise of the **Invincible Presence** of the Lord
“You shall not dread them, for the LORD your God is in your midst, a great and awesome God.
And the LORD your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to put an end to them quickly, lest the wild beasts grow too numerous for you. 23 But the LORD your God shall deliver them before you, and will throw them into great confusion until they are destroyed. 24 And He will deliver their kings into your hand so that you shall make their name perish from under heaven; no man will be able to stand before you until you have destroyed them.”

Peter Craigie: The initial conquest would be sudden, but the process of settlement and complete conquest would be more gradual, while the Israelites grew sufficiently in number (i.e., while the promise of v. 13 was being fulfilled) to enable them to populate the land. The gradual changeover would thus avoid the danger of the land returning to a primitive state of natural anarchy: lest the wild beasts become too numerous for you. But during the gradual course of the conquest and settlement, God’s hand would be at work, and even those not immediately conquered would become anxious as they anticipated their own defeat: he will disturb them with great unrest until their annihilation (v. 23).

Daniel Block: However, to prevent his hearers from imagining that all they need to do is stand passively by and watch (Ex. 14–15), Moses adds a series of caveats to his promises of divine involvement.

(1) Although Yahweh will clear away the Canaanites, he will not do so in a single moment, but “*little by little*” (v. 22). He recognizes that the Israelites presently lack both the resources to eliminate them quickly and the population to occupy all the land that has been promised (cf. Ex. 23:30). The elimination of the population all at once would create a vacuum leading to a dangerous increase in the number of wild animals—presumably involving both scavenging creatures like jackals and more aggressive wolves and lions that actually threaten the Israelites (cf. 2 Kings 17:24–26).

(2) In **verse 24b** Moses declares that Yahweh will deliver the kings into the Israelites’ hands so they may obliterate their names from under the heavens (cf. 4:32). Since the ancients thought that people lived on in their children, the worst fate one could experience was to have his seed cut off and his name destroyed from his father’s household. The battle reports in the book of Joshua name several kings who opposed the Israelites, but the absence of royal names in the catalogue of defeated kings in **Joshua 12:7–24** seems intentional.

(3) The concluding clause in **verse 24**, “*you will destroy them*,” summarizes the Israelites’ obligation in the conquest. Moses’ use of the same verb for “*destroy*” in **verses 23 and 24** (*hišmîd*) reflects the **synergy of divine and human involvement**.

3. (:25-26) Prohibition that Should Protect Holiness

“The graven images of their gods you are to burn with fire; you shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it, for it is an abomination to the LORD your God. 26 And you shall not bring an abomination into your house, and like it come under the ban; you shall utterly detest it and you shall utterly abhor it, for it is something banned.”

Duane Christensen: The strong language of the concluding verses (**Deut 7:25–26**) bears witness once again to the **demands of holiness** in our relation to God. We must shun the very appearance of evil. Even the precious metals used to make “*graven images of their gods*,” however valuable they may be in themselves, are to be abhorred and discarded as “*an accursed thing*” (v **26**). The story of the golden calf that Aaron made at Mount Sinai stands as a powerful reminder of this reality (see **Exod 32**).

Daniel Block: In **verse 26** he identifies the root of the problem. Idolatry is not only seductive (“*a snare*”) and an abomination to Yahweh; the “*abomination*” is contagious. Contact with abominable objects neutralizes the Israelites’ status as a holy people and reduces them to being simply one among the nations, but it also renders the Israelites absolutely defiled and fundamentally degraded. There is only one solution for anything or anyone declared to be *tô ‘ēbâ*: the rigorous application of the policy of *ḥērem*.

Peter Craigie: In the concluding verses, the complete destruction both of the people of Canaan (v. **24**) and of their religion (v. **25**) is anticipated. The kings of the enemy states would be defeated and their temporal power and authority would be lost in the forgetfulness of human history. Their religion, pretending reality, would have its symbolic forms burned in fire. Even the precious metals (silver and gold) employed for decorating the idols, though they were valuable in themselves, were to be discarded as an abominable thing (vv. **25, 26**). The association with false religions made the metals totally unsuitable for use within the Israelite community, which might again be tempted to misuse the materials to make a representation of God as had been done in the past (see **Exod. 32**).

John Schultz: Among a nation that had lived for centuries in Egypt, a land where idol worship was rampant, and where idols could be seen at the corner of every street, the pull toward idolatry must still have been rather strong. God wanted them to be protected against this kind of danger. He also knew the future of the people He had chosen, and loved. He knew that idol worship would be their undoing, and He wanted to postpone the disintegration of the nation as long as possible.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where do we need to be more forceful and aggressive in driving out sin from our lives?
- 2) What are the implications to you of being viewed as God's **treasured possession**?
- 3) Why do you think God chose you for salvation?
- 4) How can you address a mindset that is focusing on the magnitude of your enemies and the opposition to spiritual growth and ministry?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gerald Gerbrandt: Outline

Election Requires Separation, **7:1–5**

Election and Its Basis, **7:6–11**

7:6 Israel's Election

7:7 Rejection of Erroneous Explanation

7:8 Election Grounded in God's Love

7:9–11 Therefore Yahweh Your God Is God

Faithfulness to Election Leads to Blessing, **7:12–26**

7:12–16 Outline of Blessing

7:17–26 Blessing and the Awesome God

Daniel Block: Instead of interpreting this book as legislation, we should treat it as rhetoric. It is observed that **chapter 7** is not concerned primarily with the practice of *ḥērem*; rather, it focuses on Israel's status as the people of Yahweh (**7:6, 9–10**). That the instructions regarding *ḥērem* demonstrate Israel's status is reinforced by the concentric pattern of motifs:

A The *ḥērem* principle, grounded in Israel's status as a holy people (**vv. 1–6**)

B Past victory (exodus), grounded in Yahweh's love for Israel and oath to the ancestors (**vv. 7–8**)

C The character of Yahweh, the ground of Israel's present conduct (**vv. 9–10**)

D Obedience, the response to Yahweh's command (v. 11)

C' The character of Yahweh, the ground of Israel's future hope
(vv. 12–16)

B' Future victory (in Canaan), grounded in Yahweh's presence with Israel
(vv. 17–24)

A' The ḥērem principle, grounded in Israel's holiness (vv. 25–26)

Duane Christensen: vv. 1-11 -- In vv 1–4 the focus is on YHWH's Holy War against the seven traditional enemies of Israel, whereas vv 9–10 present the character of the covenant God, who is faithful to those who keep his commandments and will destroy those who "hate" him. The people are commanded to destroy utterly the enemies in the land, so as not to be enticed to serve other gods. The innermost frame opens with a command to destroy utterly all Canaanite places of worship (v 5). In the corresponding structure (vv 7–8), the focus is on the reason God chose Israel. He chose them because of his love for them, and the promise he had sworn to their fathers. It was purely a matter of grace. In the central prosodic subunit (v 6), the Numeruswechsel is used to mark the center, or turning point, of the larger structure. The people are commanded to remove all the places of worship of other gods in the land, for they are a holy people whom YHWH has chosen.

Doug McIntosh: As Israel entered the land of promise, they were told, "*When the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy*" (Deut. 7:2). Few statements of Scripture have received harsher criticism than this one. It seems to conflict with repeated biblical commands to show mercy to others (see Zech. 7:9; Mic. 6:8; Matt. 23:23). What are we to make of this divinely announced policy of extermination?

In part, the policy represents God's own justice at work through Israel's weapons of war. God waited until this period of time to bring Israel into the land, at the moment Canaanite culture was at its most depraved (cp. Gen. 15:16). The Canaanites needed to be judged, and Israel was God's instrument of judgment.

However, it should also be noted that extermination does not represent the standard policy that God commanded Israel to pursue. When describing Israel's behavior toward the inhabitants of Canaan, the normal imperative was not exterminate but drive out: "*When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols, and demolish all their high places*" (Num. 33:51-52). Calls to expel or drive out far outnumber commands to kill the Canaanites.

The two commands are actually compatible when seen from God's perspective. He had two primary purposes in bringing Israel into Canaan. First, he wanted to give the land to Israel and fulfill his promises to the patriarchs. Second, he desired to provide Israel a homeland that was free of the temptations to moral depravity that were part of

Canaanite religion. As a result, the culture had to be destroyed—an action as easily accomplished by expulsion as by extermination.

Israel's slow approach over a period of forty years was closely observed by the native peoples (cp. **Josh. 2:9-11**). Many of them must have left voluntarily as Israel drew near, particularly after the dramatic and early victory at Jericho. Those who held out and remained behind the walls of Canaanite cities would have been the people who had the most to lose by leaving: the civic and religious leaders most committed to the blasphemous and degraded Canaanite cult. God knew that if they survived they would prove enthusiastic evangelists for the twisted cult—and so they did.

Israel's greatest danger would come after the fighting was over, when they saw the survivors of the battles they fought. Their natural inclination would have been to bring those devotees to paganism into their own homes and to adopt their guests' immoral and destructive religious practices. Their most profound danger, in effect, came in showing mercy toward those who posed a lethal danger to them.

Regrettably, that danger became a reality. Because Israel refused to exterminate that hard core of survivors, God's people became infected with idolatry so deeply that they themselves eventually had to be driven from the land. Israel exhibited an incomplete dedication to an important task. They thought so little of God's commands and their own spiritual lives that they permitted small pockets of wickedness to infect their nation.

Believers can make a similar mistake. We are to have no mercy on the sins that lie resident within us. We are persistently and without hesitation to drive them out of our lives, or they will become causes for spiritual stumbling. (Holman Old Testament Commentary – Deuteronomy)

TEXT: Deuteronomy 8:1-20

TITLE: REMEMBER AND DON'T FORGET

BIG IDEA:

REMEMBERING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN TOUGH TIMES (THE WILDERNESS) SHOULD GUARD AGAINST FORGETTING GOD IN PROSPEROUS TIMES SO THAT WE OBEY RATHER THAN PERISH

INTRODUCTION:

Michael Grisanti: Looking back at God's faithfulness to Israel as they wandered in the wilderness and looking forward to the good land God is giving them, Moses exhorts the Israelites to avoid a spirit of independence and self-sufficiency and instead to remember the Lord by keeping his commandments, lest he cause them to perish. Moses uses two "double themes" to strengthen his challenge for Israel to live in the light of their covenantal relationship with Yahweh: *remember/forget* and *wilderness/Promised Land* (Craigie, 184).

Gerald Gerbrandt: **Chapter 8** picks up the theme of blessing and emphasizes the goodness of the Promised Land. It is a land of great natural resources, a land in which they will become wealthy, a land in which they will be filled and lack nothing. But this very abundance, this outcome of their election, has the possibility of dulling their memories. It can lure them into forgetting the God who has led them out of Egypt and provided for all their needs in the wilderness. The contrast between the obvious dependence upon God in the wilderness and the danger of perceived self-sufficiency in the land plays a key role in the argument.

Daniel Block: Moses continues to address the **challenges to faith** that the Israelites will encounter in the Promised Land. In this chapter that threat emerges because Yahweh is faithful to his promises. Moses' fivefold appeal to keep alive the memory of Yahweh's actions on Israel's behalf (vv. 2, 11, 14, 18, 19) suggests that the notion of *remembering/forgetting* is a key motif in the chapter. In addition, Moses' charge to keep the commands of Yahweh by walking in his ways and fearing him (v. 6; cf. v. 11) points to the heart of the matter: Will Israel serve Yahweh in the land, or will they not? This is the same question Moses had raised in **chapter 7**, though now the nature of the test has changed dramatically. . .

Whereas in the past Yahweh had tested and refined his people with deprivation and manna, in the future he will do so with prosperity. His aim in both is to produce a nation that brings praise and glory to him in the sight of the nations (**26:19**). If they fail the test and refuse to be refined, he will discard them again like dross and consign them to the slag heap (cf. **Ezek. 22:17-22**).

I. (:1-10) REMEMBER AND OBEY AND LIVE IN THE GOOD LAND

A. (:1-6) God's Faithfulness in Tough Times Should Prompt Obedience

1. (:1) Exhortation to Obedience

"All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to give to your forefathers."

Michael Grisanti: What God desires for his covenantal people is abundant life in the Promised Land, where they will live long and multiply in number.

Daniel Block: If Israel will be faithful to Yahweh, they will achieve life, increase (of population), entrance into the land, and possession of it.

2. (:2-5) Remembering God's Faithfulness in Tough Times

a. (:2) Goal of Humbling and Testing

"And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not."

Peter Craigie: The wilderness tested and disciplined the people in various ways. On the one hand, the desolation of the wilderness removed the natural props and supports which man by nature depends on; it cast the people back on God, who alone could provide the strength to survive the wilderness. On the other hand, the severity of the wilderness period undermined the shallow bases of confidence of those who were not truly rooted and grounded in God. The wilderness makes or breaks a man; it provides strength of will and character. The strength provided by the wilderness, however, was not the strength of self-sufficiency, but the strength that comes from a knowledge of the living God.

b. (:3) Key Lesson = Dependence on the Revealed Will of the Lord for Everything

*"And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that **man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.**"*

Daniel Block: it seems best to understand that "*which comes from the mouth of God*" to be his revealed will, represented by the Supreme Command and all the stipulations, decrees, and laws. The chapter opens with the challenge to obey the commands of Yahweh "*so that you may live*" (v. 1); it ends with a sentence of death on all who think they can live by feasting on physical food but neglect the will of God (v. 20). To live one must also ingest (*take to heart*, 6:6) the life-giving commands that come from the mouth of Yahweh, and let them energize one to do his will (cf. 17:19–20; 31:11–13).

Peter Craigie: The complete dependence on the word of God and God's ability to provide is always a hard lesson for man to learn, whether in ancient times or modern. Man knows that he must work in order to provide the essentials for physical existence, but in that very labor, he may easily forget that, in the last resort, it is God who makes provision for man's life. Thus, when the divine command comes, or when a period of testing is entered, man's self-sufficiency is undermined, for his own ability to provide for his needs is removed and he must learn again that his existence, physical and spiritual, can only be grounded in God.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The contrast "is not spiritual versus material food but trust in the Lord's provision and obedience versus reliance upon self" (P. Miller 1990: 116).

c. (:4-5) Goal of Humbling and Disciplining

"Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. 5 Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son."

Gerald Gerbrandt: The wilderness experience is a time of discipline. **Discipline** must be distinguished from **punishment**. Punishment is penalty for past sin; discipline is training or schooling for the future. The discipline of the wilderness is to change Israel's heart (v. 5). The second reference to heart, preceded by the imperative (*Know*), may suggest God had learned that Israel's heart was not ready for life in the land. The Exodus accounts of the wilderness period demonstrate that at times Israel responded to adversity without the trust and obedience God desired (e.g., **Exod 16:1–36; 32:1–35**). This passage puts the whole in the context of the love of a parent for a child. God, like a parent, expresses love both by carrying and protecting (cf. **1:31**) and by preparing for the future. Through the wilderness experience, God makes clear to Israel its utter dependence on God.

Daniel Block: Why did Yahweh treat Israel the way he did? To this question he provides three answers.

(1) Yahweh was intentionally depriving Israel of normal food to humble them.

(2) Yahweh was testing his people to assess the quality of the vassal's fidelity (**8:2**) and to enhance Israel's covenant commitment through discipline (**8:5**). Just as the metallurgical process of refining precious metals involves extraction of impurities from ore through intense heat, so metaphorical refinement involves a demanding and painful process.

(3) Yahweh was exposing the shallowness of the people's commitment to him. This aim is expressed explicitly by the clause "*to know what was in your heart*," and the method involved observing whether or not the Israelites would keep his commands. Moses' present statement echoes Yahweh's words in **Exodus 16:4** and assumes that people's actions express what is inside their hearts/minds.

3. (:6) Exhortation to Obedience

“Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.”

B. (:7-10) God’s Blessing of Prosperity Should Prompt Thanksgiving

1. (:7-9) Blessing of Prosperity

a. (:7a) Summary of Blessing in the Good Land

“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land,”

Daniel Block: The general reference to the land as “a good land” functions as an introductory thesis statement, whose meaning will be clarified in the following verses, and it contrasts the land ahead with the desert the Israelites have left behind.

b. (:7b) Abundant Water

“a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills;”

c. (:8) Abundant Food

“a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey;”

d. (:9a) Abundant Provision

“a land where you shall eat food without scarcity, in which you shall not lack anything;”

e. (:9b) Abundant Mineral Resources

“a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper.”

2. (:10) Response of Thanksgiving

“When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.”

II. (:11-20) DON’T FORGET AND DISOBEY AND PERISH

A. (:11-17) Warning against Forgetting God

1. (:11) Forgetting God Manifests Itself in Disobeying His Commands

“Beware lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today;”

Peter Craigie: That is, forgetfulness is not simply a state of mind, or something akin to absentmindedness. Facts may still be remembered, in a literal sense, but they have ceased to be part of a living memory of the reality of God, who no longer seems to be a

living and real presence. The reality of the living God is not bounded by time; but finite man, pressed continually by the pressures of the present moment, is constantly tempted to limit his horizons to that which is immediately known and experienced. When the immediate experience is one of security and tranquility, then the living memory of the reality of God fades and easily ceases to be the governing principle of daily life. The danger was a constant one, so the people were warned by Moses: Be very careful lest you forget the Lord your God (v. 11).

2. (:12-14) Forgetting God Responds to Prosperity with Pride Instead of Thanksgiving

“lest, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, 13 and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, 14 then your heart becomes proud, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

Peter Craigie: The Exodus event had been the liberation of Israel from human servitude and had made possible submission to God in the covenant formed at Sinai. Israel was not a free nation, though the newly found prosperity in the Promised Land might lead to the delusion of freedom. The freedom from Egypt was significant only in that it formed the basis for a new allegiance, the allegiance given to God in the covenant. The belief in self-sufficient freedom and independence would be a dangerous thing in the new state of Israel. There could be freedom from Egypt, freedom from worldly domination, but only insofar as Israel was absolutely committed to God in a covenant relationship which totally permeated every aspect of its life.

Eugene Merrill: The chief danger was that they would become amnesiac about their history and in the pride of the present would forget the sacred story of their election and redemption. They would no longer recall that the Lord had brought them out of Egyptian slavery (v. 14; cf. 4:9; 6:12), that he had led them through the trackless and terrible deserts (v. 15; cf. 1:19; 2:7; 32:10) and had given them water and food in supernatural ways (vv. 15b-16a). They could even have forgotten the lessons he had taught them then and there, instruction designed to prepare them well for the purpose to which he had called them (v. 16b). Instead, they would claim credit for all their successes as though by their own wisdom and strength they had managed to become so prosperous (v. 17).

3. (:15-17) Forgetting God Manifests Itself in Prideful Self Confidence Instead of Humble Dependence on God

“He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. 16 In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. 17 Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.'”

B. (:18) Exhortation to Remember God's Faithfulness

"But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day."

Eugene Merrill: The connection between covenant and blessing is clearly affirmed in v. 18, where Moses commanded his hearers to remember the Lord inasmuch as the success they enjoyed was confirmation of his covenant favor and the covenant relationship was the source of their blessing. In other words, there is a reciprocal dynamic in which covenant produces blessing and blessing proves the reality of covenant.

Daniel Block: In contrast to the wrong response to the test (vv. 11–17), Moses now provides three elements of the correct response.

- (1) When the Israelites prosper in the land, they must "remember the LORD." As elsewhere the verb *zâkar* involves more than simply acknowledging his existence; it means to take seriously his presence and actions.
- (2) Even if the Israelites prosper through hard work, they must recognize that the skill and energy needed to do that work is a gift from Yahweh.
- (3) They must remember that Yahweh gives strength not primarily for their prosperity, but to confirm his covenant with the ancestors. Moses' use of the expression "*to confirm his covenant*" proves he is not speaking of a new covenant, but the fulfillment of a previous covenant, here identified as the covenant he made with the ancestors of his audience.

C. (:19-20) Warning against Forgetting God

"And it shall come about if you ever forget the LORD your God, and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you shall surely perish. 20 Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so you shall perish; because you would not listen to the voice of the LORD your God."

Peter Craigie: A basic theme of Deuteronomy is the demand for covenant allegiance, and always this is contrasted with the danger of unfaithfulness to the covenant God and following other gods. Thus, the last two verses of the chapter serve to tie the particular themes of the chapter more closely to the overall themes of the book.

Michael Grisanti: Moses gives Israel a stern warning. If Israel chooses to forget the Lord and instead worships pagan gods, Yahweh will destroy them just as he intends to judge the Canaanite nations. If the Israelites want to live like Canaanites, God will treat them like Canaanites. Just as the destruction of the Canaanites was theologically or morally justified, the same would be true of God's judgment of his own covenantal

nation. The “forgetting” of God and worshiping of idols are symptoms or manifestations of the fundamental problem: not obeying, or disregarding, their covenantal Lord.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Although the focus of the chapter has been on the danger of replacing confidence in God with pride and self-confidence, the conclusion takes the next logical step for Deuteronomy and speaks against following, serving, and worshiping (three separate terms used for emphasis) other gods. Not only may hubris itself be another god; it also easily leads to the recognition of new gods, gods that the peoples of the land serve in their quest for prosperity and security. Breaking the first commandment then becomes a temptation as well.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some memory aids that Christians should utilize more effectively?
- 2) How does our present day prosperity present such a dire spiritual threat?
- 3) Why does the Lord’s discipline seem so unpleasant to us when it is accomplishing such a good purpose?
- 4) What is the connection between forgetting God, self-confidence, and idolatry?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: Chiastic Structure

- A Be careful to keep God’s commandments **8:1**
- B Remember how God humbled you to test you in the wilderness **8:2–4**
- C Keep God’s commandments by fearing him **8:5–6**
- X **Song of the good land 8:7–10**
- C’ Take heed not to forget God’s commandments **8:11**
- B’ When you forget YHWH your God, he will humble you **8:12–16**
- A’ Remember that it is God who sustains you in the land **8:17–18**
- Conclusion: If you are unfaithful to YHWH, you will perish **8:19–20**

Peter Craigie: Structure

There are two double-themes which are employed to emphasize the call to obedience:

- (a) “remember/forget”;
- (b) “wilderness/promised land.”

In the structure of the chapter, the two double-themes are closely interwoven, and lead eventually to a solemn warning in vv. 17–20, which indicates the basic danger threatening the covenant faith.

- Vv 2–6 remember the wilderness
 and God’s presence there

- Vv 7–10 God will bring his people into the Promised Land

- Vv 11–16 beware of forgetting God in the Promised Land
 beware of forgetting God who was present in the wilderness

- Vv 17–20 beware of presumption: remember God, the source of strength
 do not forget God and follow other gods
 forgetfulness leads to disaster

The act of remembering prompts obedience to the covenant law, for it brings to the forefront of the mind the reality and faithfulness of God; forgetfulness is tantamount to disobedience, for the self and human concerns have pushed into the background of the mind the reality and claims of God.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Outline

- Introductory Entreaty, **8:1**
- Remember! **8:2–10**
- Do Not Forget! **8:11–17**
- Concluding Warning: Remember! Do Not Forget! **8:18–20**

Chiastic structure:

- A1 Introduction, **8:1**

- B1 God’s Discipline in the Wilderness, **8:2–6**

- C1 The Goodness of the Land, **8:7–10**

- D Central Exhortation: Do Not Forget, 8:11**

- C2 The Temptation of the Land, **8:12–14**

- B2 God’s Care in the Wilderness, **8:15–17**

- A2 Conclusion, **8:18–20**

Patrick Miller: So Israel is meant to learn from the wilderness experience that its sustenance comes from God, who is to this people as a teaching parent. But the sermon of Moses indicates that the experiment in the wilderness was a test by which God also would learn something—whether Israel would keep the commandments (v. 2). The results of the experiment at that point are ambiguous. We are never told whether God received an answer or what that answer might be. That ambiguity or unanswered question is not unimportant for comprehending the purpose of Deuteronomy or the purpose of the narrative of Jesus' temptation. For it is precisely the case in Deuteronomy that the issue of the whole book is to answer: Has Israel learned the lessons of the past and will it now, in a (later) situation of prosperity and abundance, remember who is the provider and live by that one's word? The matter is still open-ended and even more acute, for the richness of life on the land with beautiful houses, lush gardens giving both the necessities and delicacies of life, and large mineral resources (v. 7–10) creates an even larger possibility that prosperous people will forget the gift-giver and think, I did it all by myself (v. 17).

Paul Barker: **Deuteronomy 8** is profound. It balances the issues so simply. The Israelites could easily have thought that their time of testing was over and now, in the land, things would be fine. After all, the land has already been described in such glowing terms (e.g. 6:3, 10, 11). Yet the point will be made clearly that both in bad times as well as good the Israelites need to be careful to learn. This chapter has a strong and deep understanding of the love of God. His love is strong enough to discipline us, as a father does his children. This is not wimpy, watery love but robust, rigorous love. This is love that really cares. . .

The chapter finishes with another warning against **idolatry**. This is where forgetfulness will lead. The gods of the Canaanites were fertility gods whose tasks were to provide produce from the land. This was the danger of the land of Canaan. Moses has made it clear that fertility of the land is Yahweh's work, not the work of the so-called gods of the Canaanites. Forgetting God results in his being replaced by other idols or gods. The implication is that this is folly. God, Yahweh, is the sovereign provider. The worship of anything else is the worship of the provision, not the provider; the worship of the creation, not the creator. Idolatry is shortsighted and amnesiac. We need to see beyond the provision to the God who provides, keeping an attentive memory in faithful obedience.

Duane Christensen: We are in constant danger of forgetting God, and we need to find new ways to remember his mighty acts in times past. Christians as well as Jews need to find ways to own the great festival traditions of ancient Israel in our own time. These traditions are not the private property of any single religious community. They constitute the paradigm that enables the individual at any time or in any place to experience the redemptive grace of God and to make that experience both a living reality and the basis of their collective memory in times to come.

Daniel Block: While some question the place of **verses 19–20** in this chapter, the parallels between the structure of this unit and the preceding units argue for its integrity.

This interpretation is buttressed by the **structural and thematic links** between **6:10–15** and **chapter 8**, as illustrated by the following synopsis of the principal elements of each:

Heading	Clarification	6:10–15	8:1–20
The context of the test	In the land Yahweh had promised the ancestors	6:10a	8:1
The nature of the test	Limitless opportunity and prosperity	6:10b–11	8:7–10 ³
The wrong response to the test	Forgetting Yahweh	6:12	8:11–17
The correct response to the test	Fearing/remembering Yahweh	6:13–14	8:18
The final warning	Elimination from the land	6:15	8:19–20

TEXT: Deuteronomy 9:1 – 10:11

TITLE: REFUTATION OF SELF RIGHTEOUSNESS –
SURPRISING PERSISTENCE OF COVENANT PRIVILEGES

BIG IDEA:

**DESPITE ISRAEL'S HISTORY OF PROVOKING THE LORD TO ANGER,
COVENANT PRIVILEGES PERSIST**

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: Deuteronomy 9:1–10:11 is a self-contained literary subunit whose boundaries are marked by Moses' anticipation of crossing the Jordan and claiming the land in 9:1, and by Yahweh's command to Moses to lead the people away from Sinai/Horeb to go and possess the land he had sworn to their ancestors (10:11). The intervening material is held together by the motif of Israel's rebellion, the tone of tension between Israel and Yahweh, and the temporal phrase "*forty days and forty nights.*"

Eugene Merrill: From a literary standpoint Deut 9:1–10:11 is a **travel narrative** much like Deut 1:6–3:29, with which, in fact, it shares much in common. For example, both are introduced (1:1-5; 9:1-6) and concluded (3:29; 10:11) by a setting in the plains of Moab in anticipation of the conquest of Canaan. . .

In the previous passage, Moses's concern was that the people would forget Yahweh and take credit for their own prosperity. In this text, the issue is not the likelihood that Yahweh will be forgotten but that Israel will attribute whatever good he does for Israel to their own worthiness (von Rad 1966a:74). In a sense, **chapter 8** deals with salvation by works and **chapter 9** with salvation by self-righteousness. Neither mindset is cognizant of the need for divine grace.

Duane Christensen: In times past, when Moses left the people to receive the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, the people forsook YHWH and provoked him to anger—to the point that he decided to destroy them (9:12–14). But Moses interceded in their behalf and God spared them (9:26–29). Now Moses is about to leave them permanently, and he fears that the people will once again act presumptuously. . . This time he will not be there to intercede with God in their behalf.

Paul Barker: Moses has already dealt with one trap of pride into which Israel may fall, the pride of wealth and abundance. A more basic trap is now dealt with at some length. If Israel does cross over the Jordan and conquer "*nations larger and mightier than you, great cities fortified to the heavens, a strong and tall people, the offspring of the Anakim,*"[1] what a great victory and national celebration there will be! What a time for **national pride!**

Peter Craigie: In the previous chapter, the address centered on the contrast between **memory** and **forgetfulness**; a living memory of God aided in the maintenance of a living relationship with God, but forgetfulness undermined the continuity of love which was the basis of the covenant relationship. In this chapter there is a shift in emphasis, and now the **stubbornness** of Israel becomes the focal point of attention. Stubbornness can be a good quality, but it is not an unyielding, stubborn faithfulness to the covenant that is described in this portion of the address. Israel is described rather as being stubborn in its perversity, stubborn in its **continual provocation** of God.

I. (9:1-6) COVENANT PRIVILEGES NOT BASED ON ISRAEL'S MERIT

A. (:1-3) Guarantee of Conquering Superior Foes in the Land = Major Covenant Privilege

1. (9:1-2) Superior Foes Must be Defeated to Possess the Land

“Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, great cities fortified to heaven, 2 a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you know and of whom you have heard it said, 'Who can stand before the sons of Anak?’”

Eugene Merrill: Moses commenced this section on a note of greatest urgency and importance by his use of the imperative *ma*, “listen!” He did so three other times in Deuteronomy (**4:1**; **5:1**; **6:4**), each time either introducing a major section of the book or drawing attention to something of unusual significance (as the Shema in **6:4-5**).

2. (9:3) Subdued by God in Order to be Defeated by Israel

“Know therefore today that it is the LORD your God who is crossing over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you, so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the LORD has spoken to you.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Earlier the image of God as a **devouring fire** illustrated God's jealousy for Israel with regard to exclusive worship (**4:24**). Its connotation here remains similar: God has the power to consume those who in some way withstand him; but now that fire is turned on the inhabitants of the land. Israel is called upon to dispossess and destroy, but first it says God will defeat them and subdue them (**9:3**; cf. **7:1-2**; **11:23**; **19:1**; **31:3**). The two are treated as essentially one, but the focus is on **God's action**. As was proclaimed at the beginning of Deuteronomy and the beginning of their journey from Horeb, God is giving them the land in fulfillment of his promise (**1:8, 21**): Israel only has to take possession.

Peter Craigie: These opening verses set the scene by bringing together many themes that have already been mentioned earlier in Deuteronomy. The people were poised on the verge of the conquest. Beyond the river were more powerful nations, heavily fortified cities, and the gigantic Anakim. But the people knew that their strength and hope of victory lay in God's strength and in his word of promise. The contrast is

between the weakness of Israel and the strength of the Canaanites, but the latter are eclipsed by the power of God. In v. 3, the power of God is described in three ways:

*It is he who crosses ahead of you as a devouring fire;
It is he who will destroy them;
It is he who will humble them before you.*

There is thus a strong emphasis on the role of God in giving military victory to his people in the coming conquest, but nevertheless the people are not simply bystanders or observers.

B. (:4-6) Gift of the Land Not Based on Israel's Righteousness

1. (9:4-5a) Refutation of National Pride or Claiming Credit – Nations Deserve Defeat Due to Wickedness

“Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you. 5 It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God is driving them out before you,”

2. (:5b) Reason for Giving Israel the Land

“in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: God is giving Israel the land in order to fulfill the promise ... *to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob (9:6; cf. 1:8, 21, 35; 6:10, 18, 19, 23; 7:8, 12, 13; 8:1, 18; etc.)*. Obviously this does not resolve the problem. It simply raises the question to another level: why did God promise this to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? But it does place the giving of the land into a larger historical context, and it does draw attention to God's faithfulness.

Eugene Merrill: For one people to be chosen to salvation out of all other possible candidates is a mystery beyond human understanding.

3. (9:6) Reality of Israel's Stubbornness in Provoking God – Israel Does Not Deserve Victory

“Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people.”

Daniel Block: With the promise of Yahweh's confirmation of the covenant to the fathers in the background (8:18), Moses speaks of Yahweh's dispossessing the Canaanites and handing over their land to Israel. This raises the question: **Why should Yahweh be interested in the Israelites at all?** Moses answers this question first by

refuting any claim to merit as the basis for the divine favor, and then by highlighting the mercy of Yahweh in getting them to the Promised Land. Loosely following the form of a **disputation speech**, this section divides into two major paragraphs (vv. 1–3 and vv. 4b–6), separated by a hypothesis explaining Yahweh’s interest in Israel, cast as direct speech in the mouth of a hypothetical interlocutor (v. 4a). . .

If this were a pure disputation speech, Moses would have begun his response to the mistaken hypothesis by explicitly disputing the claim. He does indeed do so twice in this short paragraph—in **verse 5a** and then in **verse 6**. However, around these repudiations of the hypothesis, he weaves his counter-thesis, which consists of three arguments, each relating to a different party in this equation.

(1) **The Canaanites**. Yahweh’s act of driving out the Canaanites is not grounded in Israel’s righteousness but is a response to the wickedness of the Canaanites.

(2) **Yahweh**. Yahweh is driving out the Canaanites to fulfill the promise that he made to the patriarchs, listed here by name as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v. 5; cf. 1:8; 8:18).

(3) **Israel**. Saving the most devastating argument for last, Moses declares that far from claiming “*righteousness*” as their characteristic attribute, the Israelites are fundamentally “*a stiff-necked people*.” This idiom is based on the image of draft animals, especially yoked oxen, whose locus of power is perceived to be in the neck, but who often refuse to work as their master directs.

With his verdict of “*stiff-necked*” Moses pricks Israel’s balloon of inflated self-esteem and sets the stage for his portrayal of the Israelite’s fundamentally flawed character. They have nothing to commend themselves to God: no physical greatness (7:7), or power (8:17), or moral character. Their election, occupation of the land, and prosperity within it are all **gifts of divine grace**, granted to them in spite of their lack of merit.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The Canaanites may be guilty and deserve their fate, but in no way does this imply Israel’s innocence. In rejecting this corollary, Deuteronomy is indirectly questioning the explanation it just gave. Rejecting such a possible misinterpretation of election then becomes the major focus of the chapter. . .

The election claim remains, but its grounds ultimately are unfathomable. The passage’s focus on the stubborn and rebellious nature of Israel then serves to accentuate the graciousness and mercy of a God who elected Israel and gave it the land.

Peter Pett: The implications of this statement are huge. It is saying that it is not anything in them that brings them within Yahweh’s purposes, it is all of His **mercy**. He has chosen them because of His love for their fathers (**Deuteronomy 4:37; Deuteronomy 10:15**), and because of His sovereign love (**Deuteronomy 7:8**) and that is why they are acceptable before Him, and that is why He is bringing them into the land. It is all of His grace, His positive and unmerited love in action towards the undeserving. They have been delivered from Egypt by His gracious act, and they are entering the land by His

gracious act. All He requires of them is the faith to respond. Nevertheless the result must be that they become righteous in response to His love. That is the purpose of His bringing them into the land, and if they do not they will be thrust out of the land.

II. (9:7-24) COVENANT PRIVILEGES SURPRISING IN LIGHT OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY OF PROVOKING THE LORD

(:7) Introduction to Israel's History of Provoking the Lord

“Remember, do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day that you left the land of Egypt until you arrived at this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD.”

Daniel Block: Verse 7b begins the exposition of the thesis announced in verse 7a. In fact, it functions as a front bookend for this subsection, whose final counterpart occurs in verse 24. These two statements mirror each other both with respect to content and structure:

- A From the day you left Egypt until you arrived,
 - B you have been rebellious against the LORD. (9:7)
 - B' You have been rebellious against the LORD
- A' ever since I have known you. (9:24)

Peter Craigie: *Remember! Do not forget* (v. 7)—the emphatic call to remember is reminiscent of the theme of ch. 8, but it is prompted by the topic of vv. 4–6. If the people were ever foolish enough to claim that the gift of the land was a result of their righteousness, then they would be suffering from a severe case of religious amnesia. They are called, therefore, to remember the long history of their stubbornness and provocation of God, which had extended from the time of the Exodus from Egypt up till the present moment on the plains of Moab (v. 7b).

A. (9:8-21) Provoking the Lord at Horeb – Requiring Intercession of Moses

1. (:8-14) Anger of the Lord

a. (:8) Severity of the Provocation at Horeb

“Even at Horeb you provoked the LORD to wrath, and the LORD was so angry with you that He would have destroyed you.”

Duane Christensen: The recollection of events associated with Mount Sinai/Horeb here is similar to themes developed in Deut 1–3. The choice of Horeb is probably dictated by its central importance in the experience of nascent Israel. If there was ever a time when the people should have been faithful to their covenant God, it was during the events that actually produced that covenant. But *“even in Horeb you provoked YHWH to anger”* (9:8). The people's behavior at that time was such that God almost destroyed them; thus there was no way they could argue that the gift of the land was the reward for their righteous behavior.

- b. (:9) Preparation for Receiving the Two Tablets of the Covenant
“When I went up to the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the LORD had made with you, then I remained on the mountain forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water.”
- c. (:10-11) Reception of the Two Tablets of the Covenant
“And the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone written by the finger of God; and on them were all the words which the LORD had spoken with you at the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. 11 And it came about at the end of forty days and nights that the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.”
- d. (:12-14) Anger of the Lord at Israel’s Ungrateful Apostasy
 1) (:12) Abomination of the Molten Image
“Then the LORD said to me, ‘Arise, go down from here quickly, for your people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted corruptly. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them; they have made a molten image for themselves.’”

Peter Pett: Perhaps a word should be said here about the molten calf. It is doubtful if Aaron would have made it if he had seen it as an image of another god. Indeed the people at this stage probably did not want another god. What they wanted was the Yahweh Who had delivered them from Egypt brought down to earth, and not in that dreadful Mount. We know from elsewhere that bulls and other animals were often seen as the pedestal that supported the god. Hadad, Canaanite god of storm, is depicted as standing on a bull. Thus the idea may have been that here was the place where they could visualize the presence of their invisible God. But many, if not all, probably did see the calf as representing Yahweh, and that was always the danger.

However, Yahweh had forbidden the making of a molten image before which men bowed, for such an image regularly did indicate a god. Baal was regularly depicted as a bull. Thus what possibly began as a pedestal containing an invisible god would soon become a representation of God Himself. And that was unthinkable. Such blurring of the truth is always dangerous. It is very possible that much later worship of Baal by the Israelites began with their calling Yahweh ‘baali’, ‘my Lord’. Then they may have persuaded themselves, or each other, that they could see Baal images as Yahweh’s throne. It was not then long before many went the whole way and worshipped Baal.

This is probably also the explanation for the golden calves that Jeroboam would later make and set up in Bethel and Dan when he was desperate to prevent the people from seeking to Yahweh in Jerusalem (**1 Kings 12:26-30**).

2) (:13-14) Annihilation Proposed

“The LORD spoke further to me, saying, ‘I have seen this people, and indeed, it is a stubborn people. 14 Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.’”

2. (:15-21) Actions of Moses in Response

(chiastic structure)

a. (:15-17) Smashed the Tablets

1) (:15) Bringing the Tablets Down the Mountain

“So I turned and came down from the mountain while the mountain was burning with fire, and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands.”

2) (:16) Viewing the Abomination of the Molten Calf

“And I saw that you had indeed sinned against the LORD your God. You had made for yourselves a molten calf; you had turned aside quickly from the way which the LORD had commanded you.”

J. Vernon McGee: At the very moment when God was giving them the Commandments, they were turning from Him -- yet they were saying they would obey Him. People can be more phony in religion than in anything else. It seems to be something that is characteristic of the human nature. Even people who are really sincere are as phony as can be. We all need to pray the prayer of the psalmist, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (**Ps. 139:23-24**). Every child of God needs to pray this. Paul has this admonition for the believers: *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”* (**2Cor. 13:5**). Check whether you are in the faith or not. I believe and I preach the security of the believer, my friend. I believe that the believer is secure. But I also believe and preach the insecurity of the make-believer. There are a lot of make-believers. We need to search our hearts, every one of us.

3) (:17) Smashing the Tablets

“And I took hold of the two tablets and threw them from my hands, and smashed them before your eyes.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: With the mountain still ablaze (cf. **4:11, 24, 36; 5:22–27**) with the presence of God, Moses descends to the people. Once Moses sees the sin of the people for himself, he takes the drastic step of smashing the two tablets of the covenant. This is not a spontaneous act of uncontrolled temper but a **symbolic statement** representing what Israel has done to the covenant through its mutinous action. It announces to the people that they have violated the covenant. It may be compared to formally tearing to

shreds a contract that has been broken. The reference to doing this before your eyes suggests the **legal nature** of his action (Mayes: 200), but it also ties it to those many other events that Deuteronomy uses to teach Israel about God (cf. **1:30; 4:3, 9, 34; 6:22; 7:19**; etc.).

John Schultz: For Moses, the forty-day encounter with God, when the Ten Commandments were received, was, in more than one sense, a mountain top experience. Never before had any human being thus communed with God. A more striking contrast between the presence of the Almighty on top of the mountain in the midst of what appears to have been a volcanic eruption, and the riotous idol worship at the foot of the mountain, can hardly be imagined. More than mere common anger must have gripped Moses when he smashed the two stone tablets.

b. (:18-19) Interceded for the People

1) (:18) Humbling Himself by Fasting

“And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you had committed in doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke Him to anger.”

Peter Pett: Note the strong threefold phrase, ‘the sin that they had sinned in doing evil’. He wanted them to realise the grossness of their sin.

Eugene Merrill: The forty-day session with the Lord to which Moses referred was that in which he had received the revelation of the covenant in the first place (**Exod 24:18**; cf. **32:11-14**). It was appropriate, then, that he spend forty more days in confession and repentance as he awaited the renewal of the gracious covenant of the Lord (**Exod 34:28; Deut 9:9,11; 10:10**). The number forty throughout Scripture symbolizes testing and/or judgment (cf. **Gen 7:17; 8:6; Num 13:25; 14:33-34; 32:13; Deut 8:2; Ps 95:10; Matt 4:2**). In the present account it is noteworthy that Moses fasted throughout the time of covenant reaffirmation, an act that not only expressed his brokenhearted mediation for his people but his total preoccupation with spiritual things. This, too, was the concern of Christ, who, in agonizing trial in the Judean desert, reminded the tempter that “*man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*” (**Matt 4:4**; cf. **Deut 8:3**).

2) (:19) Fearing the Potential of God’s Wrath

“For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was wrathful against you in order to destroy you, but the LORD listened to me that time also.”

Daniel Block: In his recollection Moses highlights the transformation in the symbolism of Horeb from a place of grace and glory, of revelation and response, of covenant and promise, to a place of human rebellion and divine fury.

- c. (:20) Interceded for Aaron
“And the LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him; so I also prayed for Aaron at the same time.”
- d. (:21) Destroyed the Golden Calf
“And I took your sinful thing, the calf which you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it, grinding it very small until it was as fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the brook that came down from the mountain.”

Daniel Block: Moses concludes this phase of his report of the rebellion at Horeb by describing how he disposed of the calf itself. Referring to the “calf” as “*that sinful thing of yours*” (lit., “*your sin*”), he describes his actions against it with a rapid-fire sequence of verbs: He “*took*” it, “*burned it*,” “*ground it to power as fine as dust*,” and “*threw the dust*” into the stream flowing down the mountain, flushing it away as excrement. Josiah’s similar treatment of idolatrous objects in **2 Kings 23:12–16** suggest these were stereotypical procedures for dealing with offensive pagan objects (cf. **7:5**).

Gerald Gerbrandt: All detail is subservient to the central point of the section: Israel’s apostasy at the mountain is the foremost illustration of its persistent stubbornness. The story provides a permanent reminder that Israel should never understand its receiving the land as a reward for righteousness.

B. (:22) Provoking the Lord on Multiple Occasions

“Again at Taberah and at Massah and at Kibroth-hattaavah you provoked the LORD to wrath.”

Daniel Block: Moses offers four additional illustrations of their unrighteousness. For the first three he simply lists place names that serve as code words for different dimensions of their rebellious character. Taberah (“*Burning*”) symbolizes Yahweh’s response to Israel’s sour disposition; it illustrates both Yahweh’s destructive power as “*a consuming fire*” and the constant need for Moses’ intervention (**Num. 11:1–3**). Massah (“*Place of Testing*”) is a code word for Israel’s contentious disposition toward Moses (the place was also called Meribah, “*Place of Contention*”) and testiness toward Yahweh (**Ex. 17:1–7**). At Kibroth Hattaavah (“*Graves of Craving*”), the people had expressed their boredom with Yahweh’s provision by complaining about the manna (**Num. 11:4–34**), to which Yahweh responded by providing quail and punishing by plague. Regarding Kadesh Barnea, in **verse 23** Moses summarizes in a sentence what he had described in great detail in **1:26–43**. Here the Israelites’ refusal to enter the land from Kadesh Barnea was paradigmatic of their rebellion, unbelief, and disobedience (cf. **1:26, 32**).

John Schultz: The first major failure was at Horeb, where the people made the Golden Calf. Then there is mention of incidences at Taberah, at Massah and at Kibroth Hattaavah. At Taberah the people complained about their hardship, and by way of punishment a fire broke out in the camp. The incident at Massah (and Meriba)

pertained to the people complaining about a lack of water. At Kibroth Hattaavah the people craved for meat, and were fed such an abundance of quail, that it lasted them for a whole month.

C. (:23) Provoking the Lord at Kadesh-Barnea

“And when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, ‘Go up and possess the land which I have given you,’ then you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God; you neither believed Him nor listened to His voice.”

(:24) Summary of Israel’s History of Provoking the Lord – Requiring Intercession of Moses

“You have been rebellious against the LORD from the day I knew you.”

Patrick Miller: The issue of innocence and guilt, righteousness and wickedness, in these verses is not an issue of the relation of Israel to “these nations” but of each of them to God. Even the victor who is favored by God can claim no special merit; quite the contrary. The theological conclusion of these verses, therefore, is similar to the argument and claim of Paul in **Romans 1–3** that all are under the power of sin, Jew no less than Gentile (**3:9**). Although he does not allude to this passage, Paul found basis for that conviction all through the Old Testament. He knew that the torah, the divine instruction, is to be kept (**Rom. 3:31**) and that the keeping of it is the responsibility of the people of God in their relationship with God. But the story will always show a failure to do so that vitiates any claims to righteousness.

Peter Pett: But the point of bringing all this out here was to disillusion the people about their own righteousness. Through God’s grace He had accepted them as His people. But it was not because they deserved it. If it had been left to their righteousness they would not be there. Let them then take to heart that they deserved nothing. They were not worthy. It was all of grace.

III. (9:25 - 10:1) COVENANT PRIVILEGES AND CONQUEST MISSION PERSIST DUE TO GOD’S GRACE, POWER AND FAITHFULNESS

A. (9:25-29) Intercession of Moses to Maintain Covenant Privileges – Based on 4 Arguments

(:25-26a) Intercession of Moses Introduced

“So I fell down before the LORD the forty days and nights, which I did because the LORD had said He would destroy you. 26 And I prayed to the LORD, and said,”

1. (:26b) Argument #1 – Redemption Cannot End in Destruction – Emphasis on God’s Power

“O Lord God, do not destroy Thy people, even Thine inheritance, whom Thou hast redeemed through Thy greatness, whom Thou hast brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand.”

2. (:27) Argument #2 -- Remember the Believing Patriarchs –
Emphasis on God’s Mercy

*“Remember Thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;
do not look at the stubbornness of this people
or at their wickedness or their sin.”*

3. (:28) Argument #3 -- Reputation of the Lord at Stake –
Emphasis on God’s Faithfulness

*“Otherwise the land from which Thou didst bring us may say,
“Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land
which He had promised them and because He hated them
He has brought them out to slay them in the wilderness.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: Regardless of the justification God might have in destroying Israel, Moses argues, it will be interpreted either as failure (Because the Lord was not able to bring them into the land) or as a sign of God’s duplicity (because he hated them, he has brought them out to let them die in the wilderness) (v. 28). The first challenges God’s sovereignty, the second questions God’s integrity. God’s very reputation is at stake, Moses charges.

4. (:29) Argument #4 -- Relationship Commitment as God’s Inheritance –
Emphasis on God’s Power

*“Yet they are Thy people, even Thine inheritance,
whom Thou hast brought out by Thy great power
and Thine outstretched arm.”*

Daniel Block: The chapter division between **chapters 9 and 10** creates a false impression, inviting readers to separate these two chapters from each other. However, these parts belong together as cause and effect, or action and response.

Peter Craigie: The prayer of Moses expresses his understanding and knowledge of God: the justice of God is balanced by the mercy of God, and it was to God’s mercy that Moses appealed. But the prayer expresses boldness, for it involved the attempt, in humility, to turn aside the wrath of a righteous God. Thus the recollection of the prayer in Moses’ address served to bring a sobering influence on his audience; in the past, there had been moments when the whole future of the people of Israel had been in the balance. In the present, therefore, the people were to remember the past mercies of God and to commit themselves wholeheartedly in allegiance to their Lord.

B. (10:1-5) Covenant Renewed

1. (:1-3) Preparations Commanded and Completed

a. (:1-2) Preparations Commanded

*“At that time the LORD said to me, ‘Cut out for yourself two
tablets of stone like the former ones, and come up to Me on the
mountain, and make an ark of wood for yourself. 2 And I will*

write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered, and you shall put them in the ark.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The new element is the introduction of the *ark of wood*, as it is called here. This is the first mention of the ark in Deuteronomy. Within Deuteronomy the ark functions exclusively as a container for the two tablets containing the Decalogue (cf. **1 Kings 8:9**), the content of the Horeb covenant (cf. **4:13**). As such, it fulfills a role similar to the religious shrines of that day in which copies of political treaties would be kept (**Craigie 1976: 199**).

Michael Grisanti: As **Wright** (Deuteronomy, 143) points out: The point of **Deut. 10:1–5** is not to give a detailed physical description of the ark or to explain every aspect of its religious significance, but rather, in the context of **ch. 9**, to see its construction for the purpose of storing the new tablets of the Law as tangible proof of the forgiveness of the people and the renewal of the covenant by God’s grace.

Peter Pett: The covenant having been broken we come now to the renewing of the broken covenant, followed by the renewal of the priesthood and the replacing of the firstborn sons of failed Israel with the Levites who had proved their worth. The first part of the chapter is a miscellany of different activities importantly involved in the renewing of the broken covenant and the provision for its protection once renewed. It includes the renewing of the priesthood and the appointment of the Levites, put together in no particular chronological order in a typical speech approach. The purpose was to indicate that the renewed covenant was finally prepared, sealed, delivered and put under the direct protection of Yahweh with the priesthood renewed and new servants appointed for the Tabernacle. he is concerned with what happened, not the order in which it happened.

b. (:3) Preparations Completed

“So I made an ark of acacia wood and cut out two tablets of stone like the former ones, and went up on the mountain with the two tablets in my hand.”

2. (:4) Ten Commandments Inscribed on the New Tablets

“And He wrote on the tablets, like the former writing, the Ten Commandments which the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly; and the LORD gave them to me.”

3. (:5) Two Tablets Placed in the Ark of the Covenant

“Then I turned and came down from the mountain, and put the tablets in the ark which I had made; and there they are, as the LORD commanded me.”

Duane Christensen: The renewal of the covenant relationship at Horeb following the incident with the golden calf illustrates the graciousness of God, who has made possible

the survival of the people of Israel throughout their long journey in the wilderness. The ark of the covenant is the visible symbol of God's presence, and a constant reminder of the covenant obligations that are based on the contents of the two stone tablets within that container. The death of Aaron sets the stage for the death of his brother Moses as well, and the beginning of a new era in the life of God's chosen people.

C. (10:6-9) **Aside: Death of Aaron and Role of the Levites**

1. (:6-7) Death of Aaron and Succession of Eleazar

“(Now the sons of Israel set out from Beeroth Bene-jaakan to Moserah. There Aaron died and there he was buried and Eleazar his son ministered as priest in his place. From there they set out to Gudgodah; and from Gudgodah to Jotbathah, a land of brooks of water.”

Michael Grisanti: Although there is a slight difference between this listing of sites and that found in **Numbers 33:30–33**, that difference need not be attributed to variant traditions of Israel's itinerary during the wilderness wanderings. Instead, since Israel probably passed through this region repeatedly during their almost four decades of wanderings, they likely visited these sites in different sequences. Most of these sites cannot be identified with any certainty.

2. (:8-9) Role of the Levites

“At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to serve Him and to bless in His name until this day. 9 Therefore, Levi does not have a portion or inheritance with his brothers; the LORD is his inheritance, just as the LORD your God spoke to him.)”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Two short passages **interrupt** the narrative at this point. The first (vv. 6–7) is a fragment from a travel report (cf. **Num 33:30–33**). Its reference to Aaron dying at Moserah (cf. **Num 33:37–38**) confirms that the intercession Moses made on his behalf (**Deut 9:20**) was fruitful. Not only did he live, but also his son succeeded him. God's forgiveness is again demonstrated.

Perhaps triggered by the reference to the ark (vv. 1–5), a second insertion reports the designation of the tribe of Levi for special service to God (vv. 8–9). According to **Exodus 32:25–29** it was the Levites' zeal in punishing those who had succumbed to the temptation of the calf that occasioned their designation to God's service. The background is omitted here, but the commission remains.

Peter Craigie: According to Moses, Yahweh himself is the inheritance of the Levites (**10:9**). In other words, the Levites would live by participating in that which was given directly to the Lord. Though they would not have the physical security derived from their own personal property, they had the high honor of directly serving the Lord on behalf of their fellow Israelites.

Duane Christensen: vv. 1-7

A Moses is told to replace the tablets and make an ark to hold them **10:1**

B God promises to write the words again on the tablets **10:2**

C Moses made the ark, took the tablets and went up the mountain **10:3**

X YHWH wrote the Ten Words and gave them to Moses 10:4

C' Moses went down the mountain **10:5a**

B' Moses put the tablets in the ark he had made **10:5b**

A' Israel journeyed on, Aaron died and was replaced by Eleazar **10:6-7**

Daniel Block: The narrator summarizes the professional privileges/duties of the Levitical priests with four infinitive purpose clauses:

(1) *“to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD,”* which means to serve as custodians of the tablets inside, and by implication of the covenant itself;

(2) *“to stand before the LORD,”* which elsewhere represents official court language authorizing entrance into the presence of the king (cf. **Dan. 1:4**);

(3) *“to minister”* to Yahweh, a reference to the cultic service they would render by presenting offerings and sacrifices on the altar, maintaining the tabernacle/temple as Yahweh’s residence (**Num. 18:1-6; Ezek. 44:11**), and resolving disputes on God’s behalf (**Deut. 21:5**); and

(4) *“to pronounce blessings”* before the people in the name of Yahweh, which probably involved pronouncing the “Aaronic benediction” of **Numbers 6:24-26** (cf. **Lev. 9:22; 1 Chr. 23:13**).

D. (:10:10-11) Conquest Mission Initiated

1. (:10) Destruction Averted

“I, moreover, stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights like the first time, and the LORD listened to me that time also; the LORD was not willing to destroy you.”

Peter Craigie: The concluding verse of the section emphasizes the principal theme, namely, that Moses’ prayer had been answered, the people had not been destroyed, and the covenant relationship between God and his people was still intact, only through the grace of God.

2. (:11) Destination Pursued

“Then the LORD said to me, ‘Arise, proceed on your journey ahead of the people, that they may go in and possess the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.’”

Eugene Merrill: Moses had come to learn that God's irrefragable promises prevail no matter what; for should they not, he himself would lose his reputation and glory among the nations and, in fact, would deny himself (**Exod 32:11-14**). On the basis of his very

person and promises, therefore, he had commanded Moses to lead the people on to the land he had promised their fathers to give them (v. 11).

David Guzik: Israel's rebellion at Mount Sinai with the golden calf was significant; it was no small matter. Yet God was not done with them. After they came back to His word and came through His priesthood, it was time to move on. God had a place to take them and they had to get about the business of getting there. That they may go in and possess the land: Getting right with God after a time of rebellion must always come to a place of progress again. It does no good to come back to the word, come through God's priesthood in Jesus, and then remain stuck in the same place. God wants us to move on with Him, and when we are walking right with God again, we will go in and possess the land.

Michael Grisanti: The whole section ends, as it began in **9:1**, with the onward movement of the people into the land of promise. In the light of all that has come between the beginning and the end of this section, this should be a chastened people about to move into the land; a people with every confidence in their God, but with no illusions about themselves.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How quick are we to try to claim credit for something that God has accomplished – as if our righteousness earned the blessing?
- 2) How can you use this account to help present the doctrine of election to someone who has doubts that this is how God operates?
- 3) In what area of your life do you have a pattern of provoking the Lord?
- 4) Why should we never give up on the ministry of intercession – even when it seems like we will have no hope of success?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gerald Gerbrandt: Outline

Explaining God, Characterizing Israel, 9:1–6

9:1–3	God, the Devouring Fire, Crosses Over before Israel
9:4–6	Justification: Not Because of Righteousness, for Israel Is Stubborn

Israel's Stubbornness Epitomized at Horeb, 9:7–10:11

9:7–8	Introduction
9:9–14	Moses on Horeb
9:15–29	Moses Intercedes on Behalf of the People
10:1–5	The Covenant Renewed
10:6–9	Interruption: Death of Aaron, Designation of Levites
10:10–11	Return to the Journey

Daniel Block: This text offers some profound **lessons on prayer**. Those who pray with firm trust in God will be prepared for three possible outcomes of their prayer.

(1) Sometimes prayer is the process whereby external circumstances are changed. I will never forget the motto my parents hung above the dining room table in the farmhouse in which I grew up: “Prayer changes things.” It certainly did for Peter in **Acts 12:1–17**. In answer to the people’s prayer Peter walked out of prison a free man.

(2) Sometimes prayer is the process whereby the will of the person praying is changed and brought into conformity with God’s will. God does not always answer prayer the way we want him to. Moses had recounted his own earlier bitter experience of this fact (**Deut. 3:23–29**).

(3) But sometimes prayer may be the process whereby the will of God is brought into conformity with the will of the person praying. The narrative of **Exodus 32** reports that in response to Moses’ intercession on behalf of his people, Yahweh “*relented*” and withdrew his threat to destroy them (**32:14**).

But lest we be seduced into thinking that prayer is simply a formula by which we manipulate God to get anything we want (like the genii in Aladdin’s lamp), it is important to emphasize that in this case, Moses actually sacrificed his own self-interest in the interests of his people. Furthermore, in his forty-day wrestling bout with God, his single interest was the **will and reputation of God**, which he was convinced would be best served by sparing the people who had rebelled against him rather than starting over with Moses. When wicked people turn from their sin in full repentance (**Jonah 3**) or when a righteous intercessor pleads with God on behalf of sinners, God’s fury is turned back and his grace is extended to undeserving people. This is one more exhilarating dimension of the gospel according to Moses.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Deuteronomy’s account of Israel’s sin at Mount Horeb does not follow a neat chronological sequence, thus making reconstruction difficult. The five references to *forty days and forty nights* (**9:9, 11, 18, 25; 10:10**) only complicate the picture. Likely these references are to two (or at most three) separate forty-day periods. The first and second references (**9:9, 11**) refer to the forty days Moses is on the mountain receiving the covenant from God, as described in **9:9–14**. During this period the people construct the calf. At **verse 15** Moses descends from the mountain, sees the sin of the people, prays to God on behalf of the people for forty days (**9:18, 25**), and then destroys the calf (v. **21**). This is described in **9:15–21**, with **9:25–29** presenting the

prayer noted briefly in **9:18–19**, now in greater detail. The last reference to forty days (**10:10**) may be a third mention of this same forty-day period of prayer, adding the information that it took place upon the mountain. Or it may refer to a third forty-day period following the destruction of the calf, when Moses returns to the mountain to receive the second set tablets.

Warren Wiersbe: Self-Confident People Who Failed - A wealthy farmer (**Luke 12:13–21**). A courageous apostle (**Matt. 26:31–35**). A mighty ruler (**Dan. 4**). A self-satisfied church (**Rev. 3:14–22**). Some successful businessmen (**James 4:13–17**). All those people failed. They apparently did not take these words to heart: “*Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him*” (**Prov. 26:12**).

J. Vernon McGee: I want you to notice that Moses knew God. The psalmist says, “*He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel*” (**Ps. 103:7**). The children of Israel saw the mountain smoke, they saw the judgment of God, they saw His glory, but they did not know Him. Moses knew Him! Moses knew His ways.

Moses understood two things about God which are revealed here. They are paradoxical, but they are not contradictory.

Moses knew that **God hates sin**. May I say to you that we today do not have the faintest conception of how God hates sin and how He intends to punish it. Moses went down on his face before God and fasted and cried out to God for forty days and forty nights! Why? Because Moses knew the ways of God. He knew how God hates sin. The average Christian today does not seem to realize how God hates sin in his life. My friend, God never ignores a sin we commit. God will deal with sin in your life and in my life. . .

Moses also knew the **mercy of God**. Moses comes to God because he trusts in His mercy. God will punish sin, but, my friend, we do not comprehend how wonderful He is. He is so gracious. He extends mercy to the sinner. He has extended His mercy to you, I am sure. I know He has to me.

Paul Barker: To sum up, **Deuteronomy 9:1–10:11** takes away any possible grounds for the people of God to think that God’s amazing acts are motivated by their worth or value. The Israelites are no better than anyone else. They are sinners needing mercy. In this light we realize how astonishingly good God really is. We can offer him nothing at all to contribute to or warrant his attention and salvation. Yet, because of his boundless love, he considers us worth saving through the death of Jesus. We can never finish plumbing the depths of divine love.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 10:12 – 11:1

TITLE: PLEDGING TOTAL ALLEGIANCE TO THE GOD OF THE COVENANT

BIG IDEA:

TIMES OF TRANSITION REQUIRE A RENEWED PLEDGE TO TOTAL ALLEGIANCE TO THE GOD OF THE COVENANT

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: The elevated style of **Deuteronomy 10:12–11:1** suggests that Moses’ second address is nearing a climax. As in **chapter 4**, Moses signals the climactic moment with “*and now*” (*we ‘attâ*). He is about to declare the moral and spiritual implications of the privilege of covenant relationship that he has been preaching to this point of the second address. Apart from this rhetorical marker, the boundaries of this unit are demarked by an opening question (**10:12a**) and the summary answer in **11:1**.

Moses begins his reflection on the practical implications of the covenant with a **question**: In view of the grace that Yahweh has lavished on his people, **what does he require of Israel?** And with this question we realize that we are about to encounter the heart of the covenant—in Jesus’ words, “*the more important matters of the law*” (**Matt. 23:23**).

Michael Grisanti: Yahweh makes it absolutely clear that all the detailed requirements God has Moses present to the covenantal people have a driving purpose. Yahweh requires one thing of his chosen people: to live in wholehearted and undiluted **allegiance** to him.

Eugene Merrill: The structure of the passage reveals an enveloping pattern in which injunctions to obey God (**vv. 12-13; 20–22**) embrace the corollary command to exhibit proper care and concern for other people, especially the socially and economically disadvantaged (**vv. 14-19**). The motive clause and that which binds the whole together is **v. 17**, a confession of the sovereignty of God and of his justice.

Jack Deere: Having shown the impossibility of self-dependence (**chap. 8**) and the impossibility of spiritual pride in light of her rebellious history (**9:1 – 10:11**), Moses called Israel to exercise her only option for survival; **total commitment** to the Lord.

Earl Kalland: This exhortation, most eloquent in order and content, reminiscent and somewhat repetitive of **chapter 6**, fittingly climaxes this section, which precedes the giving of specific covenant-treaty stipulations that Moses held to be especially important as the people faced entrance into the land.

Nathan LeMahieu: Moses’ life will soon be over, but before it is, he addresses the people who are about to cross over into the Promised Land after 40 hard years of

wandering in the wilderness. They had pledged their allegiance to the Lord back at Mt Sinai decades earlier, but now as they transition to their lives in a new land it's time to **renew that pledge** – are you in or are you out? And we see this kind of dichotomy throughout Deuteronomy. It says *'I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse. Which one is it going to be?'* And frankly we experience many of these same checkpoints or transitions in our lives. . . . And it's useful at all these times to remind ourselves of Moses' message to the people here in what basically amounts to his last lecture. And his message is essentially this: as we move on from one stage of life to another, we must be willing to pledge our allegiance to God, and specifically to God alone. We must be willing to pledge our allegiance, our unshared loyalty, to God alone. <https://nathanlemaheiu.weebly.com/sermon-on-deut-1012-22.html>

(:10:12a) COVENANT QUESTION

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you,”

Fundamental question that God asks of every single individual.

I. (10:12b-13) COVENANT REQUIREMENTS – COMPREHENSIVE NATURE OF OUR ALLEGIANCE TO GOD

A. Fear the Lord -- Reverence

“but to fear the LORD your God,”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Fearing God is not a state of terror but arises from a full recognition of the awesome nature of God and the gravity of the human relationship with God. It does not paralyze but leads to trust and action.

David Thompson: God expects His people to fear Him. As we have already pointed out, this is a critical key to a right relationship with God in both the O.T. and the N.T.

- 1) **Psalm 33:10** - fearing God causes God's protective eye to be on one who fears Him.
- 2) **Proverbs 1:7** - fearing God is the beginning of knowledge.
- 3) **Proverbs 9:10** - fearing God is the beginning of wisdom.
- 4) **Romans 3:18** - not fearing God is the mark of one unsaved heading to eternal destruction.
- 5) **Romans 11:20** - fearing God is the key to a right grace relationship with God.
- 6) **II Corinthians 7:1** - fearing God is a critical key to holiness.
- 7) **Colossians 3:22** - fearing God is the key to pleasing God in your work.
- 8) **I Peter 2:17** - fearing God is the will of God.
- 9) **Revelation 19:5** - fearing God is the key to praising God even in heaven.

There is a lot at stake in fearing God. No wonder it is twice mentioned to His people concerning His expectations.

B. Walk in All His Ways -- Lifestyle

“to walk in all His ways”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Psalm 119 opens with a beatitude that introduces this same metaphor: *“Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways”* (vv. 1–3). The psalm regularly returns to this image of *“the way”* (e.g., vv. 27, 59, 105). Perhaps influenced by Deuteronomy, Jesus uses a similar image, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life”* (John 14:6).

John Schultz: Walking in God’s ways, means walking where He walks. We read in Revelation about the ones who are gathered with Jesus on Mount Zion: *“They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.”* It means following His example. The Apostle Peter says: *“Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”* Because of the Incarnation, walking in His ways has become much easier for us, than it was for the Israelites of old.

C. Love Him -- Priority

“and love Him,”

David Thompson: He wants His people delighting in Him.

D. Serve the Lord Wholeheartedly -- Worship

“and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,”

E. Obey the Lord – Submission and Dependence

“and to keep the LORD’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?”

Daniel Block: The common denominator is the importance of **allegiance** to Yahweh as the God of the covenant. The list consists of responses that involve fundamental dispositions (*fear, love*) and active expressions (*walk, serve, keep*). Attitude and action are interrelated. Fear is primary and love (covenant commitment) is at the core. Without these, the actions are legalistic efforts to gain the favor of God. Without the actions, fear and love are useless and dead.

Michael Grisanti: Concerning the five verbs that follow, **Wright** (ibid., 145) suggests that this sentence “is like a five-note musical chord. Each note has its own distinct tone, but taken all together they sound forth in a harmony that expresses the whole content of Deuteronomy and the Torah.”

These five verbs demonstrate the multifaceted expectation of God. They thoroughly show that God expects much more than external obedience to a disparate collection of laws. God demands the kind of obedience that affects every part of a person’s being.

II. (10:14-15) COVENANT MOTIVATION = SOVEREIGN AND GRACIOUS ELECTION – PRIVILEGE OF OUR ALLEGIANCE TO GOD

A. (:14) Transcendent Dominion of God

“Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it.”

Eugene Merrill: The introduction to the horizontal demands of the covenant is couched in an appeal to recognize the absolute uniqueness and dominion of the Lord, he who is Lord of heaven and earth (v. 14) and who, therefore, has the authority to elect whom he will to salvation and service (v. 15). The phrase *“highest heavens”* does not suggest some cosmological scheme in which there are levels of heavenly realm, but it is merely a Hebrew construction indicating totality. As Creator, the Lord obviously rules over all things and disposes of them as he will.

John Schultz: The way the NIV puts it, there is a contrast between God’s rule over the universe, and His love for the patriarchs and Israel. The use of the little word *“yet”* emphasizes this. It is a human tendency to think that greatness entails a lack of interest in smallness. We picture God as being too great to be bothered by details, because that is the way we would act if we became great. Jesus gives us a clearer picture of God’s greatness, when He tells His disciples: *“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”* The God who created the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it, is also the God who created the atoms. He is the God of the infinite great, and the infinite small. As human beings we are, probably, somewhere in the middle of the two extremes. God is not too great to love, and we are not too small to be loved by Him.

Nathan LeMahieu: A second aspect of pledging allegiance to God is that it is a privilege rather than a burden. Look at vv14 and 15. We have this paradox set up. On the one hand we see God’s cosmic ownership of everything. To him belong the heavens, even the highest heavens. In other words, everything imaginable belongs to God. But on the other hand, God chooses insignificant Israel out of all the nations to be his people. . .

On one hand we need to avoid **universalism** that says there are no distinctions – everybody’s the same – it doesn’t matter what you believe. On the other hand we have to avoid **exclusivism** which says, God only cares about me. The rest of those people? They don’t matter.

B. (:15) Sovereign and Gracious Election of Israel

“Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The present passage again affirms the fact of election, relates it to God's love, but then places it within a context of God's sovereignty over all. All creation belongs to God—everything, whether in the highest heavens or anywhere on earth. The phrase heaven and the heaven of heavens is probably to be understood as a form of the superlative (cf. **1 Kings 8:27; Ps 148:4**). No further effort at explanation is attempted. God's dominion over all gives God the right to elect whomever God wishes (cf. **Neh 9:6–7; Isa 45:12–13; Jer 27:5–6**). One is reminded of the book of Job. After repeated efforts by Job to have God explain himself, God responds by pointing to the mystery and greatness of creation. Finally Job can only accept his lot and repent of his audacity (**Job 42:1–6**). God's sovereignty means that Israel's election cannot be fully explained. Its wonder and mystery can only be accepted, with the responsibility to live accordingly.

Duane Christensen: Though God is presented as a transcendent cosmic power to whom "*belong the heavens and the heaven of heavens [and] the earth and all that is in it,*" he is also presented here as a personal God who has "fallen in love" with Israel, as **Thomas Mann** translated the phrase "*the Lord set his heart in love on your ancestors*" (**Mann** [1995] 101). That love is the basis of the election of Israel when God "*chose their descendants after them, namely you above all peoples*" (v 15). Events of the more distant past, when the election of Israel was promised to the patriarchal fathers and sealed in God's covenant at Mount Sinai, are here linked to the present moment on the plains of Moab—"as at this day."

III. (10:16-19) COVENANT GOAL = IMPARTIAL JUSTICE AND LOVE – RADICAL NATURE OF OUR ALLEGIANCE TO GOD

A. (:16) Transformation of the Heart Required

"Circumcise then your heart, and stiffen your neck no more."

The actions demanded of us will not come naturally. We need a transformed heart so that we can model our behavior after the standard of righteousness which God has established and demonstrated.

Michael Grisanti: Physical circumcision constituted an outward sign of covenantal allegiance and conformity. Consequently, circumcision of the heart would signify the internal commitment to covenantal allegiance and conformity. Rather than resisting his will, God wanted his children to submit gladly to it.

Eugene Merrill: Throughout the Old Testament "*stiff-necked*" is a metaphor for stubbornness and recalcitrance (cf. **Job 9:4; 2 Chr 30:8; 36:13; Neh 9:16-17, 29; Jer 7:26; 17:23; 19:15**). In the present context it denotes a lack of compliance to the covenant requirements.

Jack Deere: The proper response to their election by the sovereign Lord was to circumcise their hearts (cf. **30:6**). An uncircumcised heart means a will that is hardened against God's commands. It is another way of saying the person is *stiff-necked* or

stubborn (cf. **9:6, 13; 31:27**). Thus the command to circumcise their hearts assumes that human hearts are naturally rebellious and need correction. Though human hearts are slow to change, Moses warned the nation that no bribe or anything less than an **inward transformation** could satisfy the Lord, who is *the great God*.

B. (:17-18) Transcendent Attributes of the Supreme God Set the Standard

1. (:17a) Personal Majesty

“For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God”

Daniel Block: Moses combines these **transcendent attributes** of Yahweh with four verbal declarations of his **immanence** (cf. **Ex. 33:18–34:8**). He begins with a double-barreled, thesis-type statement: Yahweh “*shows no partiality and accepts no bribes*” (**Deut. 10:17**).

Peter Craigie: God is God in the fullest and most complete sense and is absolute Lord or Sovereign. But this dimension of the nature of God is beyond the comprehension of man—he can only worship God in awe. The transcendent and almighty God, however, also revealed himself to man: the great, mighty, and fearful God. The language employed here to describe God directly implies the God of the Exodus,⁸ the one who had participated in human events specifically on behalf of his chosen people. Who is impartial—rendered literally, the Hebrew idiom is “... *who does not lift up faces*.” The emphasis of the verse is now directly upon the relationship of God to man; God shows no partiality to man on the basis of his social or economic standing in the community. What God requires of man is a proper attitude of heart (**10:16**).

2. (:17b-18) Practical Righteousness = Impartial Justice and Love

*“who does not show partiality, nor take a bribe.
He executes justice for the orphan and the widow,
and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: In the ancient Near East, justice was the responsibility of the king (cf. **Ps 72**). The king had responsibility for ensuring that justice be fair (*is not partial and takes no bribe*, **Deut 10:17**; cf. **1:17**) and that the orphan, the widow, and the stranger—three elements of society that in the usual process have least access to the judicial system—be protected. The reference to God supplying these people with food and clothing highlights that not only does God protect them but also goes the next step, providing them with essentials for life. God’s greatness is represented most particularly by this concern and help for the poor. To live with a circumcised heart thus means to *love the stranger* (RSV, *sojourner*): after all, God cares for the stranger, and the people of Israel experienced this care when they were strangers in the land of Egypt. This last directive is especially interesting because here the stranger is not an Israelite but a foreigner, possibly even a descendant of the original inhabitants of the land.

Eugene Merrill: The structure of the passage reveals an enveloping pattern in which injunctions to obey God (**Deuteronomy 10:12-13; Deuteronomy 20-22**) embrace the

corollary command to exhibit proper care and concern for other people, especially the socially and economically disadvantaged (**Deuteronomy 10:14-19**). The motive clause and that which binds the whole together is **Deuteronomy 10:17**, a confession of the sovereignty of God and of his justice."

C. (:19) Take Care of the Aliens

"So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."

Daniel Block: Moses' reference to the alien in **verse 18** triggers a practical exhortation in **verse 19**. Because the Israelites know what it is like to be an alien, they should be especially sensitive to the plight of aliens in their midst (cf. **Lev 19:33-34**). As in his modification of the Sabbath command of the Decalogue (**Deut. 5:14-15**), Moses' appeal for compassion by the Israelites is based on a memory of their own experience as aliens (cf. **Ex. 22:21[20]; 23:9**).

IV. (10:20 – 11:1) COVENANT REQUIREMENTS REPEATED – COMPREHENSIVE NATURE OF OUR ALLEGIANCE TO GOD

A. (10:20a) Fear the Lord

"You shall fear the LORD your God;"

Stephen Felker: So the starting place in a healthy relationship to God is **reverence**. Just about everything else flows from a recognition of the absolute **greatness** of God and the fact that he should be feared and referenced. Do you fear and reverence God? The fear of God leads to repentance of sin, a fundamental requirement of a right relationship with God. **Prov. 8:13** says, *"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil...."* Such fear and awe of God also motivates one to worship God and obey God.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/1021191534150.pdf>

B. (10:20b) Serve Him

"you shall serve Him"

C. (10:20c) Cling to Him

"and cling to Him,"

David Thompson: The word *"cling"* (*dabaq*) is a word that means God wants His people glued to Him. He wants His people attached and firmly adhering to their relationship with Him (**William Gesenius**, Hebrew Lexicon, p. 185). God wants His people totally cemented in their relationship with Him.

Bruce Hurt: **SELF SUFFICIENCY** is the arrogant assumption that I can go it alone... without God. **CLINGING** is the humble acknowledgment that I must be intimately connected to God for life to make sense and to be worth living. In Joshua's admonition to **CLING** to God he gives this warning:

"If you ever go back and CLING to the rest of these nations (i.e. the world and its values)... (they) shall be to you as: A snare and a trap... A whip on your sides... Thorns in your eyes... until you perish from off this good land which the Lord your God has given you." (Joshua 23:12)

Charlie Garrett: When Naomi told Ruth to return to her people, it says that Ruth clung (*dabaq*) to her. She would not let go, and she promised to never let go, but to remain with her always. It is this closeness that is implied in the words now.

D. (10:20d) Swear by His Name

"and you shall swear by His name."

David Thompson: God's people need to take God's name seriously. God's people need to take His name as being sacred. Oaths should be taken in His name. His names should always be revered.

John Schultz: The taking of oaths in the Name of YHWH, in vs. 21 is a repeat of **ch. 6:13**. It re-emphasizes that our relationship with God rules our inter-human relations. Swearing by the Name of the Lord pertains specifically to commerce, and justice.

(10:21-22) Motivation

1. (:21) Covenant Relationship

"He is your praise and He is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you which your eyes have seen."

Peter Pett: But He is also the One fitted for praise. He is totally praiseworthy, and is to be the object of their worship. And the reason that they should praise Him is because He is their God, the very God Who has done great and terrible things for them which their eyes have seen. Many of the oldest had been in Egypt as small children and had seen His power revealed there, and the great and terrible things that He had done, and even more of them had seen what He had done since in the wilderness, including especially the defeat of the Amorite kings, Sihon and Og, and their territories.

2. (:22) Covenant Blessing

"Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven."

Eugene Merrill: Most remarkable of all, perhaps, was his multiplication of his people from the seventy who descended into Egypt with Jacob (cf. **Gen 46:27**) to the multitude so numerous as to be compared to the stars in the sky (v. 22; cf. **1:10**), a direct fulfillment of the promise to the patriarchal ancestors (**Gen 15:5; 22:17**). A God so faithful to his promise and with sufficient resources to bring it to pass was surely worthy of his people's wholehearted commitment to the covenant he had graciously made with them.

E. (11:1a) Love the Lord

“You shall therefore love the LORD your God,”

F. (:11:1b) Obey the Lord

“and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How is it possible to both **fear** and **love** the Lord? Are we still called to fear the Lord in NT times?
- 2) What aspects of this passage focus on the **transcendence** of God and what aspects on the **immanence** of God?
- 3) Why so much **repetition** in the book of Deuteronomy?
- 4) How does the command to **love strangers** impact your approach to immigrants?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: Moral Obedience. With the opening question Moses raises a subject that surfaces frequently in the Old Testament. His answers should put to rest a common misperception that under the old covenant religion was an **external matter** focused on sacrifices and other forms of external cultic service. Moses’ call to fear and love Yahweh, to walk in his ways and serve him, and to keep all his commands places the center of gravity on **faith** and **covenant commitment** to Yahweh. Remarkably, he omits any reference to sacrifices or other forms of worship. In placing greater stock in moral obedience than in cultic performance, Moses prepared the way for the prophets.

- Like Moses, Samuel declared, *“To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams”* (**1 Sam. 15:22**).
- Like Moses, Amos taught that the practice of *“justice”* and *“righteousness”* took precedence over the noise of festivals and offerings (**Amos 5:21–25**).
- Like Moses, Hosea affirmed that Yahweh found greater delight in *“mercy”* and personal relationship with him than in sacrifices of every sort (**Hos. 6:6**).

- Like Moses, in Micah's mind true piety is demonstrated not in extravagant sacrifices but in *doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God* (**Mic. 6:6–8**).
- Like Moses, Isaiah announced that if ethical righteousness, demonstrated especially on behalf of the marginalized, was lacking, no liturgical celebrations would impress Yahweh (**Isa. 1:10–17**).
- Like Moses, Jeremiah believed that acceptance with God was dependent on ethical behavior rather than attendance at the house of God (**Jer. 7:1–15**).

This perspective is also found in the Psalms, which emphasize that acceptable worship is preconditioned by lives that demonstrate covenant commitment to Yahweh and to one's neighbor (**Pss. 15; 24**).

This paradigm carries through to the New Testament. Jesus castigates Jewish religious leaders for tithing mint and dill and cummin but neglecting weightier matters of Torah (i.e., love for God and one's neighbor; **Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42**). Sounding like Moses, James declares that "*religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world*" (Jas. 1:27). The same is true of Paul, who calls believers to offer themselves as "*living sacrifices*" (**Rom. 12:1**) and then explains what this means (**12:2–15:13**).

Warren Wiersbe: The central element in these five imperatives is **love**, a word that Moses uses six times in this section (**Deut. 10:12, 15, 19; 11:1, 13, 22**). Is it possible both to fear and love the Lord at the same time? Yes, it is, for the reverence we show Him is a loving respect that comes from the heart. Moses used the word "*heart*" five times in this section of his address (**10:12, 16; 11:13, 16, 18**), so he made it clear that God wants more than external obedience. He wants us to do the will of God from the heart (**Eph. 6:6**), a loving obedience that brings joy to our Father in heaven. Love is the fulfillment of the Law (**Rom. 13:10**), so if we love God, serving Him and keeping His commandments will not be a burden or a battle. These five elements are like the sections of a telescope that belong together and work together.

Matthew Henry: We are here taught our duty to our neighbour (**Deuteronomy 10:19**): **Love the stranger**; and, if the stranger, much more our brethren, as ourselves. If the Israelites that were such a peculiar people, so particularly distinguished from all people, must be kind to strangers, much more must we, that are not enclosed in such a pale; we must have a tender concern for all that share with us in the human nature, and as we have opportunity; (that is, according to their necessities and our abilities) we must do good to all men. Two arguments are here urged to enforce this duty:--

(1) **God's common providence**, which extends itself to all nations of men, they being all made of one blood. God loveth the stranger (**Deuteronomy 10:18**), that is, he gives to all life, and breath, and all things, even to those that are Gentiles, and strangers to the

commonwealth of Israel and to Israel's God. He knows those perfectly whom we know nothing of. He gives food and raiment even to those to whom he has not shown his word and statutes. God's common gifts to mankind oblige us to honour all men. Or the expression denotes the particular care which Providence takes of strangers in distress, which we ought to praise him for (**Psalms 146:9**, The Lord preserveth the strangers), and to imitate him, to serve him, and concur with him therein, being forward to make ourselves instruments in his hand of kindness to strangers.

(2) **The afflicted condition** which the Israelites themselves had been in, when they were strangers in Egypt. Those that have themselves been in distress, and have found mercy with God, should sympathize most feelingly with those that are in the like distress and be ready to show kindness to them. The people of the Jews, notwithstanding these repeated commands given them to be kind to strangers, conceived a rooted antipathy to the Gentiles, whom they looked upon with the utmost disdain, which made them envy the grace of God and the gospel of Christ, and this brought a final ruin upon themselves.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 11:2-32

TITLE: LOYALTY TEST = KEY TO POSSESSING THE PROMISED LAND

BIG IDEA:

CHOOSING OBEDIENCE, LOVE AND LOYALTY TO GOD ENSURES THE BLESSING OF POSSESSING THE PROMISED LAND

INTRODUCTION:

David Whitcomb: Now that we know we must **love God** first and foremost, we can learn with Israel that our LORD expects us to **keep His rules**. Once we decide to agree with God and attempt to keep His rules, we will wonder what we are supposed to keep. Moses expressed that with the words *keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments (v.1b)*. Here are four words that map out our manual for living out our love for God, “*charge, statutes, rules, and commands.*”

A **charge** is an obligation, commission, or duty assigned. God assigns a duty in connection with the covenant He makes with His people. **Statutes** refer to a decree or something prescribed. Literally the word means to cut or etch in stone like God did with the Ten Commands. This body of instruction is like a president issuing “executive orders.” The third word, **rules**, speaks of the act of deciding. It is like a sentence or what the judge concludes. Rules are not voted on but decreed. Finally there is the word, **commands**, with which we are very familiar. Commands make up instruction from an authority to a subordinate. But more than that, commands are a statement that must be obeyed. Thus we read that God commanded creation. *For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm (Psalm 33:9)*. All creation had to appear in obedience to God’s command.

In comparison, how do we relate to God’s rules, commands, requirements? God’s plan is for us to **keep them**. The word “*keep*” means to watch over, observe, and protect. Therefore, keeping God’s rules has to be an **activity** not a theory, philosophy, or theological discussion. Keeping God’s rules is the “DOING” of faith. That is what James meant when he wrote, *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (James 2:17)*. Moses also spelled out when God’s people are expected to keep His rules. In a word, it is always. Actively applying God’s rules is to be the character of His peoples’ lives. We must not forget that the motivation for this activity is love, and love implies a **relationship**. If God is a theory, a topic of theological discussion, a mystical spirit out there somewhere, there is no love – He is not. He is a being who created us in His image so that we understand that we must know God personally, intimately. When God breaks into your naturally sinful life, convicts you of sin, gives you faith and saves you, love begins and continues to grow. Your entire relationship with God is rooted in love. You are now with Him, for Him, in Him part of His family, and on His team.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/7151820435010.pdf>

I. (:2-7) LESSONS FROM HISTORY – REVIEWING THE MIGHTY ACTS OF GOD

A. (:2) Extolling the Personal Attributes of God

“And know this day that I am not speaking with your sons who have not known and who have not seen the discipline of the LORD your God— His greatness, His mighty hand, and His outstretched arm,”

Daniel Block: Verses 2–7 comprise one complex sentence in Hebrew. Referring twice in verses 3 and 7 to the deeds Yahweh has performed, Moses’ primary concern is to review again his mighty acts on Israel’s behalf. Moses frames this recitation with awkward references to his audience (vv. 2a, 7), keenly aware that the addressees are not equally familiar with what he will describe. This review of past events provides vital background for verses 8–28, especially verses 26–28, in which Moses calls for decision by the people standing before him.

Gerald Gerbrandt: History is an important teacher for Deuteronomy, especially in the first speech (chs. 1–4), but also here in the first half of the second. The review now reminds the readers of God’s lessons in the past. The term discipline is used (v. 2), but much more than punishment is meant (cf. 4:36; 8:5). It is God preparing Israel, nurturing Israel, training them for life in the land. God’s education includes both acts of correction as well as acts demonstrating God’s power and nature, deeds of deliverance, and deeds of judgment. The three cited examples reflect both aspects of discipline.

B. (:3-6) Extolling the Powerful Actions of God

1. (:3) The Deliverance from Pharaoh in the Exodus

“and His signs and His works which He did in the midst of Egypt to Pharaoh the king of Egypt and to all his land;”

David Guzik: Moses called Israel to remember **what God did** in their history. Most of history – both official and personal – is simply concerned with what man has done. But God wants us to look at history and see what He did. We learn far more, and are far more benefited, by looking at what God has done, rather than looking at what man has done.

2. (:4) The Deliverance from Egypt’s Army in the Crossing of the Red Sea

“and what He did to Egypt’s army, to its horses and its chariots, when He made the water of the Red Sea to engulf them while they were pursuing you, and the LORD completely destroyed them;”

3. (:5) The Discipline of Israel in the Wilderness

“and what He did to you in the wilderness until you came to this place;”

Peter Craigie: Israel had experienced not only the provision and help of God, but also the chastisement and rebuke of God.

Daniel Block: Moses has in mind Yahweh's punitive acts against the Israelites themselves for their faithlessness and rebellion (cf. **Ex. 32; Num. 25; Deut. 1:22–45**).

Gerald Gerbrandt: As Deuteronomy has earlier emphasized, although the desert is generally a place of great danger, for Israel this has been a time when it lacked nothing (**2:7**; cf. **8:2–6, 15–16**). God led Israel, protected it, and gave it food and water. In the wilderness Israel learned that it was totally dependent upon God.

Jack Deere: The **discipline** of the Lord refers to God's **moral education** of His people. Because of the waywardness of the human heart, diligent and drastic measures were needed to quell that waywardness. So God sent Israel "**to school**" in Egypt so that she might learn of His majesty and power (*mighty hand and outstretched arm*; cf. **Dt 4:34; 5:15; 7:19**) and respond with grateful obedience for her deliverance from Pharaoh.

4. (:6) The Destruction of the Rebellious Ringleaders Dathan and Abiram
“and what He did to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben, when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, their households, their tents, and every living thing that followed them, among all Israel —“

C. (:7) Eyewitness Confirmation of the Mighty Acts of God

“but your own eyes have seen all the great work of the LORD which He did.”

Eugene Merrill: Both of these lessons from history—the positive in Egypt and the negative in the desert sojourn—should have been fresh in the minds of Moses' audience, for it was they, and not their children (cf. **vv. 2,5**), who had seen them. As adult participants, therefore, they could not plead either ignorance or lack of personal accountability. What they had experienced should have provided the highest motivation to loving response and obedience.

Earl Kalland: The dominant personnel in the nation were those who had seen what the Lord had done for them in Egypt (**v. 3**) and in the desert (**v. 5**). They had seen this with their own eyes (**v. 7**). They were not of the generation doomed to die in the desert for their disobedience at Kadesh-Barnea (**1:35–36**) but those who ranged from infancy to the age of twenty (**Num 14:29–30**). These were the children who remained alive (**14:31**), whom their fathers had said would be taken as plunder in the desert (**14:3, 31**). Though they were then young, they too had seen the great redemptive acts of God and were thus about to enter the Promised Land.

Jack Deere: Moses exhorted the people to learn from their past, for God had constructed their history with a didactic purpose. The stress on **your own eyes** and the double mention of the **children** not seeing the events of this period (**Deut. 11: 2, 5**), hint at the parents' responsibility to set an example of obedient living for their children and to pass on the main truths learned from these experiences.

II. (:8-12) LAND ASSESSMENT – REMARKABLE LAND WATCHED OVER BY THE LORD

A. (:8-9) Charge to Obey and Possess the Land

1. (:8a) Priority of Absolute Obedience

“You shall therefore keep every commandment which I am commanding you today,”

2. (:8b) Possession of the Land Requires the Strength Derived from Obedience

“so that you may be strong and go in and possess the land into which you are about to cross to possess it;”

David Thompson: This word “*strong*” (*chazaq*) is fascinating. It is a word that describes something that needs to be repaired or restored or rebuilt. The word means that something that is previously weak or broken or damaged is made into something that is strong and mighty and fully recovered from the previous condition (**William Gesenius**, *Hebrew Lexicon*, pp. 269-270). This is what a commitment to God’s written word can do for any person. When a person gets serious about God’s written word, it will restore them and rebuild them and strengthen them.

3. (:9a) Prolonging Your Days is the Added Benefit

“so that you may prolong your days on the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give to them and to their descendants,

4. (:9b) Productivity of the Land is Unsurpassed

a land flowing with milk and honey.

B. (:10-12) Comparison of the Promised Land to the Land of Egypt

1. (:10) The Land of Egypt Required Difficult Human Cultivation

“For the land, into which you are entering to possess it, is not like the land of Egypt from which you came, where you used to sow your seed and water it with your foot like a vegetable garden.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Although the precise nature of the work assumed by the phrase *irrigate by foot* is not clear (building dams for water? digging irrigation ditches? operating lifting devices?), it likely refers to some type of irrigation. In a land of hills and valleys, irrigation is viable primarily for small vegetable gardening (**Weinfeld:** 445). But instead of seeing this as a problem, the passage emphasizes that here God waters the fields.

It is admitted that the contrast “has a touch of theological exaggeration about it” (**Cairns:** 115). As the stories of the ancestors reflect (e.g., **Gen 12:10–20; chs. 41–47**), Egypt was the breadbasket of the world of that day, comparable to the garden of the

Lord (**Gen 13:10**). Irrigation might be hard work, but with rich soil and a plentiful water supply, it virtually assured sufficient food. But the point of the comparison is that in the Promised Land Israel is **dependent upon God and not on human technique**. The land God is giving Israel is a land that **God looks after**, a land upon which the eyes of the Lord are always present.

R. K. Harrison: The reference is to a water-wheel and pump worked by the feet.

Michael Grisanti: Others suggest that here Moses makes a sarcastic contrast between the desirability of the Land of Promise and the land of Egypt. Understanding “*fool*” as a euphemism for the genitals, they see Moses as contrasting the Egyptian practice of irrigating with **impure water** (i.e., **urine**), whereas God provides Canaan with **pure rainwater** (**Walton and Matthews**, 233). Some suggest he contrasts the small fields in Egypt (small enough to be watered with urine) with the spacious lands of Canaan (**G. Nicol**, “Watering Egypt (Deuteronomy xi 10–11) Again,” VT 38 [1988]: 347–48).

2. (:11-12) The Promised Land is Cultivated by the Lord

a. (:11) The Lord Waters the Land with Pure Rain

“But the land into which you are about to cross to possess it, a land of hills and valleys, drinks water from the rain of heaven,”

Daniel Block: Moses’ excitement at Israel’s prospect of entering the land (**vv. 9b–12**) is evident in his excursus extolling its virtues even more effusively than in **6:10–11** and **8:7–9**. Unlike Egypt, this land yields its bounty spontaneously. Moses develops this point with three basic statements.

- (1) This land flows naturally with milk and honey (**v. 9b**).
- (2) This land contrasts sharply with Egypt, from where the Israelites have come (**v. 10**) and where food production depended entirely on human effort.
- (3) This is a land of hills and valleys that drink water from the rains of heaven (**v. 11**).

Clarifying his comment in **8:7**, Moses invites his hearers to imagine ever-flowing streams of fresh water coursing down the hills and watering the landscape, in contrast to the stagnant and brackish waters of the Nile Delta.

b. (:12) The Lord Constantly Cares for the Land

*“a land for which the LORD your God cares;
the eyes of the LORD your God are always on it,
from the beginning even to the end of the year.”*

Daniel Block: In **verse 12** Moses adds a fourth reason why the land is special: it is the object of Yahweh’s special attention and care (**v. 12**). He “*cares for*” (*dāraš*) it continuously, and his eyes are fixed on it from one year to the next. This statement expresses Yahweh’s disposition toward the land more dramatically and tenderly than any other in Scripture. Here the verb *dāraš* does not bear its common meaning, “*to*

seek” something that is lost (22:2), but a nuance of election (cf. Lev. 25:23). Just as Yahweh has chosen Israel out of all the peoples of the earth, so he has chosen the land of Canaan (Palestine) from all the territories of the earth.

III. (:13-17) LOYALTY TEST PRESENTED

Daniel Block: The Test of Faith

Moses presents life in the land as a test, with significant consequences (cf. 6:10–15; 8:6–20). The land symbolizes a choice between two ways: the way of blessing, prosperity, and life, or the way of the curse, adversity, and death. Moses presents the options before the people in two frames almost identical in length and remarkably parallel in content and form, as the following synopsis of relatively literal translations shows:

The Test of Faith		
	The Passing Grade Deuteronomy 11:13–15	The Failing Grade Deuteronomy 11:16–17
The human response to the test	So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul,	Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them.
The divine evaluation of the test	then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains,	Then the LORD’s anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain
The interim result	so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil.	and the ground will yield no produce,
The end result	I will provide grass in your fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.	and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you.

A. (:13-15) Promise of Blessing, Prosperity and Life

1. (:13) Response of Love and Loyalty

“And it shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul,”

2. (:14-15) Reward of Productivity and Prosperity in the Land

“that He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early and late rain, that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil. 15 And He will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you shall eat and be satisfied.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The *early rain*, coming in late fall, softens the soil baked hard by the summer sun, thereby making seeding possible. The *later rain*, coming in spring, provides the moisture needed for the final maturation of the grain. When these rains come, harvests are bountiful and pastures provide ample feed for the herds; when these rains come, Israel will eat its fill (cf. **8:10**). Truly enjoying the land comes only through obedience.

IVP Bible Background Commentary: Israel has a rainy season (winter months) and a dry season (summer months). The rainy season begins with the autumn rains (“early rains,” October-November) and ends with the spring rains (“latter rains,” early April). These are important for what they contribute to the overall moisture levels in the earth and for softening the ground for plowing. Grain is harvested in the spring (barley in May, wheat in June), and the summer months (July and August) are for threshing and winnowing. Grapes are harvested in the fall, while the olive harvest stretches into the winter.

Peter Pett: So the lesson is clear. To live in that land, which was God’s land, was to be dependent on God, and the provision of all they needed would depend on His supply. But they need not fear, for it was His land for which He cared. And if they loved and feared Him, and lived rightly before Him, they could then be sure of His full provision.

B. (:16-17) Warning of Cursing, Adversity and Death

1. (:16) Perversion of Apostasy and Idolatry

“Beware, lest your hearts be deceived and you turn away and serve other gods and worship them.”

David Thompson: Now the word “*deceive*” is one that means to let yourself be persuaded or enticed by something that is not consistent with God’s word (**William Gesenius**, *Hebrew Lexicon*,, p. 696). The tense of the verb is Imperfect, which means this is a continual and unfinished threat (**William Gesenius**, *Hebrew Grammar*, p. 125). God’s people must always be on guard that they do not permit something or someone to seduce them away from God and His word.

2. (:17) Punishment of Adversity and Banishment from the Land

*“Or the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you,
and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain
and the ground will not yield its fruit;
and you will perish quickly
from the good land which the LORD is giving you.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: God will give Israel the land, but it is not a gift that can be taken for granted. Forgetting and forsaking God, serving and worshiping other gods—all such lead to the loss of that gift.

Michael Grisanti: Since Yahweh demands absolute loyalty of his covenantal nation, he prohibits Israel from worshiping any other gods (**Dt 11:16–17; cf. 4:15–19; 6:14**). The Canaanite gods might seem enticing to the Israelites because they were allegedly responsible for rain and the fertility of the land (**Baal/Hadad**; ABD, 1:546–49). However, if the Israelites fail to recognize that Yahweh alone brings rain and fertility to the land, and if they worship other gods to accomplish that end, they will learn a painful lesson. God will cause the rain to stop and prevent the fields from producing. Because of their rebellion, rather than enjoying a long tenure in the land they will not survive.

IV. (:18-25) LEGACY OF FAITHFUL PROPAGATION OF GOD’S WORD YIELDS VICTORY IN CONQUESTING THE LAND

A. (:18-21) Legacy of Faithful Propagation of God’s Word

Daniel Block: Verses 18–21 hold the key to the future relationship of deity, people, and land. In order to ensure that God’s design for Israel will be realized, the people must commit themselves wholeheartedly to him and his covenant. Yahweh’s desire is to see their population explode as the lifespan of each generation increases on the land that he had promised the ancestors. The final temporal reference, “*as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth*” (v. 21), alludes to the **eternality** of Yahweh’s covenant commitment to his people. Although Yahweh has previously characterized his covenant with Israel as eternal, this is first time the cosmic symbols are applied to it (cf. **Gen. 8:22**).

But how can Moses say in one breath that Israel will be destroyed, and in the next appeal to the cosmos as a symbol of the eternality of God’s covenant with the nation? The answer is found in the fact that every generation and all individual Israelites must accept the covenant by faith and demonstrate fidelity to Yahweh through obedience. Moses seems to think that Israel’s exile is inevitable, but he knows it will not be the last word (**4:31; 30:1–10**). Yahweh’s promise to Israel is firm, like the cosmos itself.

1. (:18-20) Methodology of Faithfully Propagating God’s Word

a. (:18a) Personal Appropriation and Application

*“You shall therefore impress these words of mine
on your heart and on your soul;”*

- b. (:18b) Public Representation of God’s Truth
*“and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand,
and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.”*
- c. (:19) Persistent Teaching in the Course of Life
*“And you shall teach them to your sons,
talking of them when you sit in your house
and when you walk along the road
and when you lie down and when you rise up.”*
- d. (:20) Prominent Display of God’s Truth
*“And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house
and on your gates,”*

2. (:21) Benefits of Faithfully Propagating God’s Word
*“so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied
on the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them,
as long as the heavens remain above the earth.”*

B. (:22-25) Yields Victory in Conquering the Land

1. (:22) Condition of Obedience, Love and Loyalty
*“For if you are careful to keep all this commandment
which I am commanding you, to do it,
to love the LORD your God,
to walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him;”*

2. (:23-25) Claim to Victory in Possessing the Land

- a. (:23) Dispossessing Stronger Nations
*“then the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you,
and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than you.”*
- b. (:24) Dominion Throughout the Land
*“Every place on which the sole of your foot shall tread
shall be yours;
your border shall be from the wilderness to Lebanon, and from
the river, the river Euphrates, as far as the western sea.”*

Eugene Merrill: The extent of their conquest would be measured by the amount of territory on which they trod, specifically from the desert (i.e., the Negev) to Lebanon, the south to north extremities, and from the Euphrates River to the western (i.e., Mediterranean) sea, the east to west boundaries (v. 24). This was very much in line with the land grant promised to Abraham (**Gen 15:18**) and reaffirmed to Moses (**Exod 23:31; Num 34:1-15; Deut 1:7-8**). It is worth noting that David and Solomon created an empire that included all this (**2 Sam 8:1-14; 1 Kgs 4:21-24**), but it is equally significant that the Transjordan was not in the ancient promises even though it was

settled by the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh's tribe (cf. **Num 32:33-42**), even with God's blessing (**Deut 3:18-23**).

To *tread on the land* (*d rak*) was to assert dominion as many instances of the use of this verb attest.

Earl Kalland: The land that the people would acquire by obedience to the Lord (**vv. 22-23**) under the covenant was limited in two ways:

- (1) by “*every place where you set your foot*” (**v. 24a**) and
- (2) by geographic boundaries (**v. 24b**).

The Lord confirmed this promise to Joshua (**Josh 1:3**). He also had made a particular promise of this sort to Caleb (**1:36**), a promise that was fulfilled (**Josh 14:9-13**).

- c. (:25) Dread of you Paralyzing Your Enemies
*“There shall no man be able to stand before you;
the LORD your God shall lay the dread of you
and the fear of you on all the land on which you set foot,
as He has spoken to you.”*

Norman Geisler: Is this a False Prophecy?

PROBLEM: Moses told the children of Israel that “*No man shall be able to stand against you; the Lord your God will put the dread of you and the fear of you upon all the land where you tread, just as He has said to you.*” But this seems clearly false both in the short view and in the long run. Even under Joshua, Israel lost some battles (**Josh 7:4**). And in the long run, they were overrun by the Assyrians (**2 Kings 16:9**) and the Babylonians (**2 Kings 25:22**).

SOLUTION: This was not a false prophecy—it was a **conditional promise**. Notice it is prefaced by the condition “*if you diligently obey My commandments which I command you*” (**v. 13**), and “*if you carefully keep all these commandments*” (**v. 22**). In short, these were not categorical predictions, but conditional projections. When the people of Israel obeyed God, they were invincible against the most formidable foe (cf. **Josh. 6**). But when they did not obey Him, they fled in the face of the tiniest adversary (cf. **Josh. 7**). (*When Critics Ask*)

V. (:26-32) LOYALTY TEST FINALIZED

R. K. Harrison: **11:26-32** – These seven verses sum up the second discourse, and at the same time form an introduction to the detailed commandments.

A. (:26-28) Decision Time Today -- Two Options: Blessing or Cursing

1. (:26) The Choice

“See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse:”

Daniel Block: The formality of the situation is reinforced by the repetition of “today” in the presentation of the blessing and the curse. While the nature of the occasion is unclear, it seems that the covenant renewal ceremony reflected in **26:16–19** underlies this text. By choosing the blessing the people formally accept their status as Yahweh’s covenant people and him as their covenant Lord.

Eugene Merrill: The climax of this lengthy conclusion to the general stipulation section of the Deuteronomy covenant document is found in vv. **26-32**, the setting forth of a statement of blessing and curse for covenant obedience and disobedience respectively. This **call to commitment** is, in fact, the pervasive theme of the whole chapter, a fact suggested by reference to “decrees” (*uqqîm*) and “laws” (*mi p tîm*) in both the opening and closing verses. It was only as Israel took these to heart and obeyed them that they could expect the blessing of the Lord. It is fitting, moreover, that the general stipulation section should conclude with exhortation to covenant loyalty, for that is exactly how it began (**5:1-5**; cf. **4:32-40**).

Michael Grisanti: For the first time in Deuteronomy (cf. **27:9–28:68**), Moses utilizes the technical terms of the covenant, “blessing” and “curse.” Ancient Near Eastern treaties generally included a section promising blessings and threatening curses contingent on the faithfulness of the vassals to their covenantal commitments. Yahweh “sets before” or “gives” these promises and threats to Israel. Throughout Deuteronomy, Yahweh affirms that he has or is giving to Israel the land he has promised.

2. (:27) The Blessing

“the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I am commanding you today;”

3. (:28) The Curse

“and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known.”

Patrick Miller: So a **choice** has to be made. Blessing and curse, the possibilities for life or death, are out there before Israel; it is up to the people now to choose. In a preaching manner, and consistent with the character of covenant, Moses calls for a verdict by the people; their choice will determine what the future holds for them—obedience to the Lord’s will and way in the land, which will open up all its possibilities for life and blessing, or disobedience, which will bring loss of the land, its rich abundance, its provision for life, and thus will lead to death.

B. (:29-32) Decision Time Restaged – Same Two Options: Blessing or Cursing

1. (:29) Symbolism of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal

“And it shall come about, when the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it,

*that you shall place the blessing on Mount Gerizim
and the curse on Mount Ebal.”*

Eugene Merrill: Just as the original covenant was made at a special place, namely, Mount Sinai, so the renewal could not have been undertaken at just any place in Canaan. It had to, in fact, occur at Shechem, at the base of the mountains Gerizim and Ebal (v. 29). Half the tribes would stand on one mountain and half on the other and in antiphonal chorus assent to the curses and blessings as they were shouted out by the Levites (cf. 27:11-14; Josh 8:30-35). The reason for the selection of Shechem and its vicinity was clearly the association of this holy place with the patriarchs to whom the Lord had first appeared and made covenant promises concerning the land. It was there that Abraham had built his first altar (Gen 12:6-7); there Jacob had bought a piece of property (Gen 33:19), where he built an altar (Gen 33:20) and dug a well (John 4:6); and there his son Joseph was buried (Josh 24:32). From those ancient days onward Shechem was closely associated with covenant making of all kinds, both legitimate and illegitimate (cf. Josh 24:1-28; Judg 9:1-21).

Peter Pett: Confirmation is now given of the certainty of success in the invasion by announcing that once they are established in the land they are to perform a **covenant ceremony** in the very land in a place connected with the two large mountains between which lies the valley in which is Shechem, the mountains of Gerizim and Ebal. Some will stand on one mountain, and some on the other (Deuteronomy 27:11-14), with the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh in the valley in between (Joshua 8:30-35). This is the place that Yahweh their God has chosen for such a ceremony. The blessing will be declared from Mount Gerizim, and the cursing from Mount Ebal.

Meredith Kline: This twofold prospect and its challenge, which Moses placed before Israel this day in Moab, would be set before them again by Joshua on the other side of the Jordan in Canaan, that the nation might be careful to obey God and live (11:29-32). The transition from the Mosaic to the Joshuan leadership was thus to be marked by a two-stage renewal ritual, which would exhibit the continuity of the more ultimate divine leadership. This arrangement was the equivalent of measures taken in vassal treaties by human suzerains to guarantee the dynastic succession on their thrones. See **Deuteronomy 27** for the more detailed directions concerning the second stage of the ceremony to be conducted on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal (cf. Josh 8:30-35).

2. (:30) Significant Location of the Two Mountains

*“Are they not across the Jordan, west of the way toward the sunset,
in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah,
opposite Gilgal, beside the oaks of Moreh?”*

3. (:31-32) Strategic Moment

*“For you are about to cross the Jordan to go in to possess the land
which the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall possess it and
live in it, 32 and you shall be careful to do all the statutes and the
judgments which I am setting before you today.”*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) At what point in your life did you understand the clear choice that God was presenting you with in the gospel of Jesus Christ?
- 2) What lessons from your history have been especially meaningful?
- 3) What concrete steps are you taking to faithfully propagate God's Word to the next generation?
- 4) Why would someone ever choose cursing over blessing?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: As we move into the more detailed presentation of life in the Promised Land in **chapters 12–26**, we must keep in mind the essential elements of that vision.

1. Israel's land is a gift from Yahweh in fulfillment of his covenant promises to the ancestors (**v. 9**).
2. Israel's land offers the covenant people a paradise-like context in which to fulfill their destiny (**vv. 9–11**).
3. Israel's land is the special object of Yahweh's election and his perpetual care (**v. 12**).
4. Israel's land offers the people a geographic context for an ethical response to the covenant (**vv. 8, 13, 22**).
5. Israel's land fulfills its intended role within the triangular covenant relationship only as Yahweh providentially enables it to do so (**vv. 14–17**).
6. Israel's possession of the land is contingent on Yahweh's giving it to the people, and their retention of it is contingent on their fidelity to the covenant (**vv. 22–25**).

Peter Craigie: In **ch. 11**, this portion of the address continues in the same manner; the requirements of God are reaffirmed and then applied and illustrated by a variety of particular themes:

- (a) Requirement: love God and keep his commandments (**11:1**).
- (b) Illustration-: the lessons of history (**11:2–7**).

- (c) Requirement: Keep the commandments (11:8).
- (d) Illustration: the good land compared with Egypt (11:9–12).
- (e) Requirement: Keep the commandments, love and serve God (11:13).
- (f) Illustration: the fertility of the good land (11:14–17).
- (g) Summary: concluding the exposition on the basic commandments (11:18–25).

In each case, the statement of requirements refers back to 10:12–13, stressing different aspects of that summary statement; the two principal features are **love** and **obedience**.

The framework within which the detailed presentation of the law is set can be seen in the following outline:

- (a) The blessing and curse in the present renewal of the covenant (11:26–28).
- (b) The blessing and curse in the future renewal of the covenant (11:29–32).
- (c) The specific legislation (12:1–26:19).
- (d) The blessing and curse in the future renewal of the covenant (27:1–26).
- (e) The blessing and curse in the present renewal of the covenant (28:1–29:1).

Duane Christensen: chiasmic structure of vv. 10-25

- A The land that you are entering is special 11:10
 - B It is not like the land of Egypt 11:10
 - C Such is the land you are going over to possess 11:11
 - D It is a land that drinks water by the rain from heaven 11:11
 - X It is a land that YHWH cares for 11:12
 - D' YHWH will send rain for your land 11:14
 - C' If you are unfaithful, you will be driven off the good land 11:17
 - B' Keep these commandments before you so as to remain in the land 11:21
- A' YHWH will give you the whole land on which you shall tread 11:25

Earl Kalland: The **constant repetition** of ideas, words, and phrases characterizes the messages of Deuteronomy. The repetition shows the intensity of the Lord's desire to remold his people to prepare them for the conquest and settlement of Canaan. By this repetition Moses attempted to plant firmly in the minds of the people the necessity of total allegiance to the Lord. **Chapter 11** is markedly illustrative of this hammerlike repetitive style. The exhortations to love, remember, observe, worship (serve), obey, teach, and walk in the Lord's ways are all here. So also are the words used to describe the basic content of the messages as requirements, decrees, laws, commands, words, and symbols. Reference is made to what God did for them and how he did it by his majesty, his mighty hand, and his outstretched arm. If they would live and obey the Lord, he would drive out the nations then in Canaan, settle the Israelites in the land, and provide for them to their satisfaction; but if not, they would be destroyed.

Warren Wiersbe: How do we claim God's blessings? By stepping out by faith (**11:24-25**). This is what God commanded Abraham to do (**Gen. 13:17**) as well as Joshua (**Josh. 1:3**). It was this promise that Caleb claimed when he asked for his inheritance in the Promised Land (**14:6-15**), and it's the promise all believers must claim if they expect to enjoy the blessings God has for them. You don't "claim the land" by studying the map and dreaming of conquest. You claim the land by stepping out by faith, believing God's Word, and depending on His faithfulness.

Craig Thurman: In the beginning God had a special garden that He planted eastward in Eden. Here He put Adam and his wife Eve to dress and to keep this garden. (cf. **Ge.2.8, 15**) But as soon as they sinned He removed them from it. (cf. **Gen.3.24**) They would have defiled His beautiful garden. Canaan was a land like the garden of Eden because the LORD cared for it. The Gentiles that presently lived there were to be dispossessed of it because they had defiled the land through their wicked and abominable practices. (cf. **Le.18.24, 28; Deu.8.20**) As Israel took possession of it the Gentiles would be expelled. But as the history of Israel goes, because they disobeyed the LORD and acted very much in the same way as the Gentiles before the LORD would raise up their enemies to trouble them on every side and finally remove them completely from the land, even as it is to this day. But all of us know that one day Israel shall have this land because they shall be saved. Then Israel shall have a renewed mind, a renewed heart and a renewed spirit. (cf. **Jer.31.31, 33, 34; Ez.1.18; 36.26**) Then Israel shall never be removed from the land.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/129211930432199.pdf>

Jack Deere: In return for their obedience the Lord would grant Israel supernatural success against superior (larger and stronger) enemy armies. He would put a **terror and fear** in their enemies so that they could not fight successfully against Israel. Rahab's words to the spies, "*I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us*" (**Josh 2:9**), are one example of the fulfillment of this promise (cf. **Ex. 15:15-16; Deut. 2:25; 28:10; Josh. 2:11, 24; 5:1**). Had Israel continued to obey God faithfully, her boundaries would have been enlarged (**Deut 11:24**) to fulfill the promise made to Abraham (**Gen. 15:18**). But because of Israel's disobedience the fulfillment of the **whole land promise** is still future.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 12:1-32

TITLE: *THE CENTRALIZATION OF WORSHIP*

BIG IDEA:

ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND PROVIDES THE TRANSITION TO CENTRALIZED WORSHIP ALONG WITH THE FREEDOM TO EAT MEAT LOCALLY

INTRODUCTION:

Patrick Miller: Placement of the instruction about worship at the sanctuary in first position indicates clearly its priority for Deuteronomy, which assumes that the starting point for the proper, full, and exclusive love of the Lord (the primary demand of the first and second commandments and the Shema) is found in the way Israel carries out the activities of worship. The radical and unyielding demand for a total commitment to God does not regard the practices and details of worship as incidental or secondary to other matters. Whatever else such commitment involves, it begins in the service of worship. . .

Negating one group of names and establishing another name in effect calls for a new order, a transformation: a shift from an order where there are multiple claims for human allegiance . . . and where human design determines the place and nature of worship. This order is to give way to another, wherein **divine control** is placed over human worship and **one name** replaces all other names.

Duane Christensen: What we see in this chapter is a description of sacred slaughter in ancient Israel in the context of public worship, in which the sacrificial animals were slaughtered and eaten—in particular, during the three agrarian pilgrimage festivals delineated in **16:1–17**.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Deuteronomy tends to present a command or directive in a fairly simple manner, then to expand upon it through repetition, explanation, greater clarification, and motivation to obey. That style comes into play in this chapter, with **verses 4–7** presenting the directive regarding worship at **The Place** in its most simple and direct form, with the remainder of the central block serving as expansion of the directive (**Tigay**: 118–27). This expansion consists of five sections that alternately repeat the substance of the centralization directive (**vv. 8–12, 17–19, 26–28**) and consider the implication of the directive for the slaughter of domestic animals for food (**vv. 13–16, 20–25**). The command to seek the place thus receives priority attention. It is the focus of the initial presentation (**vv. 4–7**) and is presented three times in the expansion, including the all-important central position. . .

Deuteronomy 1–11 repeatedly emphasizes that the God of the exodus has chosen Israel as his special people (e.g., **4:34; 7:7–8**) and that Yahweh is the only God for Israel (first commandment, the Shema): One God, One People.

Now Deuteronomy teaches that this unique relationship requires Israel to worship and bring sacrifice to that one God only at the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes as his habitation to put his name there (**12:5, 11, 14**, etc.). Israel is not to worship where the former inhabitants worshiped nor wherever it pleases. To **One God, One People** is added **One Place**. Here may be Deuteronomy's most unusual but far-reaching teaching. . .

The logic of the chapter may be summarized as follows:

1. Obedience to the first command requires the rejection and destruction of Canaanite worship.
2. Rejection of Canaanite worship requires one worship center.
3. One worship center requires a new approach to butchering animals for food.

Michael Grisanti: The general picture in **ch. 12** as it relates to proper worship of Yahweh is one of anticipation. The Lord desires that sacrifices offered to him take place only at a location among the tribes of Israel where he "*places his Name.*" At all times in Israel's history as a nation (i.e., after Sinai), the Israelites could offer sacrifices only at locations marked out by Yahweh (and not associated with any pagan forms of worship). Once Solomon erected the temple of Yahweh, the restriction was narrowed: the Israelites were not to offer Levitical sacrifices at any location other than that temple.

Jack Deere: The command for a single sanctuary promoted or emphasized three things:

- the unity of God (i.e., He is One, not many),
- the purity of the Israelites' worship of the Lord,
- and the people's political and spiritual unity.

(:1) PROLOGUE – COVENANT OBEDIENCE = KEY TO POSSESSING THE LAND

"These are the statutes and the judgments which you shall carefully observe in the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess as long as you live on the earth."

Daniel Block: As already noted, **Deuteronomy 12:1** marks the transition from the exposition of the Supreme Command (**chaps. 5–11**), to the exposition of the stipulations of the covenant in **chapters 12–26**. As elsewhere (**4:45; 5:1; 26:16–17**), "*the decrees and laws*" represent the covenantal obligations that Yahweh revealed at Sinai. Continuing the second address begun back in **5:1**, this opening statement echoes many of the expressions found in **11:32**, the conclusion to the previous section. Using familiar phrases this opening makes four points.

1. Moses specifies the genre of the material to follow. Although they will be presented in a profoundly hortatory way, these are "*decrees and laws.*"

2. He declares his goal—to govern conduct: “*Keep them by doing them*” (pers. trans.).
3. He links his instructions with the gift of land: They are to be obeyed in the land that “*the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess.*”
4. He identifies the context to which they apply: They are to be obeyed “*as long as they live in the land.*”

Warren Wiersbe: The statement in **verse 1** was both an assurance and a commandment. The assurance was that Israel would enter the land and overcome the enemy, and the commandment was that, having entered the land, they must purge it of all idolatry.

I. (:2-7) MANDATE CENTRALIZED WORSHIP FOR OFFERING YOUR SACRIFICES AND CELEBRATING YOUR MAJOR FEASTS

A. (:2-3) Destroy False Worship Sites and Objects

1. (:2) Destroy False Worship Sites

“You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess serve their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree.”

Eugene Merrill: The command to destroy is couched in the strongest terms, for there must be no residue of paganism remaining after the conquest. And the strategy of destruction would be, first, the elimination of the “places” of worship and then their paraphernalia.

2. (:3) Destroy False Worship Objects

“And you shall tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and burn their Asherim with fire, and you shall cut down the engraved images of their gods, and you shall obliterate their name from that place.”

Peter Craigie: These objects were to be systematically destroyed so that the places associated with them would be divested of any semblance of sanctity. The physical act of destruction was thus also a symbolic act of rejection, the rejection of the deities and of the efficacy of the religious system of the Israelites’ predecessors on the land. The act of destruction not only removed any subsequent temptation for the Israelites to lapse into foreign forms of religion, but also obliterated their name (i.e., of foreign gods) from that place. There was only one name on which the Israelites could call; this is the theme of the next section.

David Thompson: God does not want His people **tolerant** of any false religion. Now in this dispensation, we cannot go around tearing down and smashing to bits places that promote false religion, but we certainly can point them out and we certainly can get rid

of anything religious that is not true and sound from our own lives and we should certainly do it here in this church.

B. (:4-5) Centralize Your Worship at the One Place God Has Chosen

1. (:4) Reject the Idolatrous Worship Practices of the Canaanites

“You shall not act like this toward the LORD your God.”

Duane Christensen: The worship of YHWH at this sanctuary is to be altogether different from that of the gods of Canaan, who are worshiped in various places throughout the land with specific religious paraphernalia, which the people of Israel are commanded to destroy (**vv 2–3**). Instead they are to bring offerings to YHWH at the central sanctuary (**v 6**). . .

For the Christian, this principle of one center of true worship is correct; but the center is not a place but rather a person who embodies the symbols of ancient Israelite worship.

2. (:5) Embrace the Lord’s Prescription for Worship

“But you shall seek the Lord at the place which the LORD your God shall choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come.”

MacArthur: Various places of worship were chosen after the people settled in Canaan, such as Mt. Ebal (**27:1-8; Jos 8:30-35**), Shechem (**Jos 24:1-28**) and Shiloh (**Jos 18:1**), which was the center of worship through the period of Judges (**Jdg 21:19**). The tabernacle, the Lord’s dwelling place, was located in Canaan, where the Lord chose to dwell. The central importance of the tabernacle was in direct contrast to the multiple places (see **v. 2**) where the Canaanites practiced their worship of idols. Eventually, the tabernacle was brought to Jerusalem by David (cf. **2Sa 6:12-19**).

Peter Pett: This dwelling among men did not in any way limit Yahweh. Moses has shown earlier, especially in Egypt and in the wilderness, that He could act where He would, He could speak where He would, and He knew all that happened everywhere even to the extent of knowing people’s minds. Thus men could pray to Him wherever they were and He would hear them. But it stressed that there was only one physical place of approach to Him by men, not through nature but in the place that He chose, where He came to them in His invisible presence, the heavenly coming in contact with the earthly. This emphasised His distinctiveness. We could see this chapter as based on the first commandment, ‘*you shall have no other gods before My face*’.

C. (:6-7) Offer Your Sacrifices and Celebrate the Feasts in the Presence of the Lord

1. (:6) Offer Your Sacrifices as Prescribed by the Lord

“And there you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the first-born of your herd and of your flock.”

2. (:7) Celebrate Your Feasts with Joy and Thanksgiving

“There also you and your households shall eat before the LORD your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you.”

Patrick Miller: The text also has the character of Kingdom anticipation in that one sees here in Israel’s regular life the seeds of the Messianic banquet. The community is called to gather with all its gifts before God to eat, rejoice, and celebrate the blessing of God with no member of the community unprovided for or left out.

Eugene Merrill: The nature of these assemblies—times of covenant reaffirmation and renewal—is evident from the festivity carried out at those times and at the central sanctuary (v. 7). It consists essentially of a meal shared by all the congregants, a repast *“in the presence of the LORD your God.”* This does not mean only that the Lord was there but that he too shared in the banqueting as the Great King among his loyal subjects. This was standard protocol at times of covenant making or renewal as a number of biblical texts attest (cf. **Exod 24:11; Deut 12:18; 14:23, 26; 15:20; 27:7**).

II. (:8-12) MANAGE THE TRANSITION TO IMPLEMENTING CENTRALIZED WORSHIP IN THE PROMISED LAND

Gerald Gerbrandt: chiasmic structure

- Centralization, **12:8–12**
- Secular Slaughter, **12:13–16**
- Centralization, **12:17–19**
- Secular Slaughter, **12:20–25**
- Centralization, **12:26–28**

A. (:8-9) Inherit the Land with the Goal of Implementing God’s Worship Plan

1. (:8) Reject Any Human-Devised System of Worship

“You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes;”

Paul Barker: Undergirding all these laws lies a fundamental, theological principle. God has revealed himself. God has spoken. The only way we can know how to appropriately worship God is that he has told us. We are not to worship God in our own ways or *“according to our own desires”* (**12:8**) because God has told us how to worship him in the Bible.

2. (:9) Embrace the Divinely Ordained System of Worship to be Practiced in the Promised Land

“for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you.”

Earl Kalland: “*The resting place*” (vv. 9-10) as a description of the land begins with Jacob’s blessing when he called the allotment of Issachar “*his resting place*” (**Gen 49:15**). **Numbers 10:33** states that the ark was to find a place of rest for the people as they journeyed from one place to another, but those resting places gave merely temporary relief. Canaan was to be a settled place of rest. Solomon, after the prayer of dedication for the temple, said, “*Praise be to the Lord, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised*” (**1 Kings 8:56**). Isaiah used this term with reference to the messianic age (**Isa 11:10; 28:12; 32:18; 66:1**); and Micah enjoined the false prophets about the Jerusalem of his time, saying, “*Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place*” (**Mic. 2:10**).

David said of the Lord, his shepherd, “*He leads me beside quiet waters, [the waters of rest or restful waters]*” (**Ps 23:2**); and in **Psalm 132:8, 14**, Zion is extolled as the resting place for the ark and for the Lord.

Psalm 95:11 becomes the source for vital NT teaching. The psalmist says that the Lord had declared of the people who disobeyed him in the desert, “*They shall never enter my rest.*” The author of Hebrews, quoting from **Psalm 95:11**, says that those who disbelieved, disobeyed, and rebelled did not enter into his rest (**ch. 3**). Neither did later Israelites, for Joshua did not give them rest since the Lord was still offering this rest in the days of David. To fulfill the promise of God, a rest was still to be provided. That rest was for the soul in Jesus as Savior from sin: “*We who have believed enter that rest*” (**Heb 4:3**). **Jesus** is the “*resting place*” for the believer.

B. (:10-11) Implement God’s Worship Plan Once You Live in the Land

1. (:10) God is Providing the Land for Your Rest and Security

“When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security,”

2. (:11) God is Ordaining the Place for His Name to Dwell for the Focus of Worship

“then it shall come about that the place in which the LORD your God shall choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the LORD.”

Eugene Merrill: As is well known, the first permanent location of the tabernacle was Shiloh (**Josh 18:1**), a site chosen only after the land had been brought under control. How long after the conquest Shiloh was chosen cannot be known precisely, but it seems to have been a minimum of seven years (cf. **Josh 14:7-10**). In the meantime it is clear that altars of the kind authorized by the Lord in **Exod 20** were built in Canaan both before (**Josh 8:30**) and after the selection of Shiloh as the place of national convocation (**Josh 22:10-11; Judg 6:24-26; 13:20; 21:4; 1 Sam 7:17; 2 Sam 24:18-25**).

C. (:12) Include Your Entire Community in Your Joyful Worship Celebrations

*“And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God,
you and your sons and daughters, your male and female servants,
and the Levite who is within your gates,
since he has no portion or inheritance with you.”*

Duane Christensen: Since the Levites had no allotted tribal territory from which to derive their income, they were dependent economically on the largesse of the general populace. Not all Levites officiated at the central sanctuary. They were distributed throughout the land of Israel with duties of teaching and expounding the faith, including the law (see **33:10; 2 Chr 15:3; 17:8–9; 30:22; 35:3**). They not only read publicly the law to the people of Israel, they interpreted it so that the congregation would know what it meant. When the term “*Levite*” is used alone in Deuteronomy, it refers to the teaching priests who functioned at the local level, in towns throughout the land of Israel. They were clients of the community and thus are included with the poor and landless who must be cared for (cf. **Deut 12:18–19; 14:27, 29; 16:11, 14; 26:11–12**).

Meredith Kline: Love to God expressed in joyful worship was also to find its corollary in love to the brethren, especially in kindness to those who, like the Levites (v. 12; cf. v. 19), were dependent on the generosity, indeed on the piety, of the congregation (cf. **Num 18:21; 35:1 ff.**).

III. (:13-14) MAINTAIN GOD’S PROGRAM OF CENTRALIZED WORSHIP

A. (:13) Stay on Track in Your Worship

*“Be careful that you do not offer your burnt offerings
in every cultic place you see,”*

B. (:14) Stick to the God-ordained Script

*“but in the place which the LORD chooses in one of your tribes,
there you shall offer your burnt offerings,
and there you shall do all that I command you.”*

IV. (:15-27) MEAT EATING ALLOWED LOCALLY

A. (:15-16) Freedom to Slaughter and Eat Meat Locally

1. (:15) Concession to Allow Local Slaughter and Eating of Meat

*“However, you may slaughter and eat meat within any of your gates,
whatever you desire, according to the blessing of the LORD your God
which He has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it,
as of the gazelle and the deer.”*

R. K. Harrison: Not being domestic animals they were not acceptable as sacrificial offerings, though “clean” in other respects. These species of game were apparently

plentiful at the time; subsequently, and in the city, they were regarded as a delicacy (1 Ki. 4:23).

2. (:16) Caveat Regarding Not Eating the Blood

*“Only you shall not eat the blood;
you are to pour it out on the ground like water.”*

Warren Wiersbe: The emphasis on the **shedding of blood** is at the heart of the message of the Gospel. We aren't saved from our sins by the life of Christ or the example of Christ, but by the sacrificial death of Christ, *“in whom we have redemption through his blood”* (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). The blood of Christ is precious to us (1 Peter 1:19) because of who shed it – the spotless Lamb of God – but also because of what it accomplishes for those who trust Him: justification (Rom. 5:9), cleansing (Rev. 1:5; 1 John 1:7), eternal salvation (Heb. 9:11-28), access to God (10:19-20), and reconciliation (Eph. 2:13), to name but a few of the blessings we have through Christ's blood.

B. (:17-19) Forbidding of Local Consumption of Items Associated with Worship

1. (:17) Specification of Items Not Appropriate for Local Consumption

“You are not allowed to eat within your gates the tithe of your grain, or new wine, or oil, or the first-born of your herd or flock, or any of your votive offerings which you vow, or your freewill offerings, or the contribution of your hand.”

Peter Craigie: The freedom of eating meat, however, did not extend to those products and foodstuffs which were set aside specifically for God (v. 17); they could be eaten legitimately only in God's sanctuary (v. 19), as had already been stressed earlier in the chapter (vv. 6, 11).

2. (:18) Sanctifying the Centralization of Worship

“But you shall eat them before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD your God will choose, you and your son and daughter, and your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God in all your undertakings.”

3. (:19) Special Focus on Providing for the Levites

“Be careful that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land.”

C. (:20) Fondness for Eating Meat

“When the LORD your God extends your border as He has promised you, and you say, 'I will eat meat,' because you desire to eat meat, then you may eat meat, whatever you desire.”

Eugene Merrill: Granting that it was natural and proper for the individual to desire meat as part of his diet, Moses legislated that such could be done once the land was conquered and settled and great distances precluded easy access to the tabernacle or temple.

David Thompson: God did not ever restrict His people to being vegetarians. His people have a right to eat meat. They could eat it from their own herds or flocks and they could hunt for deer or gazelle. The only stipulation was they were not to eat the blood.

D. (:21-25) Freedom of Eating Non-sacrificial Meat Locally

1. (:21) Accommodation for Distance from Worship Center

“If the place which the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, then you may slaughter of your herd and flock which the LORD has given you, as I have commanded you; and you may eat within your gates whatever you desire.”

Duane Christensen: The rules regarding secular slaughter of animals for consumption within the towns throughout the land are spelled out in greater detail in **Deut 12:20–28**. Once the tribes had settled in their allotted territories, it would no longer be feasible to have all slaughter carried out at the central sanctuary. The slaughter of animals for consumption was permitted (**vv 20–22**), but only if the blood was poured out on the ground like water (**vv 23–25**). For the holy things reserved for use at the central sanctuary, the old rules still applied—in which the blood of the sacrificial animals was poured out on the altar, and only the flesh eaten (**vv 26–27**). . .

As long as the people of God were journeying through the wilderness, they did not eat meat of any kind from the flesh of animals that were not killed at the door of the tabernacle, with part of it presented to God as an offering (**Lev 17:3–4**). But when they settled in the Promised Land, the distance from the tabernacle was too great for many of them. Thus they were permitted to slaughter from their flocks and herds without bringing part of those animals to the altar at the central sanctuary.

Michael Grisanti: Some scholars refer to the slaughter of animals away from the central sanctuary as “profane” or “secular” slaughter; but it might be better to view this allowance as “nonsacrificial” slaughter (**Vogt, 209**). Yahweh desires that even in this act his people recognize that their presence in the land and their enjoyment of its abundance is a consequence of his faithfulness to them. By obeying God in each of these areas, they are demonstrating their loyalty to him. To consume the blood in violation of this requirement is viewed as covenantal treachery (**12:25**). Moses exhorts Israel diligently to obey *“all these regulations”* (**12:28**). The fact that their continued prosperity in the land is at stake reveals that their obedience is not profane in orientation but covenantal.

2. (:22) Authorization of Eating Gazelle or Deer

“Just as a gazelle or a deer is eaten, so you shall eat it; the unclean and the clean alike may eat of it.”

3. (:23-25) Prohibition of Eating the Blood

a. (:23) Why Not Eat the Blood? -- **The Blood is the Life**

“Only be sure not to eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh.”

b. (:24) What to Do with the Blood?

“You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out on the ground like water.”

c. (:25) What are the Benefits of Obeying?

1) Prospering Your Family

“You shall not eat it, in order that it may be well with you and your sons after you,”

2) Pleasing the Lord

“for you will be doing what is right in the sight of the LORD.”

E. (:26-27) Offer Your Sacrifices at the Designated Centralized Worship Place

“Only your holy things which you may have and your votive offerings, you shall take and go to the place which the LORD chooses.

And you shall offer your burnt offerings, the flesh and the blood, on the altar of the LORD your God; and the blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out on the altar of the LORD your God, and you shall eat the flesh.”

VI. (:28-32) CLOSING EXHORTATION, MOTIVATION AND WARNING TO OBEY

A. (:28a) Exhortation to Obey

“Be careful to listen to all these words which I command you,”

B. (:28b) Motivation to Obey

1. Prospering Your Family

“in order that it may be well with you and your sons after you forever,”

2. Pleasing the Lord

“for you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God.”

Peter Craigie: The Israelites were not immune from God’s wrath on account of the covenant relationship; if they behaved in the same manner as the Canaanites, they would also be liable to be driven from the land, unworthy to continue there as its residents.

C. (:29-31) Warning to Obey

1. (:29-30a) Danger of Defeated Enemies Corrupting You

“When the LORD your God cuts off before you the nations which you are going in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, 30 beware that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed before you,”

2. (:30b) Danger of Curious Investigation of Idolatrous Practices

“and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?’”

3. (:31) Detestable Nature of Their Acts of Worship

“You shall not behave thus toward the LORD your God, for every abominable act which the LORD hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The term *abhorrent* (NIV, *detestable*; KJV, RSV, *abomination*), first used in 7:25–26, now becomes a common term in Deuteronomy for designating that which is especially reprehensible to God, frequently because of its connections with Canaanite cultic practices.

David Thompson: God wants us to use our minds to learn things. But He does not want us to learn godless, immoral, false religious things. I have never believed it was right to study the beliefs of false religions that God detests. The reason is because the potential exists for God’s own people to do detestable things.

(:32) EPILOGUE – COMPREHENSIVE COVENANT OBEDIENCE COMMANDED

“Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.”

Michael Grisanti: Moses ends this section where he began, by exhorting the Israelites genuinely to obey all that God demands of them. Since God’s covenantal stipulations are both of paramount importance and sufficient, Israel must not alter them in any way. What God expects of his covenantal people is not open to debate or up for negotiation.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What advantages would centralized worship have for the nation of Israel once they were at rest and secure in the Promised Land?

- 2) Why was slaughtering and eating meat locally such an issue for the Israelites?
- 3) How are we to respond to false gods in our culture today contrasted with how God commanded His people to respond in the context of the OT theocracy?
- 4) Why do we need to guard our curiosity against too much investigation of false theology?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gerald Gerbrandt: A recent commentary on Deuteronomy by **Gary Hall** follows the outline of **Dennis Olson** and organizes his consideration of **Deuteronomy 12–26** around the commands of the Decalogue. Below is an adaptation of this proposal as developed by **Olson** and used by **Hall**:

Commandment	Deuteronomy
1 Have no other gods.	12:2–13:18
2 Make no images.	12:2–13:18
3 Use God’s name rightly.	14:1-21
4 Keep the Sabbath.	14:22–16:17
5 Honor your parents.	16:18–18:22
6 Do not murder.	19:1–22:8
7 Do not commit adultery.	22:9–23:18
8 Do not steal.	23:19–24:7
9 Do not bear false witness.	24:8–25:4
10 Do not covet.	25:5–26:15

The larger difficulty is that although there may be some correlation between the first commandment and the first chapters of this section (12–13), and perhaps between the fourth commandment and **chapters 15–16**, the schema is quite forced when dealing with the later material.

Michael Grisanti: The outline found below (revised from **Vogt**, 182; cf. **Christensen**, Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9, 234–35) could be presented in a chiasmic fashion to highlight its internal coherence as well as its central focus:

A Introductory Statement: “These are the laws you shall observe” (12:1)

B No God but Yahweh: Destroy idolatrous centers of worship (12:2–4)

C Demonstrate loyalty to Yahweh alone in all aspects of worship (12:5–28)

B’ No God but Yahweh: Do not imitate idolatrous worship (12:29–31)

A’ Closing statement: “Observe all that is commanded” (12:32 [13:1])

This entire section (12:1–13:18 [19]) affirms that Israel must not worship Yahweh in the same manner that the nations worshiped their gods. They must worship in the manner he dictates and at the places he chooses.

Duane Christensen: Deut 12:1—13:1 may also be outlined in a more elaborate concentric structural design:

A Summary heading: these are the statutes and the ordinances 12:1

B Destroy pagan shrines and worship at the place YHWH chooses 12:2–7

C Do not do what is right in your own eyes 12:8–9

D Bring your offerings and tithes to the central sanctuary 12:10–12

E Sacred and profane slaughter are distinguished 12:13–16

X Tithes and sacrifices are to be eaten only at the chosen place 12:17–19

E’ Profane slaughter is permitted in your local towns 12:20–22

D’ Bring your offerings and tithes to the central sanctuary 12:23–27

C’ Do what is good and right in the eyes of YHWH 12:28

B’ Do not serve the gods of those you dispossess 12:29–31

A’ Summary conclusion: Be careful to do what God commands 12:32

At the center of the above structure stands the rite of animal sacrifice at the altar of the

central sanctuary in ancient Israel. In some respects, what we designate here as profane slaughter is roughly equivalent to the meat-packing industry in modern society, but under the direct administration of religious authorities—namely, the Levitical priesthood. The blood of the slaughtered animals was not to be consumed, but to be poured out on the ground like water (v 16). At the central sanctuary the slaughtered animals were consumed in public celebration at the three pilgrimage festivals in the context of family households, which included the Levites and resident aliens. In proper worship, the blood of sacrificial animals was poured out on the altar “*before YHWH*” (vv 23–28).

Daniel Block: Some argue that Moses’ presentation of the covenant obligations in **Deuteronomy 12–26** is structured after the Decalogue. However, this approach seems forced. The flow of thought is best grasped by outlining the material on the basis of content. The logic of the overall structure is clear. Viewing Israel as a theocracy, Moses begins with the nation’s direct obligations to Yahweh (12:2–16:17), then moves successively to the offices through which Yahweh will exercise his kingship once the people have settled in the Promised Land (16:18–21:9), family law (21:10–22:30), a reminder of the boundaries of the covenant community (23:1–8[2–9]), regulations regarding many different aspects of Israelite life (23:9[10]–25:19), and ending with further instructions for worship (26:1–15).

Gerald Gerbrandt: The absence of any specific location allows the passage to focus on the most important characteristic of **The Place**: God will choose it. The Place is not just any place: it is not a place Israel desires (v. 8) or just any place you happen to see (v. 13), nor is it even necessarily a place with an important historical memory. Right worship means **allowing God to choose** and determine where, not choice by the Canaanites or Israel. The term choose has its background in Deuteronomic election theology. God chose Israel as his special possession (4:37; 7:6, 7; 10:15; 14:2). Later Deuteronomy gives Israel permission to have a king, but only one whom the Lord your God will choose (17:15). In language similar to that used in the centralization directive, God has chosen Levi out of all your tribes to stand and minister in the name of the Lord (18:5). For Deuteronomy, the otherwise general phrase the place becomes a code phrase for this central worship location, occurring twenty-one times in the book (12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:23, 24, 25; 15:20; 16:2, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16; 17:8, 10; 18:6; 26:2; 31:11). That the central thrust is **God’s choosing** rather than the nature of The Place is indicated by the fact that in each of these references the term is linked with some form of the word choose.

Paul Barker: Reasons for wiping out Idolatry

There is not much room for tolerance here! The words stress the total and absolute obliteration of these practices. Why? There are six reasons.

- The gods of the Canaanites were false gods and not Yahweh. Since Israel belonged to Yahweh by virtue of his choice of Israel and redemption of it from Egypt, allegiance to any other god was detestable.
- Worship of these gods was prohibited because these gods had not acted to

redeem Israel. As we shall see later, a key part of Israel's worship was the remembrance and thanksgiving for redemption.

- Worship of these gods was wrong because Yahweh was the God of all, including the land they were about to enter. He was not a territorial god restricted to the wilderness at all. The land was his.
- Worship of the Canaanite gods was wrong because Yahweh was the God who provided everything – rain, sun, produce. This has been stressed in the early chapters of Deuteronomy (e.g. **8:7–10, 12–18**).
- Worship of the Canaanite gods was prohibited because it was immoral, involving cultic prostitution and child sacrifice as means of trying to win the favour of the gods to give fertility (**12:31**).
- Such worship was prohibited in these strident terms because with its slack demands and immorality it was a temptation to Israel. There is always a seductive appeal in other gods which demand little and promise much. Israel was to strenuously resist such temptation. If Yahweh is the only God, there is no place at all for any worship of other supposed gods.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 13:1-18

TITLE: *WARNING AGAINST SPIRITUAL SEDUCTION*

BIG IDEA:

**THREE HYPOTHETICAL ATTEMPTS AT SPIRITUAL SEDUCTION
DENOUNCED IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN COVENANT LOYALTY**

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: The unity of **Deuteronomy 13** is evident in the form with which Moses presents the three seditious scenarios. Each is divided into three major parts: the **protasis**, introduced by an “if/when” clause in the third person; an **apodosis** in the second person, prescribing the **appropriate response** to the conspirators; and a complex **motive clause**. . .

[Moses] prescribes a **preventative strategy**: undivided and unreserved love for Yahweh, demonstrated in obedience to his voice (**vv. 3–4, 18**) and in remembrance of his saving grace (**vv. 5b, 10b**).

Paul Barker: The three cases build up momentum. The first is of a false prophet, someone who may be personally remote or not well known. The second case strengthens the force of the warning by identifying the potential deceiver as a close relative or most beloved friend. The stress is on the closeness or intimacy of the person. The threat may lie close at hand. Then the third case adds to the momentum for it describes a case where the deception has actually succeeded in leading a town astray. This makes it even clearer that the threat is indeed a strong and subtle one.

Eugene Merrill: It is appropriate, then, to address the matter of competing gods once that of the exclusive existence and worship of the Lord has been addressed in the preceding section (**12:29-31**).

Peter Craigie: In each of these sections, a number of points are emphasized in the address, dealing with the source and nature of the temptation, the legal penalty to be accorded to the criminals, and the positive action to be taken in order to maintain true allegiance to the Lord of the covenant. The legal penalties noted in this chapter may seem at first sight to be excessively harsh, but the reason for the severity lies in the nature of the crime. The continued existence of the covenant community depended literally upon allegiance to the Lord of the covenant. Thus the crime is considered not simply in light of the actions of the perpetrator, but in light of the effect of the crime on the welfare of the whole people of Israel.

David Thompson: We are living in a day and age in which the cry of the religious world is **tolerance**. We are told that we need to get along with each other and we need to respect each other especially when it comes to religion. Religious tolerance, we are told,

is a great virtue and the mark of real sophistication. It is the politically correct way to think. Problem is, when you stack that up against the word of God, that view is false.

John Schultz: The whole tenor of this chapter is a warning to people who love and serve the Lord that no one is immune to **temptation**. Our enemy knows our vulnerability, and he is clever in manipulating us at our weakest points. This is the main lesson we can draw from this severe chapter

I. (:1-5) DENOUNCING SPIRITUAL SEDUCTION BY A FALSE PROPHET OR DREAMER OF DREAMS

A. (:1-2) Signs and Wonders Cannot Always Be Viewed as Authenticating

“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’”

Eugene Merrill: One of the means by which prophets received revelation was by dreams, so here the prophet is further defined as a “*dreamer of dreams*” (v. 1; cf. **Gen 37:1-10; Num 12:6**). This epithet was later commonly associated with false prophets, however, and it may connote negative overtones already to the passage (cf. **Jer 23:23-32; 27:9-10; 29:8**). The fact that he could perform signs and wonders did not by itself legitimize him as a prophet of the Lord.

Warren Wiersbe: God raised up prophets in Israel during those times when the people needed to be called back to the faithful worship of the Lord. It has often been said that prophets weren’t just “foretellers”; they were primarily forth-tellers who declared the Word of the Lord in the name of the Lord. The faithful prophet spoke in God’s name and gave only God’s message for God’s glory and for the good of God’s people. The key phrase in **Deuteronomy 13** is, “*Let us go after other gods*” (vv. 2, 6, 13).

Daniel Block: Moses anticipates that prophets and dreamers who call for defection to other gods will try to prove their authenticity with an attesting “*sign or wonder*” (v. 2a; cf. 4:34). These expressions do not speak merely of an accompanying miraculous act (**Ex. 4:1-9**) but of a verbal wonder, a prediction of a specific natural or extraordinary event that would supposedly prove the person was a genuine divine messenger. For the sign to authenticate the medium’s call to worship other gods, the predicted event had to transpire within a short period of time. If an event would happen just as the prophet predicted, people whose faith was weak would be convinced that both the person and the message were genuine—even if it contradicted what they had been taught about Yahweh and the other gods. Perhaps recalling his own encounters with the magicians of Egypt (**Ex. 7:11, 22; 8:7[3]**), Moses recognizes that false prophets are sometimes able to work wonders.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Later Deuteronomy identifies the fulfillment of a prophet’s pronouncement as the key criterion for determining whether the prophet truly speaks on

behalf of God (18:21–22). That test would support the **authenticity** of the prophet in our passage. Yet the content of their word, the invitation to go after other gods, is in direct conflict with what Israel knows to be true. Here is a further and more significant test of a faithful leader. **Results are an insufficient indicator.** In addition, the word and action of the prophet or leader must be based in the faithful tradition of the community.

Jack Deere: Miraculous signs alone were never meant to be a test of truth. Miracles happen in many religions because Satan uses false religions and false prophets to deceive the world (cf. **2 Cor. 11:13-15; Eph. 6:11; Rev. 12:9**). So Moses warned the people that the standard for truth must never be a miraculous sign or wonder (or other areas of human experience). The standard of truth is the Word of God.

B. (:3) Spiritual Seduction Can Be a Test from God

“you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”

Michael Grisanti: This set of circumstances represents a **divine test** to discern the status of Israel’s heart, i.e., whether they love God wholeheartedly (live in absolute loyalty). Instead of following after pagan gods, they should follow and revere Yahweh, keep his commands, obey and serve him, and hold fast to him (the longest collection of “covenantal” verbs in Deuteronomy).

Peter Craigie: The temptation would test the true disposition of the hearts of the Israelites, and while the temptation was genuinely dangerous, the overcoming of that temptation would strengthen the people in their love of God and obedience to his commandments.

C. (:4) Six Ways to Stay on Track Spiritually

1. “You shall follow the LORD your God”

2. “and fear Him;”

3. “and you shall keep His commandments,”

4. “listen to His voice,”

5. “serve Him,”

6. “and cling to Him.”

Bruce Hurt: **Self Sufficiency** is the arrogant assumption that I can go it alone... without God. **Clinging** is the humble acknowledgment that I must be intimately connected to God for life to make sense and to be worth living. In Joshua's admonition to **Cling** to God he gives this warning:

*"If you ever go back and **Cling** to the rest of these nations (i.e. the world and its values)... (they) shall be to you as: A snare and a trap... A whip on your sides... Thorns in your eyes... until you perish from off this good land which the Lord your God has given you." (Joshua 23:12)*

D. (:5a) Spiritual Seduction is a Capital Offense Because it Threatens to Negate the Freedom Secured by Redemption

"But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk."

Gerald Gerbrandt: Any prophet or leader within Israel who, despite everything God has done (v. 5b) and despite the clarity of God's expectation (vv. 3b-4), invites people to reject this story in favor of some unknown god—that speaker has committed **treason** (v. 5). Although rebellion (RSV, NIV) may be a more common translation of the Hebrew here, the term treason more fully captures the spirit and emotion of the text. Such a person has betrayed the very nature of their own identity as a member of God's people. Such an action puts at risk the survival of the larger people, with the punishment for treason being **death**; even today some nations punish treason with death. The phrase *put to death* is common Old Testament language for the ultimate punishment (cf. **Gen 26:11; Exod 19:12; Lev 19:20; Deut 17:6**; etc.).

E. (:5b) Spiritual Surgery Protects the Community from Apostasy

"So you shall purge the evil from among you."

Gerald Gerbrandt: The Hebrew term translated *purge* is based on a verbal root that means "to burn out," or "to cauterize." The logic of the passage is that the sin of going after other gods is such that the people as a whole can be poisoned by it, "so that unless the offender is 'excised,' the covenant is threatened and the communal life placed in jeopardy (cf. **Josh. 7**)" (**Cairns**: 136), that is, like surgery to remove cancerous growth.

II. (:6-11) DENOUNCING SPIRITUAL SEDUCTION BY A CLOSE RELATIVE OR FRIEND

A. (:6-7) Secret Seduction by Loved Ones is Especially Pernicious

"If your brother, your mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife you cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods' (whom neither you nor your fathers have known, 7 of the gods of the peoples who are around you, near you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other end),"

Gerald Gerbrandt: Whereas the temptation of the prophet probably was a public situation, here the text draws attention to the secretive or private nature of the enticement.

Daniel Block: Viewed as a whole, this list imagines those who are closest and dearest as potential conspirators intent on leading the family and the community away from the worship of Yahweh. Like most seditious plots, this action is urged “secretly,” presumably within the walls of one’s home—as if Yahweh or his spies are unable to see what goes on inside. To “entice” people to follow a different god is treason of the highest order.

Michael Grisanti: Especially in the light of Israel’s social structure based on the extended family, one relative had significant potential to influence other relatives for evil or for good. But loyalty to God supersedes personal relationships (cf. **Lk 14:26**).

Earl Kalland: When speaking of the gods of the people who would be around them in Canaan (v. 7), Moses referred to them three times in this chapter either as “*gods you have not known*” (vv. 2, 13) or as “*gods that neither you nor your fathers have known*” (v. 6). It is not that the Israelites had never heard of these gods but rather that neither they nor their fathers had ever acknowledged them as gods. They had never known them as their gods in day-to-day experience. Craigie (p. 223) says, “The Israelites *knew* God from their experience of his presence with them and word to them, but they had no such knowledge of any other supposed gods.”

B. (:8) Secret Seduction Must be Resisted in 5 Ways

1. “*you shall not yield to him*”
2. “*or listen to him;*”
3. “*and your eye shall not pity him,*”
4. “*nor shall you spare [him]*”
5. “*or conceal him.*”

Daniel Block: The instructions are detailed, beginning with five negative commands, followed by three positive orders. By heaping up the former (v. 8) Moses addresses the tendency to let sentimentality interfere with the proper administration of justice. Whereas earlier Moses had simply urged his people not to listen to prophets or dreamers (v. 3), in **verse 8** he intensifies the command with a direct appeal to the will of the hearer: “*Do not yield to him or listen to him,*” and follows this up with a twofold charge not to let natural human emotions deflect from what needs to be done. The first, “*Show him no pity,*” discourages persons charged with carrying out punishment from being lenient toward the offender. The second, “*,*” prohibits feeling sorry for or showing compassion toward the person *Do not spare him*. The last command, “*Do not ... shield him,*” demands that relatives and close friends expose the perpetrator of the crime—they are not to give him asylum.

Duane Christensen: The focus of attention in this structure is that no pity is to be shown to the guilty party, however close the relative may be. The outer frame moves from the

command not to do what the person says to that of not condoning it as well. In a similar manner, the inner frame moves from the command not to listen to the words of the guilty party to the command not to spare them from the penalty God has decreed for their action.

C. (:9-10) Secret Seduction Requires You Taking the Initiative in Execution

“But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. 10 So you shall stone him to death because he has sought to seduce you from the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The proximity of the source of seduction leads to a heightened emphasis on the punishment. Not only is the verdict death, but also the lured family member initiates executing the verdict.

D. (:11) Swift Execution Serves as a Deterrent from Future Seduction

*“Then all Israel will hear and be afraid,
and will never again do such a wicked thing among you.”*

David Guzik: Many modern researchers and pundits say that capital punishment is no deterrent to crime. God says it is a deterrent (properly practiced, of course).

III. (:12-18) DENOUNCING SPIRITUAL SEDUCTION BY UNIDENTIFIED URBAN REVOLUTIONARIES

A. (:12-13) Entire Cities Can be Susceptible to Spiritual Seduction

*“If you hear in one of your cities, which the LORD your God is giving you to live in, anyone saying that 13 some worthless men have gone out from among you and have seduced the inhabitants of their city, saying,
'Let us go and serve other gods' (whom you have not known),”*

Peter Craigie: the temptation might come from a group of men intent upon undermining the allegiance of a whole city. . . The evildoers are “urban revolutionaries” in that the action they advocated would be contrary to the constitution of the state and of the city (viz., the covenant with God) and (if successful) would have led to a total change in the nature of ancient Israel, which would have been disastrous in its effects.

B. (:14a) Establishing the Truth Requires Thorough Investigation

“then you shall investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly.”

Daniel Block: Because this scenario envisages rumors of spiritual sedition rather than direct contact with those who lead in the defection from Yahweh, instead of immediately calling for the death penalty Moses demands **careful investigation** to determine whether the rumors of “*this detestable thing*” are true or false (v. 14a). The seriousness of the inquiry is reflected in the verbs describing the process: “*to inquire, seek,*” “*to probe, search out,*” and “*to investigate [thoroughly].*”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Presumably the public pronouncements of a prophet, or the enticement of someone close, albeit expressed in secret, would have been unambiguous.

R. K. Harrison: A further important principle of justice is here enunciated, namely that the fullest investigation should precede punishment. Much of British common law can be traced to the Mosaic enactments.

C. (:14b-15) Entire City Would Then be Subject to Destruction if Found Guilty

“And if it is true and the matter established that this abomination has been done among you, 15 you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it and all that is in it and its cattle with the edge of the sword.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The text raises the possibility that a whole town may fall prey to the seduction of other gods.

D. (:16a) Elimination of the Booty by Means of a Fiery Sacrifice to the Lord

“Then you shall gather all its booty into the middle of its open square and burn the city and all its booty with fire as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God;”

Duane Christensen: The law as stated here in **13:13–19** concerns an entire Israelite city that has been enticed into idolatry. That city is to be treated as though it were under the ban of holy war. Like the cities of Jericho and Ai in the book of Joshua, it is to be burned as a holocaust to YHWH, and all of its inhabitants destroyed utterly. Behind this command lies the concept that idolatry is a violation of holiness that pollutes. Purity can be restored only when the impurity is removed from the midst of the larger community of faith.

E. (:16b) Enduring Legacy = Perpetual Ruins

“and it shall be a ruin forever. It shall never be rebuilt.”

F. (:17-18) End Result of Obedience Will Be Renewed Mercy and Prosperity

“And nothing from that which is put under the ban shall cling to your hand, in order that the LORD may turn from His burning anger and show mercy to you, and have compassion on you and make you increase, just as He has sworn to your fathers, 18 if you will listen to the voice of the LORD your God, keeping all His commandments which I am commanding you today, and doing what is right in the sight of the LORD your God.”

Adam Clarke: As God did not permit them to take the spoils of these idolatrous cities they could be under no temptation to make war upon them. It could only be done through a merely religious motive, in obedience to the command of God, as they could have no profit by the subversion of such places. How few religious wars would there

ever have been in the world had they been regulated by this principle: ‘Thou shalt neither extend thy territory nor take any spoils!’

R. K. Harrison: The punishment of idolaters and apostates must not be a thing of material gain for Israel.

Daniel Block: Moses ends this chapter with a general pastoral reminder of the **conditionality** of Yahweh’s renewed favor (v. 18). Employing familiar language, he sets out three conditions: Israel must obey the voice of Yahweh in whatever he says, keep all his commandments that Moses is giving them this day, and do what is right in his eyes. This is an efficient summary of the essence of Israel’s vassaldom. As the trophy of divine grace, her devotion must be directed to Yahweh alone, and her love for him demonstrated in unreserved and unqualified obedience.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can we tell that a prophet is truly speaking the Word of the Lord?
- 2) When we fail to deal with sin decisively (cf. the Israelites not driving the Canaanites out of the land), how does that open us up to spiritual seduction?
- 3) Why does the Lord demand capital punishment for those instigating spiritual seduction?
- 4) Why would the Israelites have been tempted to show pity and be too soft in their approach to spiritual seduction?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gerald Gerbrandt: Each scenario is presented with a common structure:

1. Identification of a source of temptation (vv. 1, 6, 12). Each paragraph opens with some individual or group leading the people astray. The examples cover an unusual breadth of temptation. Each case makes a specific point: together they stand for all possible sources of apostasy.

2. A set phrase for the invitation to stray: *Let us follow/go worship/go and worship other gods (vv. 2, 6, 13).* The temptation is in direct speech, beginning with the important words *Let us*. With these words someone entices or attracts others to join in a particular direction. The language of following, or worshiping, or going after other gods is typically Deuteronomic. The text does not make clear whether the invitation is to

have these gods replace Israel's God, or whether the invitation is to worship these gods alongside God. But ultimately this distinction makes no difference: both are clear transgressions of the first commandment and thus rebellion against God.

3. A reference to the gods as previously unknown (vv. 2, 6, 13). It is striking that each invitation includes some reference to these gods as previously unknown. The term “*know*” implies **relationship** and **experience**, not merely awareness of them. Hosea, a prophet whose theology has numerous contacts with Deuteronomy, repeatedly uses the term in his characterization of God's relationship to his people. He addresses a people God “*know[s]*” (**Hos 5:3**), but which has demonstrated a lack of “*knowledge of God*” (**2:8; 4:1, 6; 5:4; 11:3**), yet in the future will once more “*know the Lord*” (**2:20; 6:3**). Deuteronomy emphasizes that the God of the exodus has loved and chosen Israel (e.g., **7:7–8**), that Israel has seen with its own eyes what God has done (e.g., **1:30; 3:21; 4:9, 34; 6:22**) and thus should know this God. Notice **4:35**—*To you it was shown [i.e., you were made to see] so that you would acknowledge [i.e., know] that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him.* Israel has a God it knows; the repeated portrayal of the gods in this passage as ones Israel has not known emphasizes the enormity of their fickleness. Israel has no excuse.

4. Identification of God with exodus and gift of land (vv. 5, 10, 12). Each scenario at least once, directly or indirectly, declares that it is Yahweh who led them out of Egypt and is giving them the land. Through God's actions on behalf of Israel, in the exodus and in the gift of the land east of the Jordan, Israel has experienced God's nature and has come to know God. The tone of exasperation is clear: how can Israel now turn its back on the God who has demonstrated through these past actions his love and care for the people? How can they go after unknown gods?

5. A verdict of death (vv. 5, 9–10, 15–16). The matter of whom Israel worships is a life-and-death matter. Death is the consequence of rebuffing the God of life.

6. An interpretation of outcome (vv. 5, 11, 17–18). Each account concludes with a statement of motivation or interpretation, consistent with this not being case law. With this common structure and uniform conclusion, the case is made. Through election and deliverance, Israel is bound to its God. Substituting the worship of some other god, or even adding the worship of other gods alongside the worship of Yahweh, has fatal consequences. It is a clear either/or situation.

David Guzik: This chapter asks an important question: **What would it take to lead you away from God?** Would signs and wonders do it? What if your mate forsook God, or all of your friends? What if culture, or nationalism, or ethnic ties called you away from Jesus? We must never such ties to come before our bond to Jesus. We must decide, as the song says, “*Though none go with me, still I will follow.*”

Warren Wiersbe: Unfortunately, Israel didn't obey these laws and idolatry multiplied in the nation during the reign of Solomon and after the kingdom divided. When Jeroboam became ruler of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, he made idolatry official by setting up

two golden calves for the people to worship, one at Dan and the other at Bethel. In this way, he encouraged the people not to go to Jerusalem to worship (**1 Kings 12:25ff**). Because of their idolatry, Israel fell to Assyria in 722 B.C. and Judah fell to Babylon in 606–586 B.C. God would rather that the nation be scattered and the holy sanctuary be destroyed than that His people worship false gods. The people forgot that it was the Lord Jehovah who delivered them from Egypt and gave them their land (**Deut. 13:5, 10**).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 14:1-21

TITLE: *HOLINESS REFLECTED IN EATING REGULATIONS*

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S PEOPLE MUST MANIFEST THEIR DISTINCTIVE OF HOLINESS IN AREAS OF DAILY LIVING (e.g. DIETARY LAWS)

INTRODUCTION:

Michael Grisanti: This pericope begins and ends with a focus on Israel's identity as God's "*children*" (14:1), a people "*holy to the LORD*" (14:2, 21). This repeated emphasis forms an **inclusio** (the repetition of a theme or an explicit statement "enveloping" the passage) that highlights the theme of the entire section, namely, the **impact of a holy identity on daily life**. The practices delineated in the ensuing verses are not holy themselves but were ordained by Yahweh to mark out Israel more clearly from the pagan nations around them.

Daniel Block: Moses transforms the legal dietary document (Lev. 11) into a moral document (Deut. 14), declaring how Israel's status as Yahweh's "*holy people*" is to be reflected in actions as fundamental as **eating**. Here the focus of Israel's pastor is on affirming what the Israelites may do rather than on prohibiting what they may not do. That Moses seems more concerned to open doors rather than to close them is reinforced by the opening declaration ("*You are the children of the LORD your God,*" v. 1a) and his framing **verses 4–20** with statements that are profoundly ethical (vv. 1b–3 and v. 21). The positive introductions to the categories of food are equally striking (vv. 4, 9, 11, 20), suggesting these statements are better understood as grants of permission and invitation than as legal proscriptions. Being the covenant people of Yahweh implicates all aspects of life—even as mundane a matter as eating.

Gerard Gerbrandt: As does **Leviticus 11**, Deuteronomy here instructs Israel regarding clean and unclean animals, identifying which may be eaten and which are prohibited. As in the creation story of **Genesis 1**, the animal world is divided into three categories—animals of the land, animals of the sea, and animals of the air. Significant for the passage are its opening and closing, emphasizing the holy nature of Israel. Incorporated within the framework are a few additional prohibitions: against participating in certain mourning rites (14:1b), against eating animals that have died of themselves (14:21a), and against boiling a kid in its mother's milk (14:21c).

Jack Deere: In conclusion, all these food laws would have reminded Israel of her **unique status** before God. No Israelite could eat without realizing that in every area of his life he was to be **consecrated** to God. Likewise an Israelite's diet served as a **testimony** of his relationship to the Lord in the presence of Gentiles. As stated earlier, in the New Testament God abolished the food laws of the Old Testament (**Mark 7:14–23; Acts 10:9–23**). However, Christians should demonstrate their unique relationship to

God by the purity of their lives. Christians may demonstrate their faith and unique relationship with the Lord by offering sincere thanks at mealtimes to God, the Creator and Provider of all food (1 Tim. 4:3–5).

I. (:1-2) OUR FAMILY IDENTITY AND OUR ELECTION CALL US TO HOLINESS

A. (:1) Our Family Identity Calls Us to Holiness

1. Sons of God

“You are the sons of the LORD your God;”

Gerard Gerbrandt: The people of Israel are *children of God*, both because this represents a tender and intimate relationship and because this relationship places responsibilities on Israel to live in a particular manner.

2. Separate from Pagan Customs Regarding Mourning Rites

*“you shall not cut yourselves
nor shave your forehead for the sake of the dead.”*

MacArthur: The practice of making deep gashes on the face and arms or legs, in times of grief, was universal among pagans. It was seen as a mark of respect for the dead, as well as a sort of propitiatory offering to the gods who presided over death. The Jews learned this custom in Egypt and, though weaned from it, relapsed into the old superstition (cf. Isa 22:12; Jer 16:6; 47:5). Tattoos also were connected to names of idols, and were permanent signs of apostasy.

Jack Deere: The other nations had peculiar and superstitious beliefs about dying and the dead. Some even worshiped dead spirits. The precise significance of the rituals mentioned here (Deut. 14:1)—laceration and shaving the head for the dead—is unknown today. But cutting oneself was a sign of mourning (cf. Jer. 16:6; 41:5; 47:5; 48:37). However, it is clear that these practices reflected beliefs about the dead that conflicted with faith in the Lord, the ultimate Source of life. Therefore when a loved one died, the Israelites were to demonstrate their faith in the Lord by refraining from these pagan practices. Today Christians may demonstrate even greater faith when a believing loved one dies (cf. 1 Thes. 4:13–18).

Daniel Block: He highlights their unique status with four expressions. They are:

- (1) the children of Yahweh;
- (2) a holy people, belonging to Yahweh their God;
- (3) the elect people of Yahweh, chosen from all the peoples on the face of the earth, to be
- (4) Yahweh’s own treasured possession.

The meaning of these prohibitions against pagan practices in the present context seems to be bound up with the dietary laws themselves. Viewing this text as an invitation to eat at Yahweh’s table, it is important that the participants be ritually clean (cf. 26:14).

If physical contact with a corpse was deemed defiling (cf. **Lev. 11:24–40**), how much more objectionable for the holy people of Yahweh to attempt spiritual contact with the dead.

B. (:2) Our Election Calls Us to Holiness

1. Chosen Purposefully – to be Holy and Dedicated to the Lord

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God;”

All of our insecurities in life – our fears, our sense of inadequacy and lack of significance – are resolved by realizing how precious we are to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are special!

Gerard Gerbrandt: As in **Deuteronomy 7:6** (a verse identical to **14:2**), Israel’s holiness is a by-product of its undeserved election, not something it achieves. This election is from all the peoples of the earth, thereby drawing attention to Israel’s unique status, as reflected in the phrase his treasured possession. The introduction and conclusion thus place the dietary regulations within a context of living in a manner consistent with Israel’s identity as a holy people. . .

Deuteronomy frames the dietary regulations with the statement *For you are a people holy to the LORD your God*, and adds in the introduction, *it is you the LORD has chosen out of all the peoples of the earth, his treasured possession*. The dietary regulations thus are not the way to holiness, but they reflect and represent this holiness. Although concern for order and completeness may have been a factor in their original development, in Deuteronomy these regulations distinguish Israel from others: they set the boundaries between Israel as a holy people and the profane nations surrounding it.

2. Chosen Personally

“and the LORD has chosen you”

3. Chosen Possessively

“to be a people for His own possession”

We are a treasured, precious possession of the Lord God who both created and redeemed us.

Made-up Chorus I used to sing to my young children upon putting them to bed every evening:

*“Precious . . . that’s what you are to me
You’re so precious my babykins my sweet [Julie]
I love my girl, you’re my pride and joy,
And you’re precious, so precious to me.”*

4. Chosen Preferentially

“out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”

The Creator could have chosen anybody . . . any nation . . . but He has chosen ME!

II. (:3-20) HOLINESS IS REFLECTED IN DIETARY LAWS – CLEAN VS UNCLEAN ANIMALS WITH RESPECT TO EATING

A. (:3) Summary Prohibition

“You shall not eat any detestable thing.”

Daniel Block: The rationale for the boundaries described here is not clearly understood, Scholars have proposed a variety of theories for taboos on unclean food:

- cultic (they were associated with Canaanite religious practices),
- aesthetic (they are loathsome or repulsive),
- hygienic (they cause illness),
- sociological (they have ambiguous form and lack physical integrity), and
- didactic (they illustrate/teach wrongful behavior).

It seems most likely that the forbidden animals are rejected because of their association with **death**.

- (1) **Leviticus 11:24–40** emphasizes the defiling effect of contact with animal carcasses.
- (2) The dietary instructions in **Deuteronomy 14** are introduced with reference to rituals related to the cult of the dead (v. 1).
- (3) The account concludes with regulations concerning animals that have died a natural death (v. 21).

In addition, we note that most of the animals designated unclean are carnivores, or scavengers that feed on carrion, or ground creatures in constant contact with unclean matter.

Duane Christensen: Forbidden foods are placed in the same category of the “*abominations*” of idolatry (**7:25–26; 13:15**), sacrifice of blemished animals (**17:1**); witchcraft and pagan forms of divination (**18:9, 12**), wearing clothing of the opposite sex (**22:5**), bringing “*a harlot’s fee*” in payment of a vow to YHWH (**23:19**), and other forbidden acts (**12:31; 17:4; 20:18; 24:4; 25:16; 27:15; 32:16**).

Eugene Merrill: The list of animals prohibited for human consumption is characterized by the single word “*detestable*,” a term that suggests anything that is repulsive to and abhorred by God or even man (cf. **Lev 18:22-30; Deut 7:25; 12:31; 17:1; 18:9-14; 25:13-16; Prov 6:16-19**). In the context these creatures were detestable because they represented objects outside the pale of covenant allowance for the Israelite diet and not simply because they may or may not have had nutritive or hygienic deficiency. That is, they were impure **simply because the Lord said so** and for that reason alone were detestable and to be avoided. This is precisely the principle underlying the Lord’s words to a protesting Peter, who, in his vision, refused to eat animals let down from heaven: “*Do not call anything impure that God has made clean*” (**Acts 11:9**). All things are pure

or impure as God himself dictates and not by inherent character or quality. Israel also, then, was pure (or holy) and the nations impure (or unholy) **according to the elective purposes of God**, not because of intrinsic qualities (cf. **Deut 7:7-8**).

B. (:4-8) Clean and Unclean Land Animals

1. (:4-6) Clean

“These are the animals which you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, 5 the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope and the mountain sheep. 6 And any animal that divides the hoof and has the hoof split in two and chews the cud, among the animals, that you may eat.”

2. (:7-8) Unclean

a. (:7) Defining Characteristics

“Nevertheless, you are not to eat of these among those which chew the cud, or among those that divide the hoof in two: the camel and the rabbit and the rock-badger, for though they chew the cud, they do not divide the hoof; they are unclean for you.”

Utley: This animal is apparently mentioned in **Lev. 11:6** as “hare” or “rabbit.” It is interesting that Leviticus says (as assumed here) that the rabbit **chews the cud**. This is a good place to remind readers that the Israelites based their knowledge of nature on **observable characteristic** (phenomenological language). Rabbits do not, in actuality, chew the cud, but the rapid movement of their noses look as if they do. This is not an error in the Bible, but the recognition the ancients based their knowledge on observation, not modern, scientific methods.

b. (:8) Special Case of the Pig

“And the pig, because it divides the hoof but does not chew the cud, it is unclean for you. You shall not eat any of their flesh nor touch their carcasses.”

C. (:9-10) Clean and Unclean Sea Animals

1. (:9) Clean

“These you may eat of all that are in water: anything that has fins and scales you may eat,”

2. (:10) Unclean

“but anything that does not have fins and scales you shall not eat; it is unclean for you.”

D. (:11-20) Clean and Unclean Sky Animals

1. (:11) Clean

“You may eat any clean bird.”

2. (:12-19) Unclean

“But these are the ones which you shall not eat: the eagle and the vulture and the buzzard, 13 and the red kite, the falcon, and the kite in their kinds, 14 and every raven in its kind, 15 and the ostrich, the owl, the sea gull, and the hawk in their kinds, 16 the little owl, the great owl, the white owl, 17 the pelican, the carrion vulture, the cormorant, 18 the stork, and the heron in their kinds, and the hoopoe and the bat. 19 And all the teeming life with wings are unclean to you; they shall not be eaten.”

3. (:20) Clean

“You may eat any clean bird.”

III. (:21) MAINTIAN YOUR DISTINCT HOLY STATUS

A. Avoid Food from Animals that Died a Natural Death

1. Prohibition

“You shall not eat anything which dies of itself.”

Peter Craigie: it is more likely prohibited because the animal had not been killed in the proper fashion and the blood drained out (see **12:16**). For this reason, the animal could be eaten by a resident alien or sold to a foreigner, neither of which would have been possible if the meat was already bad. The Israelites were not to eat such meat, which would be ritually unclean, because they were a holy people to the Lord (see also **14:2**).

2. Rationale

a. Does Not Apply to Non-Israelites

“You may give it to the alien who is in your town, so that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner,”

b. Applies to Israelites Due to Their Holy Status

“for you are a holy people to the LORD your God.”

B. Avoid Certain Types of Preparation of Food

“You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.”

Duane Christensen: The Yiddish word **kosher** has made its way into the English language as referring to animals and food that conform to all the dietary laws for slaughter and preparation, including the separation of meat and dairy products, on the basis of the prohibition of boiling a kid in its mother's milk (**Deut 14:21b**).

Eugene Merrill: Exactly what this means has been much debated, but it clearly has to do with a religious or cultic ritual so abhorrent to the Lord that it is mentioned twice previously as a summary statement of that which is illicit to Israel as a special people. The first of these occurrences is in **Exod 23:19**, the verse that brings to a conclusion the so-called Book of the Covenant. Here it is also in the immediate context of festival keeping and proper use of blood and other materials of sacrifice (**23:14-19**). The second

allusion to the rite appears in **Exod 34:26**, at the end of the “ritual decalogue” of vv. **10-26**. Here it follows a statement identical to that of **Exod 23:18-19** and in the same liturgical context of festival and offering.

It is reasonable to conclude that the boiling of a young goat in its mother's milk was part of a **Canaanite festival ritual** that so epitomized that depraved cultus that it came to symbolize all that was evil and detestable in it. Both uses of the prohibition against it in Exodus are in **festival contexts** and, indeed, this is the case here in Deuteronomy as well, though here the festival instructions follow rather than precede it (**Deut 14:22-29**). Its position in Deuteronomy is to allow it to serve as a framing device matching the prohibition of **14:1**.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do we try to appear **distinctive** as Christians (in a good sense) or do we try to blend in with the world?
- 2) How could God institute these dietary regulations for the nation of Israel and then lift them in the church age?
- 3) What is the connection between **Election** and **Holiness**?
- 4) Why were there different standards of behavior for native born Israelites vs. aliens that were in their towns?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: The structure of the larger unit as a whole may be outlined as follows:

- A On being a holy people in regard to pagan mourning customs **14:1-2**
 - B Land animals: eat what parts the hoof and chews the cud **14:3-8**
 - X Water animals: eat what has fins and scales **14:9-10**
 - B' Winged animals: eat only clean birds **14:11-20**
- A' On being a holy people in regard to pagan culinary practices **14:21**

Michael Grisanti: Rationale or Underlying Principles Separating Clean vs Unclean: Finally, various symbolic explanations have been offered over the years (see **Wenham**, “Theology of Unclean Food,” 8–9, and **Hartley**, 143, for some of the suggested symbolic explanations). **Mary Douglas** (Purity and Danger [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966], 41–57; idem, “The Abominations of Leviticus,” in Anthropological

Approaches to the Old Testament [ed. B. Lang; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 100–16) has proposed a symbolic understanding based on anthropological studies that several scholars have found commendable (W. Bellinger, Leviticus [NIBC; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001], 9–10, 72; P. Budd, Leviticus [NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 159–60; Hartley, 144–46; Wenham, Leviticus, 23–25, 168–71; Wright, Deuteronomy, 185–86). She suggests that holiness involves more than separation from evil but also includes the positive **concepts of wholeness and integrity**. Any anomaly in that wholeness causes uncleanness. The animal world can be divided into three realms: those that fly in the air, those that walk on the land, and those that swim in the sea (cf. **Ge 1:20–30**). Any animals that do not conform to the customary features of each division are regarded as unclean (e.g., insects that fly like birds but have four legs like land animals, fish without fins and scales, the regular means of locomotion).

Although Douglas’s proposal deserves attention, like others it fails to answer certain questions. For example, why must the hoofs of a land animal be split for it to be considered pure? J. Moskala has sought to connect the distinctions between clean and unclean to the **creation ideal of life**. Unclean animals are linked to death for various reasons, including their carnivorous diets, use in war, and hygienic dangers (The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals of Leviticus 11 [Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society, 2000], 315–48; cf. idem, “Dietary Laws in Leviticus 11 and Creation,” in *Creation, Life, and Hope: Essays in Honor of Jacques B. Doukhan* [ed. J. Moskala; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews Univ. Press, 2000], 17–28).

[continuing] Milgrom (Leviticus 1–16, 722) has developed the **concept of holiness** as the rationale for these regulations and made the following comparison: All animals, clean animals (fewer), and sacrificial animals (fewest), correspond to humankind, the nation of Israel, and Israel’s priests, respectively. The dietary system delineated in **Leviticus 11** and **Deuteronomy 14** would teach the Israelites reverence for life by “

- (1) reducing his choice of flesh to a few animals;
- (2) limiting the slaughter of even these few permitted animals to the most humane way . . . and
- (3) prohibiting the ingestion of blood . . . as acknowledgement that bringing death to living things is a concession of God’s grace and not a privilege of man’s whim” (735).

Utley: Grieving Rites

The Israelites expressed sorrow for the death of a loved one and for personal repentance, as well as corporate crimes, in several ways:

1. tear outer robe, **Gen. 37:29, 34; 44:13; Jdgs. 11:35; 2 Sam. 1:11; 3:31; 1 Kgs. 21:27; Job 1:20**
2. put on sackcloth, **Gen. 37:34; 2 Sam. 3:31; 1 Kgs. 21:27; Jer. 48:37**
3. take off shoes, **2 Sam. 15:30; Isa. 20:3**
4. put hands on head, **2 Sam. 13:9; Jer. 2:37**
5. put dust on head, **Josh. 7:6; 1 Sam. 4:12; Neh. 9:1**
6. sit on the ground, **Lam. 2:10; Ezek. 26:16** (lay on the ground, **2 Sam.**

12:16) Isa. 47:1

7. beat the breast, **1 Sam. 25:1; 2 Sam. 11:26; Nah. 2:7**
8. cut the body, **Deut. 14:1; Jer. 16:6; 48:37**
9. fast, **2 Sam. 1:16, 22; 1 Kgs. 21:27**
10. chant a lament, **2 Sam. 1:17; 3:31; 2 Chr. 35:25**
11. baldness (hair pulled out or shaved), **Jer. 48:37**
12. cut beards short, **Jer. 48:37**
13. cover head or face, **2 Sam. 15:30; 19:4**

Peter Pett: So the emphasis all through this passage has been on doing what is seemly, and avoiding all appearance of lowering themselves to the level of the world of predatorial beasts and birds, and creeping things, and death. Especially of avoiding all things that were seen as consigned to the dust to which the serpent had originally been consigned, and the avoidance of contact with the sphere of '*the dust of death*'. In Leviticus the connection with **Genesis 1-3** is more apparent. They were to **look Godward and not earthward**. This would then protect them from disease and from idolatry, but equally importantly, from being unwholesome. The aim of such teaching was not only to prevent their eating what might physically harm them, but to give them an attitude to life that was pure.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 14:22-29

TITLE: THE BASICS ABOUT THE ANNUAL TITHE OF CROPS AND LIVESTOCK

BIG IDEA:

OFFERING TITHES AFFORDS THE OPPORTUNITY TO JOYFULLY CELEBRATE A COMMUNAL FEAST IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: Deuteronomy 14:22–29 is transitional, bringing to a conclusion a chapter on eating in the presence of Yahweh and introducing a series of instructions on charity that extends through **chapter 15**. With the latter it shares a common concern to loosen the Israelites' hold on their material possessions.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Tithes easily sound like taxes and, when required of people, are really not that different. The distinction between tithes and taxes was even less in the ancient world, where state and religious bureaucracy were interconnected and where people were “taxed” for the support of public personnel, whether religious, political, or military. . . the overall mood is one of eating, drinking, and rejoicing in the presence of Yahweh, the God who has redeemed them and now is blessing them (**14:29**).

Duane Christensen: It was the individual worshiper's responsibility to provide the means to maintain the religious establishment, but a major part of the offerings presented in the annual tithe were in fact consumed by the worshiper himself and his household. It is much easier to give when the giver's own needs are met as well within the context of celebration in public worship. For the people of God in ancient Israel, tithing was not an option. Part of the offerings went to the support of the Levites, and in the three-year cycle a major part to the poor (symbolized by the widow, the orphan, and the resident alien in their midst). Nonetheless, the chief purpose of the tithe was “*that you may learn to fear YHWH your God always*” (**v 23**).

Keil: As the Israelites were to sanctify their food, on the one hand, positively by abstinence from everything unclean, so were they, on the other hand, to do so negatively by delivering the tithes and firstlings at the place where the Lord would cause His name to dwell, and by holding festal meals on the occasion, and rejoicing there before Jehovah their God.

Ryrie: The tithe had to be taken to the central sanctuary. This referred to what was known as the second tithe. Two tithes were required: an annual tithe for the maintenance of the Levites (**Lev. 27:30; Nu. 18:21**) and a second tithe brought to Jerusalem for the Lord's feast (**Dt. 14:22**). Every third year, however, the second tithe was kept at home and used for the poor (**Dt. 14:28**). One's use of money is often a barometer of his spirituality (cf. **1 John 3:17**). This command was considered by

Jewish interpreters to be for a second tithe (see **Lev. 27:30+** and **Num. 18:21** for the first; also **Mal. 3:8+**), which was brought to the central sanctuary either in kind or in money. Apparently the offerer could use a part of this tithe for a feast at the sanctuary (**Dt 14:26-27**).

Peter Pett: In total contrast with what has gone before, the tithe is holy food. It has been set aside for Yahweh and is for the priests (a tenth of it), the Levites (a good proportion of it) and Yahweh's 'pensioners', the widows, the orphans and the resident aliens, with some being made available at the religious feasts held at the Sanctuary, the place which Yahweh chooses.

So having listed those things which may or may not be eaten, he goes on to deal with eating in its highest form, eating before Yahweh of that which is His. This is the purest form of eating. They can do this because they are 'clean'. He ignores the tithing of the increase among animals, a practice which was now common among them and did not therefore need to be referred to, and proceeds to deal with what will be a relatively new phenomenon in the future, the tithing of crops and vegetation. The abundance of this which will be produced when they enter the land will result in an additional purpose for the tithe.

R. K. Harrison: When Moses spoke these words, the principle of tithing was already well accepted in Israel. Tithes were first given as a token of gratitude (**Gn. 14:20**) or devotion (**Gn. 28:22**). Man's wealth is a divine gift, and is held in trust for God (**Dt. 8:18; Mt. 25:14**). To mark the sacredness of this whole, a definite proportion is to be set aside and dedicated at the sanctuary. This is the so-called "second tithe", as contrasted with that tithe of the produce given to maintain the Levites (see **Nu. 18:26-28**).

I. (:22) THE BASIC REQUIREMENT OF ANNUAL TITHING

A. Tithing is Essential for Every Family

"You shall surely"

This is not optional; not some type of freewill thank offering; this giving is commanded and the amount is commanded

B. Tithing is Proportional = Ten Percent

"tithes"

C. Tithing is a By-Product of Working Responsibly

"all the produce from what you sow,"

D. Tithing is Based on Your Harvest Which God Has Provided

which comes out of the field every year."

Gerald Gerbrandt: The **basic expectation** is stated in the opening verse. All were familiar with the general practice, so no background explanation is needed. Whether tithe or tax, state bureaucracy requires income. The king and his court, the cult and its personnel—all need resources to survive and implement their programs. Since the king was chosen by God, the line between religious and political is blurred. Deuteronomy, like Leviticus (27:30–33) and Numbers (18:21–32), assumes that tithing is part of life.

Duane Christensen: This tithe is to be presented in the Feast of Booths, at the end of the agricultural year, to be consumed by the household of each worshiper, along with the priestly establishment at the central sanctuary. It should be noted that all the firstlings of the livestock were consumed at the central sanctuary, not just a tenth of them (see 15:19–20).

Michael Grisanti: Building on other tithing passages (Ge 14:20; 28:22; Lev 27:30–32; Nu 18:21–28), Moses commands the children of Israel to set aside one-tenth of their produce (grain, new wine, and oil) and the firstborn of their herds and flocks each year and devote them to the Lord. As families, they will eat from that “tithe” in the central sanctuary (“*at the place he will choose*”). The pedagogical purpose for this practice is to teach God’s chosen people to fear him always (cf. 4:10; 17:19). Their prosperity will not result from their irrigation or advanced agricultural techniques but is due to Yahweh’s fixed commitment to his covenantal promises (Craigie, 233). This abundance will not be caused by Canaan’s fertility god but by the one and only God of the world, Israel’s marvelous God.

II. (:23-27) THE BASIC REGULATIONS GOVERNING TITHING

A. (:23) Standard Practice

1. Place of Celebration

“And you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name,”

2. Prescribed Offerings

“the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the first-born of your herd and your flock,”

3. Purpose of Celebration

“in order that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Deuteronomy has previously exhorted Israel to remember and not forget what God has done (e.g., 6:12; 7:18), with the danger in mind that Israel may begin to think that it is responsible for producing its own wealth (8:17). The tithe challenges any such misreading of reality. The required response is to fear God (see on 10:12–11:32, which repeatedly calls Israel to fear God; 10:12, 20). The tithe feast of **Chapter 14** brings together an emphasis on rejoicing with a didactic purpose.

Eugene Merrill: More specifically, these were all **edibles**; for the presentation of these goods, in line with covenant ratification and renewal procedures, involved a meal shared by the Lord and the people alike at the dwelling place of the Great King, the central sanctuary (cf. **Exod 23:19; 24:11; 34:26; Deut 12:5-7**). The “eating” by the Lord was, of course, represented by the burning of the offerings whereas that by the people was literal and actual. Not to be overlooked is the fact that the underlying purpose for presenting the tithe was to instill within the Israelite a proper reverence for the Lord as the Sovereign, the one to whom he was ultimately accountable (v. 23).

B. (:24-26) Special Circumstances = Logistical Concessions Based on Geography

1. (:24) Determined by Distance from the Place of Worship

“And if the distance is so great for you that you are not able to bring the tithe, since the place where the LORD your God chooses to set His name is too far away from you when the LORD your God blesses you,”

Gerald Gerbrandt: First, the tithe is a response to **God’s blessing**. Not only does **verse 24** refer to God’s blessing (cf. **12:7**); it also makes this point more vividly by listing what Israel is to tithe: the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil, as well as the firstlings of your herd and flock (**14:23**). Here is an echo of **Deuteronomy 7**, with its focus on Israel’s election. After declaring Israel’s election (**7:6**) and its basis (**7:7–11**), the chapter turns to how it benefits Israel (**7:12–26**). The key verse there is **verse 13**: *He will love you, bless you, and multiply you; he will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock, in the land that he swore to your ancestors to give you*. Each example of blessing in **Chapter 7** now is repeated in the same order, with the exception of the reference to multiplying you (herd replaces cattle). Tithing is possible because of God’s blessing, and it is a reminder of that blessing.

Daniel Block: Moses’ sympathetic disposition toward the people is evident in **verses 24–25**, where he recognizes the **logistical difficulties** that the requirement might pose for those who live far from the central sanctuary. When the Israelites experience the fulfillment of Yahweh’s blessing (**7:13; 11:13–15**), how will they carry the tithe, whether horticultural or animal, to the place of worship? Moses’ solution is both liberal and practical. Instead of packing up these goods and transporting them, the people may convert their value into silver. The worshipers were to wrap the silver in a cloth or bind it in a bag and carry it by hand to the place that Yahweh would choose to establish his name. Upon arrival at the sanctuary, the silver could be exchanged for beef or veal from the herd, mutton or lamb from the flock, and wine or other alcoholic drink.

2. (:25-26) Designated Transaction Instructions

“then you shall exchange it for money, and bind the money in your hand and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. 26 And you may spend the money for whatever your heart desires, for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires;”

3. (:26b) Devoted Joyful Participation

“and there you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: A tithe quite naturally draws to mind thoughts of giving away, of sacrificing, of losing. And yet the striking feature of this passage is that its tone is best captured by the term **rejoicing** rather than by a sense of giving away or sacrifice. For Deuteronomy, the tithe is a tithe of **celebration**.

Eugene Merrill: Like any other concession of this kind, it was subject to abuse by those who, like the moneychangers, would profit from the exchange by charging exorbitant rates.

Peter Pett: Note the emphasis on the feast as being **fully satisfying**. The land is being portrayed as providing fullness of bliss. With Yahweh dwelling among them as He has chosen to do, how could it be otherwise? It is implanting the hope of a blessed future. It was in embryo pointing forward to the everlasting kingdom.

C. (:27) Special Emphasis = Remember the Levites

“Also you shall not neglect the Levite who is in your town, for he has no portion or inheritance among you.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Even though it introduces a new element, **verse 27** is part of this section rather than the following verses (as is suggested by the NRSV paragraph divisions). Since the Levites have no allotment in the land, they need special consideration (cf. **18:1**). Numbers assigns the total tithe to the Levites with the expectation that they contribute one-tenth of it to the priests (**18:21, 26**). Deuteronomy may adjust this expectation but does not cancel it entirely. Even if the tithe celebration at the central sanctuary is lavish, at least for ancient times, there still is food left over. This verse reminds the people that despite the distinctive thrust of these verses, with all celebrating the blessing, the more traditional understanding of the tithe remains: **the Levites must not be neglected**.

III. (:28-29) THE BLESSING PROVIDED EVERY THIRD YEAR TO THE LEVITES AND THE DISADVANTAGED

A. (:28) Local Target for the Tithe Every Third Year

“At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year, and shall deposit it in your town.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The last two verses of the chapter present a third-year variation for the annual tithe (cf. **26:13–15**). Every third year (probably understood as the third and sixth year of a seven-year cycle) the tithe is stored in the local community as a “food bank” for those in need, *the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns*.

Daniel Block: Rather than bringing their tithes to the central sanctuary, in the third and sixth years the farmers must deposit their tithes in their towns. It is unclear whether everyone must do this in the same third and sixth years of the seven-year cycle, or whether they are to be staggered, which would ensure a continuous supply of food for the Levites. Although in **verse 27** “*your gates*” functions metaphorically for “*your towns*” (NIV), **verse 28** uses the expression in its literal sense. Here they can be stored and distributed to the Levites.

Michael Grisanti: Rabbinic writings refer to three kinds of tithes (**Tigay**, Deuteronomy, 141–42; **Averbeck**, NIDOTTE, 2:1052–53): a “first” tithe given to the Levites (**Nu 18:1–28**); a second tithe, part of which was eaten by the Israelites who offered their tithe to Yahweh (**Lev 27:30–31; Dt 14:22–27**); and a third tithe (for the poor) every third year (**Dt 14:28–29**). Other scholars contend that there were two distinct tithes, with the second tithe being an additional tithe sent to local Levites every third year (**14:28–29; Merrill**, Deuteronomy, 241). A number of scholars identify only one tithe. In that case, the triennial tithe was sent to the local communities rather than to the central sanctuary (**Averbeck**, NIDOTTE, 2:1047; **G. McConville**, Law and Theology in Deuteronomy [Sheffield: JSOT, 1984], 68–78; **Ridderbos**, 180; Thompson, 184). Although one must remain tentative in light of the limited evidence, the second option appears to be the most likely. The central sanctuary (and the priests and Levites serving there) would always have the same needs. It seems unlikely that they could have functioned without the tithe for a year. Also, the tithe referred to in **26:12–15** suggests a distinct tithe.

B. (:29) Loving Target for the Tithe

“And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: **Sharing blessings** is the way to ensure continuation of blessings from God.

Michael Grisanti: This loving care for the needy in their midst manifests a genuine commitment to enacting God’s desire for justice and equity among the members of his servant-nation. God promises to bless sincere conformity to his covenantal expectations.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What is the connection between this text and the beginning of **Chap. 14**?

- 2) Why the emphasis on **eating in the presence of the Lord** in joy and celebratory fashion – and how that is reflected now in the church age?
- 3) What connection have you seen in your life between your own giving and how God has blessed you?
- 4) How do these instructions compare with the NT teaching on generous and sacrificial giving?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gerald Gerbrandt: The resources themselves are significant because they are used to support the work of the church, both to pay its workers (cf. **Num 18:21–32**) and to support the disadvantaged (**Deut 14:28–29**). The Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith summarizes this as follows:

The Bible teaches cheerful, sacrificial, and proportional giving through the church in grateful response to God’s goodness. Christians do not claim any of their possessions as their own, but manage all their resources, including money, time, abilities and influence, in generous ways that give glory to God. They do not despise the poor but practice mutual aid within the church and share what they have with others in need. (MBCF 1999: 22)

One of the elements of the Deuteronomic tithe regulations largely absent in more recent use of these passages is the prominence they give to **joyful rejoicing** in the presence of God. The key limitation placed on the celebration is that it be inclusive: the whole household participates in the celebration. Other than that, the tithe money can be spent on whatever you wish or whatever you desire. The vision of Deuteronomy is for a community with a strong social concern, but the voice of Deuteronomy is not that of a dour prophet who sees only the harshness of the responsibility. Rather, the voice is more like that of a cheerleader enthusiastically encouraging the people in unabashed celebration of the blessings of the land that God has given them.

Daniel Block: Although this paragraph begins with an emphatic command annually to set aside one tenth of all that the fields produce (v. 22), the remainder reads more like an invitation to a celebration than a cultic ordinance.

(1) Moses introduces **the place** where the banquet will be held: at the place that Yahweh “*chooses as a dwelling for his Name*” (v. 23). This is not merely a geographical location. In specifying “*in the presence of the LORD your God,*” he identifies Yahweh as the divine host.

(2) Moses introduces **the banquet fare:** the tithe of their crops and their livestock (cf. 7:13, 11:14). As in 7:13, he completes the picture with “*the firstborn of your herds and*

flocks.” Whatever the Israelites bring to Yahweh they may eat.

(3) Moses declares **the purpose** of the banquet: that the Israelites may learn to revere Yahweh their God “*always.*” It is not the eating that teaches people to fear Yahweh, but eating in the presence of Yahweh. Thus the presentation of the tithe provided a means by which the settled people could participate annually in the kind of event that the elders of Israel had experienced on Horeb (4:10; Ex. 24:9–11). Reverent awe and gratitude were to characterize the people of Yahweh.

Peter Craigie: The type of community envisaged and anticipated in the Promised Land was one in which the majority of men and families would be **self-sufficient** in terms of producing their sustenance and living from the land. There would inevitably be members of the community, however, who were not self-sufficient. The system of tithes described in these two verses enabled both groups to learn and understand their continual dependence upon God. The people with produce and income gave a portion back to God, who had made provision in the first place; year by year, they learned to know and remember that the source of their sustenance was God, and every third year they remembered particularly that not all others were blessed as they were. Those without regular means of subsistence, such as aliens, widows, and orphans, were thrown onto God, the Lord of the community, for provision. In receiving it from the tithe, which properly belonged to God, their needs were met. Thus the health of the community would be maintained and the people would continue to experience the blessing of God which led to prosperity (v. 29b).

David Whitcomb: Life Governing Principles for God’s Precious Possession -- For some reason, it is difficult for Christians to take the precise truths from the Old Testament and draw an **application** for our modern lives based on the established principles of those truths. That is why the Old Testament is deemed antiquated and irrelevant by contemporary Christians. They wonder how could such odd laws as not eating bacon or not wearing clothes made of a polyester/wool blend be applicable to our lives? The key is for us to find the **principle** that is being taught by particular requirements or rules and then draw a comparison for our modern lives. That is how Jesus explained His fulfilling of the law in the Sermon on the Mount.

The theme that runs throughout the book of Deuteronomy is that the nation of Israel is God’s chosen nation. He repeatedly reminded the people through Moses that they were His precious possession. Therefore, because the people belonged to God, they would obviously be **distinct** from their neighbors who did not belong to God. Why is it so difficult for us to pull that same principle across the centuries into twenty-first century local churches? Should it also be true that because we are God’s precious possession that there are obvious distinctions between us and our unsaved neighbors, coworkers, and families? Our text lays down particular laws that worked to that end and which we should also be able to apply principally. . .

God reminded the people that He was a participant in their worship through these sacrifices. The whole tithe thing was about worshiping God. It was a reminder that all

the material blessings they enjoyed were from God's hand. Being able to take a tenth of their profit reminded the people that God's plan was for His people to use the land, wisdom, opportunities that He provided to be self-sufficient in regard to others and, at the same time, wholly dependent in regard to Him. . .

God's plan for the Church flows from those Old Testament principles. But at the same time, God's plan is different in that He does not prescribe a tithe for the Church. There is no indication in the New Testament that we are to give 10% of our increase. That idea generates debate and confusion. Is it 10% of our gross pay before taxes are withheld, or of our net pay? And does the amount on which we tithe include benefits like retirement contributions, health insurance, union dues, and all that stuff?

The 10% tithe law is a good starting place if we need a base from which to begin. But more exactly, we find in the New Testament four principles which describe God's plan for offerings in the Church. The first two are found in Paul's first letter to the Christians in Corinth. *On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come (1 Corinthians 16:2)*. Here we learn that we are to **give systematically** (like every time we are paid), and we are to give **according to how God has prospered us**. The third and fourth principles are found in Paul's second letter to those same Christians. *Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7)*. The third principle for giving is that we **give purposefully**, having thought about it. Fourth, we are to **give cheerfully**. If giving to the Lord's work is drudgery or you hate it, either stop doing it or ask the Lord to change your heart.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/82618195562.pdf>

TEXT: Deuteronomy 15:1-18

TITLE: *SABBATICAL DEBT AND INDENTURED SERVANT RELEASES*

BIG IDEA:

**THE SABBATICAL DEBT AND INDENTURED SERVANT RELEASES
GRANT A NEW START FOR ISRAELITES WHO HAVE FALLEN ON HARD
TIMES**

INTRODUCTION:

Gerald Gerbrandt: The distinctive thrust of the Deuteronomic release provisions becomes more striking when read within its larger setting. As a way of meeting their responsibility to ensure justice for the weak and disadvantaged, kings throughout the ancient Near East would issue royal decrees of release. These edicts “were royal proclamations intended to release private debts and some form of public taxes” (**Hamilton:** 48). Not uncommonly a king might issue such a release proclamation at the beginning of his reign, although it could also happen at other times. Kings considered such an act to be a sign of their commitment to justice, one of their important achievements.

Israel thus lived in a world in which the occasional canceling of debts and freeing of slaves was known, in which this was considered a significant act of justice, and in which the king was the authority with the responsibility to make it happen. That the Old Testament includes reference to debt and slave release is not unique or especially radical within the world of the day. What distinguishes the Deuteronomic release from the occasional royal decrees of kings is their **regular nature** (every seven years) and their **separation from the king**. Their implementation is to be independent of the will or political calculations of the king. Release is at the heart of life in the community of Israel.

Daniel Block: This chapter continues the appeal for soft hearts and open hands begun in **14:22** by appealing for generosity toward the poor in one’s own family (**vv. 1–11**) and toward those enslaved (**vv. 12–18**). Although on first sight, **verses 1–3** seem to have a legal flavor, Moses the pastor spends more than 80 percent of his time trying to motivate the people to adopt the policy. These are practical instructions for the congregation on the life of godliness. . .

Moses addresses both the interior and the exterior dimension of ethics. When he speaks of the “*heart*”/“*mind*” of the rich, his concern is their **disposition** toward the poor; when he speaks of the “*hand*,” his concern is their **action**.

Michael Grisanti: Throughout the OT, Israel’s treatment of the poor, fatherless, and widows served as a barometer of the nation’s conformity to Yahweh’s covenantal expectations. Treating these needy people with compassion, justice, and equity was a

fundamental part of being able to lift up God's name before the surrounding nations. The health of the covenantal nation was often measured by the quality of their care for these needy people, not by its accumulation of wealth (Hall, 257; Wright, Deuteronomy, 195).

Eugene Merrill: Through poor judgment, wrong advice, or circumstances beyond human control, there are always persons who become destitute and who must therefore cast themselves upon the merciful beneficence of others. Such contingencies in ancient Israel could be addressed by interest-free loans that could be repaid either by goods or by labor.

I. (:1-11) THE SABBATICAL DEBT RELEASE

A. (:1) The Mandate

“At the end of every seven years you shall grant a remission of debts.”

John Currid: The foundational unit of the Hebrew calendar is the observance of the weekly Sabbath (5:12–15). One application of that principle from the Decalogue is the institution of the sabbatical year. Its primary purpose is to demonstrate that Israel is fully dependent on God for her existence. A secondary purpose is to care for the disadvantaged in Israel. It is what Kaufman calls ‘a welfare system for the poor’.

Bruce Hurt: This practice tends to facilitate socio-economic balance. It does not make the poor rich, but does help them to get a new start in their economic life. The word **remission** is **shemittah** and is used only 4x (Dt 15:1, 2, 9, 31:10) which has the primary sense of letting drop and simply means the cancellation of a debt that was owed to another person. In other words, in a normal business setting this was a loan that the person would have been expected to and even be obligated to repay. In Ex. 23:10–11 **shemittah** is used for the land lying fallow every seven years. There is a type of fishing called "catch and release," which in a sense pictures this practice. The debtor is caught in the net of the creditor, but the creditor has to release him at 7 years! At that time the debtor has absolutely no obligation to pay back what had been loaned to him.

B. (:2-3) The Manner of Release

1. (:2a) Relates to the Full Obligation of the Loan

*“And this is the manner of remission:
every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor;”*

2. (:2b) Remission Demanded by the Lord

*“he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother,
because the LORD's remission has been proclaimed.”*

3. (:3) Restricted to the Israelite Community (not applicable to foreigners)

*“From a foreigner you may exact it,
but your hand shall release whatever of yours is with your brother.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: vv. 2-3 -- chiasmic structure

- A1 *Every creditor shall remit the claim that is held against the neighbor,*
B1 *not exacting it of the neighbor who is a member of the community,*
C *because the LORD's remission has been proclaimed.*
B2 *Of a foreigner you may exact it,*
A2 *but you must remit your claim on whatever any member of your community owes you.*

C. (:4-6) The Motivation for Obedience

1. (:4) Blessing without Poverty Is the Ideal Situation

“However, there shall be no poor among you, since the LORD will surely bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess,”

Eugene Merrill: The matter of borrowing and lending ought to be a moot point anyway, Moses argued, for poverty ought not to exist in the rich land the Lord would give them.

Warren Wiersbe: The **blessing of God** ought to motivate us to be a blessing and a help to others. Note how often Moses mentions the blessing of God (**Dt 15:4, 6, 10, 14, 18**). God has opened His hand generously to us, and we should open our hands widely to others (**Dt 15:8**). He blesses us so that we might be a blessing (**Gen. 12:2**). Not only must we have generous hands, but we should cultivate glad hearts as we share (**v. 10**). Giving is an occasion not for shrewd calculation (**v. 9**) but for jubilation! Paul may have had this verse in mind when he wrote *“not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver”* (**2 Cor. 9:7**)

2. (:5) Blessing Depends on Obedience

“if only you listen obediently to the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: In this idealistic depiction, obedience leads to blessing, which leads to no needy people, which leads to a wealthy corporate reality, which leads to national influence. Here is the crux: **If only Israel will obey... (v. 5)!**

3. (:6) Blessing Results in the Power of Prosperity

“For the LORD your God shall bless you as He has promised you, and you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; and you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you.”

Daniel Block: In **verse 6** Moses' attention shifts from personal economics to corporate implications of Yahweh's blessing. For rhetorical effect he repeats the divine blessing formula, adding *“as he has promised,”* a reference to a previous ordinance outside the book. Moses summarizes the evidence of Yahweh's blessing for Israel as a nation with

four statements declaring Israel's economic and political hegemony over the rest of the world, cast in symmetrical and chiasmic parallelism.

Michael Grisanti: The two areas [of blessing] specified in this passage are **financial abundance** (they will lend to many and not need to borrow from any) and **sovereignty over the nations** (cf. Dt 28:12–13). **Chapter 28** specifies that disobedience will occasion covenantal curses, including financial disaster (they will not lend but will have to borrow; 28:44) and rule by other nations (28:25, 43, 49–52).

D. (:7-11) The Magnanimity of Providing Release

Gerald Gerbrandt: The middle verses (7–11) are a general exhortation for generosity, but their reference to the seventh-year release (v. 9) clearly connect them to the debt release.

Daniel Block: Based on the syntax and the flow of ideas, this paragraph divides into three parts arranged in an ABA pattern as follows:

- instructions on how to treat the poor (vv. 7–8);
 - o a warning, signaled by “*be careful*” (v. 9);
- more instructions on how to treat the poor (vv. 10–11).

Eugene Merrill: Having addressed the matter of debt cancellation and the theoretical possibility of there being no poverty in the land of promise, Moses shifted the emphasis to the practical reality of poverty and how the more affluent in society must deal with it.

1. (:7-8) Instructions Regarding Generosity toward the Poor

a. (:7a) Generic Case Study

*“If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers,
in any of your towns in your land
which the LORD your God is giving you,”*

b. (:7b) Generosity Commanded Negatively

*“you shall not harden your heart,
nor close your hand from your poor brother;”*

Daniel Block: Israelites are to be softhearted and openhanded.

Gerald Gerbrandt: **The heart**, the place of decision making, is named thrice in the exhortation, each time with an ominous tone: *Do not be hard-hearted* (v. 7). *Do not entertain a mean thought* (v. 9; RSV, *Take heed lest there be a base thought in your heart*). *Give... and be ungrudging* (v. 10; RSV, *your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him*). Each is a “warning against a malicious will.... Deuteronomy is well aware of the self-interest of those who wield economic power and dictate economic policy and realizes that justice for the poor requires a wholly different mind-set translated into personal and political willpower” (C. Wright 1996: 191).

c. (:8) Generosity Commanded Positively

*“but you shall freely open your hand to him,
and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need
in whatever he lacks.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: **the hand** owns the loan (v. 2), it can release the loan (v. 3), it can refuse the loan (v. 7), and it can be generous (vv. 8, 11). **The hand** reflects and represents the power the wealthy have over the poor.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Deuteronomy employs a Hebrew grammatical style that **intensifies** the force of a verb through the use of the imperfect followed by the infinitive absolute of the same verb. An example of this appears in a literal translation of **verse 8**: *But opening, you shall open your hand to him; lending, you shall lend enough to him for his needs that he needs* (AT). . . . Deuteronomy uses this technique more in this chapter than anywhere else in the book, thereby heightening the intensity of the exhortation.

2. (:9) Warning against Selfish Scheming to Beat the System

a. Selfish Scheme

*“Beware, lest there is a base thought in your heart, saying,
‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,’”*

Michael Grisanti: Knowing that this mandate might cause some Israelites to refuse making loans to needy fellow Israelites as the sabbatical year approaches, Moses demands that they do not allow this divine requirement to limit their lending practices.

b. Stingy Scrooge Mentality

*“and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother,
and you give him nothing;”*

c. Sin Issue

*“then he may cry to the LORD against you,
and it will be a sin in you.”*

Daniel Block: The text identifies three pathological dispositions that plague those who are economically well-off.

- (1) The first malady is a twisted mind.
- (2) The second malady is an evil eye (NIV “*ill will*”).
- (3) The third pathology is tightfisted hands.

Earl Kalland: A warning is appended: the brother can appeal to the Lord, and the grudging-hearted will be found guilty of sin. How the appeal is made is not indicated – whether it be an informal prayer or a formal petition through a priest. Likewise, the indictment “*You will be found guilty of sin*” (v. 9) may be either one made directly by the Lord to the conscience or a formal one made by a priest (23:21-22; 24:15; cf. Lev 20:20; Num 9:13; 18:22).

3. (:10-11) Instructions Regarding Generosity towards the Poor

a. (:10) Key to Divine Blessing

“You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings.”

b. (:11) Key to Addressing the Inevitable Economic Bondage

“For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.'”

Daniel Block: In **verse 11** Moses ends this paragraph with another realistic reminder that the poor will always be around. Although the utopia he described in **verses 4–6** may never be achieved, it is an ideal for which to strive.

Duane Christensen: It is most unfortunate that this law and its citation in the NT have been misinterpreted through the centuries as license for neglect of the poor. “The sense of the passage in this view is that among an ideal people, obedient and blessed, there will be no poor, but should reality not attain the heights of the ideal, there is a specific attitude which one should have toward the poor (unbegrudging charity) and a certain act which one should do (freely give)” (**Hamilton**, VT 42 [1992] 222).

II. (:12-18) THE SABBATICAL INDENTURED SERVANT RELEASE

A. The Mandate

“If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free.”

Michael Grisanti: Since poverty can lead to slavery or servanthood, this section provides an appropriate sequel to the forgiveness of loans (**15:1–11**; cf. **Ex 21:2–11**). Being unable to provide for oneself (or experiencing some other financial distress) could lead a person voluntarily to become a slave (an “indentured” servant) to obtain basic needs or to pay off a debt (cf. **Lev 25:39–55**; **Ne 5:4–5**).

Duane Christensen: Two types of servitude are dealt with in biblical law: full slavery and indentured servants. The law here in **15:12–18** concerns **indentured servants** and is based on the recognition that Israel’s ancestors were slaves in Egypt (**v 15**). Consequently the people should show empathy to those who have been forced into servitude by the vicissitudes of life. . .

According to the book of Deuteronomy, servants had certain legal rights including rest on the Sabbath (**5:14**), inclusion in the celebration of the pilgrimage festivals (**12:18** and **16:11, 14**), and protection from abuse on the part of their masters (**23:16–17**). Moreover, full slavery was limited to foreigners. Though Israelites might become

indentured servants, they could not be held indefinitely against their will (15:12–18). On self-sale into indentured servitude, see **Mendelsohn**, *Slavery*, 18–19 and 88–90.

B. (:13-14) The Manner of Release

1. (:13) Release not Intended Repeat the Cycle of Poverty

*“And when you set him free,
you shall not send him away empty-handed.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: it exhorts the slave owner not to send out the newly freed person empty-handed. A person in debt slavery would have lost all personal resources, including access to the land, the source of the blessing. A freed slave then would have virtually no alternative but to once more sell oneself into a new cycle of slavery. Simply implementing the law in a legalistic manner achieves little. Deuteronomy follows up the basic law with a challenge to the slave owner to make it possible for the newly freed person to really start over, with the potential of being successful.

2. (:14a) Release Provided with Generous Provision

*“You shall furnish him liberally
from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat;”*

3. (:14b) Release Proportionate to How the Lord Has Blessed You

“you shall give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you.”

Michael Grisanti: The master must “*supply him liberally*” from every category of his resources (flock, threshing floor, and winepress) for at least two reasons. Because all the master has is a direct blessing from Yahweh, he will simply be sharing what God has given him. Also, since the Israelites were slaves in Egypt and experienced a unique provision of their needs from the Egyptians (pagans non-Israelites; **Ex 12:35–36**) they left behind, the Israelites should be more than willing to treat their fellow Israelites with abundant generosity.

C. (:15) The Memory Lesson

*“And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt,
and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: Release is grounded in the nature of God and in God’s relationship to Israel, a relationship shaped by Israel having been released from Egyptian slavery by that God.

David Thompson: At the root core of the word “*redemption*” is the idea of paying the price that is required to possess something that was once owned or lost. In the Greek Septuagint, the verb “*redeemed*” (*lutrow*) is one that means to pay the price and set one free. That is what God did for Israel and that is what He has done for us. That should prompt us to be generous to others.

D. (:16-17) The Master-Servant Exceptional Case

1. (:16) Relationship Working Well

“And it shall come about if he says to you, ‘I will not go out from you,’ because he loves you and your household, since he fares well with you;”

Eugene Merrill: It was altogether possible, however, that some persons who had entered into this arrangement were content to remain in it for whatever reason. The text itself suggests at least two such motives:

- (1) a bond of affection that had developed between the debtor and his patron and
- (2) his or her greatly improved standard of life under the arrangement (**v. 16**).

2. (:17) Relationship Made Permanent

*“then you shall take an awl and pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant forever.
And also you shall do likewise to your maidservant.”*

Net Note: When the bondslave's ear was drilled through to the door, the door in question was that of the master's house. In effect, the bondslave is declaring his undying and lifelong loyalty to his creditor. The scar (or even hole) in the earlobe would testify to the community that the slave had surrendered independence and personal rights. This may be what Paul had in mind when he said *“I bear on my body the marks of Jesus”* (**Gal 6:17**).

Warren Wiersbe: Certainly there’s a spiritual message here for God’s people today. We should love our Lord so much that we should want to serve Him willingly and gladly all our lives. We must never look upon our service as “slavery” but as privilege. “I love my master and don’t want to go free” is a wonderful confession of faith and love (**Ex. 21:5**). Granted, the servant’s love for his wife and children entered into the picture, but even those blessings came because of his master’s kindness, and the master was caring for them as well as his servant. What we all need is the open ear to hear God’s will (**Ps. 40:6–8; Isa. 50:4–5**) and a pierced ear that announces we love Him and are ready to obey His every command. The emphasis in this section is on faith that produces generosity. If we are “hardhearted or tightfisted” (**Deut. 15:7**, NIV), it’s evidence that we don’t really believe that God keeps His promises and provides for those who give to the needy. Jesus became poor that He might make us rich (**2 Cor. 8:9**) and He blesses us that we might be a blessing to others.

E. (:18) The Motivation for Obedience

1. Appreciative of the Service You Have Enjoyed

“It shall not seem hard to you when you set him free, for he has given you six years with double the service of a hired man;”

2. Anticipating the Lord’s Future Blessing

“so the LORD your God will bless you in whatever you do.”

Daniel Block: As in **verses 4, 6, and 10**, Moses ends with a motive clause: the reward for this gracious disposition toward persons who are granted their freedom will be the blessing of Yahweh on all that the creditor sets his hands to do.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How could we show more compassion and justice towards our Christian brethren who are poor?
- 2) When would it be beneficial for indentured servants to remain in the household and servitude of their masters?
- 3) Do we make every effort in our family finances to avoid incurring any debt – especially in light of the power of prosperity described here?
- 4) When we show generosity towards others, are we able to do it without any type of internal attitude of resistance?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gerald Gerbrandt: In ancient Israel most people lived at a subsistence level, so survival was the primary concern. When misfortune came, whether through accident, poor health, or bad crops, there was little if any reserve to fall back upon. In severe situations this could necessitate borrowing from a community member to buy food or to purchase seed for next year's crop. Generally, borrowing was reserved for such times of crisis. The contemporary practice of borrowing money for investment, whether for furthering one's education, purchasing a home, or to pursue a business venture, was uncommon.

Borrowing then began a vicious cycle. With interest rates extremely high (as high as 50 percent) and the means of production limited, it was difficult to escape from this cycle. Patrimonial land could be mortgaged and lost; with no other alternative, people themselves could be assigned to a creditor, whether the male head of the family himself or one of his dependents (e.g., **2 Kings 4:1**). Chattel slavery (e.g., slaves resulting from capture in war; cf. Deut 20:14) could happen, but **debt slavery** was much more common. As Israelite society became more complex and segmented, as state taxation increased, more and more Israelites lost everything, including their own personal freedom.

The sabbatical release of this passage works toward breaking the cycle of poverty, debt, and debt slavery that so easily ensnared people in its grip. God had given all of Israel

the Promised Land. All of Israel was to benefit from this and experience the blessings of the land. . .

Financial loans in Israel tended to be **crisis loans** made for survival purposes. It is these loans that are to be canceled at the end of the seventh year. Loans made to foreigners (i.e., people living outside of Israel in contrast to aliens who were not Israelites but lived among them) were more likely to be commercial transactions. This is consistent with traditional Jewish interpretation that understood this call for release not to apply to “unpaid wages, bills owed to shopkeepers for merchandise, and certain types of secured loans” (Tigay: 143). The distinction between a member of the community and a foreigner may thus have more to do with the nature of the loan than the identity of the person making the loan. Deuteronomy is spelling out a vision for a community with an **economic safety net** that allows those who have been caught in the cycle of poverty to escape: it is not setting policies for commercial activity. . .

the passage employs **rich relational language** (P. Miller 1990: 136). The needy person is not far removed, but a *neighbor* (vv. 7, 9 [twice], 11), a member of your community (lit., *brother*, v. 7; cf. vv. 2, 3). The repeated use of **personal pronouns** reinforces this. Twenty-one times in this short passage some form of the second-person pronoun is used. The message comes from your God and is directed at you. The needy are your neighbors, your brothers and sisters, living in your land. If you open your hand to the needy, God will bless you and your work. This piling up of personal pronouns highlights the connection between the text and the audience, as well as uniting various groups and actions: God and the people, the well-to-do and the needy, action and consequence.

Daniel Block: Moses here instructs the Israelites on how those with means were to treat indentured countrymen. He permits them to use the services of indentured Israelites for six years. The six-year period envisioned here differs from the release ordinance of **verses 1–11**, which had linked the time of release to the national sabbatical year (cf. v. 9). The present ordinance seems to base the timing of the indentured servant’s release on the date when he was pressed into service: “in the seventh year.” This guarantees independent Israelites seven years’ service by anyone who indentures himself/herself—but the creditors may not demand more time. Indeed, here Moses transforms an impoverished person’s legal right (**Ex. 21:2**) into a creditor’s moral obligation—he must release the debt-servant, granting him independence as a fully free citizen of Israel. **Verses 13–14** charge those whom the impoverished person has served to help “jumpstart” their economic independence by liberally loading them with meat, grain, and wine in proportion to the blessing of Yahweh. . .

Just as the Israelites had left with the Egyptians’ goods in their possession (cf. **Ex. 3:21–22**), so creditors must ensure that when debt-servants leave, they have been lavishly provided for.

Duane Christensen: The laws on social justice in **Deut 15** are aimed primarily at those who have the capacity to shape society. “The powerful are reminded that the health of

society is defined both by the absoluteness of its allegiance to YHWH and by its treatment of the dependent in its midst. The responsibility, the moral imperative, is thus not on the dependent but on the powerful who can make. . . that society a just one” (Hamilton, Social Justice, 150).

Grant: There are spiritual lessons to be learned for today. The **generosity** of the Lord that we have enjoyed should make us generous to others. This is vital in material matters. Where there are saints in straitened circumstances, those who have been blessed materially should be willing to help. In the contributions made to the work of the local assembly the offerings should reflect the willingness of the saints to give. The principle set out by Paul when dealing with giving, that “*He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully*” (2 Cor 9:6), should be recognised. It is not that those who give should do so with the motive of obtaining more of this world’s currency. The lesson is that those who are liberal in giving can be confident that the Lord will meet their needs, just as they have been used to meet the needs of others. The writer of the Proverbs sets out the same principle when he states that “*There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty*” (Prov 11:24). But let us not lose sight of the fact that the principle holds good also in spiritual matters. Those who spend time in ensuring that they have spiritual food for the Lord’s people will find that they, also, are abundantly rewarded in spiritual wealth.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 15:19 – 16:17

TITLE: *CONSECRATION OF LIVESTOCK AND CELEBRATION OF ANNUAL FEASTS*

BIG IDEA:

THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS SACRIFICES AND ANNUAL CELEBRATORY FEASTS REFLECTED THEIR JOY IN GOD'S DELIVERANCE, PROVISION AND ABIDING PRESENCE

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: Whereas chapter 16 will deal with scheduled celebrations in the presence of Yahweh, **15:19–23** invites Israelites to be ready to celebrate any time. Regulations concerning the offering of the firstborn are found elsewhere in the Pentateuch (**Ex. 13:2, 11–16; 22:29b–30[28b–29]; Num. 18:15–18**).

Duane Christensen: In the story of the exodus from Egypt, the firstborn of both livestock and human beings died—immediately before the institution of the Passover. Here the law of the firstlings (**15:19–23**) precedes the law of Passover (**16:1–8**). In the law a distinction is made between the firstborn without blemish and those that are blemished. In the narrative of the book of Exodus, a distinction was made between the firstborn of the Israelites and the Egyptians (**Carmichael**, LNB, 85). . .

From earliest times, these **three pilgrimage feasts** were given theological meaning in relation to Israel's epic story. Passover and Unleavened Bread were connected with the Exodus from slavery in Egypt. The Feast of Weeks, on the fiftieth day after the people came out of Egypt, marked the occasion of the giving of the Torah to Moses at Mount Sinai. And the Feast of Booths called attention to God's provisions for his chosen people in the wilderness on route to the exodus—their entrance into the Promised Land.

Michael Grisanti: Just as offering the first-fruits demonstrated God's ownership of and blessing on the land (**Lev 25:2; Dt 8:10–18**), the sacrifice of these firstborn animals represents the recognition of God's ownership of and blessing on the herdsmen (**Hall**, 259).

Jack Deere: These festivals demonstrated that worshiping God should be a joyful experience in which the participants gratefully share in the bounty of His blessing (**Deut. 16:11, 14–15; cf. 12:7, 12, 18; 14–26**).

Thomas Constable: God's people should celebrate their redemption from sin, remember their previous spiritually enslaved condition, and rejoice in God's provisions, corporately and regularly (cf. **Eph. 5:4; Phil. 4:6; Col. 2:7; 4:2; 1 Tim. 4:3–4**). These are the things God encourages Christians to remember at the Lord's Supper (**1 Cor. 11:23–28**), as well as at other times.

I. (15:19-23) CONSECRATING THE FIRSTBORN LIVESTOCK

Gerald Gerbrandt: In its present context the passage serves as a transition between the sabbatical release provisions (15:1–18) and the festival calendar (16:1–17; cf. the role of the tithe provisions, 14:22–29).

A. (:19) Consecration Commanded

1. Practice = Set the Animal Aside for the Lord

“You shall consecrate to the LORD your God all the first-born males that are born of your herd and of your flock;”

Gerald Gerbrandt: By consecrating (i.e., recognizing as holy) the animal, the Israelite worshiper is setting the animal apart from the rest, removing it from profane use. Moreover, in Exodus it is converted into a reminder of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt: the firstborn of the Egyptians died in the tenth plague (Exod 13:11–16) while Israel’s were redeemed. The practice thus combined a gift of thanksgiving to God for blessings received with a commemoration of God’s foundational redemptive act.

David Guzik: 3 Reasons for Consecration of First Born:

- First, because Israel was God’s firstborn (Exodus 4:22), and this honored that fact.
- Second, because the firstborn was thought to be the best, and the best was always given to God.
- Finally, it was to be a reminder to all generations of when God redeemed Israel, His firstborn.

2. Prohibition = Don’t Profit from the Animal

“you shall not work with the first-born of your herd, nor shear the first-born of your flock.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The prohibition not to work the animal or shear it (v. 19b), a prohibition not needed if the animal is offered to God on the eighth day, prevents the farmer from receiving any economic benefit from the animal during its life since it belongs to God (Nelson 2002: 200). The term translated *work* (v. 19b) also yields the term “*slave*.” Not working the animal during this time represents the freedom Israel has received. The holy animal in their midst serves as a visible reminder to the people that they also have been made holy, or consecrated, and redeemed from slavery in Egypt.

B. (:20) Celebration Commanded

“You and your household shall eat it every year before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses.”

C. (:21-23) Caveat: No Animal with Any Serious Defect

1. (:21) Prohibition = No Serious Defect

“But if it has any defect, such as lameness or blindness, or any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God.”

Daniel Block: Lest they become careless about their offerings, Moses reminds the Israelites that the only meat worthy of Yahweh’s table is that which comes from flawless animals (v. 21). Although he specifies defective as lame and blind, the addition of “*any serious flaw*” suggests these expressions function as shorthand for any conceivable defect. They may be physically flawed, but they represented ceremonially clean species of animals. Therefore, like wild game, they could be eaten by anyone, whether in a state of cleanness or uncleanness in the towns where the people lived, provided the blood was properly drained during slaughtering.

Duane Christensen: The sacrifice of the unblemished firstborn from the flock or the herd points both backward and forward in time. It speaks of the original Passover sacrifice in Egypt, when the firstborn of the Israelites was spared and the firstborn of the Egyptians slain by the angel of death (**Exod 13:1–15**). But it also speaks of another Passover lamb (**1 Cor 5:7**), who was “*without blemish or spot*” (**1 Pet 1:19**), and whose sacrificial death provided salvation for all.

2. (:22) Permission = Local Consumption

“You shall eat it within your gates; the unclean and the clean alike may eat it, as a gazelle or a deer.”

3. (:23) Prohibition = Don’t Eat the Blood

“Only you shall not eat its blood; you are to pour it out on the ground like water.”

Thomas Constable: The Israelites were not to use their firstborn male animals for personal gain, but were to offer them to God as sacrifices. The Law taught them to regard them as God's possessions (cf. **Exod. 13:2, 12**). They could eat defective firstborn animals at their homes, however, rather than offering them at the tabernacle. Every Israelite who owned farm animals was to set aside his healthy firstborn oxen and sheep for God, to be used as sacrifices, because God had blessed the herd or flock with fertility. The Israelites were to offer God as near a perfect specimen as possible. This taught them that God deserves the very best, which would have cost them the most.

II. (:16:1-8) CELEBRATION OF THE PASSOVER AND THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD (IN SPRING)

A. (:1) Charge to Keep the Passover

“Observe the month of Abib and celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Within the biblical story these two celebrations are merged into one larger festival, even if the details of how they fit together may not always be clear.

[This] statement reflects the emphasis of Deuteronomy. Although **verse 1** only speaks of **Passover**, and **verse 16** only speaks of **Unleavened Bread**, Deuteronomy envisages a combined, centralized Passover and Unleavened Bread as the most important celebration for Israel, one that it is to keep for the Lord your God as a commemoration of God's bringing Israel out of Egypt by night (**v. 1**).

Daniel Block: Structurally, this passage divides into three parts:

- (1) the charge to keep the Passover (**v. 1**);
- (2) instructions for keeping the Passover (**vv. 2–7**);
- (3) the charge to keep the Festival of Unleavened Bread (**v. 8**).

The outer elements echo the Sabbath command of the Decalogue, creating an effective “sabbatical envelope” around the entire unit. . .

Abib was the first month of the year, which may suggest that this celebration also functioned as a New Year Festival.

B. (:2-7) Instructions for Keeping the Passover

1. (:2) Summary Instructions

“And you shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to establish His name.”

Michael Grisanti: Although the Passover began as a family event, once Israel becomes established in the Promised Land God's people (as families) must celebrate it together as a nation (**2Ch 35:4, 12**).

Peter Craigie: In Egypt, the Israelites had been a number of families under the suzerainty of a worldly power. After the Exodus and forming of the covenant at Sinai, Israel became a single nation, the family of God; thus the Passover became the act, symbolically speaking, of the one large family of God, celebrated in one place where the sanctuary or house of God was located.

2. (:3-4) Specific Instructions Regarding Unleavened Bread

“You shall not eat leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), in order that you may remember all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt. 4 For seven days no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory, and none of the flesh which you sacrifice on the evening of the first day shall remain overnight until morning.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The unleavened bread is called the **bread of affliction** and represents the great **haste** with which Israel had to flee Egypt (**v. 3**). On that night there was no time to wait for the bread to rise. Unleavened bread thus was the answer. Even today it is sometimes the bread of choice when a meal must be prepared quickly. But the absence of leaven also symbolizes **a new beginning**. Today yeast is normally used as

leaven, but in ancient times bread would be leavened by some dough from a previous batch that had been left to ferment. Bread with leaven in it thus represented continuity with past; unleavened bread represented a new future (W. Janzen 2000: 159).

Michael Grisanti: The Israelites are to eat unleavened bread during the week following the Passover to remind them of their hasty departure from Egypt. (Unleavened bread could be made quickly; cf. **Ex 12:11, 39**.) In addition to refraining from any use of leaven for seven days, the Israelites are to consume all the meat of the sacrificed animal before the following morning (probably to prevent decay; **Ex 12:10; 23:18; 34:25; Nu 9:12**). The unleavened “*bread of affliction*” will cause them to recall their hardships in Egypt and the pharaoh’s vain opposition to Yahweh’s demands. . .

This historical reality should have a life-transforming impact on their present and future existence. Each new generation, made up of Hebrews who did not witness this great event, should through the commemorative event bring to life that national deliverance and gladly accept the privileges and obligations that accompany a treasured covenantal relationship with Yahweh.

Utley: Leaven, which was regularly used in sacrificial items (cf. **Lev. 7:13; 23:17**), became a symbol of sin and rebellion. The fermentation was viewed in this symbolic feast as Israel’s opportunity on an individual basis to examine their lives for any hint of rebellion or disobedience to YHWH. As the Day of Atonement (**Leviticus 16**) functioned on a national level, the Feast of Unleavened Bread functioned on an individual or family level. This annual required feast being combined with the Passover feast kept the gracious deliverance of YHWH ever before the minds and hearts of His people. As grace and promise provided deliverance from Egypt, so Israel depended on these unchanging divine characteristics to save her as the years went by (cf. **4:9**).

John Schultz: the **unleavened bread** represented two completely opposite matters: the affliction and hardship of the slavery of Egypt, and the sincerity and truth of a life dedicated to the service of the Lord. Very few, if any, of the Israelites who lived in slavery in Egypt would have concluded that they endured their hardship because they were God’s elect. Yet, seen against the background of the cosmic struggle between light and darkness, between God and Satan, the suffering of God’s children in this world can only be accounted for by the fact that they are the representatives of heaven in a sin-stained world. This is the reason Paul wrote: “*In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*” Christ Himself, who is the antitype of the unleavened bread, is the best example of affliction and holiness. The very reason for His crucifixion was the fact that He was the Son of God in a world that is under the dominion of the prince of darkness.

3. (:5-7) Specific Instructions Regarding Place of Sacrifice and Eating

“You are not allowed to sacrifice the Passover in any of your towns which the LORD your God is giving you; 6 but at the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name, you shall sacrifice the Passover in the evening at sunset, at the time that you came out of Egypt.

7 And you shall cook and eat it in the place which the LORD your God chooses. And in the morning you are to return to your tents.”

Jack Deere: After roasting and eating the Passover animal the people were *to return to their tents*, the temporary homes of those who had come to the central sanctuary for the celebration.

C. (:8) Charge to Keep the Festival of Unleavened Bread

“Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD your God; you shall do no work on it.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: In Deuteronomy, Passover with Unleavened Bread receives considerably greater attention (eight verses) than Weeks (four verses) and Booths (three verses). In Deuteronomy, Passover with Unleavened Bread is the most important event of the year. The more detailed descriptions confirm this first impression.

Daniel Block: Our text uses the expression *‘asheret* (NIV “assembly”), which suggests a mandatory celebration for Yahweh (**Deut. 16:8**), with the people gathering at a particular place. The designation of the Passover elsewhere as a “*pilgrimage festival*” reinforces this understanding. Since the exodus involved freeing a “*people*,” a **national**—rather than family—commemoration of that event is appropriate. Thus while the original Passover was observed in Israelites’ homes, a national celebration was anticipated from the beginning.

III. (16:9-12) CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF WEEKS (IN SUMMER)

A. (:9-10) Summary Instructions

1. (:9) Timing of the Festival

“You shall count seven weeks for yourself; you shall begin to count seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain.”

Daniel Block: Instead of specifying a date for its celebration, twice the opening statement calls on the people to “*count off seven weeks*.” The point of reference is “*the time you begin to put the first sickle to the standing grain*.” In the context of **Leviticus 23:11–16**, this “time” would probably be the last day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, which is identified as “*a sacred assembly*.” Here the festival would have fallen in the month of Sivan (May-June), so that the Festivals of Unleavened Bread and Weeks respectively served as bookends on either side of the grain harvest.

Duane Christensen: Whereas the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Booths were in each case seven-day celebrations, before and after the agricultural year in ancient Palestine, the Festival of Weeks took place in early summer, at the conclusion of the grain harvest. In Palestine, Weeks properly lasted but a single day. Within diaspora Judaism the celebration was extended to two days in order to avoid the possibility of celebrating it on the wrong day. Because it is a shorter period of celebration, and because it takes place in the midst of the agricultural year, to the present day it is not a family occasion

in the same manner as the other two pilgrimage festivals. Originally only adult males were required to make the pilgrimage journey to the central sanctuary for the Festival of Weeks.

2. (:10) Tribute of the Festival

“Then you shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with a tribute of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give just as the LORD your God blesses you;”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Other Old Testament passages speak of it as the **festival of harvest** (Exod 23:16; cf. 34:22) or the time of **firstfruits** (Exod 23:16; 34:22; Num 28:26).

B. (:11) Synchronized Celebration

1. Focused on Inclusive Celebration

“and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst,”

Gerald Gerbrandt: the dominant tone of the festival is **inclusive celebration** (cf. ch. 12, plus 14:22–27; 15:19–23).

2. Focused on the Centralized Sanctuary

“in the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name.”

C. (:12) Significance of the Celebration

“And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.”

Jack Deere: Appropriately the Holy Spirit was given to New Testament saints during the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2). This symbolized the end of the Old Testament system of worship and the beginning of the New. It also pointed to the fact that God’s greatest provision for a Christian’s daily living is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

IV. (16:13-15) CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF BOOTHS OR INGATHERING (IN FALL)

A. (:13) Timing of the Celebration

“You shall celebrate the Feast of Booths seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat;”

Gerald Gerbrandt: this also was an agricultural festival, marking the end of the harvest year with special emphasis on the completion of the grape harvest. Fruits (e.g., dates, figs, olives, and grapes) were the last crop to be harvested before the fall rains arrived. This festival thus celebrates the end of the agricultural year.

Daniel Block: The term “*ingathering*” does not refer to the harvest of agricultural products, but to the collection of processed grain and unfermented grape juice and their storage for winter in granaries and vats. Rejoicing over the blessing of harvest and the safe processing of the foodstuffs, the Festival of Booths is the happiest of all the festivals. . .

The present text sets the time of the Festival of Booths more generally: “*after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress.*” This phrase confirms that the festival occurs not when crops are harvested but when the agricultural products have been processed and stored.

B. (:14) Tone of Inclusive Celebration

“and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns.”

C. (:15) Theme of God’s Abundant Blessing

1. Duration and Location of the Feast

a. Duration

“Seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the LORD your God”

b. Location

“in the place which the LORD chooses,”

2. Joy from Celebrating God’s Blessing of Productivity

“because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you shall be altogether joyful.”

John Schultz: The Feast of Tabernacles strangely combined elements of **hardship and privation with abundance and rejoicing**. It was the Jewish Thanksgiving Day, but also a commemoration of the journey through the wilderness when the people lived in makeshift tents instead of in solid stone dwellings. It emphasized the transience of life on earth as well as the provision of the Lord. It is at the same time a reminder that life on earth is not our final destination, but a half-way house, and that we are heading for eternity, and it also reminds us of the fact that God provides for our needs in a most generous way while we are on the road.

The Feast of Tabernacles acquires special meaning in the light of the Incarnation. John’s Gospel says: “*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory.*” The Greek word translated “*made his dwelling*” is *skenoō* which, according to Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, literally means: “*to pitch a tent*” or “*to tabernacle.*” Jesus’ coming to earth combines the same elements as are manifested in the Feast of Tabernacles: the transience and the glory of human life on earth. Sin has turned God’s creation into a desert, and death makes life on earth a fleeting experience. But the presence of the Lord gives glory and exuberance to life. It makes life on earth something to be celebrated, in spite of hardship and sorrow.

We are trekking to the place of God's abode, heaven, to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles eternally. In Revelation we see those who came out of the great tribulation celebrating this feast. We read how the Apostle John is interviewed by one of the elders: *"Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?' I answered, 'Sir, you know.' And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"* The phrase: *"He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them"* is rendered differently in other versions. The NKJ says: *"And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them."* The Greek word again is *skenoo*.

(:16-17) EPILOGUE – CONCLUDING SUMMARY

A. (:16a) Presence Commanded at Three Annual Feasts

"Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths,"

Meredith Kline: This concluding summary turns all eyes again to the central sanctuary (v. 16a) and bring into relief the character of the pilgrimages as tributary trips to the throne of the God-King (v. 16b).

B. (:16b-17) Presentation of Offering Commanded

1. (:16b) Stated Negatively

"and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed."

2. (:17) Stated Positively

"Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you."

Michael Grisanti: This long section (14:22–16:17) began with the giving of tithes (14:22–29), and it ends with a summary of Israel's "festal" responsibilities. The varied duties described in these verses represent "tribute" that Israel has the privilege of offering to her covenantal Lord. By obeying these divine mandates, God's covenantal people both manifest and pledge their continuing loyalty to Yahweh, their Redeemer.

God demands that for all three of these pilgrimage feasts, all Israelite men must travel to the central sanctuary to celebrate his stupendous deliverance of and abundant provision for Israel. In the light of those factual realities, no one should come to these great gatherings without a gift proportionate to Yahweh's blessing of them.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the significance to you of viewing yourself in the privileged position of the **firstborn**?
- 2) How is your worship enhanced by understanding Christ to be your **Passover Lamb**?
- 3) How do you manifest your joy in the Lord via freewill offerings based on how He has prospered you?
- 4) What are the backwards-looking and forwards-looking aspects of the Feast of Booths?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: The content of vv 1–8 contains repeated words and phrases nested in a menorah pattern, which may be outlined as follows:

- A Keep the Passover in the month of Abib (Nisan) **16:1**
 - B Offer the Passover sacrifice in the place YHWH chooses **16:2**
 - C No leaven is to be found among you for seven days **16:3a**
 - X Remember your exodus journey from the land of Egypt 16:3b**
 - C' No leaven is to be found in your midst for seven days **16:4**
 - B' Offer the Passover sacrifice in the place YHWH chooses **16:5–7**
 - A' Eat unleavened bread for six days, assemble on the seventh **16:8**

In subsequent tradition the **book of Ecclesiastes** became the festal scroll for the annual pilgrimage Festival of Booths (sometimes called Tabernacles). On first glance, the choice of Ecclesiastes appears to be somewhat inappropriate; for the fall festival in ancient Israel was the most **joyous** occasion in the community life of ancient Israel, as witnessed by the repetition of the command to “*rejoice in your feast*” in vv 14 and 15 of our text (**Deut 16:13–15**). The motive of joy is the simple fact of God’s bountiful blessing occasioned by the agricultural harvest now completed. How then can we explain the association of the “**pessimism**” of the book of Ecclesiastes with the joy of thanksgiving? The answer to this question is found in the complex shift of circumstances for the people of Israel in the exilic and postexilic periods, when the Festal Scrolls emerged as “alternative texts” for the great moments of feasting and fasting in the religion of ancient Israel.

The author of the book of Ecclesiastes has taken the theme of joy, which is characteristic of the Feast of Booths, and hidden it within a complex concentric

structural design where a surface reading suggests pessimism—anything but the joy of thanksgiving for God’s bounty in the recently completed harvest of God’s people who are dwelling in their promised land. I do not have space here to delineate the marvelous symmetry and mathematically designed structural detail of the book of Ecclesiastes. Suffice it to say that the structural center of this book is a single enigmatic statement, which may be paraphrased: “*Be satisfied with what you have*” (**Ecc 6:9**).

There are 111 verses in each half of the book. When the center in each half (the 56th verse) is located, we find the following (**Ecc 3:12** and **9:7**):

I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good as long as they live. [3:12]

Go, eat your bread with rejoicing and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God already approves what you are doing. [9:7]

The theme of **rejoicing with what you have in life** appears at the center of each half of the book of Ecclesiastes. Another theme appears in **3:14** (“*that people should fear before him*”) and is expanded as a concluding outer frame at the end of the book, namely: “*The end of the matter, all has been heard: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of humankind*” (**12:13**). This is nothing more than a restatement of a central theme in Deuteronomy (cf. **Deut 10:12–13**). In this regard, it should be noted that the book of Deuteronomy itself was read within the context of the Festival of Booths every seven years in ancient Israel (**31:10–13**), as part of a covenant-renewal ceremony—long before the book of Ecclesiastes became an “alternative text” for this occasion in early Judaism.

Since all is vanity and a chasing after wind (**Ecc 1–3**), the reasonable response for us is to embrace the good, fear God, and keep his commandments (**9:13—12:8**). And even though our toil is vain, we are to find enjoyment in that toil (**2:24**); for everything has its own place in time, as determined by God (**3:1–22**). In the face of the fact that all is vanity, we are admonished to fear God (**Ecc 4–5**) despite the fact that the wicked appear to prosper (**7:15—9:12**). And though one cannot discern between love and hate on the part of God, you are to “*eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already approved what you do*” (**9:7**). This is indeed a fitting text with which to celebrate the Festival of Booths in the Dispersion, after the destruction of Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem (587 B.C.E.).

John Currid: Significance of the Firstborn

Throughout the Old Testament the position of the **firstborn** in a family is special. The firstborn is pre-eminent and privileged. He has the right of the firstborn, which includes a double portion of the inheritance (**Dt 21:17**) and leadership of the family when the father dies. He is also set apart to Yahweh in a special way (**Exod. 13:2; Num. 3:13**); the firstborn belong to him. In the New Testament, believers are called the ‘firstborn’ of God. The writer to the Hebrews says, “*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general*

assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven ...' (Heb. 12:22–23). Believers have been set apart to the position of firstborn because of the work of Jesus Christ, the firstborn Son of God. When God looks at Christians he sees Christ and the work of Christ on our behalf. He sees us as firstborn children who will receive the inheritance because of Jesus' work for us. We are special, because Jesus is special!

Warren Wiersbe: Summarizing the 3 Feasts

From the seven feasts on the Jewish calendar (**Lev. 23**), Moses selected three to emphasize, and they bear a message to the believer today.

Passover (Dt 16:1–8) looks to the past and reminds us that we have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God (**John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:18–19**). Redemption brings responsibility: feeding on the Lamb and removing from our lives all things that are wrong. (See **1 Cor. 5:1–8**).

Pentecost (Dt 16:9–12) speaks of renewal and the coming of the Spirit of God to His people (Acts 2). It is a harvest festival that calls us to enter into His service and help reap the harvest (**Luke 10:2; John 4:33–38; Acts 1:8**).

Tabernacles (Dt 16:13–17) reminded the Jews that they had lived in booths as a pilgrim people in the wilderness. We are "*sojourners and pilgrims*" in this world (**1 Pet. 2:11**) and must not get too settled down. Tabernacles also looks to the future kingdom that God has promised His people when their pilgrim journey is ended.

We need these three reminders today, lest we forget our redemption responsibilities.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 16:18 – 17:13

TITLE: *RIGHTEOUS ADMINISTRATION OF JUDGMENT*

BIG IDEA:

RIGHTEOUS ADMINISTRATION OF JUDGMENT PURGES THE EVIL FROM THE COMMUNITY TO MAINTAIN RIGHTEOUSNESS

INTRODUCTION:

Duane Christensen: The brief section on judges, and the concern for justice (16:18–20) forms an inclusion with the section on the high court of referral in 17:8–13. As such, the content of this opening pericope (16:18–20) is a fitting introduction to the larger section on political and religious leadership in ancient Israel contained in 16:18—21:9.

Daniel Block: The declaration in 16:20 (“*Righteousness [šedeq], only righteousness you shall pursue,*” pers. trans.) highlights the central issue in this section—covenant righteousness—and identifies the primary audience—“*you.*” What follows is not a manual for judges, kings, priests, and prophets, but an appeal to the people to be involved in the maintenance of righteousness. Although NIV’s rendering of *šedeq* as “*justice*” coheres with most translations, the issues addressed range far beyond social justice, from personal morality to idolatry. Furthermore, no officials are addressed directly, and the subunits exhibit a lack of concern with the formal duties of these leaders. In every case, the ultimate concern is **righteousness** (*šedeq*), demonstrated in the people’s fidelity to Yahweh. As agents of the people and Yahweh, the officials to be appointed are to support the people in their maintenance of righteousness.

Gerald Gerbrandt: There is no sharp separation between cultic matters and civil matters, nor between religious personnel or political offices. For Deuteronomy, all of life is constructed around the exclusive worship of the one God who led Israel out of Egypt (first commandment together with its prologue, 5:6–7; cf. the Shema, 6:4–5). . .

The **people** as a whole are responsible for administering justice. They do this by appointing judges and officers (16:18–20), but even then their role is not finished. They continue to participate in the local judicial process as witnesses and presumably as people who contribute to the thorough investigation. When these safeguards are followed, this local process has authority over even the most serious cases, including those with a possible capital punishment. In this way the people contribute as they purge the evil from their midst (17:7).

Matthew Henry: Care taken for the due administration of justice among them, that controversies might be determined, matters in variance adjusted, the injured righted, and the injurious punished. While they were encamped in the wilderness, they had judges and officers according to their numbers, rulers of thousands and hundreds;

Exod. xviii. 25. When they came to Canaan, they must have them according to their towns and cities, in all their gates; for the courts of judgment sat in the gates.

I. (16:18-20) PURSUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS – BY DEFINING THE APPOINTMENT, CHARACTER, ROLE AND REWARD OF RIGHTEOUS LOCAL JUDGES

A. (:18) Appointment of Righteous Local Judges

1. Appointment According to Towns within Tribes

“You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes,”

Thomas Constable: Probably the people chose the judges by popular consensus (general agreement), and the leaders of the nation then officially appointed them (cf. **1:13**). "Judges" were individuals responsible for administering justice, and "officers" were administrators charged with the enforcement of law, perhaps similar to modern police officers. The number of these in each town probably varied according to the needs of the community.

2. Appointment Designed for Righteous Judgment

“and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment.”

B. (:19) Character of Righteous Judges

1. No Distorting of Justice

“You shall not distort justice;”

Michael Grisanti: The notion of perverting or twisting judgment occurs eight times in the OT. To pervert justice is to deprive a person of the justice due that person (**La 3:35**). This expression occurs in juxtaposition to partiality (**Pr 18:5**) and bribery (**Dt 16:19; 1Sa 8:3; Pr 17:23**) and normally affects the poor, the alien, and the fatherless (**Ex 23:6; Dt 24:17; 27; 19**).

2. No Showing of Partiality

“you shall not be partial,”

Michael Grisanti: Just as Moses did with the judges he appointed soon after Sinai, so here he exhorts these judges not to show favor based on a person's status or wealth. The phrase used is literally *“recognize the face”* (cf. **Dt 1:17; Job 34:19; Pr 24:23; 28:21**), a phrase much like *“lifting the face”* (**10:17; 28:50**); it is antithetical to genuine justice.

3. No Taking of Bribes

“and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous.”

Michael Grisanti: In the present verse, bribery is abhorrent because it has destructive implications: it blinds the eyes of the wise and distorts or renders ineffective the words

of the righteous (Ex 23:8). In other words, it chokes justice rather than achieving it!

C. (:20a) Role of Righteous Judges = Pursuit of Justice

“Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue,”

Gerald Gerbrandt: *Justice, and only justice* serves as a kind of rallying cry for the introduction to this block (16:20). Judges who will render just decisions are the road to achieving this. Living a life of blessing in the land depends upon the faithful worship of God and upon a communal life shaped by justice. As **Christopher Wright** puts it, “The integrity of the judicial system was (and still is) basic to the preservation of society. Any society will have some levels of crime and some levels of injustice, but if the means of restitution and redress themselves become corrupt, then there is only despair. Justice itself turns to wormwood (Amos 5:7, 10)” (1996: 205).

D. (:20b) Reward of Righteous Judges = Long Life and Possession of the Land

*“that you may live and possess the land
which the LORD your God is giving you.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: The passage closes with one further reference to the land. At first glance this is simply another expression of a typical motif: faithfulness and obedience are associated with good life in the land. A more careful examination of the phrase draws attention to an ambiguity. The direction to appoint judges throughout your tribes, in all your towns assumes that Israel is already living in the land. The final verse, however, appears to make the occupation itself, an event in the future, conditional upon having followed the provisions. Deuteronomy holds in tension “occupation of the land as a decisive event in history and as permanent future possibility, which has its obverse in the possibility of loss” (McConville 2002: 286). This contributes to Deuteronomy continuously having a present quality. It speaks to Israel during the time of the monarchy, and it speaks to Israel in exile: the hearers and readers of Deuteronomy are always at some **today**, where they are confronted by the challenge of how to respond to God’s exclusive claim and its implications (cf. 5:1–21).

II. (16:21 – 17:1) PREVENTION OF IDOLATRY AND POLLUTED SACRIFICES

A. (16:21-22) Prevention of Idolatry

1. (:21) No Spiritual Syncretism

*“You shall not plant for yourself an Asherah of any kind of tree
beside the altar of the LORD your God,
which you shall make for yourself.”*

Daniel Block: The first command warns against **spiritual syncretism** (v. 21). The perversity in question involves compromising one legitimate act (building an altar for Yahweh their God) with an illegitimate act (setting up an Asherah pole beside the altar of Yahweh). In Canaanite religion Asherah was a female goddess, the consort of El, who represented the female principle in the fertility religion. However, to Moses an

Asherah pole is merely a piece of wood made from “*any tree*” and “*planted*” by human hands. Whether Israelite worshipers understood such a pole as a symbol of the fertility they expected of Yahweh (cf. **7:12–14**), or as a consort of Yahweh, by erecting it next to Yahweh’s altar, they were violating the Supreme Command (cf. **5:7**).

Peter Craigie: The Israelites have already been commanded to destroy the asherim (plural of asherah) and pillars of the Canaanite cult centers (see **7:5**). Now they are explicitly forbidden to set up similar cult objects beside the altar of the Lord in the sanctuary. An asherah of any kind of wood—the Hebrew may be rendered literally: “*an asherah, any tree ...*” Which the Lord your God hates (see also **12:30–31**)—to set up an asherah or pillar would be indicative of **syncretism** with Canaanite religion and would therefore be repulsive to God.

2. (:22) No Sacred Pillars

“Neither shall you set up for yourself a sacred pillar which the LORD your God hates.”

Duane Christensen: Once the demands of character were met in the appointment of judges and officials in the land (**16:18–20**), the first task placed before them concerns prevention of idolatry (**16:21–22**). The people of Israel must not so much as plant a tree near God’s altar, lest it look like the altars of the Canaanite gods. And they must not set up images, statues, or pillars to the honor of God; for such things “*YHWH your God hates.*”

Eugene Merrill: Moses had just discussed the matter of righteous judgment and the blessing that followed such a policy. Now he provided a hypothetical case or two to illustrate what he meant by untainted jurisprudence and the practices to be followed in achieving it. The violations he adduced could not be more significant, for they strike right at the heart of the covenant relationship. In fact, they challenged the uniqueness of the Lord and the exclusiveness of his worship, on the one hand (**16:21–22**), thus disobeying the first two commandments; and, on the other hand, they spoke to the sin of cultic impurity in defiance of the third and fourth commandments (**17:1**). At stake was nothing less than who God is and how he is to be worshiped. Were such sins to be committed, how must the case be investigated and prosecuted? This was the concern of the case law that follows (**17:2–7**).

B. (17:1) Polluted Sacrifice Forbidden

1. Defective

“You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep which has a blemish or any defect,”

Peter Craigie: It is possible that Canaanite religion did not have such a prescription, and therefore that offering defective animals was a sign of further lapse into a syncretistic form of religion. Any type of syncretism with foreign religion would be *an abomination of the Lord your God*.

Jack Deere: To offer less than the best to God was to “*despise*” His name (**Mal. 1:6-8**). Offering a less-than-perfect sacrifice was, in effect, failing to acknowledge Him as the ultimate Provider of all that is best in life. Also it was a failure to acknowledge the vast gulf that exists between the perfectly holy God and sinful people.

2. Detestable

“for that is a detestable thing to the LORD your God.”

Daniel Block: The characterization of blemished sacrifice as a “*detestable [thing]*” (*tô ‘ēbā*) of Yahweh places such worship in the same category as overtly pagan actions (cf. **7:26; 12:31; 18:9; 20:18**).

Michael Grisanti: The two commands in **16:21–22** primarily deal with Yahweh’s claim on Israel’s exclusive loyalty. The next command repeats Yahweh’s requirement of unblemished animals for use in sacrifices to him. Taken together, these three commands seem to affirm one key point: Israel’s **wholehearted adherence to Yahweh** is the sum total of the Mosaic law (**McConville**, 288). Who God is and how he is to be worshiped are at stake (**Thompson**, 201).

Gerald Gerbrandt: The next verse (**17:1**) repeats the directive of **15:21** that animals with defects are not to be offered to God. The only new element is the surprisingly strong statement: *for that is abhorrent to the Lord your God*. Although the offering of a flawed animal does not appear to have any necessary connection with the worship of other gods (a common context for the word *abhorrent*), the use of the term here emphasizes the significance of the concern. Malachi says offering a blind animal to God is despising the name of God, and he compares it to offering God polluted food (**1:6–8**).

III. (17:2-13) PURGING OF EVIL TO PROTECT THE COMMUNITY

Daniel Block: This section divides into two panels of identical length (**vv. 2–7** and **vv. 8–12**), followed by a summary conclusion (**v. 13**). Each panel opens with a complex clause setting the context (**vv. 2–4a; v. 8a**), is followed by a lengthy prescribed response (**vv. 4b–7a; vv. 8b–12a**), and concludes with a declaration of the goal (**v. 7b; v. 12b**). The symmetry of structure and the verbal links suggest that **verses 2–7** and **8–12** have been intentionally composed to develop a common point—**how to deal with unrighteous behavior**. The first involves relatively clean cases; the second involves the procedure for cases insoluble by ordinary means of investigation.

A. (:17:2-7) Local Courts -- Purging of Idolaters at the Local Level

1. (:2-3) Exposure of Idolaters

“If there is found in your midst, in any of your towns, which the LORD your God is giving you, a man or a woman who does what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, by transgressing His covenant, 3 and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the heavenly host, which I have not commanded,”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Three times the passage uses the phrase *man or woman*, drawing attention to the fact that both men and women are equally accountable for their actions (vv. 2, 5 [twice]). This is not a contemporary commitment to equal rights but is consistent with other passages where Deuteronomy treats women as real people with a place in the community (cf. the fifth commandment, 5:16; the clear inclusion of women in the *you* of many of the regulations, as in 14:26; etc.).

2. (:4) Examination of the Charge

*“and if it is told you and you have heard of it,
then you shall inquire thoroughly.
And behold, if it is true and the thing certain
that this detestable thing has been done in Israel,”*

3. (:5) Execution of the Idolater

*“then you shall bring out that man or that woman
who has done this evil deed, to your gates,
that is, the man or the woman, and you shall stone them to death.”*

Duane Christensen: When the crime is made known, either by **direct report** (“*it is told to you*”) or by rumor (“*you hear of it*”), the officials in charge are to “investigate thoroughly”; and if it turns out that the matter “*is established—behold it is true, this abomination has been done in Israel,*” the guilty party is to be executed by stoning. It should be noted that this is an example of a judicial proceeding that took place at the local level—“*in one of your towns*” (v 2). It was not necessarily seen to be a case of sufficient difficulty to merit taking the matter before the central tribunal (see 17:8–13 below).

Daniel Block: The prescription for confirmed spiritual defection is execution by stoning (v. 5). Whereas **Leviticus 24:14** and **Numbers 15:35** call for the execution of criminals “*outside the camp,*” here the sentence is to be administered in the city gates. The former treatment was reasonable, as long as the Israelites camped together with the tabernacle in the center. However, once they scattered to their tribal territories and towns, maintaining sanctity throughout the land would need to be localized. Executing criminals in the gate would make a spectacle of them and demonstrate the heinousness of their “*evil deed*” (v. 5b).

David Thompson: There were no prisons or jails. Just judgments were to be made and if someone was worshipping something other than God, and it was proved true, they were to be stoned to death.

4. (:6-7a) Engagement by Multiple Witnesses

a. (:6) Imperative of Multiple Witnesses for a Death Verdict

*“On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses,
he who is to die shall be put to death;
he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.”*

- b. (:7a) Initiation by the Witnesses of the Execution Process
“The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people.”

Duane Christensen: Specific steps were taken as a safeguard against injustice on the part of dishonest or mistaken witnesses by requiring *“the testimony of two witnesses”* as a minimum. As many witnesses as possible are to be heard; for the officials are to *“investigate thoroughly”* (v 4); but *“the person shall not be put to death on the testimony of a single witness.”*

Ryrie: they had to be sure enough of their own testimony to be willing to cast the first stones. In a stoning, the victim was stripped naked and his hands bound; then he was paraded out of town, where he was placed on a scaffold about nine feet high. The first witness pushed him off the scaffold; the second dropped a large stone on his head or chest. Then bystanders pelted the dying man with stones. No mourning was permitted for the dead man.

Craig Thurman: The **entire community** was to be actively involved in maintaining the true worship of God. They were to be unanimous to hate every false way. (**Ps.119.104, 128, I hate every false way.**)

5. (:7b) Excising the Evil
*“So you shall **purge the evil** from your midst.”*

Daniel Block: Although the judicial process ends with execution, the purpose of the procedure is not merely to give criminals their due. The concluding declaration summarizes the goal: to *“purge the evil”* from the midst of Israel. Moses’ concern for communal health leaves no room for sentimentality or prejudice. Yahweh’s agenda requires a people united in its devotion to him and rigorous in its preservation of its own character as a holy people (cf. **7:1–6**). Eliminating those guilty of capital crimes eradicates the evil from the land and the people.

B. (17:8-12) Central Courts -- Purging of a Wide Range of Evil by Referral to Centralized Judgment for More Difficult Cases

1. (:8-9) Difficult Cases Referred to Centralized Judgment

- a. (:8a) Types of Cases Requiring Referral
*“If any case is too difficult for you to decide,
between one kind of homicide or another,
between one kind of lawsuit or another,
and between one kind of assault or another,
being cases of dispute in your courts,”*

Duane Christensen: Though a system of justice was established at the local level in the towns throughout the land of ancient Israel, it was also recognized that on occasion a case would arise that would prove too difficult to resolve in that setting. The principle

had already emerged in the experience of the people of Israel in the wilderness, when Moses responded to the advice of his father-in-law Jethro to reorganize the legal system so as to relieve Moses' heavy burden. Moses handled the cases without legal precedent, whereas ordinary cases were handled by appointed lay leaders in **Exod 18:13–27** (cf. **Deut 1:17**—“*Any case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it*”). In the desert, Moses himself functioned as the central authority; but in the Promised Land it was the Levitical priestly establishment at the central sanctuary that had the authority to handle the hard cases.

Daniel Block: Moses identifies three kinds of cases that might lead to an impasse: murder/unintentional manslaughter, civil or criminal disputes, and physical assaults. Such cases are to be sent on to the higher tribunal.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The Hebrew translated *too difficult* literally is *too wonderful*, with the connotation of relating to the **divine**. “Such ‘*wonderful*’ cases are beyond human knowledge (**Job 42:3**; **Ps 131:1**; **Prov 30:18**; cf. **Gen 18:14**) and thus require priestly intervention” (**Nelson** 2002: 221). At The Place the priests and the judge then would determine how to proceed, perhaps through divine oracle, perhaps through the use of the Urim and Thummim (instruments given the priests to determine God's word/direction), or perhaps in some other manner (cf. **Exod 28:30**; **Deut 33:8**).

b. (:8b) Travel to the Designated Location for Adjudication

*“then you shall arise and go up
to the place which the LORD your God chooses.”*

c. (:9) Trial before the Appropriate Priest or Judge to Determine the Verdict

*“So you shall come to the Levitical priest or the judge who is in
office in those days, and you shall inquire of them,
and they will declare to you the verdict in the case.”*

Duane Christensen: Together with the tradition of the seventy elders in **Num 11** and the establishment of judges in **Exod 18** and **Deut 1:9–18**, the law of the central tribunal in **17:8–13** was subsequently used in Judaism to legitimate the Sanhedrin (see **Josephus**, Ant. 4.8.14 §218; Sifre Deut 152–55).

Gerald Gerbrandt: The verdict of the central court is **divine authority**: The Hebrew term translated *consult* (v. 9) may be used of coming before God to seek a word from God (cf. **Exod 18:15**; **Deut 4:29**; **12:5**; **1 Sam 9:9**). The decision is announced from the place the Lord will choose (v. 10). The priests have been appointed to minister there to the Lord your God (v. 12).

2. (:10-11) Didactic Role of the Implementation of Righteous Law

*“And you shall do according to the terms of the verdict which they
declare to you from that place which the LORD chooses; and you shall
be careful to observe according to all that they teach you. 11 According*

to the terms of the law which they teach you, and according to the verdict which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or the left.”

David Thompson: What is interesting is that God considers this to be something that does “*teach you.*” In other words, as various judgments take place, it teaches the people to function in a way that pleases the Lord.

3. (:12) Death Sentence for Resisting Their Verdict

a. Resisting the Verdict

*“And the man who acts presumptuously
by not listening to the priest who stands there to serve the LORD
your God, nor to the judge,
that man shall die;”*

Eugene Merrill: There was no court of higher appeal beyond that of the priest and judge of the central place of jurisdiction, so the verdicts rendered had to be accepted by those who had sought redress there (v. 10). The text is most insistent that the law (*tôrâ*) and decisions (*mi a*) (that is, **the rulings of the court**) must result in unswerving compliance on the part of the litigants. Failure to do so and thus to manifest insubordination to the court (lit., “*in insolence and without obeying*”) and, more seriously, to the Lord himself, whom both priest and judge represent, was to invoke self-destruction (v. 12). The reason for such harsh measures was to preclude any similar contempt for law in the future (v. 13). Behind it all, of course, was the inextricable **linkage between law and covenant**. It was absolutely incumbent on the kingdom citizen to demonstrate loyalty and obedience to the Great King, evidence of which, among other things, was strict adherence to theocratic law and its application.

Charlie Garrett: *Now the man who acts presumptuously* -- It is a preposition and a noun, not an adverb: *v’ha’ish asher yaaseh b’zadon* – “*And the man who acts in presumption.*” It is a new word, *zadon*. It signifies insolence or presumption, coming from the word *zud*, meaning “*to boil.*” In other words, the person is like a boiling pot that refuses to act properly.

b. Excising the Evil

*“thus you shall **purge the evil** from Israel.”*

Daniel Block: Moses ends this panel as he had the previous one (v. 7b) with a declaration of zeal for the purity of the nation. By executing persons who defy God by noncompliance with his verdict, the evil of rebellion is purged from Israel and righteousness is maintained. Whether rendered by local adjudicators or the central tribunal, every decision advances the agenda of *šedeq šedeq* (“*righteousness, only righteousness*”; see 16:20).

(:13) Summary Conclusion: Deterrent against Future Evil

“Then all the people will hear and be afraid,

and will not act presumptuously again.”

Duane Christensen: When godly discipline is exercised, whether in Moses’ time or our own, *“all the people shall hear and they shall fear; and they shall not act presumptuously again” (v 13).*

David Whitcomb: Moses stated the reason for **swift punishment**. *And all the people shall hear and fear and not act presumptuously again (v.13).* The reason for swift, capital punishment against the rebel was to cause others to **fear**. Obviously, our Creator concludes that fear is an effective means for encouraging obedience. Progressive thinkers reject this idea because they are sure they know more than God. In reality, because they have rejected God and His law they cannot exercise wisdom. Therefore, they know nothing about human nature.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What principles from this text can we apply to our own judicial process?
- 2) How much of our governmental system is characterized by perversion of justice, the twisting of the truth, the showing of partiality and the influence of bribery?
- 3) How can we better protect against either false witnesses or mob justice?
- 4) How lightly do we treat the charge of **contempt of court** as compared to the severity of that crime pictured here?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: Overall Structure

- A Appoint judges and officials to seek justice in local courts **16:18–20**
 - B Do not erect an asherah or sacred pillar beside YHWH’s altar **16:21–22**
 - X Do not sacrifice a blemished animal to YHWH 17:1**
 - B’ Law on transgressing the covenant by serving other gods **17:2–7**
- A’ Law of the central tribunal cases referred from local courts **17:8-13**

When Israel journeyed through the wilderness, the people were organized with judges and officers appointed according to their numbers within a military system—with *“commanders of thousands, and commanders of hundreds, and commanders of fifties, and commanders of tens, and officers throughout your tribes” (Deut 1:15).* When they entered the Promised Land, such officers and judges were to be appointed *“in all your*

towns . . . (to) render just decisions for the people” (16:18). Though it is not stated how they were to be appointed, the wording suggests some sort of popular consent in their selection. However the persons were selected, whether by appointment within some unspecified political structure (cf. **2 Chr 19:5–7**), or by election of the people, their powers were considered to be “*ordained of God*” (**Rom 13:1**); and the judges were enjoined not to show partiality. In short, the equality of all citizens under the law, regardless of class or status, is assumed.

Eugene Merrill: With the transition from a patriarchal, familial structure in Egyptian and wilderness times to that of a village-centered culture following the conquest, Israel's understanding of authority patterns also changed. While one must continue to honor his parents, there were other, more comprehensive hierarchies that also must be given due consideration. The multiplication of urban centers, the breakdown of community cohesion, the increasing division and specialization of labor—all contributed to the need for government at increasingly higher and broader levels. The result in due time would be the rise of monarchy itself.

David Thompson: vv. 1-20 -- If God’s people want the full blessings of God, they must honor God and obey and apply the Word of God in their selection of a sacrifice, in their execution of justice and in their election of a political leader. . .

Now observe the **principle** here because many have missed it. No blemished, defective, sinful person can offer anything to God that is acceptable. In fact, for a person to think that by his or her works or goodness, he/she can be right with a Holy God, is an abomination to God.

Now one could look impressive and be a nice person and one could be a religious person who went to offer his offering. If those offerings were defective or blemished that worshipper was an abomination to God.

We are all defective people and there is only one way into a right relationship with God and that is to partake of the **unblemished Lamb of God**.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 17:14-20

TITLE: *ANTICIPATION OF THE MONARCHY*

BIG IDEA:

TRANSITION TO A MONARCHY WILL LEAD TO ABUSE OF POWER UNLESS THE KING SUBMITS TO THE SUPREME AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD

INTRODUCTION:

Duane Christensen: The law of the king (**17:14–20**), together with the law of the prophets (18:9–22), stands at the structural center of the book of Deuteronomy—as a frame around the law of the Levitical priests (**18:1–8**). This fact suggests that a primary concern of the book of Deuteronomy, and perhaps the Pentateuch as a whole, is the matter of **leadership of the people of God** (A. Wildavsky, *The Nursing Father: Moses as a Political Leader* [Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1984]).

Peter Craigie: The **role of the book** in the life of the king is of importance for understanding the full dimensions of Israel's faith. In the early part of Moses' address, he recalled for his audience the events of past history; on the basis of the experience of God in history (one form of revelation), the Israelites drew strength for the future. But the revelation of the word of God, written down for successive generations, was also a source of strength. Both the acts of God and the words of God were recorded; but while the former gave evidence of the living reality of their God, it was the latter that provided in detail the guidance and wisdom for daily living, in the first place for the king.

Meredith Kline: The main insistence of this passage, which lays the legal-covenantal foundation for the later monarchy, is that even when dynastic kingship will have replaced charismatic judgeship, the kings, too, must subject their life and reign, particularly their judicial activity, to God's covenant (**vv. 18-20**). The judicial supremacy belonged to the Lord, whose law was under the guardianship of the priests (**v. 18**; cf. **11**).

Halbe Geertsma: Israel's reason for requesting a king has nothing to do with their zeal to maintain the law of the LORD. They want a **military leader**. Afterward they openly admit that. You can read that in **v.20**. They think they need a powerful king who can lead them in battle against their enemies. A number of judges indeed filled that role, but only on a **temporary** basis. After he died, a judge was not immediately replaced by another judge. Thus, the LORD's reason for appointing a king in Israel is to cause ongoing reformation. The Israelites wanted a king in order to display their might on a permanent basis. Even though the LORD is their glory and strength, they want to impress the surrounding nations by having a king of their own. Consequently, this request for a king indicates a **rejection of the LORD**.

I. (:14-15) ANTICIPATING THE TRANSITION IN GOVERNMENT AWAY FROM THE THEOCRACY TO A MONARCHY

[Application: Anticipating the transition in church government away from the biblical plurality of elders to a Senior-Pastor led church with helping elders]

A. (:14) Circumstances Feeding a Desire for a King

1. Security in the Promised Land by God’s Grace and Power

“When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it,”

Duane Christensen: Kingship originated in the desire of the people, not as a divine ordinance.

2. Syncretistic Compromise Based on a Preference for Visible Human Leadership over the Invisible Leadership of God

“and you say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,’”

What could be better than a theocratic form of governance where the invisible God who has already proven His power to establish you in the land can now be trusted to protect and provide and govern you going forward? It is similar to the temptation of being saved by the Spirit and then trying to seek sanctification by the flesh.

Yet the human temptation is to desire a visible, charismatic leader that you can look to as the visionary and focus of power and might. What a mistake to desire to be like the pagan Gentile nations in this arena of power and government. This is a man-initiated perversion of what God has revealed as His ideal form of government for Israel. It provides the type of checks and balances that the focus of power in one man loses.

Duane Christensen: The reason subsequently given for the establishment of kingship in Israel was *“that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles” (1 Sam 8:19–20).*

B. (:15) Choice of a King Must be Dictated by God

1. Limit Your Independent Self-Initiation

“you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses,”

2. Limit Your Syncretistic Compromise

“one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves;

you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman.”

II. (:16-17) WARNING AGAINST THE ALMOST INEVITABLE DANGERS OF A MONARCHY = THE ABUSE OF POWER IN DIFFERENT REALMS

[Application: Warning against the almost inevitable dangers of a Senior-Pastor led church with helping elders]

A. (:16) Prohibition against Multiplying Horses – Military Sphere -- Kings Tend to Lust after More Power

“Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall never again return that way.’”

Daniel Block: The regulation regarding horses is intended to stifle militaristic impulses (cf. **Deut. 20:1; Josh. 17:16–18; Judg. 1:19**).

Gerald Gerbrandt: The restriction also brings to mind the account of the rise of kingship in **1 Samuel 8–12**. Again Israel is afraid of an enemy, this time the Philistines. The people come to Samuel with the request that he appoint a king for them *“so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go before us and fight our battles”* (**1 Sam 8:20**, emph. added). To multiply horses is the same sin as to request a king to fight our battle: both are a **rejection** of the God who has demonstrated through the exodus that deliverance does not occur through armies and horses but through obedience to that God. The prophet Isaiah indicts the *“house of Jacob”* because *“their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots”* (**2:7**; cf. **Mic 5:10**).

B. (:17a) Prohibition against Multiplying Wives – Political Sphere -- Kings Tend to Lust after More Pleasure and Political Alliances and Status

“Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away;”

Daniel Block: The prohibition against multiplying women extends far beyond providing the king with unlimited opportunity for sexual gratification. Since marriages were often arranged to strengthen alliances, the institution of the harem enabled kings to be allied simultaneously with many outside rulers (cf. **1 Kings 11:1**), while also providing decoration for the court to impress visitors. But this text seems unconcerned about these considerations. Instead, Moses the pastor views the harem as a threat to spiritual fidelity to Yahweh: The women will **turn the king’s heart away**. The warning concerns defection into idolatry (cf. **7:3–4**), though in light of what follows it may involve defection from the Torah in general and the Supreme Command in particular. The reference to *“his heart”* suggests such defection is not primarily an external act but a fundamental aspect of one’s being (cf. **6:5**). Like wine and strong drink, pursuing pleasure and status can inhibit the proper exercise of one’s responsibilities.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Likely the prohibition against multiplying wives also has **internal considerations** in mind. After all, the text itself does not specify “foreign” wives but prohibits many wives of any kind. Internal alliances with powerful families, “signed” and sealed through marriages, had the potential to undermine the king’s place as one of the community. This was true both because it would give key families undue influence, thereby making it difficult for the king to **promote justice for all**, and because it would reflect a wealth and status well above that of the common people (Nelson 2002: 224).

Earl Kalland: A large harem of many wives also represented a likeness to the oriental courts of other kingdoms, and having many wives envisaged the usual procedure of acquiring those wives from families of other kings and so sealing treaties by marriage. Such wives would bring the impact of foreign cultures into the palace, particularly the worship of other gods, and so lead the heart of the king astray (v. 17).

C. (:17b) Prohibition against Multiplying Silver and Gold – Economic Sphere -- Kings Tend to Lust after More Possessions (Wealth)

“nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.”

Daniel Block: In the ancient Near Eastern political world, this wealth was generally amassed at the expense of the people by taxing the citizens and demanding tribute from subject states. . .

Godly leaders exist for the well-being of those they lead and refuse to exploit their positions for personal advantage. The three restrictions placed on royal behavior address three common temptations of leaders: an increasingly insatiable lust for power, status, and wealth. In the Bible responsible headship is never about power or privilege; it is always about securing the well-being of those under one’s charge.

Duane Christensen: In short, the king is commanded not to place his trust in any of the normal sources of power to which a king might turn (military, political, or economic). The story of King Solomon is subsequently told in a manner that highlights the violation of all three of these provisions of the law of the king in Deuteronomy.

III. (:18-20) ELEVATING THE WORD OF GOD TO THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF AUTHORITY TO PROTECT THE INTEGRITY OF THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM

[Application: Elevating the Word of God to the highest level of authority to protect the integrity of the Senior-Pastor and his flock]

A. (:18) Priority of the Word of God and the Worship of God

“Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests.”

Daniel Block: In the ancient Near Eastern political world, this wealth was generally amassed at the expense of the people by taxing the citizens and demanding tribute from subject states.

MacArthur: The ideal set forth was that of the king who was obedient to the will of God, which he learned from reading the law. The result of his reading of the Pentateuch would be fear of the Lord and humility. The king was pictured as a scribe and scholar of Scripture. Josiah reinstated this approach at a bleak time in Israel's history (cf. **2Ki 22**).

B. (:19a) Devotion to the Word of God

1. Keep it Close

“And it shall be with him,”

2. Keep it Real

“and he shall read it all the days of his life,”

C. (:19b-20b) Value of the Word of God

1. (:19b) Promotes the Fear of the Lord

*“that he may learn to fear the LORD his God,
by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes,”*

2. (:20a) Promotes Humility

“that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen”

Halbe Geertsma: The king and his subjects must be united in that obedience to the LORD. In **v.15** the word ‘*brothers*’ is used intentionally. The king must be willing to be an ordinary child of the LORD, and thus a brother with respect to his subjects.

3. (:20b) Promotes Obedience

*“and that he may not turn aside from the commandment,
to the right or the left;”*

D. (:20c) Blessing of the Word of God

*“in order that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom
in the midst of Israel.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: Solidarity with the people and obedience to God's instructions as represented by the book of Deuteronomy are the key to continued blessing in the land, for the people as a whole as well as for the king. The concluding phrase of the passage takes the characteristic Deuteronomic promise of long life in the land and applies it more particularly to the situation of the king. Kingship and dynastic succession go hand in hand.

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Can a leader be both chosen by the Lord and chosen by the people? What was the motivation of Israel for wanting a king?
- 2) Where must a leader look to for strength and how can the people boast in the glory of the Lord rather than the glory of the leader?
- 3) Do you see the parallel that I am making to the church's desire for a prominent Senior-Pastor type leader rather than the invisible leadership of Christ as the Head of the church and the desire of the nation of Israel for a king rather than the invisible theocratic rule of God?
- 4) How did the Lord Jesus exemplify the characteristics of the ultimate king of righteousness?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: While the present text offers no clues concerning what might occasion this request, in the ancient Near East kings normally fulfilled three primary roles:

- (1) as warrior protecting the nation from outside threats;
- (2) as judge, guaranteeing justice within;
- (3) as patron of the cult, ensuring the right ordering of worship.

Moses reins in temptations to abuse the office by proscribing greed and ambition (vv. 16–17) and by prescribing an extraordinary spiritual and ethical standard for the king (vv. 18–20).

Duane Christensen: As **Mark Twain** once put it, “Kings are mostly rascals.” **Lord Acton** wrote “power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”—and the persons with absolute power throughout history are kings. The law of the king (17:14–20), with its threefold policy in limiting the power of human rulers, was written to deal with this aspect of the human condition. Since kings exercise the most authority and power, they are also deemphasized the most as leaders in ancient Israel. Deuteronomy's views on kingship, which are unique in the world of antiquity, stand in sharp contrast with those of its neighbors in Egypt and Mesopotamia. In ancient Israel, the king was subject to the law along with his subjects—and that law, which was given by God through Moses, was transmitted in the hands of the Levites. Together with the law of the prophets (18:9–22), this law played a formative role in the separation of powers as drafted in the U.S. Constitution.

TheologyofWork.org -- Just as people and institutions must not contravene legitimate authority, people in positions of power must not use their authority illegitimately.

Moses specifically deals with the case of a king.

In this text we see two restrictions on the use of authority—those in authority are not above the law but must obey and uphold it, and those in authority must not abuse their power by enriching themselves.

Today, people in authority may try to put themselves above the law, as for example when police and court workers “fix” traffic tickets for themselves and their friends, or when high-ranking public servants or business employees do not obey the expense policies others are subject to. Similarly, officials may use their power to enrich themselves receiving bribes, zoning, and licensing exemptions, access to privileged information, or personal use of public or private property. Sometimes special perks are granted to those in power as a matter of policy or law, but this does not really eliminate the offense. Moses’ command to kings is not to make sure to get legal authorization for their excesses, but to avoid the excesses altogether. When those in power use their authority not simply to gain special privileges but to create monopolies for their cronies, to appropriate vast lands and assets, and to jail, torture, or kill opponents, the stakes become deadly. There is no difference in kind between petty abuses of power and totalitarian oppression, merely in degree.

The more authority you have, the greater the temptation to act as though you are above the law. Moses prescribes an antidote. The king must read God’s law (or word) every day of his life. Not only must he read it, but he must develop the skill to interpret and apply it rightly and fairly. He must develop the habit of obeying God’s word himself, of putting it into practice in his work, “*diligently observing all the words of this law*” (**Deut. 17: 19**). By this the king learns to revere the Lord and fulfill the responsibilities God has given him. He is reminded that he too is under authority. God does not give him the privilege of making a law unto himself, but a duty of fulfilling God’s law for the benefit of everyone.

<https://www.theologyofwork.org/old-testament/deuteronomy-and-work/gods-law-and-its-applications-deuteronomy-4442868/statues-and-ordinances-deuteronomy-444-2868/using-governmental-authority-justly-deuteronomy-1714-20>

Biblehub.com: The spiritual government of an invisible Ruler was an idea difficult to grasp. **The mind craved for some concrete and visible embodiment of that authority under which they lived.** It probably lay in God's purpose ultimately to give them a king, but it was necessary that they should be made first distinctly to feel their need of it. The need in human nature to which this points is adequately supplied in the Messianic King, Christ Jesus. The central idea of the Kingship of Christ is the personal indwelling of the Divine in the human. In Christ, moreover, is realized the three things which ancient nations sought for in their kings.

- (1) An ideal of personal excellence. "Heroic kingship depended partly on divinely given prerogative, and partly on the possession of super eminent strength, courage, and wisdom" (**Maine**).
- (2) A leader inspiring them with personal devotion.

(3) A bond of unity in the State, the monarch representing, as he does still, the whole system of law and authority which is centralized and embodied in his person. "The king is the dot on the i" (Hegel). The kingship in Israel typified that of Christ.

<https://biblehub.com/sermons/deuteronomy/17-14.htm>

J. M. Campbell: Christ Our Brother and Our King

What I desire now to lay before you is the counsel of God in Christ, which is set forth to us in these words. What is contained in them is that we are to have a king over us, and that **this king is to be our brother**; by which is expressed the **reigning of love**. It is exceedingly important that we be taught to feel that our place is that of being reigned over — that it does not belong to us to be independent or to be our own masters; and again, that the control under which we are to be is one which is to **govern us through the heart** — that the obedience which is to be rendered is to be the obedience of the will — not an outward obedience, an obedience in word or in action, but an inward obedience, an obedience in our will. To this end it is needful that, in obeying, we should have that confidence in him whom we obey, and that understanding of the principle of his government, and that consenting to it, which will carry our hearts along with his requirements; and this our God has considered in giving us a brother to reign over us. When it is here said that God will not give us a king who is not our brother, that we are not in any wise to have a stranger to reign over us, we are taught the great truth, which is the foundation of our religion, that **Christ took our very nature** and became in very truth our very Brother, so that there is nothing in the whole of our human nature with which He has not personal acquaintance. The knowledge which our Creator has of us, as our Creator, is a knowledge that we cannot comprehend. But when we see Christ having our nature, then we see how He should have this knowledge of us. We might have felt as if God were a stranger — we might have said to ourselves, How very different are His circumstances from ours: He is the Creator of all things — He is independent — He is not at the mercy of any outward thing, and therefore He can have no sympathy with us — He cannot know what our situation is — this language we might have held, in our ignorance of God, were not God revealed in Christ as our Brother. God says thou mayest not set a stranger over thee which is not thy brother; and He says also, "*I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have no other god before Me.*" And thus when our God says that we shall have no stranger to reign over us, and yet that He will reign over us, He teaches us that He is not a stranger — that there is no lack of interest and sympathy in His heart with all the evil of our state. . .

And while we consider Christ's understanding of our condition, for comfort in our conflict with sin, and for self-reproach in the consciousness of sinning, let us consider how His being our Brother **prepares Him for being our Judge**. There is ever a voice in the flesh offering to excuse sin. There is ever proceeding from the Lord a voice condemning sin — a voice declaring that sin is altogether a thing that need not be; and I beseech you consider what an entire putting down it is of all unbelief that Christ was holy in our nature. The will that Christ has as to us, in our condition of sowing to the flesh, is a holy will that we should be holy; but it is also the will of love — of love to us. It is exceedingly important that we should never lose sight of this, that the person is not forgotten. It is not the sin simply that is considered by Christ, but the person who

sins. Just as it is with a good man who has a son that is a prodigal. Inasmuch as he is a righteous man, the exhibition of evil in his son is a source of pain to him; but inasmuch as he is his son, it is a peculiar source of pain to him, seeing that he has an interest in the person apart from the character altogether, and that this interest is not destroyed by the evil of the character, but that both work on him jointly. Christ's having a personal tie to us, as well as an acquaintance with our condition, is a part of the revelation of God which is in Him; and is that first part of the truth concerning our God which addresses itself to our desire of salvation; and is therefore to be kept in the foreground, that men, convinced of God's interest in them, may give heed to the things that the Lord has what it expresses still further. First, there is **actual sympathy for us** in Christ our Brother. In this word "sympathy" there is contained the idea of a person — the idea of one being feeling along with another being; and so knowing Christ's sympathy, and ever turning to it, we learn personal communion with God, which is that which His heart longs for; for His heart has not the fulfilment of its desire for us, but in our having this personal communion with Him. Oh, be very jealous of reposing your hearts in any other bosom than that of God; be very jealous of telling your grief to any other ear than God. Oh, be very jealous for Christ, that He should have the confidential trust of every heart. But Christ's sympathy in our conflict is the sympathy of one who can succour us. This is a part of what properly belongs to His character as King. It belongs to His character as King to be strong in us, **to supply our need and sustain our weakness**. I would, therefore, now consider what we are taught in this Brother's being a King. Why is it not enough to tell us that He is our Brother? Why must we have a King? Now, this word "king," taken along with the word "brother," is, to my mind, what is expressed in God's being a Father, and brings out to us the necessity that there is for our being in a subordinate place, learning the will of another, and receiving that will to be our will. Our service, to be a right service, must be a free-will service; but still, in announcing His will, God announces it as King. In short, the sceptre is held out, and we are called to bow to it; and the love is revealed in order that the heart may bow to that sceptre; but it is as a sceptre that it is held out. Now, in Christ as King, there is the provision for strength, as well as the provision for authority. Our King is one who has power, not merely to be used against us if we refuse Him to reign over us, but to be used for us in our submitting to Him. He is a King to minister to our need, to supply the wants of the poor and needy. The true king is one in respect of whom we have nothing, but to whom we are altogether debtors. And this Brother, who is to be our King, we do not see rightly as King if we see him merely as exercising a control without us. We must see Him as the fountain of power within us; one who is to act in us by His might in the conflict with that evil with which we are contending, in assurance of His sympathy. This is the influence of the knowledge that He is King, that it makes His sympathy strength, as that of one of whom we know that He has strength for us. There is another blessedness besides that of conscious dependence on God which is connected with realising the Kingship of Christ, that thus, and thus alone, can we, as intelligent beings, meditating on the wide universe, **have peace as to its government**. Unless we had the omniscience of God we could not have the peace of God directly; but we may have the peace of God, without the omniscience of God, indirectly: that is, we may have the peace of God through the knowledge of God, and confiding, in regard to what we know not, in the character of Him whom we know to be King. In this way there is blessedness

in having a Brother as a King, in respect of ourselves and in respect of all things; for it is when we see the Lamb in the midst of the throne, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God — it is then that we can have perfect peace about all things, because then we see the character of Him who governs, and can say that all must be well. But what I am so desirous that you should seek to realise is **the sweetness of being reigned over** — the blessedness of having to do with a King; and that it is not the sympathy of the Brother, as reconciling to the condition of being reigned over, that you are to learn, but that while learning the character of the King in the Brother you are to learn that being reigned over is itself a blessedness.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 18:1-22

TITLE: SUPPORT OF PRIESTS AND DISCERNMENT OF PROPHETS

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S PEOPLE MUST RESPOND TO DIVINELY APPOINTED LEADERS WITH MATERIAL SUPPORT AND SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Meredith Kline: Responsibility was laid upon Israel for the support of the priestly ministers of God whose administrative assignments are cited in the preceding and following contexts (vv. 1-8). Then Moses enjoined the elimination of all false oracular claimants, including the false prophet (vv. 9-22). In that connection, he set forth the institution of the true prophets (v. 15ff., rounding out the treatment of theocratic leaders (judge, 16:8; king, 17:14 ff.; priest and Levite, 18:1 ff.), which is appropriately incorporated into this section of legislation dealing with the official administration of righteousness in theocratic life.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Deuteronomy introduces the prophet with two distinct paragraphs. The first (vv. 9-14) rejects the ways nations of that day seek information about the future. Instead, God will raise up prophets through whom God will speak (vv. 15-22). The passage contrasts the rejected ways of the nations with the type of prophet Israel will have.

I. (:1-8) PRIESTS REQUIRE MATERIAL SUPPORT FROM GOD'S PEOPLE

A. (:1-2) The Basis of the Levites' Entitlements

"The Levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the LORD's offerings by fire and His portion. 2 And they shall have no inheritance among their countrymen; the LORD is their inheritance, as He promised them."

Michael Grisanti: Their lack of a land allotment allows them to focus more fully on their God-given ministry.

Daniel Block: To compensate for their landless status, Yahweh offers himself as the Levitical priests' grant (v. 2b; cf. Num 18:20). Whereas 4:20 (cf. 32:9) designates Israel as Yahweh's *naḥalâ* ("people of grant"), here Yahweh is the *naḥalâ* of the Levitical priests. In effect, Yahweh invites them to eat from his own table; that which the people present to him, he passes on to them. "As he [Yahweh] promised them" (v. 2) reassures the Levites of their security in him, though the following statement obligates the Israelites to provide for them.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The central concern of the passage is not the job description of the priests, which is assumed, but their status within Israel and the way in which they are supported. The argument is fairly simple. The tribe of Levi did not receive an inheritance or allotment when Israel settled in the Promised Land. Instead, God is their inheritance; hence the people are to provide for the priests' daily needs through their sacrificial offerings and the giving of first fruits. . .

The Hebrew of the last part of **18:1** also is obscure, with a literal rendering something like *They shall eat the fire of the Lord and his inheritance*. The term *fire* is probably a reference to offerings to God that are partially burned at the altar. These offerings are given to God (i.e., his inheritance) but not fully burned, therefore making it possible for the priests to receive what is left for their daily sustenance.

B. (:3-5) The Substance of the Levites' Entitlements

“Now this shall be the priests' due from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice, either an ox or a sheep, of which they shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach. 4 You shall give him the first fruits of your grain, your new wine, and your oil, and the first shearing of your sheep. 5 For the LORD your God has chosen him and his sons from all your tribes, to stand and serve in the name of the LORD forever.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Deuteronomy identifies two types of dues for the priests: first, a portion of that which is sacrificed; and second, the first fruits from the field and sheep.

Daniel Block: Moses specifies three types of offerings: meat; the crops of the fields, vineyards, and olive groves; and wool (for clothing and blankets). The gifts brought to the priests must be choice gifts: the shoulder, jowls, and the stomach of the animals; the first of the processed grain, wine, olive oil; and the first fleeces of their flocks. These expressions remind the Israelites of Yahweh's abundant provision and reinforce their duty to treat the priests as generously as Yahweh has treated them.

Whereas **verse 2** grounded the Levites' privileges in **Yahweh's promise**, **verse 5** bases them in his **election**. Here Moses summarizes the Levites' roles as professional worshipers of Yahweh: Yahweh has chosen them “*to stand [before Yahweh]*” and “*[to] minister in the LORD's name always*” (cf. **v. 7; 10:8**). This is official court language, authorizing them to enter the Sovereign's presence to minister to him or to receive a commission from him (cf. **Dan. 1:4**). The reference to “*their descendants*” highlights the hereditary nature of the priesthood.

C. (:6-8) The Equality of the Levites' Entitlements

“Now if a Levite comes from any of your towns throughout Israel where he resides, and comes whenever he desires to the place which the LORD chooses, 7 then he shall serve in the name of the LORD his God, like all his fellow Levites who stand there before the LORD. 8 They shall eat equal portions, except what they receive from the sale of their fathers' estates.”

Daniel Block: In **verse 8** Moses finally gets to the point of this paragraph: equal prerequisites for equal service. The expression “*a portion like a portion*” (NIV “*share equally*”) creates an effective envelope around this passage (cf. v. 1) and highlights Moses’ concern for all Levites. He insists that those who move to the central sanctuary are entitled to the food prerequisites of **verses 3–5**, just like those who are based there.

Duane Christensen: The so-called **country Levites**, or those that Deuteronomy describes as those who “*live in your towns* [lit. ‘*gates*’],” were the clergy for the local “*assemblies*” who went to the central sanctuary with the local people in the pilgrimage festivals (Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Booths). While they were at the central sanctuary, they were to be considered part of the larger religious establishment—“*all the tribe of Levi*”—so far as priestly prerogatives were concerned. Moreover, according to **18:6–8** they were permitted to serve at the central sanctuary in times between the three pilgrimage festivals, whenever they wished to do so. While they were there, “*stand(ing) before YHWH*,” they were entitled to share “*equal portions*” in the priestly allotment in terms of food and lodging. Their primary responsibilities, however, were exercised at the local level, where they recited and expounded the Torah, carried out certain legal functions within the court system, and received sacrifices and offerings as local priests. Their functions also apparently included the role of what we might euphemistically call “*village butcher*,” particularly in regard to the firstborn of the livestock that were blemished and hence disqualified for use at the central sanctuary within the context of the three pilgrimage festivals.

Eugene Merrill: The whole passage reflects a condition in which Levites moved freely from place to place, especially from a local shrine to the central sanctuary, with no hint of necessity or coercion or restriction one way or the other. Those Levites who decided to make such a move could join the ones already serving at the central sanctuary and there could share and share alike with them despite the fact that they might have their own patrimony in addition (v. 8).

Peter Craigie: The words that follow (... besides what comes from his sale of the patrimony) are obscure in the Hebrew and of uncertain meaning, though they would seem to designate some source of income which was not to be affected by the Levite transferring his residence from one place to the main sanctuary.

II. (:9-14) PAGAN PROPHETIC PRACTICES MUST BE REJECTED AS DETESTABLE

A. (:9-12) Syncretism in Religion is Detestable to God

1. (:9) Mimics Pagan Detestable Practices

“When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations.”

Peter Craigie: The context of these verses is particularly significant for their interpretation. The beginning of the chapter dealt with the Levites (vv. 1–8), who ministered to the Lord in various ways on behalf of the people; the last section (vv. 15–

22) deals with prophecy, the deliverance of God's word to his people. These two legitimate types of religious office are contrasted by this middle section, which contains prohibitive legislation against illegitimate types of religious functionaries and practices. The period envisaged, as is consistently the case in Deuteronomy, is the time when the Israelites would possess their promised land (v. 9); at that time, they must take great care not to copy their forerunners in the land in the matter of various religious offices and practices.

Michael Grisanti: Before delineating the prophetic office, Moses warns the Israelites against imitating Canaanite counterfeit religious practice. God's gift of the land of Canaan and his dispossession of the Canaanites from that land begin and end this section. The land Yahweh is giving to them as an inheritance is a land in which God's covenantal people are to conduct themselves as loyal citizens of Yahweh's kingdom.

Eugene Merrill: As already noted (cf. **Deut 13**), prophetism was not unique to Israel. However, it assumed forms and engaged in practices among the pagan nations that were strictly forbidden to God's people. The passage under consideration speaks to these aberrant expressions of prophetism (vv. 9-13) and then turns to that of Israel for the purpose of defining its nature (vv. 14-20) and establishing criteria about the validity of its message (vv. 21-22).

2. (:10-11) Manifests Itself in a Variety of Occult Forms

“There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, 11 or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.”

Daniel Block: The practices in this list are all intended to manipulate deities, supernatural forces, and the spirits of the deceased to act in the worshiper's favor. They are grounded on several fundamental assumptions.

- (1) There is a link between the natural and supernatural world that makes cooperation between these spheres possible.
- (2) There is a world of supernatural forces that constantly threaten human beings or that may be harnessed for personal benefit.
- (3) The wills and operations of supernatural forces may be deciphered in natural phenomena through unsolicited omens (e.g., solar eclipses, birth anomalies) and solicited omens (examining entrails, dropping arrows).
- (4) By invoking the gods or manipulating other supernatural forces, a person may affect the outcome of events.
- (5) Since magic is a science, these skills can be taught and learned.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The text identifies seven or so techniques used by people in the ancient world to hear a word from God or to learn about the future. The uncertainty of ancient life leads to “a whole array of esoteric arts and practices, ... with various kinds of experts in them,” all with the goal of attempting to discover what God is saying or what the future holds (McConville 2002: 300). The Old Testament regularly denounces these methods (cf. **Exod 22:18; Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27**), and yet it recognizes that they were practiced within Israel and at points were even effective. . .

These practices challenge Israel’s conviction that God is in control and that there is a dynamic relationship between God and Israel (Brueggemann 2001: 193). The rejected practices tend to be **manipulative**, requiring **special knowledge** by those employing them. Most of the practices assume a **closed future**, one that is “set in stone,” either by fate or the gods, with the goal of the technique being to discover what that future will be. This is in sharp contrast to the theology of Deuteronomy, and indeed of the whole Old Testament. Deuteronomy is a word for today (**4:8, 26, 39, 40; 5:1; 6:6; 7:11; 8:1**; etc.), whenever that “today” may be, when the audience is challenged to choose life over death (**30:15**). The future is dependent upon how the people respond.

Eugene Merrill: The phrase “*practicers of divination*” refers generically to the whole complex of means of gaining insight from the gods regardless of any particular technique. *Sorcerers* (lit., “*those who cause to appear*”) were diviners whose specialty lay in their ability to create apparitions (cf. **Judg 9:36-37**). The *interpreter of omens* divined through the use of certain revelatory objects or devices such as a cup (cf. **Gen 44:5**) or through the actions or words of others (**1 Kgs 20:32-33**). He or she who engaged in witchcraft and was adept at performing signs (cf. **Exod 7:11**) to ward off evil (**Isa 47:9, 12**) or to mislead God's people (**Mal 3:5**). The “*spell caster*”, literally, “*the binder with a band*,” was thought capable of invoking powerful curses that would bring their intended targets under control (cf. **Ps 58:5; Isa 47:9**). The “*medium*” (“*asker of the pit*”) was a necromancer, one who sought to communicate with the dead and thereby gain secret information. The best known such practitioner in the Old Testament was the witch of Endor (**1 Sam 28:3, 9**; cf. **Isa 8:19**). In the same category is the *spiritist*. This does not appear to be a different kind of false prophet from the medium, for both are associated with necromancy and the pit (cf. **Lev 20:6, 27; 1 Sam 28:3, 9; 2 Kgs 21:6; Isa 8:19**). Finally, he “*who consults the dead*” is listed, no doubt as a general and summary term for necromancy (cf. **Isa 8:19; 11:10; 19:3**).

3. (:12) Merits Expulsion from the Promised Land

*“For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD;
and because of these detestable things
the LORD your God will drive them out before you.”*

B. (:13) Standard = Maintain Covenant Integrity

“You shall be blameless before the LORD your God.”

Michael Grisanti: The adjective (*tāmîm*, “blameless”; GK 9459) occurs frequently to describe offerings that perfectly match the priestly requirements, i.e., they are whole, perfect, or blameless (Ex 12:5; Lev 9:2; 22:21; Nu 6:14; 28:19). It can also depict the serenity of a relationship between God and the righteous that is complete or without blemish (Ge 6:9; 17:1; Dt 18:13; Jos 24:14). It describes a genuine and loyal relationship between persons (Jdg 9:16; Am 5:10). To be blameless signifies a person is upright before Yahweh (Ps 101:2; Grisanti, “2 Samuel,” 222–23).

C. (:14) Separation from Pagan Occult Practices Commanded

*“For those nations, which you shall dispossess,
listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners,
but as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do so.”*

III. (:15-22) PROPHETS CLAIMING TO SPEAK GOD’S WORD MUST BE AUTHENTICATED AND OBEYED

A. (:15) Announcement of Future Prophetic Voice

*“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you,
from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: Whereas the nations *give heed* to soothsayers and diviners (v. 14), Israel is to *heed* (v. 15) the prophet like Moses. The use of the **identical term** in both places strongly connects the two verses, and it sets the second (what Israel is to do) in contrast to the first (what the nations do). . . The opening verse of the paragraph introduces three key themes:

- (1) the divine initiative for prophecy,
- (2) the nature of a prophet—like Moses—and
- (3) the need to listen to the prophet.

Are there prophets today?

Striking about contemporary approaches is that often they do not build on the role that prophets played in Israel. Generally, Old Testament prophets were messengers of God, proclaiming the word of God, to the people of God, in a time of crisis, with a message of indictment or hope, calling for greater faithfulness to God. They appear to have been sporadic (when God raised them up), with a primary focus on Israel—in fact, often rebuking or guiding its leadership. The contemporary tendency to use the name “prophets” for those who address society is more a vestige of Christendom than a restoration of Old Testament prophets. Even the book of Jonah, although about someone who preaches to Nineveh, probably is a book addressed to Israel.

Daniel Block: Because Yahweh promises to provide Israel with prophets, there is no need to resort to divination, magic, and necromancy to determine his will. Moses contrasts the multiplicity of techniques the nations use with the singular provision of Yahweh by frontloading the subject in **verse 15**: “[*Instead*] a prophet from your midst from among your brothers like me Yahweh your God will raise up for you; to him you

must listen” (pers. trans.). Impulses that drive others to abhorrent magical practices will be satisfied in Yahweh’s provision of the prophetic institution.

Eugene Merrill: This does not mean that Israel would have had no means of access to their God and no way to determine his purposes for them. They were not to emulate the divination of the peoples whom they would dispossess (v. 14), but in the stead of these purveyors of lies there would be an order of God’s own prophets who would speak true revelation (v. 15). This order was first spoken of in the singular—“*a prophet like me*” and “*listen to him*”—but the continuing context makes it clear that the term was being used in a **collective sense** to refer to prophetism as an institution (cf. “*a prophet*” and “*that prophet*” in vv. 20, 22). There is nonetheless a lingering importance to the singular “*prophet*,” for in late Jewish and New Testament exegesis there was the expectation of an **eschatological prophet** par excellence who would be either a messianic figure or the announcer of the Messiah (cf. **John 1:21, 25; Acts 3:22; 7:37**). The ambiguity of the individual and collective both being expressed in the grammatical singular is a common Old Testament device employed to afford multiple meanings or applications to prophetic texts.

MacArthur: Both the OT (**34:10**) and the NT (**Ac 3:22, 23; 7:37**) interpret this passage as a reference to the coming Messiah, who like Moses would receive and preach divine revelation and lead His people (cf. **Jn 1:21, 25, 43–45; 6:14; 7:40**). In fact, Jesus was like Moses in several other ways:

- 1) He was spared death as a baby (**Ex 2; Mt 2:13–23**);
- 2) He renounced a royal court (**Php 2:5–8; Heb 11:24–27**);
- 3) He had compassion on His people (**Nu 27:17; Mt 9:36**);
- 4) He made intercession for the people (**Dt 9:18; Heb 7:25**);
- 5) He spoke with God face to face (**Ex 34:29, 30; 2Co 3:7**); and
- 6) He was the mediator of a covenant (**Dt 29:1; Heb 8:6, 7**).

B. (:16-18) The Appointment by Human Request and Divine Authority

1. (:16) By Human Request

“This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’”

Peter Craigie: The institution of this continued line of prophets was marked by the events at Horeb, when the people, afraid to listen directly to the voice of God, requested Moses to act as a mediator on their behalf (see **5:23–27**). The divinely appointed prophet, speaking directly God’s word (v. 18), thus provided the Israelites with a way of knowing and understanding the course of human events that was totally at variance with the manner of their neighbors. And because the word of the prophet was spoken with divine authority, to ignore that word would lead to divine judgment: *I myself will hold him responsible* (v. 19).

2. (:17-18) By Divine Authority

“And the LORD said to me, ‘They have spoken well. 18 I will raise up a

prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”

Daniel Block: This prophet will be **like Moses**. While the text does not yet explain what this means, presumably it includes

- (a) his mediatorial role;
- (b) access to the presence of Yahweh and membership in his council (**Num. 12:7**; cf. **Jer. 23:16–22**);
- (c) participation in clear, unambiguous, and direct conversation with God (**Num. 12:8**); and
- (d) his divine endowment with the spirit of prophecy (cf. **Num. 11:25–26**).

This paradigm of prophecy contrasts starkly to indirect, obscure, and ambiguous divination.

Duane Christensen: Prophetic responsibility was exercised in three general areas, as reflected in the types of oracles associated with the classical prophets:

- in matters of war (war oracles),
- in matters relating to the king (royal oracles), and
- in matters relating to the people in general (as monitors of the covenant agreement between God and his chosen people).

God was the true “king” in Israel (cf. Gideon’s response when invited by the people to rule over them in **Judg 8:23**: “*I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; YHWH will rule over you*”), so kings were subordinate to prophets.

C. (:19-20) Accountability for Rebelling against God

1. (:19) Rebelling by Rejecting God’s Revealed Prophetic Word

“And it shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.”

2. (:20) Rebelling by Prophesying Presumptuously in the Name of the Lord

“But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.”

Michael Grisanti: While it would be a simple matter to recognize the treachery of an alleged prophet of God who encourages them to worship other gods, discerning the authenticity of a prophet’s message represents a greater challenge. A prophet whose proclamation does not come to pass is not a prophet whom God has sent. Yahweh requires truth, i.e., the correspondence between the prophetic word and the realities of history (**Miller**, 153; cf. **1Sa 3:19–20**; **10:2–9**; **1Ki 17:1–7**; **21:23**; **2Ki 9:32–36**). Whenever a prophet makes a prediction (his ministry involved both preaching and predicting), the failure of that prediction to come to pass provides a clear verdict about the prophet’s lack of divine authority.

While the fulfillment of a prediction by itself does not prove the authenticity of a prophet (13:1–3 [2–4]), failed prophecy serves as an unmistakable indication of his treachery. Do the Israelites, then, have to wait for years (until a prophetic proclamation comes to pass) before knowing whether a given prophet has been sent by God? For example, what about Jeremiah, some of whose prophecies did not find fulfillment for decades? No, a prophet “like Moses” will have credibility with God’s chosen people, who will accept his messages as divinely authorized unless one of his declarations fails to take place. The coherence of a prophet’s message with the rest of Scripture will be a primary test to apply to authenticating any biblical prophet. The Israelites need not fear a prophet operating under his own authority.

D. (:21-22) Authentication of a Prophet

1. (:21) The Quest for Discernment

*“And you may say in your heart,
‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’”*

2. (:22) The Test of Historical Accuracy = Fulfillment of Prophecy

“When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The prophet who gives a word that God has not commanded has spoken it presumptuously (18:22). This term has been used thrice previously:

- (1) of Israel’s action when it tried to enter the Promised Land on its own after losing faith in God (1:43) and
- (2) of someone who does not obey the verdict of the central court (17:12–13 [two times]).

In all these cases a person is taking upon oneself a decision that is God’s: this is presumptuous!

Eugene Merrill: Such a litmus test must, of course, be somewhat nuanced. It suggests prediction, first of all, and not a word of a general moral or theological nature. Second, the time frame would have to be such that the predicted word would come to pass in the prophet’s own lifetime if his authenticity were to be judged by his contemporaries. A false prophet could speak of a day in the distant future long after his own decease and thereby evade detection as false on that basis alone. It would seem likely that one who spoke only of remote times and never of the near future would be suspect in any case. The true prophet, then, would have to validate his calling by inerrantly speaking of events in both the near and distant future. Only at the end of history could he be fully vindicated, but unfailing fulfillment of his predictive word where testable would certainly give him the benefit of the doubt.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What level of support do you feel is appropriate for your spiritual leaders?
- 2) Are false prophets aware of their presumption and deception?
- 3) In what ways do some church practices imitate pagan practices?
- 4) Why do people have such a fascination with the occult?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: By combining the information provided here with **chapter 13**, a series of criteria for testing the veracity of a prophet emerge.

- (1) A true prophet never undermines loyalty to Yahweh or encourages allegiance to any other god (**13:1–5[2–6]**).
- (2) A true prophet functions within the Mosaic paradigm, being commissioned by Yahweh and receiving messages from him. Therefore, true prophetic utterances will always be in accordance with and not contrary to the Torah of Moses.
- (3) True prophecies come to the prophet at God’s initiative rather than through professional manipulation of humanly devised means.
- (4) True prophets speak only in the name of Yahweh. Just as all other claimants to the status of deity are false (cf. **4:28**), so all who claim to speak on the authority of another god are deluded and their utterances are lies.
- (5) The utterances of true prophets are always fulfilled; the nonfulfillment of a prediction confirms the inauthenticity of the predictor.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The list of practices may not be exhaustive, but it is intended to be comprehensive. All the techniques nations use to discover the future are rejected. This is supported by the list including seven practices, with the number seven symbolizing a complete list.

- *who makes a son or daughter pass through fire:* This may refer to a divination practice rather than child sacrifice (cf. **2 Kings 17:17; 21:6**), one in which a child is passed through a fire, with the child’s survival or death providing a “yes” or “no” answer (**Nelson 2002: 233**).
- *divination:* This is a general term for seeking the divine will, including a wide variety of techniques beyond those cited in the list (e.g., **hepatoscopy**, the interpretation of the configurations of the liver of a sacrificial animal), yet also methods elsewhere accepted (e.g., the priestly use of the Urim and Thummim).
- *soothsayer:* The meaning is unclear, but in light of its Hebrew root (the word “*cloud*”), some suggest it may refer to the observation of clouds. The Old

Testament speaks of the Philistines (**Isa 2:6**) and Manasseh (**2 Kings 21:6**) practicing it, with the classical prophets rejecting it (**Isa 2:6; Jer 27:9; Mic 5:12**).

- *auger*: Again the meaning is unclear, but apparently Joseph practiced this in Egypt through the use of a cup, perhaps by observing the “patterns formed when liquids of different density are mixed in a goblet, such as drops of oil added to water or the reverse (**Gen. 44:5, 15**)” (**Tigay**: 173).
- *sorcerer, ... who casts spells*: These are probably forms of **magic** rather than divination; they attempt to affect or change the future through mysterious techniques. Exodus pronounces the death penalty on a person who practices sorcery (**22:18**). Pharaoh’s sorcerers were able to duplicate some of the signs of Moses when he came to Egypt (**Exod 7:11**). The casting of spells may be used against enemies as a form of self-defense (**Tigay**: 173; cf. **Ps 58:5; Isa 47:9, 12**). Both of these practices assume that there is power in particular techniques unrelated to the power of God.

who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead: The effort to communicate with the dead (**necromancy**) on the grounds that the dead have knowledge of the future—this was common in the ancient world, with the story of Saul and the medium of Endor (**1 Sam 28:3–25**) indicating that although the practice was prohibited within Israel, it had a long-standing reputation and was considered to be effective.

Jack Deere: The tribe of Levi was divided into three families (Gershonites, Kohathites, and Merarites). Each division originally had different responsibilities regarding the tabernacle (**Num. 3–4**). The Kohathites were further divided into those who were descendants of Aaron and those who were not (**Josh. 21:4–5**). Only the descendants of Aaron were permitted to serve as priests (**Num. 3:10**). They are generally referred to as “*the priests*” or “*the sons of Aaron*” (**Num. 10:8**). The rest of the tribe, those not serving as priests, were designated as Levites. Thus priests were a minority in the tribe of Levi. The Levites served as ministers to the priests (**Num. 18:1–7; 1 Chron. 23:28–32**), and in general as teachers of the Law in Israel (**Deut. 33:10a; 2 Chron. 17:8–9**). The priests officiated at the tabernacle and also had other duties. They served as judges (**Deut. 17:8–9**), guardians of the scroll of the Law (**17:18; 31:9**), teachers of regulations concerning skin diseases (**24:8**), and assistants to Moses in the covenant renewal ceremony (**27:9**).

Geisler: There are many **tests for a false prophet**. Several of them are listed in these very passages. Put in question form, the tests are:

1. Do they ever give false prophecies? (**Deut. 18:21–22**)
2. Do they contact departed spirits? (**Deut. 18:11**)
3. Do they use means of divination? (**Deut. 18:11**)
4. Do they involve mediums or witches? (**Deut. 18:10**)

5. Do they follow false gods or idols? (**Ex. 20:3–4; Deut. 13:3**)
 6. Do they deny the deity of Jesus Christ? (**Col. 2:8–9**)
 7. Do they deny the humanity of Jesus Christ? (**1 John 4:1–2**)
 8. Do their prophecies shift the focus off Jesus Christ? (**Rev. 19:10**)
 9. Do they advocate abstaining from certain foods and meats for spiritual reasons? (**1 Tim. 4:3–4**)
 10. Do they deprecate or deny the need for marriage? (**1 Tim. 4:3**)
 11. Do they promote immorality? (**Jude 7**)
 12. Do they encourage legalistic self-denial? (**Col. 2:16–23**)
- (See **Geisler** and **Nix**, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Moody Press, 1986, 241–42.)

A positive answer to any of this is an indication that the prophet is not speaking for God. God does not speak or encourage anything that is contrary to His character and commands. And most certainly the God of truth does not give false prophecies.
(from *When Critics Ask*)

Ray Pritchard: Consider the case of noted Christian broadcaster **Harold Camping** who predicted the Second Coming of Christ in late September 1994. When Christ did not come, Mr. Camping was forced to admit he had fouled up his calculations somewhere.

Camping predicted that Christ would return in judgment between September 15 and 27, 1994. The 72-year-old Reformed Bible teacher issued his claims on his nightly Open Forum talk-radio show, which airs on the Family Radio network he founded 35 years ago. The private network owns 39 stations and 14 short-wave international transmitters.

When the prediction did not come true, Camping said that God was testing the righteous to see if they would still be faithful to him. Unfortunately, many Christians believed Camping and were sorely disappointed when he turned out to be dead wrong about the Second Coming of Christ. Not only that, but multitudes of unbelievers who heard about his predictions now have yet another reason to dismiss the Christian faith.

All in all, the Harold Camping debacle is a sad commentary on the willingness of evangelical Christian to follow anyone who claims special knowledge regarding the end times.

Was Mr. Camping a prophet? No, not in the biblical sense. But he did make a prediction, hedged or qualified as it might have been. When you strip away all of his cautionary statements, he clearly predicted the Second Coming of Christ during the last few days of September 1994. And he was wrong.

He's lucky he didn't live during the days of the Old Testament. They had a severe way of dealing with men who made predictions that did not come true.

What prophet today would stake his life on his predictions? But that's precisely the biblical standard.

Thomas Constable: Contrasting Role of Priests vs Prophets

Priests and Prophets in Israel	
Priests	Prophets
Their threefold task:	Their threefold task:
Offer sacrifices for the people	Receive messages from God
Teach God's Word to the people	Deliver messages to the people
Facilitate public worship	Lead them in heartfelt worship
Teachers of the people	Preachers to the people
Appealed to the mind	Appealed to the emotions and will
Goal: understanding by the people	Goal: obedience by the people
Inherited their ministry	Were called by God to their ministry
Didn't foretell the future	Foretold the future occasionally
Lived in assigned towns ideally	Lived anywhere
Were very numerous	Were not as numerous
Came from one tribe and family	Came from any tribe or family
Were males only	Were males and females
Later were divided by "courses"	Later lived in "schools"
Were gifts from God to the people	Were gifts from God to the people

TEXT: Deuteronomy 19:1-13

TITLE: LAWS REGARDING MANSLAUGHTER, CITIES OF REFUGE AND MURDER

BIG IDEA:

REFUGE MUST BE MADE AVAILABLE IN CASES OF INVOLUNTARY MANSLAUGHTER BUT PREMEDITATED MURDER REQUIRES CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Gerald Gerbrandt: Cities of refuge are one way in which Deuteronomy protects due process and arrests the spiral of vengeance and violence that easily follows when justice is motivated by revenge.

Michael Grisanti: This entire passage lays great emphasis on God’s role in providing this land for his chosen nation. It is a land that he “*is giving you*” (19:1), “*is giving you to possess*” (19:2), “*is giving you as an inheritance*” (19:3, 10), “*enlarges your territory*” with (19:8), and “*promised on oath to your forefathers*” (19:8)—a promise he fulfills as he “*gives you the whole land he promised them*” (19:8).

John Schultz: The first thing that comes to mind when we read this chapter is that Canaan, the Promised Land, the rest into which God was leading His people, was not heaven; it was a place on earth, part of the world that lies under the curse of sin. There would be death, accidents, murder, and revenge in the Promised Land. The appointment of the cities of refuge is an accommodation to the condition of sin which is part of the existence of the people. The fact that the sinful nations that inhabited Canaan had been evicted by Israel did not bring about their own perfection.

Peter Pett: The lessons that come home from these cities of refuge are firstly the seriousness with which God treats deliberate murder, secondly that those who kill by accident should not bear guilt, and thirdly that just as the city of refuge was available for men to find deliverance, so our Lord Jesus Christ will be our city of refuge, even though in our case we are guilty. For as our High Priest He has died for us so that we may be forgiven and go free.

I. (:1-10) REFUGE MADE AVAILABLE FOR INVOLUNTARY MANSLAUGHTER VIA THE CITIES OF REFUGE

A. (:1-3) Provision of Three Cities of Refuge

1. (:1) Anticipation of Three Cities of Refuge

*“When the LORD your God cuts off the nations,
whose land the LORD your God gives you,
and you dispossess them and settle in their cities and in their houses,”*

Daniel Block: The opening paragraph serves as a thesis statement for the entire unit. Echoing **12:29, verse 1** sets the context by citing three preconditions to when these instructions take effect: Yahweh has cut off the nations (cf. **7:1**), the Israelites have dispossessed them, and they occupy their towns and houses. However, whereas in **12:29** Moses only spoke of occupying the Canaanites' land, here he refers to living "*in their towns and houses*" (cf. **6:10–11**). Apparently he did not envision the Israelites razing all the Canaanite towns.

2. (:2) Allocation of Three Cities of Refuge

"you shall set aside three cities for yourself in the midst of your land, which the LORD your God gives you to possess."

David Thompson: God did not want these cities in remote areas that were almost impossible to access. He wanted these cities within a distance that one could literally flee.

3. (:3) Access to Three Cities of Refuge

"You shall prepare the roads for yourself, and divide into three parts the territory of your land, which the LORD your God will give you as a possession, so that any manslayer may flee there."

Daniel Block: Continuing his penchant for triadic expression, **verses 2–3** prescribe three actions once the Israelites have occupied the land.

(1) They must designate three towns in the heartland (NIV "*centrally located*") to complement the three already set apart east of the Jordan (**4:41–42**) and complete the six called for in **Numbers 35:9–15**.

(2) They must establish the routes to the towns of asylum. Since all six asylum towns eventually selected were also Levitical cities, they were invested with a sacral character (cf. **Josh 20:7**). Even so, it seems "*the way/road*" and "*the land*" have been intentionally juxtaposed, suggesting the boundaries of the regions falling under the influence of the respective towns were to be determined by the towns rather than vice versa. The towns were probably selected on the basis of their established significance rather than their centrality.

(3) Having identified these three focal points, the Israelites were to divide the entire territory into three regions, for which the towns would function as umbrellas of protection for those fleeing from avengers of blood.

Eugene Merrill: The definition of manslaughter and its proper redress are the theme of **19:1–13**. In anticipation of it occurring in the sedentary life of Israel in the land, Moses instructed the people to select three cities as places of refuge to which persons accused of manslaughter could flee for protection. This is the second time in the book such instruction appears, the first adding the specification that these be cities to the east of

the Jordan, that is, in Transjordan (**Deut 4:41-43**). Numbers provides an even earlier listing of cities of refuge, three on each side of the river (**Num 35:6, 11-15**), and **Josh 20:7-9** gives their names. It is likely that the three cities of the Transjordan already were recognized as places of refuge by the time the law of **Deut 19** was given, so here it is necessary to speak only of the other three.

B. (:4-7) Procedure for Utilizing the Three Cities of Refuge

“Now this is the case of the manslayer who may flee there and live:”

Daniel Block: Verses 4–7 are a self-contained subunit framed by a formal introduction (v. 4a) and conclusion (v. 7). The introduction illuminates the form and the function of the passage.

1. (:4b-5) Typical Type of Case that Would Apply

*“when he kills his friend unintentionally, not hating him previously—
5 as when a man goes into the forest with his friend to cut wood,
and his hand swings the axe to cut down the tree, and the iron head slips
off the handle and strikes his friend so that he dies—
he may flee to one of these cities and live;”*

2. (:6) Typical Type of Vengeance that Would be Averted

*“lest the avenger of blood pursue the manslayer in the heat of his anger,
and overtake him, because the way is long, and take his life, though he
was not deserving of death, since he had not hated him previously.”*

Daniel Block: However, the involvement of the elders as representatives of the community (v. 12) prevented “*avengers of blood*” from operating independently or being driven by thirst for vengeance. The purpose of the institution was not to foster revenge but to promote righteousness. In cases of murder, righteousness demanded the expiation of the bloodguilt incurred by the death. Moses recognizes that despite the lofty goal of communal righteousness and the expiation of bloodguilt, personal passion could drive avengers of blood (v. 6). In rage they might pursue the “*killer*,” overtake him, and kill him. But since the “*killer*” in this case has committed no crime and has not previously expressed hatred toward the victim, the sentence of death does not apply.

Peter Craigie: *avenger of blood* -- the exact meaning of this expression has been the subject of considerable debate. Traditionally, it has been taken to refer to the nearest male kinsman of the deceased, upon whom rested the responsibility for avenging the blood of the dead man. More recently, however, the expression has been interpreted as referring to a representative of the elders of the city in which the death took place; he was therefore an official (the “*protector of blood*”), not a close relative of the deceased.

The meaning of the expression possibly lies somewhere between these two alternatives. The avenger of blood may well be the nearest male kinsman of the deceased; his responsibility, however, was not simply to kill the person responsible for the death (whether manslayer or murderer), but to bring him before the established courts of law

in his home town, who would determine the case in the proper manner. If the death was manslaughter, the manslayer would be sent to the city of refuge; the city of refuge was not simply a place of safety, but a place in which the manslayer made atonement for the deed of which he was guilty. If the death was determined to be murder, then the culprit would be executed.

Meredith Kline: One function of the kinsman-redeemer was to be the *avenger of the blood* (**Gen 4:10ff.**). This institution was not necessarily the mark of an ethically primitive society; rather, it was a mark of a less complex and less centralized form of government. Ideally, the *avenger* was to act out of passion for justice. However, because of the possibility of his acting out of mere passion, his office, while continued, was wisely controlled in the new, more highly centralized government of Israel established by Deuteronomy. The control was achieved by exploiting and expanding the institution of asylum early associated with the altar (cf. **Gen 4:15; Ex 21:14b**).

3. (:7) The Command to Set Aside the Three Cities of Refuge

*“Therefore, I command you, saying,
‘You shall set aside three cities for yourself.’”*

C. (:8-9) Potential for Additional Three Cities of Refuge

1. (:8) Expansion of Territory = the Contribution

*“And if the LORD your God enlarges your territory,
just as He has sworn to your fathers,
and gives you all the land which He promised to give your fathers—“*

2. (:9a) Exemplary Covenant Obedience = the Condition

*“if you carefully observe all this commandment,
which I command you today,
to love the LORD your God, and to walk in His ways always—“*

Daniel Block: In **verses 8–9** Moses digresses momentarily, contemplating the future when Yahweh expands the Israelites’ territory, delivering into their hands all the land he promised on oath to their ancestors. Whereas **verses 1–7** had in mind the core Promised Land west of the Jordan, the conditional construction raises the possibility of further expansion (**v. 8**). Should Israel’s territory expand beyond the original tribal allotments, three towns of asylum on each side of the Jordan would be inadequate. Therefore Moses calls for the addition of three more towns of asylum to serve the people living beyond the narrowly defined Promised Land (**v. 9b**).

However, **verse 9** recognizes that just as Israel’s prosperity in the land depends on their pursuit of righteousness, so Yahweh’s expansion of their territory is contingent on fidelity. Therefore, with a challenge we have often heard before (**6:5**), Moses appeals for scrupulous devotion to Yahweh demonstrated in action. Yahweh owes nothing to those who do not receive his grace with gratitude and respond to his covenant with obedience.

3. (:9b) Extra Cities of Refuge = the Command

“then you shall add three more cities for yourself, besides these three.”

D. (:10) Rationale for the Policy

“So innocent blood will not be shed in the midst of your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, and bloodguiltiness be on you.”

Eugene Merrill: At last the reason for such places is clearly spelled out—to spare an innocent party from miscarriage of justice and to prevent the avenger (and, indeed, the whole community as represented by him) from the guilt of shedding innocent blood (v. 10).

II. (:11-13) PREMEDITATED MURDER REQUIRES CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

A. (:11) Different Circumstances for this Contrasting Case Study

1. Premeditated Hatred

“But if there is a man who hates his neighbor”

2. Premeditated Murder

*“and lies in wait for him
and rises up against him
and strikes him so that he dies,”*

3. Presumptuous Flight to a City of Refuge

“and he flees to one of these cities,”

Daniel Block: Moses recognizes the potential for criminals to abuse the institution and reaffirms the demand in **Numbers 35** for discrimination between intentional murder and accidental death.

B. (:12) Deliverance to the Avenger of Blood for Execution

*“then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there
and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die.”*

Eugene Merrill: The act, first of all, is a response to or at least linked to an **attitude**. Homicide following hatred gives a presumption of intention to kill. This is in line with the observation of Jesus that anger toward one's brother is tantamount to murder (**Matt 5:21**). But the case was made ironclad if there was evidence that the perpetrator had killed his victim after lying in wait for him for that very purpose (v. 11). Even if this occurred, the malefactor had the protection of the law and could flee to a city of refuge while his case was adjudicated. Such proceedings are only implicit here, but the full discussion of manslaughter cases in **Num 35** suggests that a murderer was to be executed by the family avenger (**vv. 19-21**) if and when at least two witnesses implicated him (v. 30). This could be done whether or not the accused found sanctuary

in a city of refuge. He was to be retrieved from wherever he had fled and brought back to the scene of the crime to suffer his fate (**Deut 19:12**).

David Thompson: God will not bless a society or a country or a state that allows those who kill innocent people to just go on living. There needs to be the implementation of capital punishment. There needs to be the death penalty given to those who kill intentionally.

C. (:13) Divine Directives Regarding Justice in the Case of Premeditated Murder

1. Justice Must Not be Subverted by Pity

“You shall not pity him,”

2. Justice Requires Capital Punishment for the Shedding of Innocent Blood

“but you shall purge the blood of the innocent from Israel,”

Eugene Merrill: So heinous was murder its penalty was to be inflicted without pity or compassion of any kind. The reason is that humankind is the image of God (cf. **Gen 1:27; 9:6**) and therefore murder was deemed to be an assault on God himself, an ultimate act of insubordination and rebellion (**Gen 9:5-6**). The shedding of innocent blood polluted the very ground (**Gen 4:10-11**) and brought upon the community as a whole a culpability that could be atoned for only by the administration of talionic justice (v. 13). For the covenant community to tolerate such egregious sin by one of its members was to assume for itself the guilt of his deed. Only by excising the errant member could the community be restored to full covenant fellowship.

3. Justice Restores Society to a Healthy State

“that it may go well with you.”

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What does this passage teach us about the distinction between involuntary manslaughter and premeditated murder?
- 2) What is the distinction between pursuing revenge and justice?
- 3) What are the ramifications for a society that allows innocent blood to be shed without proper justice administered?
- 4) What does this passage teach us about capital punishment?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: The close reading of **19:1–7** reveals the characteristic nesting of features in the development of its thought, which may be outlined in concentric fashion:

- A Set aside three cities of refuge in the Promised Land **19:1–2**
 - B In each part of the land, provide a city for the manslayer **19:3**
 - X **This is the provision for the manslayer 19:4**
 - B' The man guilty of manslaughter shall find refuge there **19:5–6**
- A' Therefore I command you to set aside three cities of refuge **19:7**

The content of vv **11–13** may be outlined in concentric fashion:

- A A person commits intentional murder **19:11a**
 - B The murderer takes refuge in a city of asylum **19:11b**
 - X **The elders of his city shall retrieve him 19:12a**
 - B' The murderer shall be given over to the blood avenger **19:12b**
- A' Show no pity and purge the guilt of innocent blood **19:13**

Gerald Gerbrandt: Two cases or examples of killing offer criteria for distinguishing between murder and manslaughter (vv. **4–7, 11–13**). This is an expansion of the distinction in Exodus between a killing that is “*not premeditated*” but a result of “*an act of God,*” and that in which “*someone willfully attacks and kills another by treachery*” (**Exod 21:13–14**). The first case presents a scene where the death is entirely accidental, but given the often informal nature of ancient justice with its practice of blood vengeance, even such a killing could easily precipitate a rash action by a relative of the one killed. After all, hot anger easily clouds good judgment (**Deut 19:6**). The city of refuge protects the person who has accidentally killed someone.

The second case makes it clear that the city of refuge would not, however, permanently protect someone who has committed murder. Even then the city of refuge has a role to play: it serves as a place to protect the person during the time of the “*trial,*” during the time that the community determines whether it indeed is a case of murder. Here the city of refuge protects due process. The account of the second case climaxes in a guilty verdict, resulting in the execution of the murderer.

G. Campbell Morgan: The provision of these cities of refuge was a proof of the mercy and justice of God. These people were naturally fierce and vindictive. The law of God had made life sacred, and the punishment of taking it had been solemnly declared in the words: “*Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.*” Yet it was quite possible that in connection with the taking of human life there might be extenuating circumstances. For premeditated murder there was no forgiveness, and for the murderer in such case, no city of refuge was provided. For killing in haste, under sudden impulse of passion, such provision was made. These cities were not provided that men might evade justice, but that justice might be ensured. It is quite possible to do unjust things in the name of justice. It was against such a possibility that these cities were provided.

Further, the fact that a man-slayer reached one of these cities did not ensure him against enquiry and investigation. It provided for the possibility thereof, and indeed made it obligatory. Thus the man had an opportunity of explanation, and the nation the certainty of just action. The wrong of taking human life was marked in the case of the man-slayer who was not found worthy of the death-penalty, in that it was provided that he must remain in the city until the death of the high priest. It is a wonderful illustration of the strict and impartial justice of God in all His dealings with sin. While it cannot be excused, the sinner is never punished unjustly.

Rod Mattoon: Because of the importance of the cities, several conditions were met. The cities were spread out throughout the land where residents would be within a day's journey. They were placed on hills where they could be easily seen. They were for all men whether Jew or Gentile. The access to the cities were to be as easy as possible. The Sanhedrin was responsible to maintain the roads to these cities. The roads had to be free from any stumbling blocks, obstacles, or anything that would hurt the feet. Bridges were to be at least 32 cubits (48 feet) wide. Large signs were erected on every corner with the words *miklac* which means "**refuge**." The sign had to be large enough so they could be easily seen or read if in hot pursuit or flight. Two law students were placed on the route to accompany a fleeing refugee to the city in the event a blood avenger should catch up with the refugee. The lawyers would try to pacify the *goel* until there was a legal investigation. The gates of the cities were always open and attended 24 hours a day by men whose duty was to receive fugitives. The doors were always unlocked at night even in war time. Most gates of the cities were locked at night. The fugitive upon arrival would plead his case to the elders for a trial. He would be taken in and would be provided with shelter and food. The trial was usually within days. He would be judged by at least 23 officials. This was the amount needed for a guilty verdict. If the fugitive was found guilty of intentional murder, he was turned over to the blood avenger for execution. Bribes were not allowed. If the fugitive was found innocent of the charges of premeditated murder, the fugitive could live only in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest. He could then return home. If the fugitive died in the city, the bones were turned over to the family upon the death of the High Priest. If the fugitive was confined to the city, he was assigned convenient habitation, rent free. If he knew no trade, he was taught a trade for self-support. The mother of the High Priest would help feed and clothe this unfortunate victim so that they might not be impatient and pray for the death of their son (High Priest), upon whose death the fugitive's liberty and property were restored. [*Numbers Commentary*]

David Guzik: The cities of refuge as a picture of Jesus --

a. The Bible applies this picture of the city of refuge to the believer finding refuge in God on more than one occasion:

- i. **Psalm 46:1:** *God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.* More than 15 other times, the Psalms speak of God as being our refuge.
- ii. **Hebrews 6:18:** *That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.*

- b. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are within easy reach of the needy person; they were of no use unless someone could get to the place of refuge.
- c. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are open to all, not just the Israelite; no one needs to fear that they would be turned away from their place of refuge in their time of need (**Numbers 35:15**).
- d. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge became a place where the one in need would live; you didn't come to a city of refuge in time of need just to look around (**Numbers 35:25**).
- e. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are the only alternative for the one in need; without this specific protection, they will be destroyed.
- f. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge provide protection only within their boundaries; to go outside meant death (**Numbers 35:26–28**).
- g. With both Jesus and the cities of refuge, full freedom comes with the death of the High Priest (**Numbers 35:25**).
- h. A crucial distinction: The cities of refuge only helped the innocent; the guilty can come to Jesus and find refuge!

J. Parker: The universe was not constituted to give security to murderers: there is no shelter for a man hater. He may get into a city of refuge, but he is to be dragged out of it: the evil-doer may make a profession of religion, but his cloak, though of velvet and gold braided, must be torn from his shoulders. The universe has no lodgment for the man of malicious heart and murderous spirit; the city of refuge in Israel was not built for him; he has no right in it; to pity him is to despise the law; to pity the murderer is to forget the murdered. The eyes of justice are fixed upon both points in the case. It is an evil sentiment that spares the wrong-doer and forgets the wrong-endurer, the sufferer of wrong. There is one place appointed for the murderer. Who is the murderer? Not the shedder of blood: — whoso hateth his brother without a cause is a murderer. This is the great law, not of Israel only, but of the Church of Christ in all ages. Beware of malice! It does not always begin in its broadest form, or leap at once in all its intensity into human action: it begins in little frets and spites and jealousies; it starts out of a root of criticism, of fault finding, and investigations into consistency; it may begin as a clever action, showing the spirit of judgment, and proving itself to be equal to the analysis of the most hidden motive; but it grows; disappointed, it begins to justify itself; foiled in its attempts to succeed, it retires that it may increase the supposed evidence that is at command; then it returns to the onslaught; it grows by what it feeds on; at last, philanthropy — love of man — dies, and misanthropy — hatred of man — takes its place. Then is the soul a murderer; and, thank God, there is no city of refuge for the murderer of life, of hope, of love, of trust! — open the door and thrust ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness! — the sun will not spare a beam to bless the murderer. Christ is not a refuge in the sense of a criminal being able to outrun justice. The picture in Israel was the picture of a man fleeing for refuge and an avenger fleeing after him; and if the avenger were swifter of foot, the man slayer might be killed outside the city. There is no such picture in Christianity. In Christ we do not outrun justice: justice itself, by a mystery we can neither understand nor explain, has been satisfied by Christ.



TEXT: Deuteronomy 19:14-21

TITLE: LAWS REGARDING PERSONAL PROPERTY AND JUDICIAL WITNESSES

BIG IDEA:

THE LAW ENSURES BOTH PERSONAL PROPERTY RIGHTS AND THE INTEGRITY OF JUDICIAL WITNESSES

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: These guidelines regarding witnesses in judicial proceedings flesh out the eighth command of the Decalogue (cf. **5:20**; cf. **17:6**). The text divides into two uneven parts:

- (1) a call for more than one witness in all cases (**v. 15**), and
- (2) instructions on how to deal with malicious witnesses (**vv. 16–21**).

Both are driven by a concern for righteousness in judicial procedures.

Warren Wiersbe: Every system of justice depends on people knowing the truth and speaking the truth. To bear false witness is to break God’s commandment (**Ex. 20:16**) and to undermine the foundation of the legal system. The person who swears to tell the truth and then tells lies is committing perjury, which itself is a serious crime.

I. (:14) LAW ENSURES INVIOABLE PERSONAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

“You shall not move your neighbor’s boundary mark, which the ancestors have set, in your inheritance which you shall inherit in the land that the LORD your God gives you to possess.”

MacArthur: These “*boundary marks*” referred to stones bearing inscriptions which identified the owner of the property.

Charlie Garrett: Before going on, the context of the previous passage should be remembered. In the previous thirteen verses, it spoke of the cities of refuge, set up to protect the life of the manslayer who killed in innocence.

At first, it’s hard to think of why Moses would suddenly jump to an entirely different and unrelated subject, but such isn’t the case. The general consensus of scholars is reflected in the words of **Albert Barnes**.

He says – “As a man’s life is to be held sacred, so are his means of livelihood; and in this connection a prohibition is inserted against removing a neighbor’s landmark.”

The idea here is that of theft, as is defined in the eighth commandment. However, that obviously occurs because of a violation of the tenth commandment, that of coveting. Someone sees something that is not his, he covets it, and then he takes action to steal it.

In this, he then deprives the livelihood of the person. One thing follows after another. Thus, there is no unexplained leap from murder to the removing of a boundary. It is a logical progression of thought.

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Daniel Block: If **verses 1–13** build on the fifth command of the Decalogue, then **verse 14** addresses the seventh and tenth commands (**5:19, 21b**). This verse seems oddly placed, but it is linked to the preceding by its theology of land and vocabulary. The plots of land marked by boundary markers are microcosms of the Promised Land as a whole: both represented inviolable “granted” properties. Inserted here, this fragment heightens the significance of respecting others’ right to property. Justice outside the town walls—in the fields—is as vital as justice inside the gates. The pursuit of righteousness extends to all of life.

The inviolability of boundary markers is fundamental to a settled agricultural economy, where ownership of land is critical for well-being. The present expression, “*set up by your predecessors,*” assumes a formal procedure allocating parcels of tribal lands to specific clans and families (**Num. 26:52–56; 34:13–29; Josh. 14–19**). Though evidence is lacking, records of these allotments may have been stored in the central sanctuary. Israelite law viewed Yahweh as the true owner of the land, and the allotments to tribes and families were inviolable. The gravity of these grants is reflected in the covenant curses (**27:17**) and the custom of kinsmen redeemers (*gô’ēl*) reclaiming land when someone outside the clan possesses it (**Lev. 25:23–28**).

Duane Christensen: Roman law considered the moving of such landmarks a capital offense, but biblical law does not allow for capital punishment in matters of property law. . .

In subsequent Jewish tradition the command not to displace a neighbor’s boundary marker was extended to encompass a wide range of issues, including that of copyright violations. “In Jewish law the phrase ‘*moving landmarks*’ (*hassagat gevul*), in the sense of ‘violating boundaries,’ refers to unfair competition that encroaches on another’s livelihood and other rights” (**Tigay** [1996] 183). Though Jesus denied the use of this law in matters of personal relationships, he did not deny its validity as a principle for a court of law (see **Matt 5:38–42**).

Warren Wiersbe: In that day, officials didn’t draw detailed real estate maps, what we today call “plats.” Everybody was expected to honor the landmarks (boundary stones), because to move the stones meant to steal land from your neighbors and their descendants (**Prov. 22:28**). Unscrupulous officials could easily exploit poor widows and orphans and take away their land and their income (**Prov. 15:25; 23:10–11**). Since God owned the land and the people were His tenants, moving the stones also meant stealing from God, and He would punish them (Hosea 5:10). No wonder this crime was included among the curses announced from Mount Ebal (**Deut. 27:17**).

Gerald Gerbrandt: In the absence of modern surveying techniques, extensive official records, and long steel stakes, property boundaries were marked by items that were naturally available: stones or other similar moveable objects. By moving one of these markers, a boundary line could be changed, thereby stealing property from the neighbor. A prohibition like this one is common in the ancient Near East. . .

Moving a boundary marker is theft, yet much more than theft of property. It is stealing not only the means of survival but also a family's symbolic stake in God's election and the covenant. This conviction lies behind Naboth's response to King Ahab when the king offers him a better vineyard in exchange for his: "*The Lord forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance*" (1 Kings 21:3).

The significance of this particular theft is reflected by the number of biblical passages that treat it. Deuteronomy includes it in the list of curses in **Chapter 27**, preceded only by curses for making idols and dishonoring parents (27:17). Proverbs address it (**Prov 22:28; 23:10**), Job considers it a characteristic of the wicked (**Job 24:2**), and prophets inveigh against it (**Hos 5:10**). An indictment of Micah suggests that the concern is not limited to the surreptitious moving of a marker at night but may include the illegal and even the technically legal machinations of the powerful as they find ways of increasing their property holdings at the expense of weaker elements in society (**Mic 2:1–2**; cf. **Isa 5:8**). This prohibition may suggest contemporary property rights, yet its primary concern is not protecting impersonal property but guarding the nature of the covenant community, in which the livelihood of all is important and each family has its own access to God's blessings. The verse reflects well the concerns of the sabbatical release provisions (**15:1–18**).

Michael Grisanti: Although this legislation may seem out of place, it relates to the preceding passage through the repetition of certain **key words**: "*borders*" (*gebûl*; **19:3, 8**), "*inheritance*" (*naḥalâ*; **19:10**), and the verb "*to inherit*" (*nḥl*; **19:3**). The legislation concerning cities of refuge recalls **3:12–17** and **4:41–43**, passages that deal with boundary issues and cities of refuge in the region of Transjordan and pave the way for this legislation concerning boundary markers (**Wright**, *God's People*, 128–31).

Not only is Yahweh giving Israel the land as their inheritance, but the land is also allocated to the tribes, clans, and individual families. The continued possession of one's land is a primary means to a family's economic security. A person might move someone's boundary for personal advantage, i.e., to gain more land. The fact that the curses of **ch. 27** include a reference to this kind of conduct highlights its treacherous nature (27:17). Both wisdom writers (**Job 24:2–4; Pr 15:25; 22:28; 23:10–11**) and the prophets (**Isa 5:8; Hos 5:10; Mic 2:2–4**) refer to land grabbing as part of their warning or rebuke. To take land from a fellow Israelite represents theft (prohibited in the eighth commandment; **5:19**) and covetous lack of contentment with God's allotment (prohibited in tenth commandment; **5:21**).

II. (:15-21) LAW ENSURES THE INTEGRITY OF JUDICIAL WITNESSES

A. (:15) Integrity Requires Corroboration of Multiple Witnesses

1. Single Witness is Insufficient

“A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed;”

Eugene Merrill: Even Jezebel knew that she had to hire more than one witness to testify against Naboth if her case were to have any merit (**1 Kgs 21:10, 13**).

2. Multiple Witnesses Required for Confirmation

“on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.”

Earl Kalland: Jurisprudence must have rules of evidence, and in Israel witnesses were required to supply evidence or be punished (**Lev 5:1**). The rule for witnesses in capital offenses (**17:7**) is here applied to any crime or offense. Two or three witnesses are required (**17:6; Num 35:30; Matt 18:16; 2 Cor 13:1**).

Jack Deere: This principle was to act as a safeguard against a false witness who might bring an untruthful charge against a fellow Israelite because of a quarrel or out of some other impure motive. By requiring more than one witness – at least two or three – greater accuracy and objectivity was effected.

B. (:16-21) Integrity Requires Proportionate Punishment of False Witnesses

1. (:16) Example of the Case of a False Witness

“If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing;”

Jack Deere: Inevitably in some cases there would be only one witness. A single witness still was obligated to bring a charge against the offender. However, such a case would be taken to the central tribunal of priests and judges (cf. **17:8-13**) for trial.

2. (:17-18a) Examination of All Parties Involved

“then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days. 18 And the judges shall investigate thoroughly;”

Duane Christensen: the phrase “before YHWH” does not refer to the place of the trial at all, but to the fact that “the priests and the judges who are in office in those days” are the representatives of YHWH and that He is with them in their adjudication (**Tigay [1996] 184**).

3. (:18b-19a) Enforcement of Proportionate Justice

“and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, 19 then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother.”

4. (:19b-20) Evil Both Purged in the Present and Deterred in the Future

a. (:19b) Evil Purged in the Present

“Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.”

b. (:20) Evil Deterred in the Future

*“And the rest will hear and be afraid,
and will never again do such an evil thing among you.”*

5. (:21) Exclusion of Pity and Enforcement of Proportionate Justice

“Thus you shall not show pity:

life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

Charlie Garrett: Where justice is to be blind, and where punishment is to be meted out according to that justice, those responsible for such matters are demonstrating the greatest form of compassion for the society they serve. This is certain because the model is given in the laws for Israel as directed by the Lord.

Daniel Block: Verse 21 may be interpreted as the conclusion to either this subunit or the entire chapter. As in the case involving the murderer (v. 13a), Moses declares that personal interest and sentimentality are not to jeopardize the administration of justice. He reinforces the need for commitment to proportional justice with a fivefold recitation of equivalencies, generally known as *lex talionis* (“the law of retaliation”). Laws of this type are well attested in ancient Near Eastern documents⁷ and the Old Testament (**Ex. 21:23–25; Lev 24:17–21**). . .

The laws of *talion* demand that punishment for crimes against another person be proportional to the crimes committed rather than be more severe. Rather than promoting vengeance, the principle of *lex talionis* limited the penalties that adjudicators could impose on offenders.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The basic principle of the law of retribution is one of **proportionality**: “Let the punishment fit the crime.” It is likely that *eye for eye* (etc.) was a recognized saying within Israel and elsewhere that the Old Testament incorporates, a proverbial saying not necessarily understood literally (cf. Jesus instructing, “*If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell*”; **Matt 5:29** RSV).

Michael Grisanti: This often misunderstood principle does not legitimize vengeance in kind but provides appropriate limits or parameters for penalties. The punishment must be commensurate with the crime, thus preventing both leniency and excess. When Jesus addressed this issue in the Sermon on the Mount (**Mt 5:38–42**), he did not criticize the principle of *lex talionis* in general; rather, he affirmed that a strict equivalence between the “crime” and the “punishment” was appropriate in legal settings but never intended to be a guide for offenses in **interpersonal relationships**.

Warren Wiersbe: People who call this principle “barbaric” probably don’t understand what it means. The sentence must be neither too strict nor too easy but must be suited to what the law demands and what the convicted criminal deserves. Honest judges don’t give a murderer the same sentence they give the man who poisoned his neighbor’s cat, nor is a shoplifter given the same punishment as a kidnapper. This judicial principle emphasized fairness and humane treatment at a time in history when punishments were terribly brutal. In eighteenth century England, there were over 200 capital crimes, and a person could be hanged for picking pockets. Children who broke the law were frequently treated as adults and imprisoned for minor offenses.

Meredith Kline: That principle was not a license to vengeance but a guarantee of justice. Note again the pre-eminence of the priest in judgment (**Deut 19:17**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How was personal property viewed differently under the OT covenantal system than in today’s capitalistic economic structure?
- 2) What types of safeguards are provided by our judicial system to protect property rights?
- 3) Do you view our present day court system as too lenient or too severe in terms of matching the punishment to the crime?
- 4) How is our society sliding away from the conviction that appropriate punishment is a deterrent to future crimes?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Earl Kalland: The territorial imperative was of basic importance in the economy that the Lord revealed through Moses. The land – and private ownership of the land – made possible the most equitable distribution of wealth. Moses looked ahead to the time when Israel would be settled in the land within the tribal and family boundaries and when these boundaries could be subject to dispute. The boundaries once allotted in the original division of the land were to be inviolate; so moving a boundary stone was to be strictly forbidden.

The Lord had given the land to the people. Their descendants were never to disturb the boundary stones. The right to hold property was a cornerstone of Israel’s inheritance from the Lord. It is still a primary right of free people on the earth, and without it freedom is greatly limited.

G. Campbell Morgan: This chapter contains certain applications of laws already given. It deals with the sacredness of life, the importance of the land, the necessity for truth, the obligation of justice in all human inter-relationships. The particular words which we have taken set up a principle which has been recognized and acted upon wherever laws have been based upon a passion for justice. They provided that no man could be condemned upon the testimony of one witness. There must be corroboration at the mouth of another. Moreover, every witness must be put to inquisition by the judges. If in the course of that investigation a man was found guilty of bearing false witness, he was to be severely punished. This spirit of strict and impartial justice breathes through all these laws, and helps us to understand God's ways of dealing with men. Only, we are safer in the hands of God than we can ever be in the hands of man. In spite of all precautions, justice does miscarry at times, in the best human courts; and that because there are things which the eye cannot see, or the ear hear, and it is only upon these evidences that man can bear witness. Our final judgments are with Him *Who judgeth, not by the seeing of the eye, or the hearing of the ear, but with righteous judgment*, which is based upon perfect knowledge of all the facts. That is a truth which comforts and warns. With men we may be punished, or we may escape punishment, because all the facts are not known. It is never so with God.

Charlie Garrett: Thus, it is as if Israel is being smelted through the process, burning off and purging away any impurities, and thus purifying the people of any evil. And this purification process isn't just the removal of the offender. Not by a longshot. There is a greater purpose in dealing with the offender in this manner...

And those who remain shall hear and fear,

This is one major purpose of punishment in society. When a person is punished, those who hear of it, if they are wise, will say, "I don't want that." In this, they will fear the law, they will fear the consequences of breaking the law, and they will fear those who administer the law.

In this, society is kept in check, and the people will then have no fear of those who would otherwise have no fear of the law. In this, the result is...

and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.

This is the same general idea of what was said in **Chapter 13**. There, the person thought to draw the people away from the Lord to serve other gods. In that, they were to be taken out and stoned by all. The accuser first, and then by all the people –

"So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you." **Deuteronomy 13:11**

The idea is that of having all the people come to an appreciation for what is right and just. The books of wisdom, in particular, reflect the importance of maintaining

righteousness through upholding the law – whatever law that may be – that regulates the conduct of a nation’s citizens.

Solomon uses the same precept twice in Proverbs 28 to convey this notion –

“When the righteous rejoice, there is great glory; But when the wicked arise, men hide themselves.” Proverbs 28:12

“When the wicked arise, men hide themselves; But when they perish, the righteous increase.” Proverbs 28:28

The sense is that something has caused the wicked to arise. That is, invariably, a failure to maintain social order. This is the purpose of law. It is a developed structure in which people will properly conduct their affairs. When the law is not upheld, then the wicked will arise. But when the wicked are taken out of the picture, the righteous remain and even increase.

Solomon uses a similar precept in Ecclesiastes, showing that even if a sentence is handed down, it must be carried out with alacrity. If not, only more evil will result –

“Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” Ecclesiastes 8:11

With such precepts clearly understood, and with the need for them to be upheld, Moses next says of such an offender...

Your eye shall not pity:

This is certainly directed in two ways. The first is to the priests and judges who knew what a guilty sentence required. They were not to consider that when making such a sentence. The second is to the people who would be called forward to assist in executing the matter, especially if it was a sentence of death. If called to stone the person, they were to accept it as the Lord’s judgment and to participate in the judgment of the Lord.

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TEXT: Deuteronomy 20:1-20

TITLE: *WAGING GOD'S WARS*

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S WARS MUST BE FOUGHT:

- **IN DEPENDENCE UPON GOD'S STRENGTH,**
- **WITH COURAGE AND NO DISTRACTIONS,**
- **ACCORDING TO GOD'S RULES OF ENGAGEMENT AND**
- **WITHOUT COLLATERAL DAMAGE**

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: Having dealt with personal violence in **chapter 19**, Moses now shifts the focus to **corporate violence**, the violence of war. The placement of these instructions immediately after the *lex talionis* ("the principle of retaliation") suggests that in warfare even soldiers must recognize the limits of violence, and the state for whom one is fighting must respect this principle when dealing with the enemy. Against the backdrop of Moses' instructions on how to pursue righteousness in the internal affairs of the nation (**16:18–19:21**), he now instructs the Israelites on pursuing righteousness in external relationships.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Israel knew and understood war. For Israel, war was not some theoretical notion or report on the news but an ever-present reality, always accompanied by hunger, humiliation, and death. The small nation-states to the east of the Mediterranean (Israel, Edom, Moab, and Syria) regularly had conflicts with each other. And there was always the threat that one of the superpowers of the day (Babylon or Assyria to the northeast, or Egypt to the south) would impose its will on the land, wreaking havoc as it exercised its power over the region, or simply passing through it on its way to confront another superpower. The Northern Kingdom ended when Assyria captured Samaria, carrying away as captives many of its citizens (722 bce); and the Southern Kingdom ended when Babylon sacked Jerusalem, taking many of its people into exile (587 bce).

Deuteronomy comes out of a world at war: its audience knows what war is like firsthand. Recognizing this is necessary so we can grasp what the passage is really about rather than becoming caught up with what strikes us on the surface.

Chapter 20 consists of three distinct sections introduced by the identical when/ if you, followed by an imperfect second-person masculine singular verb, intended as a collective to the people as a whole. The same construction is used in 21:10 and 23:10, marking these five passages as a series dealing with war. The first unit presents the basic logic or principles of Israelite war (**20:1–9**). The second section addresses how Israel is to treat its enemies, first those far from you (**20:10–14**), then those within the

land (20:15–18). The last part of Chapter 20 introduces an unusual consideration for the trees of a besieged town (20:19–20).

Thomas Constable: God’s people should conduct their spiritual warfare confident in God’s presence, power, and ultimate victory (cf. 2 Corinthians 10:3-4; Ephesians 6:10-17; Colossians 2:15).

I. (:1-9) GOD’S WARS MUST BE FOUGHT IN DEPENDENCE UPON GOD’S STRENGTH AND WITH COURAGE AND NO DISTRACTIONS

A. (:1-4) Exhortation by the Priest Not to Fear Strong Enemies but Depend on God

1. (:1) Because of the Presence of the Lord with You

“When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you.”

Daniel Block: Arguing from greater to lesser, he reassures Israel that if Yahweh could liberate them by defeating the superior Egyptians, his presence will surely guarantee victory against the Canaanites.

2. (:2-4) Because of the Power of the Lord to Fight for You

“Now it shall come about that when you are approaching the battle, the priest shall come near and speak to the people. 3 And he shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them, 4 for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.’”

Duane Christensen: It is when God’s people step forward in his strength that things happen. In vv 1–4, it is clear that the soldiers of ancient Israel were not a mighty military force. They needed someone to encourage them by reminding them that it is God’s enabling presence in their midst that brings victory in the battles of life (v 2). The key to success for them, and for us today, is to realize afresh that God’s strength is made present in our weakness. As the apostle Paul once put it, *“I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong”* (2 Cor 12:10). Paul knew this by experience as God revealed that his strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor 12:1–13). Our culture cries out: “Be independent! Stand on your own two feet!” God’s word tells us to increase our dependence on God; for when we increase our independence, we accomplish only what we can accomplish alone. When we learn true dependence on God, nothing is impossible (Matt 17:20; Luke 1:37).

Gerald Gerbrandt: In the face of fear that is only natural when confronting a stronger enemy, with language reminding the people of God’s exclusive claim upon them, Israel

is encouraged to trust and not be afraid since it is God who gives victory.

B. (:5-7) Exhortation by the Officers Not to be Distracted by Other Obligations but Be Fully Committed

“The officers also shall speak to the people, saying,”

Most commentators take these exceptions or military deferments to be reasonable concessions to allow God’s people to live in the blessing of God’s promises and not suffer the futility of being deprived of life’s blessings. They point to the example of Gideon following the Lord’s instructions to pare down the number of forces so that God will get the glory for the victory. But I disagree. Something **negative** is going on here. God has promised victory – so the warriors should not be fearful of defeat and death. The males involved in these areas of exemption would be of prime fighting age and should be taking the leadership in the invasion campaigns. They are being dismissed from the battle because they cannot be fully committed as they should be. Look at Christ’s condemnation of similar excuses in **Luke 14:15-35** as He teaches on counting the cost of discipleship and full commitment to Him.

Duane Christensen: The law on preparing the army for battle focuses on four grounds for military deferral: three in cases of persons with new commitments that distract them (i.e., new houses, new vineyards, and newlyweds), and a fourth for those who are afraid, lest their fear spread panic among the rest of the troops.

Eugene Merrill: The concessions and exemptions that follow (vv. 5-9) are not so much prompted by compassion (though that is not altogether lacking) as by the desire for **singlemindedness** on the part of those who bear arms. It is a well-attested fact that fear or preoccupation in the midst of conflict can endanger the life not only of the person afflicted by it but also the person's compatriots. Far better for a few who are **wholly committed** than for sheer multitudes of hangers-on where the well-being of the community is involved. But there may also be an undercurrent here of that same spirit that later was manifest in the paring down of Gideon's army from thirty-two thousand to three hundred men. This was done so that Israel might not boast *“that her own strength has saved her”* (**Judg 7:2**). In line with holy war, once more, it was to be clear to all observers that battles were won because of the power and presence of the Lord and not because of human prowess.

Peter Pett: He begins by warning against fear of the enemy. That is always a great problem in war. But he points out that for them that is foolishness, for Yahweh, the God of battle, the Man of war (**Exodus 15:3**), has promised to be with them. He assures them that before they have to fight each battle Yahweh’s own representative, ‘*the Priest*’, will encourage them prior to the battle, assuring them that Yahweh is fighting alongside them. He then goes on to deal with the fighting speech that would come before all battles, in which an offer would always be made to anyone who so wished that they withdraw before battle commenced. If they did not wish to fight, Yahweh would not require it of them (compare **Judges 7:2-8**). So when they fought it would be because they had chosen to do so. **No response would probably be expected to the**

offer, for none would want to be branded a coward, but it made all feel that they were acting together as one as willing volunteers.

1. (:5b) Military Deferment for Distraction over Material Possessions

*“Who is the man that has built a new house and has not dedicated it?
Let him depart and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and
another man dedicate it.”*

2. (:6) Military Deferment for Distractions over Agricultural Pursuits

*“And who is the man that has planted a vineyard and has not begun to
use its fruit?
Let him depart and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and
another man begin to use its fruit.”*

3. (:7) Military Deferment for Distractions over New Marriage Commitments

*“And who is the man that is engaged to a woman and has not married
her?
Let him depart and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and
another man marry her.”*

C. (:8-9) Final Preparations for Battle

1. (:8) Dismiss the Fearful

*“Then the officers shall speak further to the people, and they shall say,
‘Who is the man that is afraid and fainthearted?
Let him depart and return to his house, so that he might not make his
brothers’ hearts melt like his heart.’”*

Peter Craigie: The best possible army was the one wholly committed to God and absolutely confident in his strength and ability for the battle lying ahead of the army. . .

fear in an army is like an infectious plague, which can quickly cripple the ranks with its debilitating effect. The strength of the army, it is true, lay in God’s presence; but to experience God’s presence in battle, the people were to be wholly committed to him, and fear undermined the wholeness of commitment.

2. (:9) Delegate Leadership under Appropriate Commanders

*“And it shall come about that when the officers have finished speaking to
the people,
they shall appoint commanders of armies at the head of the people.”*

Daniel Block: Verse 9 is transitional, describing the final stage in preparing soldiers for war. After the “officers” have delivered their speeches, and after those with legitimate reasons for exemption and those who are fearful have returned home, the officials are to appoint “commanders” to lead the army into battle.

Duane Christensen: The commanders of the army that is on the move to engage the enemy in battle should be selected from the ranks of the faithful who are willing to give God's work their undivided attention and commitment.

II. (:10-18) GOD'S WARS MUST BE FOUGHT ACCORDING TO GOD'S TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT

A. (:10-15) Terms of Engagement for Distant Cities – Goal of Dominion Rather than Total Extermination

1. (:10) War Must be a Last Resort

“When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace.”

John Dummelow: War is to be regarded as the last resort, and only to be employed when negotiations for peace have been tried and failed. In the event of victory, only the fighting men are to be put to death; women and children are to be spared, except in the case of neighbouring idolatrous tribes.

2. (:11) Dominion is the Goal

“And it shall come about, if it agrees to make peace with you and opens to you, then it shall be that all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor and shall serve you.”

3. (:12-14) Conquest Must Also Demonstrate Restraint

a. (:12) Fully Engage Where Necessary

“However, if it does not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it.”

b. (:13) Follow up on God's Gift of Victory by Eliminating All Opposition

“When the LORD your God gives it into your hand, you shall strike all the men in it with the edge of the sword.”

c. (:14) Forbear from Total Destruction

“Only the women and the children and the animals and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as booty for yourself; and you shall use the spoil of your enemies which the LORD your God has given you.”

4. (:15) Pattern Holds Only for Distant Cities

“Thus you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations nearby.”

Peter Craigie: This relatively humane approach to military conquest was only to apply to the cities at some distance from the land, which it was Israel's first duty to acquire.

B. (:16-18) Terms of Engagement for Cities of the Promised Land – Goal of Total Extermination

1. (:16) Extermination of All Life is the Goal

“Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes.”

Daniel Block: The policy demands the slaughter of the entire human population of the Canaanite towns. Whereas the women and children of distant towns that reject Israel’s peaceful overtures are to be spared, in the cities of the land Yahweh is giving to Israel as their grant (*naḥalâ*), nothing “*that breathes*” is to survive. Towns in the Promised Land proper are to be treated even more severely than the towns east of the Jordan had been (cf. **2:34–35; 3:4–7**). . .

the **ḥērem policy** was driven by religious rather than genocidal or military considerations: the need to “keep Yahweh’s holy people free from syncretism and idolatry.” For Israel, implementing ḥērem on a town not only secured its absolute transfer to the divine sphere; it was also intended to secure Israel’s survival. At the level of the material, it prevented Israelites from contamination by contact with the “*devoted*” articles, which would have brought them under the same curse and subject to destruction (**7:25–26**). At the level of the spirit, it cut off the possibility of the Canaanites teaching the Israelites their abominable religious practices (cf. **12:30–31; 13:1–18[2–19]; 18:9**).

2. (:17) Extermination of the Designated Idolatrous Nations is the Goal

“But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you,”

3. (:18) Elimination of the Temptation of Idolatry is the Goal

“in order that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the LORD your God.”

III. (:19-20) GOD’S WARS MUST BE FOUGHT WITHOUT COLLATERAL DAMAGE -- PROTECTING VALUABLE RESOURCES DURING SIEGE WARFARE

A. (:19) Spare the Fruit Trees

“When you besiege a city a long time, to make war against it in order to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them; for you may eat from them, and you shall not cut them down. For is the tree of the field a man, that it should be besieged by you?”

B. (:20) Construct Siegeworks from the Non-Fruit Trees

“Only the trees which you know are not fruit trees you shall destroy and cut

down, that you may construct siegeworks against the city that is making war with you until it falls.”

Daniel Block: The expression reflects human subsistence from fruit trees and represents an idiomatic way of saying, “Don’t kill the goose that lays the golden eggs,” or “Don’t bite the hand that feeds you.” The trees symbolize life. Since the Israelites will have conquered the fields around the besieged city and eventually will occupy the city, it is contrary to self-interest ruthlessly to cut down the orchards around the city.

Gerald Gerbrandt: God has created the trees also, so they should not be destroyed needlessly. The passage does reflect an ecological restraint, a concern for God’s creation. This concern is so significant that the normal tendency of war to become unconditional is placed under an external limitation.

Eugene Merrill: The real thrust of the passage, however, is to contrast the tree with humankind (v. 19b). It is only humans, ironically the image of God and the crowning glory of creation, who sin against the Creator in such egregious ways as to call upon themselves divine judgment. The innocent tree, tainted as it is by the fall of humankind, is nevertheless not culpable and should therefore be spared. No more graphic depiction of the awful calamity brought by sin could be imagined.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does the assurance of the Lord’s Presence and Power help to alleviate your fears?
- 2) What distractions or excuses pull us away from wholehearted commitment to Christian warfare?
- 3) How can we exercise discernment to distinguish the proper rules of engagement for different types of spiritual conflicts?
- 4) Why was the Lord so careful to forbid a “scorched earth” policy towards warfare?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

G. Campbell Morgan: It is necessary to bear in mind that these people were being led into the land not merely to find a possession for themselves as an established nation, but first as the scourge of God against a corrupt and corrupting people. In view of this fact war was inevitable, and therefore particular instructions were now given for the people's guidance in war.

Peter Pett: So in this chapter Moses is laying down a pattern for future warfare. Firstly he gives a vivid portrayal of what the preparation for battle will be like, and what their attitude should be in facing such a battle. Then he speaks on how they are to approach the taking of cities. And finally he explains what their attitude should be with regard to the environment, thought of especially in terms of trees. This covers the three important aspects of war in those days, approach towards the battle, approach towards the siege, approach towards the environment (for the land has to be lived in after the war). In process of this he naturally deals with the Holy War ahead against the Canaanites, but his prime aim is to prepare for all war.

He does not just lay down a pattern for the invasion. He does that within the framework of a revelation of how all their wars are to be fought in the future. He deliberately talks in such a way that they will feel that the invasion is just an interlude to be followed by a future living in and defending of the land. One of the important things in all war is to see what lies beyond. Men boost their hearts by singing of what will be once the war is over.

Furthermore he wanted them to know that if they were to be worthy of Yahweh and gain victories through His power, His people must behave rightly when at war, and during that warfare. In such war Yahweh sought their trust and their obedience. Here he was laying down an attitude towards war. He had the long distance in mind as well as the near view.

Duane Christensen: The apostle Paul understood the power of **military metaphor** in motivating the followers of Jesus to right living. To the church at Ephesus, Paul expanded such imagery in terms of military gear and weapons: *“Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may stand against the wiles of the devil. . . . Fasten the belt of truth around your waste, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. . . . take the shield of faith . . . the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”* (**Eph 6:11–17**). And to the church at Corinth, he said similar words: *“we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they are divine power to destroy strongholds”* (**2 Cor 10:3–4**). He referred to both Epaphroditus (**Phil 2:25**) and to Archippus (**Philem 2**) as *“fellow soldiers”* in Christ. The same imagery found expression through the centuries in the hymnology of the Christian Church: “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” “Sound the Battle Cry,” “Soldiers of Christ Arise,” etc.

William MacDonald: Unlike other nations, Israel was to make distinctions in her warfare under Jehovah’s direction. These distinctions were a further reflection of Israel as a holy people under a loving God. War was necessary, but the Lord would control the evil it caused. One has only to study the practices of other nations, like the Assyrians, to appreciate these guidelines. Instructions are given as to how war was to be waged. Notice the following distinctions:

1. Cities near and far (10-18). The cities in the land were an immediate danger, totally reprobate and fit for destruction. Cities outside the land were to be approached first with terms of peace. If they refused, only the men were to be killed; the women and children were to be spared. These cities did not pose so great a threat to contaminate Israel as did the ones within Israel's borders.

2. Fruitful and unfruitful trees (19, 20). The principle here is that Israel was not to practice "desolation warfare." They were to preserve what was useful instead of engaging in wholesale destruction of the land.

David Thompson: GOD EXPECTS HIS PEOPLE TO FIGHT A GOOD FIGHT AND WAGE A GOOD WAR BY FOLLOWING HIS GUIDELINES FOR VICTORY AND BLESSING.

GUIDELINE #1 – Do not be afraid when you are outnumbered; know God is with you. **20:1**

GUIDELINE #2 – A God-appointed spiritual leader is to address the people before battle. **20:2-4**

GUIDELINE #3 – The military officers are to address the people before the battle. **20:5-9**

GUIDELINE #4 – The military officers are to appoint commanders as head of the people. **20:9**

GUIDELINE #5 – When one approaches a distant city for battle, offer terms of peace. **20:10-12**

GUIDELINE #6 – When God gives you victory over distant city enemies, you are to follow God's warfare rules. **20:13-18**

GUIDELINE #7 – When you are engaged in a long war to take a city, do not destroy fruit trees. **20:19-20**

TEXT: Deuteronomy 21:1-9

TITLE: PURGING THE GUILT OF AN UNSOLVED MURDER

BIG IDEA:

THE DEFILEMENT OF GOD'S HOLY LAND BY AN UNSOLVED MURDER MUST BE ADDRESSED VIA RITUAL ATONEMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: Deuteronomy 21 consists of five short pieces: **verses 1–9, 10–14, 15–17, 18–21, and 22–23**. These sections are held together by variations of the land grant formula that frame the chapter (**vv. 1, 23**); each one opens with a conditional clause (“*If, when*”), followed by a prescribed response; there is a common concern to separate life and death; and there is an overall chiasmic arrangement, with instructions on the rights of the firstborn (**vv. 15–17**) being the center of gravity.

Verses 1–9 exhibit several links with **19:1–13**. This text presents a recipe for restoring the deity–nation–land relationship when it has been disturbed through the most serious of human crimes, but it cannot be addressed by dealing with the criminal; his identity is unknown. This is achieved through a ritual designed to atone for the people and to purge from their midst the innocent blood that has been violently shed. The paragraph divides into three parts: (1) The problem (**v. 1**); (2) The prescription (**vv. 2–8b**, though broken in v. 6); (3) The result (**vv. 8c–9**).

MacArthur: This law, which dealt with an unsolved homicide, was not given elsewhere in the Pentateuch. In the event that the guilty party was unknown, justice could not adequately be served. However, the people were still held responsible to deal with the crime. The elders of the city closest to the place where the body of a dead man was found were to accept responsibility for the crime. This precluded inter-city strife, in case relatives sought revenge. They would go to a valley (idol altars were always on high places, so this avoided association with idolatry) and there break the neck of a heifer, indicating that the crime deserved to be punished. But the handwashing of the elders (**v. 6**) would show that, although they accepted responsibility for what had happened, they were nevertheless free from the guilt attached to the crime.

Gerald Gerbrandt: **Chapter 21** opens and closes with the virtually identical, the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess/ for possession (**vv. 1, 23**). This frame not only points to the larger context but also to the focus of the instruction, the gifted land. Deuteronomy never speaks of the land of Israel as holy (on one occasion it speaks of the war camp as holy; **23:14**), but it retains the conviction that if the land is polluted or becomes unclean, Israel will suffer as result. Unclean land will not produce as it should, and the blessing Israel can expect to receive from the land will be impaired. It thus is important that Israel not pollute the land, or if something happens that otherwise

might have this effect, that it perform the necessary ritual to deflect its negative consequences.

Duane Christensen: The law on unsolved murder (**21:1–9**) is pervaded by a strong sense of **communal responsibility** for what has happened. The rite of expiation involves the cruel death of a heifer that becomes a substitute for the unknown guilty party. The law is framed in a manner to prevent violent crime by increasing the horror of the enormous wickedness so as to illicit watchfulness against occasions to disobey the terms of the covenant with YHWH. The dread of murder is thus impressed on the hearts and minds of the entire populace so that no one will withhold information or assist the criminal in eluding or escaping justice; for the guilt of innocent blood rests on the entire land.

Eugene Merrill: Laws pertaining to homicide up to this point have involved the presence of **witnesses**. Commonly, however, corpses are discovered bearing evidence of foul play but with no witnesses to the act or none willing to testify. How could such dilemmas be resolved in Israel in such a way as to **exculpate** the community, which otherwise must bear corporate responsibility and guilt? The answer lay in a **ritual**, the details of which comprise the present section.

I. (:1) POLLUTION OF GOD’S LAND IS THE CONSEQUENCE OF UNSOLVED MURDER

A. Discovery of a Slain Victim in Unoccupied Field in God’s Land

*“If a slain person is found lying in the open country
in the land which the LORD your God gives you to possess,”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: The discovery of a body murdered (lit., one who has been pierced) in the open country presents a challenge: in the absence of eye-witnesses, identifying the guilty person becomes difficult. As the passages on the judicial system shows, (eye)witnesses were the primary means of confirming guilt. The first task thus is to determine which town must take responsibility for removing the potentially fatal consequences of the murder.

B. Identity of Murderer Unknown

“and it is not known who has struck him,”

Daniel Block: The opening land grant formula illuminates the corporate significance of the crime (v. 1). The goal of the ritual is to restore the symbiotic relationships among Yahweh, Israel, and her land. The reference to land indicates that murder is not merely a crime against a human being but also a crime against Yahweh, for the land is the object of Yahweh’s special care (cf. **11:11–12**) and the gift he graciously grants to Israel (**19:10, 21:23**). Murderous acts violate its sanctity.

David Thompson: It is clear from this verse that the cause of death when you looked at this body was not natural. Apparently one could see that there appeared to be homicidal wounds on the body in that the person had been “*struck*.”

Now this word (*nacah*) in Hebrew means this one had been struck and killed (**William Gesenius**, Hebrew Lexicon, p. 549). Perhaps the body had a fractured or crushed skull. Perhaps there were stab wounds, but what is clear is that when you looked at this body, you knew it had been a homicide.

By virtue of the fact that this crime was committed “*in the land*” indicates that this was committed in the sacred Promised Land that God had given to Israel. So this crime is a double homicide crime. First, it is a crime against the victim, and second, it is a crime committed in God’s appointed sacred land.

So the question arises what do you do? How do you make this right? How do you keep on track for the blessings of God if you find a murdered dead body?

Charlie Garrett: It describes the conditions under which the situation occurs. A person has been slain, his body is a defiling influence, and the perpetrator is unknown. If such is the case. . .

II. (:2-8) PRESCRIBED RITUAL PROVIDES THE ATONEMENT FOR JUSTICE = DELIVERANCE FROM THE GUILT OF INNOCENT BLOOD

A. (:2) Determination of Responsible Locality by the Legal Authorities

*“then your elders and your judges shall go out
and measure the distance to the cities which are around the slain one.”*

Daniel Block: The purpose of this action is not to establish responsibility for the murder, but to identify the community that should take responsibility for purging Israel of its bloodguilt.

Charlie Garrett: In this, the *zaqen*, or *elders*, are those who represent the citizens. Generally, it is the elders who are responsible for proper conduct within the families, and for maintaining proper standards for all who issue from the tribe to which they belong. The word *zaqen* is from the same root as *zaqan*, a beard. Thus, it signifies someone who has age and experience.

The *judges* represent the magistrate who makes legal decisions. They are those who would sit in the gates of the city and attend to all legal matters. In this case, these elders and judges are to leave the city in order to conduct the affairs as directed by Moses. They are to go out to where the slain man is. . .

B. (:3-4) Death of Innocent Substitute (Young Heifer) in an Appropriate Place

1. (:3) Heifer Selected by the Elders of the Responsible City

*“And it shall be that the city which is nearest to the slain man,
that is, the elders of that city, shall take a heifer of the herd,
which has not been worked and which has not pulled in a yoke;”*

2. (:4) Heifer Slaughtered in a Valley with Running Water

“and the elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with running water, which has not been plowed or sown, and shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley.”

Daniel Block: The elders remove the heifer to a flowing wadi (v. 4a). Like the heifer, the location of the ritual is described with three qualifications:

- (a) There must be a wadi flowing with a perpetual stream of water;
- (b) no service has been performed in it;
- (c) it has never been planted (with seed).

The instructions envisage an Edenic oasis, a virgin river valley where plants grow naturally, rather than a place watered by a stream only in the rainy season.

The elders break the heifer's neck at the wadi (v. 4). Since the action results in the death of the animal, it probably involves a blow to the neck with a large pole or axe.

Presumably this method was prescribed **to avoid bloodshed**, which might explain why a young cow was needed. Seasoned draft animals develop strong neck muscles, making it difficult to break the neck and perhaps necessitating slitting the jugular—which is to be rigorously avoided in this ritual. The significance of this aspect of the ritual is unclear. This is obviously not a sacrifice, since it is performed by laypersons far away from any altar . . . it seems best to view the ritual as a reenactment of the murder, with the goal of banishing the defilement of the land. An innocent life has been taken in an innocent locale, with rituals performed in such a way that the land does not lose its innocence by absorbing additional blood.

Gerald Gerbrandt: *The heifer that has never been worked, one that has not pulled in the yoke; and a wadi with running water, which is neither plowed nor sown*—both have an unspoiled quality to them and thus are appropriate for a sacred ceremony (v. 4). The text identifies three elements of the ceremony, all performed by the elders:

- they break the neck of the cow (v. 4),
- they wash their hands (v. 6),
- and they say a prayer (vv. 7–8).

Charlie Garrett: Some Jewish commentators say that this land was to never be tilled or sown again. That is rather unintelligent. First, it is not to be found in Scripture, and secondly, the purpose of this is atonement. It is as if they cannot understand the meaning of atonement by making such a ridiculous insertion into the text.

The land itself is not at this time being plowed or sown. That is the condition set forth. Once the land is atoned for, it is atoned for. To say that it is never to be plowed or sown again would defeat the entire purpose of atoning for the death. For now, and to effect that atonement, the elders are to bring it to such a valley. . .

C. (:5) **Delegation of Judicial Authority to the Local Priests**

1. Approach of the Priests

“Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near,”

Meredith Kline: Here is a clear affirmation of the ultimate **judicial authority** vested in the priesthood.

Charlie Garrett: Despite it being conducted by the elders, the priests are the mediators of the Levitical law. Therefore, the rite is overseen by them. . .

As this is a matter of Levitical law, it is right that the priest was to be in attendance. In these verses so far, we have seen the elders and judges included in measuring from any near city – a moral and judicial matter. Then the elders being involved in the moral aspect of choosing the heifer. Now the elders and priests involved in completing the rite of atonement – a moral and Levitical matter.

In this, all classes of the society are involved in the purging away of the bloodguilt which, until it is accomplished, is attached to the entire community.

2. Calling of the Priests

“for the LORD your God has chosen them to serve Him and to bless in the name of the LORD;”

3. Role of the Priests Regarding Judicial Authority

“and every dispute and every assault shall be settled by them.”

Michael Grisanti: The priests, God’s chosen representatives, must be present at this ceremony even though their precise involvement is not clear. The verse summarizes their role in the life of Israel: to minister, pronounce blessings in Yahweh’s name, and adjudicate certain legal cases.

Daniel Block: their presence at this ritual was required to ensure its proper performance and to serve as witnesses. Presumably at the end they will announce the lifting of bloodguilt and the replacement of this curse with the blessing on Yahweh’s behalf.

D. (:6-8) Deliverance from the Guilt of Innocent Blood Sought by the Elders

1. (:6) Washing of Hands

“And all the elders of that city which is nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley;”

Eugene Merrill: Inasmuch as the murderer was unknown, it was the guilt or innocence of the community at large that was at stake. In light of this uncertainty the town elders, on behalf of all the people, were to symbolize the innocence of the community by washing their hands over the carcass of the heifer (v. 6), then state their collective innocence of the deed or even of being witness to it (v. 7), and plead with the Lord to accept their act of exculpation and absolve them of any blame for the death of the victim (v. 8). Once this was carried out sincerely and properly, the removal of guilt effected by it would be proclaimed, presumably by the priests who must somehow become instruments of this declaration.

Peter Craigie: The symbolism of the various actions now becomes clear: the crime deserved to be punished, as the broken neck of the heifer indicated, but the hand-washing of the elders showed that, although they accepted responsibility for what had happened, they were nevertheless free from the guilt attached to the crime. The symbolic action is reinforced by the spoken words of the subsequent verses.

2. (:7) Profession of Innocence

*“and they shall answer and say,
‘Our hands have not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it.’”*

David Thompson: There was to be an honest account given by the leaders. They were to publicly acknowledge that they had no idea who had done this. There was to be no cover-up.

3. (:8a) Petition for Forgiveness

*“Forgive Thy people Israel whom Thou hast redeemed, O LORD,
and do not place the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of Thy people
Israel.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: the prayer offered to God. In fact, the grammar of its petition—*Absolve, O Lord, your people Israel*—exposes that Israel did not understand the ritual itself to take care of the guilt of the murder in some magical way (v. 8). The real removal of the guilt is God’s action in response to the prayers of his people—*Then they will be absolved of bloodguilt*—and not a consequence of the mechanics of the ritual (v. 8).

Michael Grisanti: Reference to “*your people Israel . . . your people*” (21:8) as those who need this divine atonement demonstrates that the **nation as a whole**, not just the nearby community, needs to rectify their relationship with Yahweh.

Peter Craigie: The forgiveness is sought for the whole people (Israel is mentioned twice in the prayer for forgiveness), not simply for the city nearest the crime. A basis for forgiveness is offered in the prayer; it is not the merit of Israel, but the fact that God had ransomed (see also 7:8) his people from the bondage of Egypt. The act of ransom had been an act of grace, and on the basis of such glorious precedent, the elders sought another act of grace in receiving the forgiveness of God. But further, if all the land were punished on account of an act of murder by a person unknown, then the great work of God, initiated in the Exodus, could be brought to an untimely end. Thus the prayer for forgiveness has in mind not only the well-being of the people, but also the purpose of God.

4. (:8b) Acceptance of Forgiveness

“And the bloodguiltiness shall be forgiven them.”

Earl Kalland: Though the word *kapar* (“*atone*”) appears twice in v. 8, the atonement mentioned is not an atonement within the sacrificial system; for the blood of the heifer was not offered. It is rather an atonement for justice; the heifer suffered death in place of the unknown criminal, in order to clear the land of guilt.

III. (:9) PROCESS OF ATONEMENT REMOVES GUILT FROM THE COMMUNITY

A. Removal of Guilt of Innocent Blood

“So you shall remove the guilt of innocent blood from your midst,”

Michael Grisanti: The atonement envisioned here is not part of the sacrificial system but concerns the correction of a horrible injustice. The death of the cow clears the land and the people of Israel from their corporate guilt.

L. M. Grant: They bring no offering to make atonement for the guilt, because the guilty person was not known, but they were to ask the Lord to provide atonement according to His own perfect wisdom, and that He would not charge Israel with the guilt of this murder (v.8). Thus they would clear themselves fully from any identification with the evil. God would Himself provide atonement on their behalf, and the guilt of innocent blood would be put away (vs.8-9).

B. Righteousness Reinforced

“when you do what is right in the eyes of the LORD.”

David Thompson: We may assume that this could mean God would also permit the homicidal felon to surface so he could be punished.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you see any typology in this passage that relates to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ?
- 2) Are we too dismissive in our culture of unsolved murders?
- 3) What do you learn here from the interaction between the elders, the magistrates and the priests?
- 4) How will God ultimately deal with the defilement of His Holy Land?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Michael Grisanti: Some have suggested it is a symbolic, judicial execution (**Thompson**, 227). That is, the cow serves as a symbolic substitute for the unknown murder. Hence the killing of this cow is not viewed as a sacrifice but as an execution. However, this option does not seem to explain the obscure location for the mandated action (thus depriving it of public impact). Others view the action as a rite of expiation or elimination (**Hall**, 315; **Merrill**, Deuteronomy, 288; **Tigay**, Deuteronomy, 472–74; **Wright**, Deuteronomy, 232–33). In this view, the death of the cow represents a **reenactment of the murder** as the grounds for eliminating guilt from the land (for ancient Near Eastern parallels, see **Tigay**, Deuteronomy, 539, n. 1; **D. P. Wright**, “Rite of Elimination,” 401–3).

Thomas Constable: Cities were responsible for murders committed within their jurisdictions. This indicates that there is such a thing as corporate guilt in God’s government. The ritual prescribed removed the pollution caused by bloodshed.

The heifer (young cow) represented the unknown murderer. It was his substitute. It was to be an animal that had not done hard labor; its vital force was undiminished (**Deuteronomy 21:3**). The leaders were to take this heifer into an unplowed field in a valley where there was running water and break its neck. The breaking of the neck symbolized the punishment due the murderer but executed on his substitute. The blood of the heifer would fall on unplowed ground that would absorb it. It would disappear rather than turning up at some future date because of plowing. The water cleansed the hands of the elders who had become ritually defiled by the shedding of the sacrifice’s blood. This ritual removed the impurity that would rest on the people of the city because someone they could not find had shed human blood near it. It atoned for this guilt in such a case. One writer explained that the practice of performing rituals to remove impurity from human habitations and human concerns not only occurs in other parts of the Bible, such as **Leviticus 10, 14, 16** and **1 Samuel 5**, but also in the literature of the Hittites and Mesopotamians. [Note: **David P. Wright**, “Deuteronomy 21:1-9 as a Rite of Elimination,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49:3 (July 1987):387-403.]

Meredith Kline: Not only men, but the blood-stained land participated in the symbolical defilement; and its defilement, too, was, after a figure, purged by the judicial ritual (cf. **Num 35:33**). In this there was a reminder that perfect righteousness must at last pervade the totality of God’s kingdom. Another by-product of this ritual requirement would be the preservation of peace by the elimination of possible misunderstanding that might spark inter-city strife if the kinsman of the slain were rashly to pursue his role of avenger.

Warren Wiersbe: The land belonged to God and the people living on it were His tenants. Their sins not only grieved the Lord but also defiled the land, especially the sins of sexual immorality (**Lev. 18:24-28**) and murder (**Num. 35:30-34**). The shedding of innocent blood was a terrible crime in Israel (**Deut. 19:10, 13; Jer. 7:6; 22:3, 17**). When Cain killed his brother Abel, the ground received Abel’s blood and cried out to

God for justice (**Gen. 4:10-12; Heb. 12:24**). God keeps a record of the innocent blood shed by both animals and people, and one day will call for an accounting (**Gen. 9:5-6**). “*When He avenges blood, He remembers them; He does not forget the cry of the humble*” (**Ps. 9:12**, NJKV). When the Lord comes to judge, the earth will bear witness of the innocent blood that was shed (**Isa. 26:21**). . .

Reviewing this section of the law, we’re impressed with the fact that God wanted His people to enjoy living in their land, and the secret of this enjoyment was obedience to His will. Crime and injustice defiled the land, and God didn’t want His land defiled. The godless nations in Canaan so pollute the land that it “*vomited them out*” (**Lev. 18:24-30**). Apart from Israel, no nation of the world is in a covenant relationship with God; but the Lord still holds all nations accountable for their sins (**Amos 1:3 – 2:3**). One day God will judge the nations in righteousness (**Joel 3:9-16**) and nobody will escape.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 21:10-23

TITLE: MAINTAINING RIGHTEOUSNESS IN SOCIAL AND JUDICIAL CONTEXTS

BIG IDEA:

POTENTIALLY COMPLEX OR TROUBLESOME SITUATIONS REQUIRE THE APPLICATION OF GOD'S WISDOM TO MAINTAIN RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE PROMISED LAND

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: Deuteronomy 21 consists of five short pieces: **verses 1–9, 10–14, 15–17, 18–21, and 22–23**. These sections are held together by variations of the land grant formula that frame the chapter (**vv. 1, 23**); each one opens with a conditional clause (“*If, when*”), followed by a prescribed response; there is a common concern to separate life and death; and there is an overall chiasmic arrangement, with instructions on the rights of the firstborn (**vv. 15–17**) being the center of gravity. . .

The rest of **chapter 21** consists of four fragments devoted to the maintenance of righteousness in marriage and family relationships:

- (1) the righteous treatment of war brides (**vv. 10–14**);
- (2) the righteous treatment of a second-rank wife and her son (**vv. 15–17**);
- (3) the righteous treatment of a rebellious son (**vv. 18–21**);
- (4) the righteous treatment of a criminal’s remains (**vv. 22–23**).

I. (:10-14) RIGHTEOUS TREATMENT OF CAPTURED WAR BRIDES

A. (:10-11) The Situation Involving the Desire to Marry a War Captive

1. (:10) The Victory in Battle Resulting in Captives

*“When you go out to battle against your enemies,
and the LORD your God delivers them into your hands,
and you take them away captive,”*

2. (:11) The Vision of a Potential Beautiful Bride

*“and see among the captives a beautiful woman,
and have a desire for her and would take her as a wife for yourself,”*

Daniel Block: The primary case calls for charitable treatment of foreign brides when they are first taken; the secondary case, for their charitable treatment in divorce. The principal thrust of the passage is reflected in the concluding motive clause: “*since you have dishonored her.*”

Duane Christensen: The law here concerns the matter of a captive female from a distant city, according to the rule in **20:10–15**, not to marriage with a Canaanite woman, which is forbidden.

B. (:12-13) The Sympathetic Transition from Foreign Captive to Fully Integrated Bride

1. (:12-13a) Period of Cultural Adjustment

*“then you shall bring her home to your house,
and she shall shave her head and trim her nails.
13 “She shall also remove the clothes of her captivity
and shall remain in your house,
and mourn her father and mother a full month;”*

Duane Christensen: The woman is to be taken into the man’s house for a “**trial**” month, during which time her physical beauty is minimalized by shaving her head, cutting her nails short, and having her “*mourn her father and mother a full month*” (**vv 12–13a**). If the man can live with a wailing and relatively unattractive woman for a month and still want her as his wife, perhaps the marriage will last.

Peter Pett: The shaving of her head and the paring of her nails possibly refers to the removal from her extremities (head and hand and foot) of all connections with the old life (compare **Leviticus 14:14**). The hair and the nails were also the parts of a woman that could grow long and enhance her beauty. Thus the cutting may have symbolised the end of her old pagan beauty and the growth of a new beauty now that she was an Israelite. Or the purpose may have been to make her ritually clean (compare **Leviticus 14:8; Leviticus 14:14; Numbers 8:7**). She would now be expected to become a member of the covenant. The changing of her clothes implied something similar. She was now an Israelite and to be brought within the covenant. She must put off the clothes which distinguished her background and dress like an Israelite woman from now on. The mourning period, which was a standard period of mourning in Israel (see **Deuteronomy 34:8; Numbers 20:29**), was out of consideration for her feelings. She would have had little chance to mourn while captive, but once the month was over she would be expected to forget her old life. On marriage she would now be a free Israelite woman.

Daniel Block: Moses realistically recognizes that the system is subject to abuse, as triumphant males exploit and take advantage of female captives. Having none of this, Moses instructs the Israelites how to respect the rights and dignity of wives whom they have captured.

(1) The captive bride must be allowed to express her pain at being torn from her people and forced to join an alien community. While having her shave her hair, trim her nails, and remove her native clothing appear to be insulting demands, these actions symbolize her change of status. When her hair and nails grow and she puts on new clothes, she emerges as a new person, with **a new identity** and new status; she hereby declares nonverbally what Ruth declared verbally to Naomi (**Ruth 1:16**). The actions also remind her new husband that he is not to treat her as an alien or a slave.

(2) The woman must be permitted to mourn for her father and mother for a month. Whether or not her parents died in the conquest of the town, for this woman they have in effect died, for she has no hope of seeing them again. Moses hereby calls on Israelites to allow others the opportunity to show the same respect for their parents as they are commanded to do (**5:16**). He also links the consummation of the marriage to the end of the period of mourning; only after she has completed her month of mourning may he have sexual intercourse with her, marry her, and have her formally recognized as his wife. This month-long quarantine expresses respect for the woman's ties to her family of origin and her own psychological and emotional health, providing a cushion from the shock of being torn from her own family.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The rituals in the passage (shave her head, pare her nails, discard her captive's garb) probably are not mourning rituals but rather ones that mark the **transition** from war captive to full member of the household. They allow the woman time to adjust to the new reality. . .

Most remarkable, at least for Deuteronomy, is that the passage allows an Israelite man to marry a woman who clearly is foreign since she has been captured in war, an allowance in direct tension with the absolute rejection of all intermarriage with former inhabitants of the land (cf. **7:3**). But perhaps this very tension points in a helpful direction. The point of this passage is not that capturing women in war is acceptable: such practice is simply part of their world. Rather, its point is that when this happens, and when an Israelite man finds such a woman attractive, he is allowed to make her a **full wife** rather than treat her as a slave; and once he has done this, he is to treat her with dignity and respect. Neither war nor the patriarchal culture are directly challenged, but both are weakened and undermined at least slightly.

Eugene Merrill: The idea behind all these procedures seems to be that of cutting off all ties to the former life in order to enter fully and unreservedly into the new one. This presupposes a degree of willingness on the part of the maiden to forsake the past and to embrace a new and different way of life, for one can hardly conceive of all this taking place coercively.

2. (:13b) Passion of Marriage Consummation

*“and after that you may go in to her and be her husband
and she shall be your wife.”*

Peter Craigie: In time of war, there would be a shortage of men through death in battle, and polygamy was one way of dealing with what could become an acute social problem. Note, too, that polygamy was apparently a very ancient practice in the Near East (**Gen. 4:19**).

David Thompson: She was not to be raped. She was to be cared for and treated with respect of being a wife. Sexuality is an important part of marriage and after this initial month, she was to be intimate with her husband.

C. (:14) The Severing of the Marriage without Exploitation or Abuse

1. Free Release

“And it shall be, if you are not pleased with her, then you shall let her go wherever she wishes; but you shall certainly not sell her for money, you shall not mistreat her;”

Daniel Block: the Israelite man may not humiliate (NIV “dishonor”) her again by heartlessly treating her as property to be disposed of or exchanged for silver. . .

While this passage seems to assume that divorce was not uncommon in ancient Israel, by no means does it endorse this tragedy in a marriage. Whether or not divorce is morally justifiable, like **24:1–4** this text shows it was tolerated in Israel as a legal reality. With **Exodus 21:10–11** our text suggests that releasing a slave wife or captive woman whom an Israelite warrior has married is preferable to the man refusing to fulfill his marital duties.

Duane Christensen: A primary concern in the laws of **Deut 21–25** is for protecting the poor and vulnerable in society from exploitation on the part of the powerful.

Peter Pett: The question here is as to what is intended. On the face of it, it is the alternative to marriage. He has had a month to think it over and he is now not convinced that he wants to go ahead with marriage. His attachment has worn off and he no longer has any delight in her, which may also be explained by her reaction to the situation which has made him recognise that it bodes ill for the future. But all have been living in expectation of the marriage. She is being shamed. By sending her away he is humbling her. Thus as compensation he must not sell her, or deal with her as a slave. She must be sent away as a free woman, the position she would have held if he had married her.

Others, however, see the situation as signifying a marriage, made in haste, which has turned out to be a disaster. He had discovered that a beautiful woman did not necessarily make a good wife, especially if she had foreign tastes, and foreign habits. Furthermore she had been given little choice in the matter, and might well have been feeling angry and bitter, or have been traumatised. She might well have been behaving like a shrew. The man might have discovered that he found little delight in his marriage. This may even signify that she had refused him his conjugal rights.

It is clear that both wished the arrangement to end and in these circumstances he could ‘let her go’ presumably by divorcing her (see **Deuteronomy 24:1**). She must then be allowed to go where she wished for the marriage had made her a free woman, which might well be back to her own country (compare for all this **Exodus 21:8-11**). He must not try to sell her as a slave, or treat her as such, because he had ‘humiliated her’. This may simply refer to having put her in her difficult position, or of having ‘forced’ her to marry him, or because he has had intercourse with her on equal terms, or to the fact that divorce was necessarily usually looked on as a humbling experience for the woman. Whichever way it was he must not try to take any further advantage of her.

2. Fitting Respect

“because you have humbled her.”

MacArthur: This phrase clearly refers to sexual activity, in which the wife has fully submitted herself to her husband (cf. **22:23, 24, 28, 29**).

Michael Grisanti: The verb *’nh* occurs in several OT passages to refer to rape (**Ge 34:2; 2Sa 13:12, 14, 22, 32; Jdg 19:24**). Whether or not the Israelite man decides to send the foreign woman away before or after their marriage is consummated, he must not treat her as a slave but as a free citizen. . .

Regardless of whether or not the passage envisions an “official” divorce (*šlh*, “to send away,” can have that connotation; **Dt 22:19, 29; 24:1–3; Jer 3:1; Mal 2:16**), it does not give **divine approval** for divorce. Numerous OT and NT passages present divorce in a negative light or prohibit it altogether (**Lev 21:7, 14; Dt 22:19, 29; Mal 2:16; Mt 5:31–32; 19:3–9; 1Co 7:10–16**). In this legislation, as with **Deuteronomy 24:1–4**, God addresses a real-life situation without mandating or even recommending divorce.

II. (:15-17) RIGHTEOUS TREATMENT OF FIRST-BORN SON OF THE UNFAVORED WIFE

This discussion perhaps triggered by offspring from a war bride.

A. (:15) The Situation Involving Relationship Complexity

“If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him sons, if the first-born son belongs to the unloved,”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The complexity of the first case is not hard to understand. A man has taken a second wife, perhaps a younger and more attractive one, and has come to prefer her over the first. Not surprisingly, he then wishes to make the son of the favored wife his principal or “first” heir. Although hypothetical, the regulation echoes the story of Jacob. He had two wives, Leah and Rachel, of whom the second was the more loved and attractive (cf. **Gen 29:16–18**; NRSV says Leah has “*lovely eyes*,” but RSV suggests that her “*eyes were weak*”). It was the sons of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin, whom Jacob loved. In the end Reuben, the eldest, loses his special place, and the sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, are made equal to Joseph’s brothers, thus giving Joseph a double portion (as in **Deut 21:17**). Since Manasseh and Ephraim each receive tribal territory in the Promised Land, Israel has a visible reminder of such special treatment.

B. (:16-17) The Standard for Protecting the Rights of the Actual First-Born

1. (:16) Negative Prohibition – Don’t Show Favoritism

“then it shall be in the day he wills what he has to his sons, he cannot make the son of the loved the first-born

before the son of the unloved, who is the first-born.”

2. (:17) Positive Practice – Give the Double Portion to the First-Born

“But he shall acknowledge the first-born, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; to him belongs the right of the first-born.”

Daniel Block: The double share of the inheritance compensates the *bekôr* for his responsibility to care for the parents in their old age, to provide proper burial upon their decease, and generally to lead the clan after the father is gone. Moses hereby seeks to protect the rights and dignity of the less-favored wife by prohibiting husbands from making children pay for strained relationships between or among parents.

Duane Christensen: Although polygamy was practiced in ancient Israel, without exception it is also depicted as an occasion for family trouble. The law of the right of the firstborn (**Deut 21:15–17**) was given to limit the extent of that trouble. The story of Adam and Eve presents monogamy as the divine ideal for marriage (**Gen 2:20–24**). In sharp contrast, the story of Jacob and his two wives illustrates the problem of polygamy: “*So Jacob went into Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah*” (**Gen 29:30**). Jacob’s preference here reflects the human condition, for rivalry between the wives in such a polygamous relationship is inevitable.

This rivalry extends to the children in a polygamous family as well, particularly in the matter of the disposition of property. The law on the right of the firstborn (**21:15–17**) prohibits disinheriting the eldest son without just cause. When a man settles his estate, a child must not fare the worse for his mother’s unhappiness in being the less favored wife. This principle regarding favoritism within the family applies in monogamous relationship today as well, in the sense that parents should give their children what is due them without showing partiality. Parents should show no more differentiation in dispensing affections among their children than God makes in dispensing his grace among his children.

Michael Grisanti: The Mosaic law made this requirement because the firstborn son was the “*sign of his father’s strength.*” His birth demonstrated his father’s ability to perpetuate the family name (**Ge 49:3; Pss 78:51; 105:36**). The key issue addressed by this passage is that a husband’s attitude toward his wife must not influence his legal responsibilities to her or her children (**Merrill, Deuteronomy, 292**). . .

Even though the practice of **polygamy** was tolerated during the time of the OT, it represented a violation of God’s instituted order (the biblical ideal). Also notice that despite this toleration in OT times Mosaic legislation sought to prevent worse evils and abuses from occurring, and the absence of stiff civil or religious penalties for polygamy does not imply its legitimacy. Even if polygamy was “allowed” in certain OT scenarios, this allowance does not imply that polygamy was desirable or recommended. The absence of any word of censure or condemnation does not necessarily indicate the

condoning of a given practice. The teaching and practice of the NT resoundingly supports monogamous marriage.

Meredith Kline: The principle here enforced is that parental authority is not absolute. A father's mere personal preference did not justify disregard of the divinely sanctioned customary rights of those who were under his parental authority.

III. (:18-21) RIGHTEOUS TREATMENT OF A REBELLIOUS SON

This discussion perhaps triggered by the rival interactions between offspring of a favored wife vs. unfavored wife.

A. (:18) The Situation Involving an Insubordinate Son

1. Rebellious and Stubborn in a Life of Disobedience

“If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother,”

2. Rejects All Attempts at Discipline

“and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them,”

B. (:19-20) The Surrender of the Son to the Judgment of the Elders

1. (:19) The Inquisition

“then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his home town.”

Warren Wiersbe: This was more than a family concern, for it involved the peace and reputation of the community. The solidarity of the people of Israel was an important element in their civil, social, and religious life, for the sin of a single person, family, city, or tribe could affect the whole nation (see **Deut. 13; Josh. 7:1-15**). This is also true of the church, for as members of one spiritual body (**1 Cor. 12**), we belong to each other and we affect each other (**1 Cor. 5**).

David Guzik: It is important to note that the parents could not, by themselves, execute this penalty. They had to bring the son on trial before impartial judges. This is in contrast to ancient Greek and Roman law, which gave fathers the absolute right of life or death over their children. This was a control of parental authority more than it was an exercise of it.

2. (:20) The Indictment

“And they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.’”

Duane Christensen: The charge that the son “*is a glutton and a drunkard*” appears to be proverbial in nature, as a typical example of insubordination (cf. **Prov 23:20–21; 28:7**). . .

Drunkness, whether induced by alcohol or other substance abuse, leads inevitably to disobeying God’s law—with all its necessary consequences. . .

At the heart of the legislation here lies the need for the stability of the family. Sound family life requires the authority of the parents, upheld by respect for the law. Like disrespect for parents, disrespect for the law breeds contempt for discipline in general, whether divine or human, and the ultimate breakdown of society itself. At the same time, we do well to remember that the restraint of laws can never be so effective in the inculcation of parental respect as conversion of the heart, and the lovingkindness that comes from the enabling Spirit of God within.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Each of these requirements has the effect of limiting or controlling the arbitrary use of power by the father. The story of Judah and Tamar takes for granted that Judah has the authority to have his daughter-in-law executed for having “*played the whore*” (**Gen 38:24**). In the world of ancient Israel, parents do not require special regulations allowing them to exercise severe discipline over their children. In a time when cursing mother and father was understood to deserve death (**Lev 20:9**; cf. **Deut 27:16**), and when the larger household was the primary context for judicial decisions, parents had all the power they needed. This regulation controls the **potential abuse** of that power: a strong case of repeated rebellion is required, both mother and father must agree, and the community determines the verdict.

The central thrust of the passage may be limiting the unilateral authority of the father, but the reference to the rebellious son hints at another level of meaning. Previously Deuteronomy has spoken of Israel as a child whom God has carried through the harsh wilderness (**1:31**, lit., son), as a child whom God disciplines (**8:5**, again lit., *son*), as a people who has repeatedly rebelled against their God (**1:26, 43; 9:7, 23**). Is Israel the son about whom this passage is speaking?

Peter Craigie: They stated his crime (*he will not listen to our voice*) and indicated that his character was not befitting a member of the covenant community of God: he is a *glutton and a drunkard*. The latter words do not specify the crime, but indicate, by way of example, the kind of life that has resulted from disobedience to parental authority. The crime, in other words, is disobedience, but the result of the crime is the dissolution of a proper style of life.

C. (:21) The Stoning of the Son to Purge the Evil and Deter Future Rebellion

1. Corporate Stoning of the Son to Death

“*Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death;*”

Eugene Merrill: The severity of the punishment appears to outweigh the crime, but we must recognize that parental sovereignty was at stake. Were insubordination of children

toward their parents to have been tolerated, there would have been but a short step toward the insubordination of all of the Lord's servant people to him, the King of kings. This, of course, would have resulted in the breakdown and eventual dissolution of Israel as a chosen vessel.

2. Concern to Purge the Community of Evil

“so you shall remove the evil from your midst,”

3. Communication of the Case Should Deter Future Rebellion

“and all Israel shall hear of it and fear.”

Daniel Block: Although the procedure appears straightforward, several details deserve comment.

- (1) The appearance of both father and mother before the elders reflects the status of women in the home. Because contempt for one's mother is as objectionable as rebellion against one's father, her voice also needed to be heard.
- (2) The prescribed procedure shows that ultimate authority over life and death rests with the community. Since the body of elders was made up of heads of households, when parents present the case of a rebellious son to them, they appeal to peers to offer their righteous verdict. The effect is to reinforce social structures designed to promote the health of the community. The procedure in the gate is not conceived as a trial in the modern sense. The parents appear before the elders alone; in the proceedings the delinquent son does not defend himself and in so doing present a picture different from that painted by his parents. This does not mean the process was unfairly one-sided. The entire community, including the elders, will have witnessed the son's incorrigibility and the efforts of the parents to correct him. The procedure is driven by a commitment to righteousness within the community when parental efforts fail.
- (3) With a formal declaration of his social pathology before the elders, mother and father express their frustrations with an insubordinate son, who has renounced the parental bond. To the vices cited in **verse 18** they add that he is “*a glutton* [NIV ‘*profligate*’] *and a drunkard*,” who wastes the resources of the community (cf. **Prov. 23:20–21**). The crisis is not caused by naughty children, but by a young man who refuses to grow up and take his rightful place at home and in society. Domestic dysfunction has become a public issue; the son's conduct undermines the social order and communal peace.
- (4) Finally, Moses calls on the entire community to administer the punishment—in this case, stoning the incorrigible son to death. Unlike **17:7**, which requires witnesses to a crime to initiate the execution, here the parents are not mentioned, presumably out of respect for their affection for their son. Having turned him over to the elders does not mean parental instincts have been stifled.

IV. (:22-23) RIGHTEOUS TREATMENT OF AN EXECUTED CORPSE

This discussion perhaps triggered by the execution of the incorrigible son.

A. (:22) The Situation Involving the Corpse of a Criminal Displayed on a Tree

1. Legitimate Capital Crime

“And if a man has committed a sin worthy of death,”

2. Legal Execution

“and he is put to death,”

3. Lifted Up for Humiliating Public Display on a Tree

“and you hang him on a tree,”

Daniel Block: Displaying the body of a criminal by hanging it in a public place served two purposes:

- to shame the individual even after his death,
- and to deter others from committing the crime.

Duane Christensen: The hanging of persons by the neck until dead was not practiced in ancient Israel, but it was common to display the corpse of an executed criminal upon a post or a tree as a spectacle for all to see, so as to strike terror in others. What is prescribed here is that no matter what time of day bodies were so displayed, they must be taken down at sunset and buried, lest the land itself be defiled. According to the law, touching a dead body was defiling; therefore dead bodies must not be left hanging, because, by this same rule, that would defile the land.

B. (:23a) The Statute = Bury on the Same Day

1. Stated Negatively

“his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree,”

2. Stated Positively

“but you shall surely bury him on the same day”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The reason for the curse is not the public exposure, or even the death itself, although both of these have defiling power, but the crime committed that led to the execution.

Michael Grisanti: To be hung on a tree is tantamount to being under God’s curse, and to leave the corpse hanging there overnight is to desecrate the land that Yahweh has bestowed on his chosen nation and to invite God’s curse to fall on the entire land.

C. (:23b) The Safeguard against Desecrating the Promised Land

*“(for he who is hanged is accursed of God),
so that you do not defile your land
which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.”*

John Schultz: In these verses the criminal is cursed, and the curse is limited to the person while the land is protected. The hidden blessing of this law does not become apparent until the New Testament, where it is applied to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul quotes these verses when he says: “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*” Christ lifted the curse from the earth by putting it upon Himself. The redemption of the sinner will, ultimately, affect the whole of creation. Therefore, Paul can prophecy: “*The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*” All this was, of course, hidden from view when Moses gave this decree for the burial of executed criminals.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is potentially complex or troublesome about each of these four situations?
- 2) How should we deal with a strong-willed child who persists in rebellion against his parents?
- 3) Why was God so concerned about protecting against the defilement of the Promised Land?
- 4) What are the implications from this passage regarding polygamy and divorce?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Michael Grisanti: In spite of the clear biblical ideal for marriage (permanent and monogamous), two concessions to fallen humanity (with regard to marriage) appear to manifest themselves in the Bible. First, the phenomenon of **divorce** deviated from the biblical ideal of the permanence of marriage. With regard to divorce, Jesus affirms that the permitting of divorce arose on account of the hardness of the human heart (**Mt 19:8**). Both Moses and Jesus placed regulations on divorce to avoid a number of excesses and abuses. Divorce never was, never is, and never will be an expression of the divine intent for marriage. The biblical regulations placed on divorce by Moses and Jesus were not to make divorce easy or to elevate it to an accepted practice. On the contrary, these regulations were intended to prevent wanton, illegitimate, and repeated divorce and remarriage.

Second, the phenomenon of **polygamy** represented a compromise of God’s ideal that marriage be monogamous. From the OT, it is readily apparent that polygamy became

part of the fabric of Israelite society early in the patriarchal period. The Mosaic regulations placed on polygamous marriages served to prevent a number of potential abuses that customarily occurred in polygamous relationships (Ex 21:7–11; Dt 21:15–18, 25:5–10).

David Thompson: There are people who are very rigid when it comes to the subject of divorce. But there needs to be a healthy balance. Sometimes it happens and the Bible admits it and allows for it - **Lev. 22:13; Numbers 30:9; Deuteronomy 21:14; 24:1-4.**

The Bible also presents the fact that Divorce is not the ideal and it is not something that is loved by God - **Lev. 21:7, 14; Deut. 22:19, 29; Mal. 2:16/Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-9; I Cor. 7:10-16.** Oftentimes people will say God hates divorce, which He does.

But He also *hates haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run swiftly to evil, a false witness who utters lies and one who sows discord among the brethren (Prov. 6:16-19).* In fact, He calls these things an abomination to Him and He never says that about Divorce.

Sometimes divorce happens and God's people should not fall apart when it does. There are things that can be done even in a case of divorce that will guarantee the blessings of God.

Peter Craigie: To break the law of God and live as though he did not matter or exist, was in effect to curse him; and he who cursed God would be accursed of God. To break the law of God and incur thereby the penalty of death, was to die the worst possible kind of death, for the means of death was a formal and terminal separation from the community of God's people. Hence the use of this verse in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians is very forceful. Christ took upon himself the curse of the law, the penalty of death, thereby redeeming us from the curse of the law. The manner of his death, crucifixion, symbolized dramatically the meaning of his death. His separation from the family of God made possible our admission to the family of God, because the curse of the broken law—which would have permanently barred admission—had been removed.

Peter Pett: It may be asked, why should the firstborn be given a **double portion**? Why should everything not be equally divided among members of the family? The reason was a very good and wise one. It was to preserve his status and ensure the continuation of the family. When Israel reached the land, every Israelite family head was to receive a portion of land for the family, and we must remember that family ties were powerful in those days and that families stayed and worked together. So the family head not only had responsibility for his own immediate family but his wider family. There had necessarily to be a family head, and he was usually the firstborn. The firstborn would be the oldest and the most experienced and his being naturally appointed hopefully prevented any falling out about such a position. His authority was automatically recognized.

He would have the responsibility of looking after his mother, any unmarried daughters, and other family adherents and also the family servants. He carried on the family name and had to hold together the wider family. Thus he needed the larger portion. Then if he died without an heir his brother was to raise up a son through the firstborn's wife so that he could inherit the double portion and take over headship of the family. (Whether 'double' literally meant twice as much or whether it meant such a large portion as was necessary to maintain family unity is open to question). But even though the remainder of the land was passed on to other brothers it was still a part of the family land. If someone sold some of it off it could be redeemed by a kinsman, and whatever happened it returned to the family on the year of Jubilee. Had the land simply been divided up on death between all members of the family, soon there would have been lots of tiny pieces of land and total disunity, until some outsider took the opportunity and bought out the lot, and no one would have had responsibility to maintain the family unity. By keeping a large part of the family land together it guaranteed the future of the whole family. If all the males in the family died daughters could inherit but if there were none then the land would pass to near relatives. But it would stay in 'the family'. Family responsibility in those days was taken seriously, was fully binding and along with a sense of tribal responsibility ensured a grouping for self-defense, was for the general benefit and provided a reasonably satisfactory judicial system. The law of primogeniture was therefore of benefit to all for the purpose of maintaining a strong family head. It was only when families ceased to work together that it became a problem, but God was talking to those who recognized the basis of it.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 22:1-12

TITLE: REGULATIONS REGARDING NATURAL ACTS INFUSED WITH SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

BIG IDEA:

THE COVENANT PEOPLE OF GOD MUST MAINTAIN THEIR HOLY DISTINCTIVENESS AND FUNCTION AS LOVING NEIGHBORS AS THEY LIVE OUT GOD'S PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: Although each segment here represented a specific application of covenantal principles of righteousness within the Israelite context, since the Israel of the Old Testament was to function as a microcosm of humanity at large, underlying all are theological principles rooted in the very nature of God and his relation to the world.

Eugene Merrill: As for the literary construction of the whole passage, another transition is observable, from active homicide, whether or not intentional (**19:1–21:23**), to the failure to preserve life (**22:1-4**), to carelessness resulting in loss of life (**22:5-8**). All relate to the covenant stipulation of **Deut 5:17**: “*You shall not kill.*”

Michael Grisanti: (22:9 – 23:18) -- If one thinks of **purity** only in terms of moral separation, they will miss the point of several of the laws discussed below. The biblical concept of purity or holiness has two primary aspects: **separation from sin** (negative aspect) and **consecration to a dedicated usage** (positive aspect). So the idea of holiness does concern “separation” from or the careful avoidance of sin, but also deals with something that is dedicated for special purposes. At least two things are true about something dedicated for consecrated purposes. On the one hand, it is taken out of common or ordinary circulation; it is not used for everyday needs. On the other hand, it has been taken out of ordinary usage in order to dedicate it for special purposes. That is how a building, a table, bread, or a day could be holy. It stands distinct from normal or everyday things and is dedicated for some lofty purpose.

Warren Wiersbe: (22:1-4, 6-8; 23:24-25) – These regulations are specific applications of **Leviticus 19:18**, “*You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord*” (NKJV). The neighbor is a brother, which is even a greater motive for helping him; and God is the Lord of both, which is the highest motive of all. In fact, the Jews were to extend this same concern even to their enemies’ animals (**Ex. 23:4**). Both Jesus and Paul admonish us to love our enemies and to manifest this love in practical ways (**Matt. 5:43-48; Rom. 12:17-21**).

Meredith Kline introduces this next section - **Sanctity of the Divine Order. Deuteronomy 22:1-25:19** –

Love for God requires reverence for the divine ordinances at the various levels of creation and in the various spheres of human activity. The covenant servant must respect the sanctity of the orders of nature (**Dt 22:5-12**), marriage **Dt 22:13-30**), and the theocratic kingdom (**Dt 23:1-25:12**). With the partial exception of the natural order, the area in view is that of the mutual relationships of the covenant servants. This whole section, therefore, is bounded by laws which clearly express the basic principle that the same loving regard must be shown for one's neighbor's interests as for one's own (**Dt 22:1-4; 25:13-16**).

J Vernon McGee: Miscellaneous laws concerning brother relationships, mixtures, and marriage. This chapter brings us to another division of the Book of Deuteronomy. We have seen the repetition and interpretation of the Ten Commandments in **chapters 5-7**. Then there are the religious and national regulations in **chapters 8-21**. Now we come to regulations for domestic and personal relations in **chapters 22-26**. God directed many of these laws to the nation; now He gets right down to the nitty-gritty where the people live with laws relative to their domestic and their personal relations.

Brown: Although the topics are **diverse**, the unifying theme is clear—the covenant community must consist of **good neighbours**. God is generous and loving; nobody who believes in him is allowed to live selfishly and carelessly within society. Every believer has a responsibility towards his neighbour.

I. (:1-4) PROVIDE PRACTICAL ASSISTANCE TO OTHERS IN NEED AS THE WAY TO DEMONSTRATE LOVE FOR YOUR NEIGHBOR

A. (:1-3) Return His Straying Animals and Lost Possessions

1. (:1-2) Return His Straying Ox or Sheep

a. (:1) Bring Them Back Immediately . . . Or

“You shall not see your countryman's ox or his sheep straying away, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly bring them back to your countryman.”

b. (:2) Safeguard Them until You Can Return Them

“And if your countryman is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall remain with you until your countryman looks for it; then you shall restore it to him.”

Peter Craigie: it deals with shouldering responsibility as a member of the covenant community. A man was not to hide himself from responsibility, or to fake no notice of the happenings around him that required some positive action on his part.

2. (:3a) Return His Straying Donkey

“And thus you shall do with his donkey,”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The expansion to a neighbor's garment; *and you shall do the same*

with anything else that your neighbor loses confirms that concern right here is more for the **neighbor** than for the animal. The last phrase of the passage, *You may not withhold your help*, is especially striking. **Walter Brueggemann** notes, “The verb is ‘conceal, hide,’ stated in reflexive form. *You may not hide yourself. You may not withdraw from neighborliness*” (2001: 219).

As societies become more urban, more impersonal, as apparently happened in Israel in the ninth century bce, the natural tendency is to narrow one’s field of concern. The brother or sister or neighbor can become strangers and no longer part of “us.” One is reminded of Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan (**Luke 10:30–37**). For Deuteronomy, Israel is a close body of brother and sisters, neighbors who help each without asking whether it is required or legislated.

3. (:3b) Return His Lost Possessions

*“and you shall do the same with his garment,
and you shall do likewise with anything lost by your countryman,
which he has lost and you have found.”*

Daniel Block: A “finders keepers, losers weepers” ethic is to be resisted; whatever one finds is to be returned to its owner.

Duane Christensen: The law here is essentially that of the Golden Rule to do to others what we would have them do to us. Moreover, we ought not to let trouble and expense prevent us from doing a kind action to a neighbor in need; nor are we permitted to retain lost property we have found when there is a possibility of finding the rightful owner.

4. (:3c) Responsibility Not to Neglect Your Neighbor’s Interests

“You are not allowed to neglect them.”

Daniel Block: **Verse 1** involves stray sheep or oxen that are vulnerable to wild animals and thieves. **Verse 4** involves a pack animal that has fallen down under its load, perhaps the result of slipping or abuse by the owner, who has overloaded it.

At the sight of a stray or fallen animal one might be tempted to ignore it or claim it as one’s own property (cf. **5:21**). Concerned about the well-being of the animal, Moses addresses the first response. In the face of need, sentimental reflection on the plight of the creatures is insufficient; this is a call for action. The first animal is to be returned to its owner, and the second animal is to be helped back on its feet. Moses prohibits Israelites from ignoring animals that are lost or beasts of burden under stress. Though domestic animals played a vital role in the economy, ownership and control could easily degenerate into abusive treatment.

B. (:4) Rescue His Fallen Animals

*“You shall not see your countryman’s donkey or his ox fallen down on the way,
and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly help him to raise them up.”*

Peter Craigie: If a beast of burden was lying on the road, a man was to help his neighbor get the animal back on its feet. The animal would be heavily laden with baggage, and therefore it would not be able to get up by itself and it would be too heavy for one man. A difficult task would thus be made much easier with the assistance that was to be offered by a fellow Israelite.

Michael Grisanti: In both scenarios, an Israelite must not succumb to the temptation to ignore the problem because it concerns someone else. All members of the covenantal nation must show genuine interest in the welfare and success of their fellow Israelites.

II. (:5) PROHIBIT CONFUSING THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN ACCORDING TO THE ESTABLISHED ORDER OF CREATION

*“A woman shall not wear man's clothing,
nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing;
for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God.”*

Peter Craigie: Transvestism tends to be associated with certain forms of homosexuality . . . In **Lev. 18:22** and **20:13**, homosexual behavior is described as an **abomination**.

Warren Wiersbe: The familiar and now accepted word “unisex” first appeared in print in *Life* magazine (June 21, 1968) in an article describing unisex clothing as “good fashion as well as good fun.” In this verse, God calls it “*an abomination.*”

Daniel Block: Similar to **verses 9–11**, this injunction seeks to preserve the order built into creation, specifically the fundamental distinction between male and female. For a person to wear anything associated with the opposite gender confuses one’s sexual identity and blurs established boundaries.

Cairns: Positively stated, the theological thrust of **v. 5** is that Yahweh has created male and female with specific and complementary characteristics so that in their relationship the two constitute the full expression of humanity. To blur the intersexual distinction that Yahweh has established strikes at the natural order and harmony willed by the Creator.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Four verses in **Chapter 22** deal with abhorrent mixtures (**vv. 5, 9, 10, 11**). Each is a directive that disallows some combination or mixture. . .

Interpreters have proposed a variety of explanations, often trying to find some parallel in foreign religions that might explain these prohibitions. The most plausible explanation, although not conclusive, relates them to the ancient **need for order** (**Houtman**; Douglas). A central concern of the story of creation is **creation of order out of chaos**. The seven days of creation give it a systematic format. An important theme is creation by separation, as light is separated from darkness in order to make day and night, and earth is separated from water to make seas and land. Vegetation and animal

life are made “*according to its kind*” (**Gen 1:11, 12, 21, 25** RSV). When God rests on the seventh day, the chaos of the formless void has been replaced by an ordered creation with a diversity of life, each with its own place in the created order.

But the **threat of chaos returning** always remains. Israel must be constantly vigilant not to endanger this order. The intermingling of the sons of God with the daughters born to humans (**Gen 6:1–4**) is an obvious transgression against this order. Sodomy violates the distinction between animal and human (e.g., **Lev 18:23**). Similarly, there is an order to the way we are to live that must be protected. As **Houtman** says, “Blurring separation and variety may induce a reversion of cosmos to chaos and must therefore be prevented” (227–28).

Disregarding this order of creation is dangerous and causes ritual impurity. This overarching concern for order has probably influenced the set of prohibitions here, although individual factors impact their detail. Following these prohibitions also will contribute to distinguishing between Israel and other peoples, with the need for clear boundaries potentially also reflecting this concern for order.

David Thompson: In a society God will bless, men will be men and women will be women. God is the One who assigned sexuality to a person and He detests it when those values are disregarded.

It is clearly stated that this is an abomination to God. Paul says in Romans that God has given a natural desire within a human for a woman to be drawn to a man and for a man to be drawn to a woman. It is against what God for a woman to want to become a man or a man to want to become a woman. It is an abomination to God and God clearly says I am abandoning them to His wrath (**Romans 1:18, 26-28**).

Let’s be as clear as we can be on this from a Biblical perspective. Homosexuality, Lesbianism, Transgenderism or Transvestitism is a depravity and an abomination to God that will cause God to abandon that person and eventually send one to eternal fire and hell. If a child of God wants God’s blessings, he/she will stay far away from this kind of depravity.

III. (:6-7) PROCURE FOOD RESOURCES WITHOUT COMPROMISING FUTURE PRODUCTION AS AN EXAMPLE OF HONORING THE MOTHER – THE GIVER OF LIFE

“If you happen to come upon a bird’s nest along the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, and the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young; 7 you shall certainly let the mother go, but the young you may take for yourself, in order that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: This directive itself may be clear but not its rationale. An Israelite is free to take eggs or even a fledgling from a nest, but the mother bird is to be preserved.

Future life, both for the birds as well as for Israel, depends on the fertility of mother animals. If both mother and eggs or fledglings are taken, there will be no more birds, and a future food source is threatened. The directive thus may be a way of protecting a future source of food for the people (cf. **20:19–20**), yet it probably is more than that. The concluding promise, *in order that it may go well with you and you may live long*, appears to be an intended echo of the command to *honor father and mother*, with its promise *so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you* (**5:16**). Even a mother bird deserves a certain level of honor or respect for having brought new life into the world. Both of these considerations are consistent with contemporary ecological concerns.

Peter Craigie: If a nest was found with a mother bird and eggs or young birds in it, the natural thing to do would be to take all of them, thereby acquiring more food. The effect of such action, however, would be bad; in commercial language, it would be exchanging a long-term profit for an immediate gain. To take and kill the mother would be to terminate a potential future supply of food. To take the mother and leave the others would not be possible, for they would not be able to survive without the mother. Thus by taking the young birds (or eggs), but letting the mother go, food was acquired without the source of food for the future being cut off. The legislation thus has something in common with modern conservation laws. The large-scale killing of any species can lead to a serious diminution in its numbers and to eventual extinction.

Eugene Merrill: One notices here a descending order of value or significance in the animals listed. First was the ox or sheep (**v. 1**), clean animals useful for food or sacrifice. Then follows the donkey or ox (**vv. 3-4**), one of which (the donkey) was unclean but essential to one's livelihood as a work animal. Finally there was the undomesticated bird (**vv. 6-7**), of little intrinsic value since it was not owned but of great worth as a source of food supply. Even within the last category the mother bird was more valuable than her eggs or chicks, for they were more vulnerable to accident or premature death than she.

IV. (:8) PRECAUTIONS IN CONSTRUCTION TO PROTECT HUMAN LIFE AND SAFETY

“When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone falls from it.”

Daniel Block: Houses were often two-story constructions, with the lower floor housing animals and storing food stuffs, and the upper floor serving as the living quarters. Cooled by the breezes, flat roofs provided a third living space that residents could use for a variety of purposes. Without a barrier around the perimeter, people could step off the roof and fall to their deaths. The final clause of **verse 8** holds the head of the household responsible for the life of anyone whose death is the result of negligence.

Gerald Gerbrandt: **Criminal negligence** is the phrase we use today for an action or non-action that harms someone, even though not so intended, if this danger could have been

reasonably anticipated. The reason for neglecting to build a restraining wall on a roof might be laziness or the desire to save resources, but certainly not an intention to hurt someone walking about on the roof. And yet, bloodguilt can result. . . We are not only liable for the consequences of actions intended to hurt or defraud others, but also for actions or non-actions that otherwise may be quite innocent, yet where we should have known that they might be dangerous. Deuteronomy warns the Israelite community to be aware of the **potential consequences** of all they do lest they become guilty of criminal negligence.

Peter Craigie: Apart from the legal implications of the verse, however, the legislation reflects a concern for the value and protection of **human life**. Safety precautions were to be taken in order to protect life, which was the gift of God; as in vv. 6–7, the law reflects what we sometimes consider to be a very modern concern.

John Schultz: The Muslim philosophy of life is that everything is subject to the will of Allah. If accidents happen, it is called God’s will. This results in a very fatalistic approach to life. The Bible does not sanction such an attitude. God holds us responsible if we fail to prevent things from going wrong, when it was in our power to do so. Being responsible is part of our human dignity. We do not go through life following a pre-recorded script. We live in a world in which things can and will go wrong. God wants us to be realistic and live pragmatically. God put Adam in charge of a perfect creation. In the broken world in which we live, this mandate has not been revoked: we are called upon to prevent accidents. This means careful planning and consideration of possibilities of things going wrong and taking measures to prevent that. It means building houses with a railing on the flat roof, covering wells, keeping medicine out of the reach of children, covering up electrical outlets, etc. God hates negligence. And He hates bloodshed.

V. (:9-11) PROHIBITION OF CERTAIN MIXTURES TO EMPHASIZE THE NEED FOR A LIFE OF SEPARATION AND DISTINCTIVENESS

A. (:9) Planting Vineyard with Two Kinds of Seed

*“You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed,
lest all the produce of the seed which you have sown,
and the increase of the vineyard become defiled.”*

Eugene Merrill: The implication is that a crop in addition to grapes may be in view. While this might be possible in the world of actual agriculture, it was not to be undertaken in Israel because it symbolized an admixture of spiritual elements that is abhorrent to the Lord. The result would be a **defiling** (Heb. *tiqd s*, “it will be consecrated”) of both crops, that is, a rendering of them impure and unfit for sacred use. Elsewhere **Israel** is referred to as a **vineyard** (cf. **Ps 80:8-19; Isa 5:1-7; Jer 2:10**), so the imagery here is clear and deliberate: **Israel**, the **vineyard**, must not be contaminated by being oversown with **alien seed**. Every time the Israelite farmer refrained from planting wheat or barley in his vineyard, he reflected this important principle.

B. (:10) Plowing with a Yoked Ox and Donkey

“You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.”

Daniel Block: This practice creates a fundamentally incongruous image: the animals’ anatomies require different types of harness and a drastically modified yoke to link the two; their unequal strength and stamina could cause the more vigorous to exhaust the weaker. However, to kosher-minded Israelites, these factors were probably less significant than forcing a bond between clean and unclean, which happens when ox and donkey are yoked together.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The phrase plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together (v. 10) may imply more than merely having them work together: it may also be a veiled reference to mating the two together (cf. **Lev 19:19**).

Eugene Merrill: vv. 9-12 -- Though **adultery** is clearly alluded to only once in this entire section on purity (**22:22**), there can be no doubt that the laws here on the whole are elaborations of the seventh commandment of **Deut 5:18**: *“You shall not commit adultery.”* Known elsewhere in the ancient Near East as the “Great Sin,” adultery epitomizes all that **impurity** means, whether in family, social, political, or religious life. As noted repeatedly already, Israel's idolatry and covenant violation is frequently described as adultery, for the covenant between the Lord and Israel was akin to a marriage relationship. Unfaithfulness to its terms was nothing less than spiritual infidelity (cf. **Isa 57:3-10; Jer 3:6-10; 9:2; 23:9-15; Ezek 16:30-43; 23:30-42; Hos 1:1-4:19**).

If adultery is the metaphor for illicit relationships in general, the antithesis is **separation** from such mixed behavior. To drive home the importance of separation from sexual (and, indeed, covenant) impurity, the passage provides a number of instances in which separation must be practiced for its pedagogical value alone. Apart from whatever other benefits may be derived from these behavioral requirements, their very observance would impress indelibly upon God's people the need to be separated from the contaminating influences of Canaanite social and religious life and to be wholly faithful in their commitment to him alone. . .

Paul the apostle understood this text in the way just suggested by quoting it to underscore his point that believers should not be yoked together with unbelievers (**2 Cor 6:14-18**). To do so is to undermine the purity of God's people and to tarnish their status as ones set apart for his service (cf. **Lev 26:12**). As some scholars have noted, such a mixture of animals would not be advisable anyway because of their differing strength, gaits, and temperaments, but this is not the issue here. A mixed yoke speaks of **unwholesome partnership**, an attempt to find common ground when none in fact exists. The temptation of **religious syncretism** would be especially appealing in Canaan but was to be resisted at all cost (cf. **Deut 7:2-5**).

C. (:11) Putting Wool and Linen Together in the Same Garments

“You shall not wear a material mixed of wool and linen together.”

Daniel Block: In general, it seems that all these prohibitions were intended to guard against boundary violations that defy the order of the universe (**Gen. 1**). In contrast to the chaotic life of non-Israelites, the life of Yahweh’s people is to be characterized by order and clearly defined boundaries. However, the concern goes beyond order in everyday life. These instructions draw clear boundaries between that which is appropriate for deity (mixtures of all sorts) and that which is appropriate for mortals (no mixtures at all). Certain mixtures were fitting for Yahweh and those who represented him, but not for laypeople who lived before a watching world.

Gerald Gerbrandt: According to **Exodus 28:6–14** priests were required to wear clothes that included mixed materials. Perhaps here is an example where a practice that is required in the realm of the holy then becomes excluded from the profane.

Eugene Merrill: The clearest connection between the mingling of clothing materials and the principle of holiness is found in **Lev 19**, where the phrase *“I am the LORD”* occurs over and over (vv. **2-37**), commencing with the affirmation, *“You shall be holy”* (v. **2**). In the midst of this refrain on holiness stands the injunction *“Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material”* (v. **19**). Again, therefore, an apparently innocuous act becomes filled with spiritual significance as a paradigm of behavior.

VI. (:12) PROVIDE A PUBLIC REMINDER TO YOURSELF AND OTHERS OF YOUR COVENANT RELATIONSHIP AND COMMITMENT TO OBEY THE LAW OF GOD

“You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of your garment with which you cover yourself.”

Daniel Block: Like words of covenant commitment written on hands and foreheads and on the doorposts of houses and gates (**Deut. 6:4–9**), the tassels reminded the one who wore them and outsiders of Israel’s special status as the covenant people of Yahweh.

Michael Grisanti: Even the clothing the Israelites wear must serve as a reminder of God’s promises, their identity as his people, and his demand for their absolute loyalty.

John Schultz: Quoting **Matthew Henry** -- “The Jews being a **peculiar people**, they were thus distinguished from their neighbors in their dress, as well as in their diet, and taught by such little instances of singularity not to be conformed to the way of the heathen in greater things. Thus likewise they proclaimed themselves Jews wherever they were, as those that were not ashamed of God and his law. Our Saviour, being made under the law, wore these fringes; hence we read of the hem or border, of his garment. These borders the Pharisees enlarged, that they might be thought more holy and devout than other people. The phylacteries were different things; these were their own invention, the fringes were a divine institution. The Jews at this day wear them, saying, when they put

them on, Blessed be he who has sanctified us unto himself, and commanded us to wear fringes.”

The need to be reminded of God’s commandments points to a **poor memory**. And poor memories often speak of a lack of interest. Most people have no trouble remembering things that interest them most. It is the less interesting matters we tend to forget. Intelligent people with poor memories keep themselves alert by using memory aids: stick-on notes on refrigerator doors, or strings tied on their finger. For the Jews it was the tassel. The tassel expressed at the same time hope for the future when outward reminders would no longer be needed.

Jeremiah prophesied about this, saying: “ *‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the LORD. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’*”

It is the new heart in which the Word of God is hidden, in which Christ lives that makes the tassel redundant.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does the NT reference and use various phrases from this section of Scripture?
- 2) How does the independent American spirit sometimes tend to manifest a “finder’s-keepers” type of mentality instead of the love-for-neighbor mentality enjoined here?
- 3) Are you actively taking a stand against the current cultural attack against the divinely created order of two mutually exclusive sexes?
- 4) What are some of the memory aids for believers to keep us focused on pleasing the Lord Jesus in our daily lives?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: Tenderness vv. 6-7 – Concern for fallen animals leads to concern for defenseless birds. It would be easy for the man to wipe out the nest and have wild birds and eggs for dinner, but God prohibited such wanton activity. If the man took the mother bird, the young would die from lack of food and care; so he was allowed to take the young and the eggs. The female bird could have another brood and this would help

to preserve the species. As you read the Mosaic Law, you can't help but be touched by the Lord's concern for the natural resources He put on the earth, not only birds, but also trees (20:19-20), donkeys (22:4), and hungry oxen (25:4). God preserves both man and beast (Pss. 36:6; 104:10-30) and He expects His people to assist Him in that important work. God provides food for mankind, but the greed of a few can destroy the supply for the many. The Lord promised that it would go well with the nation if they showed concern for helpless creatures (Deut. 22:7; see 4:40; 5:16; 6:3, 18; 12:25, 28; 19:13).

Thomas Constable: Two insightful writers suggested the following outlines for these chapters. [Note: **Merrill**, Deuteronomy, pp. 218-331; and **Stephen A. Kaufman**, "The Structure of the Deuteronomic Law," MAARAV 1 (1978-79):105-58.]

Commandment	Merrill	Kaufman	Description
1	Deuteronomy 12:1-31	ch. 12	Fidelity
2	Deuteronomy 12:32 to Deuteronomy 13:18	ch. 12	Worship
3	Deuteronomy 14:1-21	Deuteronomy 13:1 to Deuteronomy 14:27	Name of God
4	Deuteronomy 14:22 to Deuteronomy 16:17	Deuteronomy 14:28 to Deuteronomy 16:17	Sabbath
5	Deuteronomy 16:18 to Deuteronomy 18:22	Deuteronomy 16:18 to Deuteronomy 18:22	Authority
6	Deuteronomy 19:1 to Deuteronomy 22:8	Deuteronomy 19:1 to Deuteronomy 22:8	Murder
7	Deuteronomy 22:9 to Deuteronomy 23:18	Deuteronomy 22:9 to Deuteronomy 23:19	Adultery
8	Deuteronomy 23:19 to Deuteronomy 24:7	Deuteronomy 23:20 to Deuteronomy 24:7	Theft
9	Deuteronomy 24:8 to Deuteronomy 25:4	Deuteronomy 24:8 to Deuteronomy 25:4	False witness
10	Deuteronomy 25:5-19	Deuteronomy 25:5-16	Coveting

Peter Pett: While in some cases there is, and has been, a connection with the **ten commandments**, that is not sufficient to explain the miscellany of laws which we must now consider, although for such a connection see, for example, **Deuteronomy 19:15-21** - '*you shall not bear false witness*'; **Deuteronomy 21:1-9** - '*you shall not murder*'; **Deuteronomy 21:18-21** '*honour your father and your mother*'; **Deuteronomy 22:22-27** - '*you shall not commit adultery*'; **Deuteronomy 23:24-25; Deuteronomy 24:7** (compare **Deuteronomy 19:14**) - '*you shall not steal*'. But we note that there is no mention anywhere of the **Sabbath day**, something which is quite remarkable if, as some think, parts of Deuteronomy were written later. It would have been seen as an obvious gap that had to be filled. But Moses may well have classed that as priestly regulation, which he rarely touches on in the speech. But these regulations which have the particular commandments in mind are found other regulations which do not obviously fit into the pattern, although attempts have been made to do it. Such attempts do, however, **require a lot from the imagination**.

From this point on therefore we have a **miscellany of regulations** which cap what has gone before. While certain connections are unquestionably at times discoverable there seem in some cases to be no particular pattern to them, apart from the important one of **consideration for others, and a need to consider covenant regulations**. The essence of the message was that they were to love their neighbours, and resident aliens, as themselves (**Deuteronomy 10:19** compare **Leviticus 19:18; Leviticus 19:34**).

In this chapter the regulations cited cover such things as lost livestock, avoiding cross dressing, conservation in nature, keeping buildings safe, avoiding cross connection of what Yahweh has established separately, maintaining a woman's honour, and so on. The underlining principle behind them all was consideration and thoughtfulness, and respect for what belonged to God and to Israel under the covenant. The very wideness of the range is testimony to the wideness of the area covered by the covenant; concern for their neighbours' possessions, concern for the relationship between man and woman, concern for the mother birds of the land, concern for the life of one's guests, concern for natural things, concern for the women of the land, concern for a father's position.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 22:13-30

TITLE: DEALING WITH MARITAL PURITY AND IMPROPER SEXUAL RELATIONS

BIG IDEA:

THE EXAMINATION OF FIVE CASES THAT PROMOTE SEXUAL FIDELITY AND PROTECT AGAINST ABUSE

INTRODUCTION:

Eugene Merrill: It is commonplace in the Old Testament to find the Lord's covenant with Israel compared to the marriage relationship between husband and wife. The following section should be understood against that theological background, though obviously the instructions here had practical and immediate relevance to Israel's family life as well.

Daniel Block: Although these texts do not gloss over sin committed by females (vv. 20–21, 22, 23–24), their primary concern is to rein in abusive and abominable male behavior: slandering and then seeking to get rid of a wife (vv. 13–19); adultery with a woman betrothed to another man (vv. 23–24); degrading a woman betrothed to another man (vv. 25–27); degrading a virgin (vv. 28–29); and finally abusing one's father and step-mother (v. 30[23:1]). The moral trajectory reflected here characterizes the entire book of Deuteronomy.

Warren Wiersbe: “Sex has become one of the most discussed subjects of modern times,” said **Fulton J. Sheen**. “The Victorians pretended it did not exist; the moderns pretend that nothing else exists.” God created sex and has every right to control the way we use it, and if we obey Him, it will bring enrichment and enjoyment. One of the basic rules is that sex must not be experienced outside of the bonds of marriage. The Law of Moses and the New Testament magnify personal purity and the importance of honesty and loyalty in marriage.

Pulpit Commentary: The laws in this section have the design of fostering purity and fidelity in the relation of the sexes, and also of protecting the female against the malice of sated lust and the violence of brutal lust.

I. (:13-21) CASE #1 – DEALING WITH THE HUSBAND'S CHARGE OF PREMARITAL SEXUAL IMPURITY AGAINST HIS NEW WIFE

A. (:13-14) The Charge

“If any man takes a wife and goes in to her and then turns against her, 14 and charges her with shameful deeds and publicly defames her, and says, 'I took this woman, but when I came near her, I did not find her a virgin,'”

Peter Craigie: Although the time sequence is not clearly specified, it is probable that the action stated in the last clause (*he hates her*) follows immediately upon the consummation of the marriage. Likewise, the reason for the hate is not made explicit, though it could have been related to some factor unknown before the wedding, such as lack of sexual compatibility.

Gerald Gerbrandt: This is not a neutral presentation of an accusation before the court, but a report of a man who without justification is **slandering his wife**: he dislikes her [, he] makes up charges against her, slandering [lit., *sends out a bad name against*] her by saying... The man is not bringing a formal charge against his wife before the court but rather is participating in **malicious gossip** within the community. The motivation for the husband's actions is not given. Perhaps the false charges are intended to provide grounds for granting a difficult divorce. Or perhaps the husband is trying to blackmail the bride's family into returning the original bride-price. In either case, the introductory wording signals that the husband's allegation is false and intentionally harmful, with the effect of dishonoring the bride and her family. . .

Although on one level the logic of the indictment is clear, the larger situation itself is less so. In fact, on a practical level the law appears quite **unworkable**. If retaining a bloodstained cloth from the wedding night is general practice, then surely the man is aware of it and would be hesitant to make the false accusation. And given the nature of the evidence, the possibility of fabricating such evidence by the parents seems not out of the question (cf. Nelson 2002: 270). These observations suggest that the passage is not really a "regulation" but intended more as instruction.

Jack Deere: This law was meant to enforce premarital sexual purity and to encourage parents to instill within their children the value of sexual purity. The law might be misused, however, by an unscrupulous husband against his wife for personal reasons, or perhaps to recover the bride-price he originally paid to the girl's father.

B. (:15-17) The Defense

"then the girl's father and her mother shall take and bring out the evidence of the girl's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. 16 And the girl's father shall say to the elders, 'I gave my daughter to this man for a wife, but he turned against her; 17 and behold, he has charged her with shameful deeds, saying, "I did not find your daughter a virgin." But this is the evidence of my daughter's virginity.' And they shall spread the garment before the elders of the city."

Daniel Block: Whereas earlier texts had called for multiple witnesses to establish the truth in a legal case (**17:6-7; 19:15**), in this case material evidence is presented. The vague reference to "*proof of her virginity*" in **verse 14** is clarified somewhat in **verse 17** with "*cloth*." Although this word normally refers to an outer garment, here it refers either to the garment worn on the night of the wedding or the bed sheet, giving evidence of the breaking of the girl's hymen. The accused woman may have stored the sheet in her "hope chest," as a commemoration of the night of her first intercourse and as concrete evidence of her virginity at the time of her marriage—in case anyone should

ever challenge this. This she now produces to her father and mother as proof of her premarital purity.

C. (:18-21) The Judgment

1. (:18-19) Judgment if the Charge is Proven False

a. (:18) Public Flogging

“So the elders of that city shall take the man and chastise him,”

b. (:19a) Punitive Fine

“and they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give it to the girl's father, because he publicly defamed a virgin of Israel.”

MacArthur: A shekel weighed .4 oz., so the total fine would be about 2.5 lbs. of silver.

c. (:19b) Permanent Marriage

*“And she shall remain his wife;
he cannot divorce her all his days.”*

Daniel Block: The testimony of the bride's father and the material evidence call for a decisive response against the husband. The elders must take the man and flog him (NIV “punish”), fine him one hundred shekels of silver—to be paid to the father of the young woman as compensation for her sullied reputation—and prohibit him from ever divorcing his wife (v. 19b). While modern readers may find the last prescription troublesome, this requirement aims for a rehabilitative outcome. Because the matter is resolved in a public court of law, the people in the community become guarantors of the man's good behavior.

The fine goes beyond compensating for the injury done to the woman's reputation; it also restores righteousness in Israel. The striking ending of the motive clause in **verse 19** assumes that sexual sins are not only personal crimes against another individual; they are also crimes against the entire community. This solution takes seriously the implications for the health of society of the original charges and the extension of the woman's guilt to the covenant community. The court must preserve the good name of all Israelite women, but they must also act to preserve righteousness within the nation as a whole.

Michael Grisanti: The final aspect of the penalty levied against the husband is that he can never divorce this wife. Although this prohibition may seem less than desirable for the woman, in fact it protects her—a defamed and maritally undesirable divorcée—from deprivation in a culture characterized by women's economic dependence on men (**Wright**, Deuteronomy, 243).

2. (:20-21) Judgment if the Charge is Proven True

“But if this charge is true, that the girl was not found a virgin,”

a. (:21a) Stoning to Death

“then they shall bring out the girl to the doorway of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death because she has committed an act of folly in Israel, by playing the harlot in her father's house;”

Daniel Block: The punishment for premarital adultery is **severe**: shameful death by stoning at the entrance to the woman's father's house, because she committed fornication while still at home. This punishment implies the public defaming of the father and his household for having “sold damaged goods” to the husband. . .

Radical surgery is required to remove those who flaunt contempt for the covenant by promiscuous behavior. Young men and women are to keep themselves pure for their spouse.

Peter Craigie: The location of the execution pointed to the shame resting on the family. Although there is no suggestion that the father knew of his daughter's offense (and therefore he was not guilty of deliberate misrepresentation in giving his daughter to the man in marriage), nevertheless, as head of the household, he was in part responsible for his daughter's behavior. By committing fornication in her father's house—the sense is not that the act was done literally in the house (though it could have been), but that the woman was guilty of fornication while still resident in the family home, before her marriage. Her act was tantamount to making the family home a “house of ill-repute.” The severe punishment appointed for the woman was not only for the sin of fornication, but for misrepresenting herself, both to the father and the bridegroom, as a virgin.

b. (:21b) Purging the Evil from the Community
“thus you shall purge the evil from among you.”

Michael Grisanti: The key point is not her sexual condition, i.e., that only virgins could become married in Israel; rather, she has concealed her immorality, which is an act of **treachery** (like any lie). By stoning her, God's people are able to purge the evil from their midst (cf. **22:22, 24**).

II. (:22) CASE #2 – DEALING WITH ADULTERY WITH A MARRIED WOMAN

A. The Crime

“If a man is found lying with a married woman,”

Eugene Merrill: The marital state of the man had nothing to do with the fact of adultery. In ancient Israel the wife was considered as belonging to her husband in a way that was not true of the converse. Thus it was always the woman who was being abused (along with her husband) and not the man, whether or not he was married.

B. The Consequences

“then both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman;”

C. The Cleansing

“thus you shall purge the evil from Israel.

III. (:23-27) **CASE #3 – DEALING WITH IMPROPER SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH A VIRGIN ENGAGED TO ANOTHER MAN**

A. (:23-24) **Occurring in the City – Assumption is Consensual Sex**

1. (:23) The Circumstances

“If there is a girl who is a virgin engaged to a man, and another man finds her in the city and lies with her,”

2. (:24a) The Consequences

“then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death; the girl, because she did not cry out in the city, and the man, because he has violated his neighbor's wife.”

Daniel Block: Whereas modern Western engagements involve public declarations of intention to marry, betrothal refers to a publicly binding legal act, which explains why in this context the woman was considered “*another man’s wife*” (v. 24).

3. (:24b) The Cleansing

“Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.”

B. (:25-27) **Occurring in a Remote Field – Assumption is Rape**

1. (:25a) The Circumstances

“But if in the field the man finds the girl who is engaged, and the man forces her and lies with her,”

2. (:25b) The Consequences

“then only the man who lies with her shall die.”

3. (:26-27) The Caveat

“But you shall do nothing to the girl; there is no sin in the girl worthy of death, for just as a man rises against his neighbor and murders him, so is this case. 27 When he found her in the field, the engaged girl cried out, but there was no one to save her.”

Daniel Block: The countercase (vv. 25–27) highlights the role of the woman as **victim**. This hypothetical encounter transpires in the open field, where, even if she had cried for help, no one within earshot would have heard her cry. Consequently, she is given the **benefit of the doubt**, while the man is considered guilty. Having encountered her (v. 27) away from the village in the open country, he seized her and “*lay*” with her. Comparing the woman’s fate to that of the victim of murder (cf. 19:11–13), Moses

pronounces the death penalty on the man. However, since the woman is presumed an innocent victim, she shall not die.

IV. (:28-29) CASE #4 – DEALING WITH IMPROPER SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH A VIRGIN WHO IS NOT ENGAGED

A. (:28) The Crime

“If a man finds a girl who is a virgin, who is not engaged, and seizes her and lies with her and they are discovered,”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The phrase *He seizes her* may imply rape (as in **v. 25**), but ambiguously so. In this particular passage the question of the woman’s consent is probably not legally significant (**Pressler:** 37). Whether voluntary or not, the effect is the same: the woman and her family have been shamed, with the result that her marriage prospects have been seriously damaged, making a negative financial impact upon her father. The punishment thus compensates the young woman’s father (thereby protecting his rights), yet also requires that the man who committed the deed marry her without any possibility of divorce (thereby protecting the young woman who has become vulnerable through the action). With this second requirement, Deuteronomy goes beyond the regulation in Exodus, possibly reflecting greater sensitivity to the impact of the event upon the young woman.

B. (:29) The Consequences

1. Punitive Fine

“then the man who lay with her shall give to the girl's father fifty shekels of silver,”

Earl Kalland: By contrast the price of a slave was 30 shekels.

Daniel Block: Because he has deflowered and degraded the woman, he must pay the father of the woman fifty shekels. Unlike **verse 19**, this payment is not considered a fine but the **bride price**, since upon its payment she becomes his wife in a marriage from which there is to be no divorce as long as they live (cf. **v. 19**). . .

However, if we translate the verb *wenātan* modally, “*and he may pay*,” rather than as an imperative, “*he shall pay*” (NIV), the tone changes significantly. If her father accepts the bride price and agrees to accept the man as a son-in-law, then the man must fulfill all the marital duties that go with sexual intercourse.

Eugene Merrill: In fact, the compensation for this loss was the fifty shekels of silver assessed as a penalty by the court (**v. 29**). This was half the amount demanded of the man who misrepresented his wife's virginity (**v. 19**), for she already was married and would never have commanded any additional bride price whereas the girl in the present situation not only would have afforded her father fifty shekels of compensation for her humiliation but most certainly the normal bride price in addition.

2. Permanent Marriage

*“and she shall become his wife because he has violated her;
he cannot divorce her all his days.”*

Michael Grisanti: The primary question raised in this passage is its relationship to **Exodus 22:16–17 [15–16]**, which deals with a man who has “*seduced*” and had sexual relations with an unbetrothed woman. There the man must pay the bridal gift (*mōhar*) to her father and marry her. The father, however, has the option of refusing the marriage (but still receiving the bridal gift). Various scholars have suggested that the father may do the same in the present scenario (**McConville**, 342; **Merrill**, Deuteronomy, 306). But since **Deuteronomy 22** does not repeat the clause allowing the refusal of the marriage and since the passage does prohibit the man from ever divorcing the woman, the **option of refusal** does not appear to be available to the father in the present context.

V. (:30) CASE #5 – DEALING WITH IMPROPER SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH A STEP-MOTHER

*“A man shall not take his father's wife
so that he shall not uncover his father's skirt.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: The last regulation in the series (**v. 30**) imagines a situation in which a man has had more than one wife. It is not stated whether the man has died or whether he has divorced the woman in question; in either case, the man is no longer part of the scene (i.e., this is not a case of adultery). The woman whom the son is not to marry is not his mother (i.e., this is not a case of incest, at least not biologically, but a marriage regulation; cf. **Lev 18:7–8; 20:11**), but a former wife of his father. Since men could marry women over a considerable period of time, it is not impossible that the woman may have been close to the son's age, possibly even younger. And yet, the passage prohibits such a marriage.

Eugene Merrill: The same euphemism occurs elsewhere to refer to dishonorable attitudes or actions, especially of a sexual nature (**Deut 27:20; Ruth 3:9**; cf. **Gen 9:20-24**). The act smacks of **filial insubordination**, of a direct challenge to the commandment that one honor his father and his mother.

Warren Wiersbe: This sin was among those condemned on Mount Ebal (**Deut. 27:20**). Apparently this was the sin of the man in the Corinthian church who needed to be disciplined (**1 Cor. 5**).

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How do these laws actually help to protect the standing of the woman in the various cases?

- 2) How would these laws function as a deterrent against future sexual misconduct?
- 3) What is the role of the father in taking responsibility for his virgin daughter until marriage is consummated?
- 4) How can we better encourage sexual abstinence until marriage?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gerald Gerbrandt: Until a woman is engaged or married, she is the responsibility of her father. The mother may play a significant role as well, but the father is the legal guardian. The father is responsible for negotiating his daughter's wedding and is the one to receive the bride-price. At the point of engagement, this responsibility shifts to the husband. **Carolyn Pressler** speaks of "the rights of the father to exclusive disposal of his daughter's sexuality and especially the rights of the husband to exclusive possession of his wife's sexuality" (42). Although one might speak of "responsibility for," rather than "rights," the emphasis holds. As a result, prior to engagement, an offense against a woman is an offense against her father, as well as the community as a whole, and after the engagement an offense against a woman is also against her husband.

Unfortunately, the foreign nature of this world makes it difficult for us to identify with confidence the central concern of each of these regulations. Given the well-established patriarchal system, it is doubtful that the regulations are intended to protect that system. But are these regulations protecting the rights of men within that system? Or are they protecting vulnerable women from the patriarchal system?

Carolyn Pressler speaks of these regulations largely in terms of how they protect the rights of the men, their claims to their daughters' and wives' sexuality, and the authority of the male head of the household. Yet at the same time she recognizes that there is another side to them: "The laws also protect the wife from false accusations, and provide for the socially vulnerable girl (22:28–29). It is not possible to distinguish completely in these cases the extent to which the laws protect the woman, and the extent to which they protect her father" (43).

Eugene Merrill: As for the structure of the pericope, it follows an order of ascending or **increasing degree of impropriety**. There first is a section dealing with the undertaking and dissolving of marriage (vv. 13-21), followed by statutes concerning improper sexual relations with a married woman (v. 22), one who is betrothed (vv. 23-27), and a virgin who is neither married nor betrothed (vv. 28-29). The unit closes with a prohibition against marrying one's stepmother (v. 30). The degree of seriousness lies not always in the deeds themselves but to some extent in the **amount of complicity** by the offended parties. For example, the adultery of v. 22 is deemed not as offensive as

the violation of the engaged girl in vv. 23-27 because in the former case the act was by mutual consent whereas in the latter there may be a question of force, especially as far as rape within a village was concerned (vv. 23-24). Marriage with a stepmother was worst of all because it **degraded the father** who, under God, retained dignity and sovereignty even after his death.

Thomas Constable: Premarital sex presumes to seize the highest privilege in marriage (i.e., intimacy through sexual union that results in the "*one flesh*" relationship). It does so without shouldering the responsibility, namely, permanent commitment to one another (expressed as "*cleaving*" in **Genesis 2:24**). It therefore perverts marriage, the basic institution of society. It presumes to dictate to God by altering His plan. Not everyone who has engaged in premarital sex has thought this through, but this is the basic reason premarital sex is wrong. To the engaged couple committed to one another and tempted to have sex before their marriage I would say postpone sex until the marriage has taken place. Scripture regards sex as the consummation of marriage, what takes place after the couple has completed everything else involved in the establishment of marriage (cf. **Genesis 2:24**). [Note: A good book to give teenagers tempted to have premarital sex is **Al Haffner's** *The High Cost of Free Love*.]

TEXT: Deuteronomy 23:1-14

TITLE: *GUARDING THE SANCTITY OF THE WORSHIP ASSEMBLY AND THE MILITARY CAMP*

BIG IDEA:

THE PRESENCE AND FAVOR OF A HOLY GOD DEMAND THAT ISRAEL GUARD THE SANCTITY OF THE WORSHIP ASSEMBLY AND THE MILITARY CAMP

INTRODUCTION:

Keil: From the sanctification of the house and the domestic relation, to which the laws of marriage and chastity in the previous chapter pointed, Moses proceeds to instructions concerning the sanctification of their union as a congregation: he gives directions as to the exclusion of certain persons from the congregation of the Lord, and the reception of others into it (vv. 1–8); as to the preservation of the purity of the camp in time of war (vv. 9–14). . .

Jack Deere: Verses 1-8 dealt with the need for maintaining the purity of the religious assembly. Verses 9-14 are concerned with the purity of the war camp.

Michael Grasso: Deuteronomy 23:1-18 shows that anyone who comes into the presence of God must be holy. These laws restricting access to God and regulating holiness and purity remained in place until the coming of Christ who has so thoroughly cleansed his people that they now have perfect access into his presence.

I. (:1-8) GUARDING THE SANCTITY OF THE WORSHIP ASSEMBLY

Eugene Merrill: The “assembly” (*q h l*) 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. This is clear from the occurrence of the verb “enter” (b) throughout the passage (vv. 1-3, 8), a verb that suggests **participation** with the assembly and not initial introduction or conversion to it. Furthermore, Israelites with such handicaps are elsewhere assumed to have been full members of the community with the only restriction being their ineligibility for the priesthood (**Lev 21:20**). Our text, then, more fully clarifies the extent to which deformed Israelites could participate in the cultus and does not speak to the issue of whether or not they belonged to the covenant community. It is everywhere assumed that they did. Their exclusion from the **worship assembly**, as discriminatory as such a policy might seem, was to underscore the principle of **separation from paganism**, where such deformities were not only acceptable but frequently central to the practice of the cult.

Daniel Block: The phrase to “*enter the assembly of the LORD*” (*qahal yhwh*) occurs six times, leaving no doubt that **guarding the sanctity of the congregation** is the primary concern of **verses 1–8**. The expression “*assembly of the LORD*” refers to those who have gathered before Yahweh for an audience with him, that is, to hear him speak. Whereas earlier texts had highlighted the inclusive nature of worship (**12:7, 12; 16:11, 14**), for the first time Moses raises barriers to the assembly. His text divides into two unequal parts, **verses 1–6** and **verses 7–8**. The first part erects walls around “*the assembly of the LORD*,” while the second opens the doors to outsiders.

Duane Christensen: The reasoning behind the laws restricting entry into the assembly of YHWH in **23:2–9** suggests the principle that only those who are **perfect** physically and not the product of some unnatural union should be members of the covenant community in ancient Israel. The situation is somewhat similar to a superficial reading of the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: “*You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (**Matt 5:48**). The holiness of God demands perfection in those who would approach his presence. In the gospel of the NT, this perfection is **found in Christ**, who provides the means of access to God for all people, regardless of their imperfections, whether moral, physical, or spiritual. The follower of Jesus stands in God’s presence as perfect—clothed in the perfection of Jesus himself.

A. (:1-6) Categories of Exclusion

1. (:1) Emasculated Men

“No one who is emasculated, or has his male organ cut off, shall enter the assembly of the LORD.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: A key phrase, *the assembly of the Lord*, occurs six times, serving as a uniting theme for the passage (once each in the opening and closing verses, four times in between). The prominence of the phrase, combined with its total absence in the remainder of the book of Deuteronomy, is noteworthy. Normally the term *assembly* simply means a **gathering of people**. Deuteronomy uses the term for Israel gathered at Mount Horeb (**5:22; 9:10; 10:4; 18:16**), and of the whole community addressed by Moses on the plains of Moab, at the border of the Promised Land (**31:30**). The phrase *assembly of the Lord* probably refers to the community **gathered specifically for worship**, including sacrificing to God, and thus has a more focused meaning. Perhaps Deuteronomy is distinguishing between Israel as a political nation that includes Canaanites and the worshiping community from which they are excluded.

Jack Deere: Excluding an emasculated male may refer to a person who intentionally had himself castrated for pagan religious purposes. At any rate this regulation was probably never meant to exclude a eunuch committed to obeying the Lord (**Isa. 56:3-5**). However, some say this law was meant to exclude all eunuchs regardless of the reason for their castration. If so, then the law probably reflected the fact that a eunuch could no longer choose to have children with God’s help. Something of the image of God in the man had been destroyed. The law would therefore have symbolically taught the need for worshipers to be perfect before God, as the sacrifices offered to God were to be without physical defects.

Utley: “**or has his male organ cut off**” This refers to a severed penis (“*a place of pouring fluid*”). This would be another way of describing a **eunuch** (cf. **Mt. 19:12**). These two damaged males are the first in a series of those who are excluded from attendance at the assemblies of Israel (i.e., events at the tabernacle). **Their exclusion is symbolic of the purity and wholeness of God’s people seen as a kingdom of priests** (cf. **Ex 19:6** and **Lev. 21:17–23; 22:17–25**). **Later in the OT many of these excluded ones are included** (e.g., Ruth the Moabitess and the eunuch of **Isa 56:3–5** and **Acts 8:26–40**). It is also possible that this practice of damaging a male’s sexual potential was part of Canaanite practices. Many of the seemingly unusual prohibitions in the Mosaic legislation were directed at a total break with Canaanite society and worship practices.

2. (:2) Illegitimate Children

a. Command of Exclusion

“No one of illegitimate birth shall enter the assembly of the LORD;”

Daniel Block: Moses’ second exclusion identifies the subject by the rare word *mamzēr* (NIV, one “*born of a forbidden marriage,*” v. **2a**). While the etymology of the word is uncertain, linked to the preceding this seems to refer to offspring of prostitutes (cf. **vv. 17–18**) who lived at pagan cult sites. Moses’ earlier warning concerning improper worship (**12:30–31**) and the linkage of the tenth generation in **verse 2b** with Ammonites and Moabites in **verse 3b** reinforce this interpretation. Since Israelites traced both of these peoples to an incestuous act (**Gen. 19:37–38**), *mamzēr* may refer to one conceived through incestuous intercourse (prohibited in **Lev. 18**), or more broadly to one born of illicit sexual relationships (**Deut. 22:13–29**).

Gerald Gerbrandt: Potentially this could include children born through incest, adultery, unmarried parents, and perhaps even mixed marriages between an Israelite and a foreigner. The time frame for the exclusion, *to the tenth generation*, is probably a colloquial way of saying “*forever*” (cf. **vv. 3b** and **6**), since a literal reading results in roughly 250 years.

Jack Deere: Possibly, however, the term refers to the child of an incestuous relationship, the child of a cult prostitute, or the child of a mixed marriage (i.e., an Israelite married to an Ammonite, Moabite, Philistine, or others). Again the stringent punishment inflicted on such a person would help deter Israelites from entering this kind of marriage.

b. Continuation of the Exclusion

“none of his descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall enter the assembly of the LORD.”

3. (:3-6) No Ammonites or Moabites or Their Descendants

a. (:3) Command and its Continuation

1) Command of Exclusion

“No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD;”

2) Continuation of the Exclusion

“none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD,”

b. (:4) Rationale

1) Withheld Normal Hospitality and Provisions

“because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt,”

2) Pursued Extreme Malice

“and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.”

c. (:5) Goodness of God

“Nevertheless, the LORD your God was not willing to listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the LORD your God loves you.”

Daniel Block: Previously Moses had noted **Yahweh’s love** as the motivating force behind his election and rescue of Israel from Egypt (**4:37; 7:8**) and his lavish blessing (**7:12**), but here it underlies Yahweh’s protection from hostile military and spiritual forces.

Eugene Merrill: The emphasis here, however, is not on the ancestry of the Ammonites and Moabites but on their **hostile behavior** toward Israel in the transit from Egypt to Canaan. They had refused the normal Eastern courtesies of hospitality (a matter not referred to elsewhere in the tradition) and, indeed, had hired Balaam to curse Israel (**v. 4**; cf. **Num 22:5-6**). This was to no avail as it turned out, for the Lord turned the curse into a blessing because of his love (i.e., his covenant favor) for Israel (**v. 5**; cf. **Num 23:5-12,26; 24:13**). Nevertheless, because of this attitude of hatred and belligerence by the Ammonites and Moabites toward Israel, they were to forever be precluded from the assembly (**v. 3**) and as nations were never to receive kind treatment at Israel's hands (**v. 6**). Subsequent history reveals how careful Israel was to keep this in mind (cf. **Judg 10:7–11:33; 2 Sam 10:1-19; 2 Kgs 1:1; 3:4-27**).

d. (:6) Perpetual Curse

“You shall never seek their peace or their prosperity all your days.”

David Thompson: God says when it comes to these kinds of people:

- 1) You shall never seek their peace. **23:6a** - Don’t make peace deals with them.
- 2) You shall never seek their prosperity. **23:6b** - Don’t seek their prosperity.

3) You shall not detest them because you were an alien in their land. **23:7** - Don't hate them.

4) You shall let third generation people into the assembly. **23:8** - Protect worship through time

B. (:7-8) Categories of Inclusion

1. (:7a) Edomites

“You shall not detest an Edomite, for he is your brother;”

2. (:7b) Egyptians

“you shall not detest an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land.”

Michael Grisanti: An abominable or repugnant nature is determined by a person's character, values, or culture. God prohibits his covenantal nation from treating the Edomites and Egyptians as loathsome, and the three-generation time frame provides sufficient time for people of these ancestries to demonstrate their enthusiastic desire to function as part of the Israelite community.

Peter Craigie: The Edomite was a brother of the Israelite; according to Hebrew tradition, the Edomites were descendants of Edom/Esau. The sojourn in Egypt, though in its latter days a time of hardship, had nevertheless been the period in which the growth toward Israel's nationhood had begun (**26:5**). Thus, for varying reasons, Edomites and Egyptians were to be treated differently from Ammonites and Moabites. If either Edomites or Egyptians took up residence in Israel, then the children of the third generation of immigrants could be granted admission to the assembly of the Lord. After the lapse of three generations, there would be no doubt that the Edomites and Egyptians resident in Israel were genuine in their desire to become full members of the worshipping family of God.

3. (:8) Generational Qualification

“The sons of the third generation who are born to them may enter the assembly of the LORD.”

Daniel Block: Verse 8 qualifies the openness of Israelites toward Edomites and Egyptians. In three generations, presumably once those who were alive at the time of Israel's exodus and desert sojourn have died, their descendants may be welcomed into Yahweh's assembly, provided they, like genuinely pious Israelites, were devoted exclusively to Yahweh (cf. **6:4-5**) and lived in keeping with the covenant.

Gerald Gerbrandt: By allowing the descendants of Edomites and Egyptians into the assembly of the Lord, this passage demonstrates that for Deuteronomy the community of Israel is not defined simply by **ethnicity**.

II. (:9-14) GUARDING THE SANCTITY OF YOUR MILITARY CAMP

Duane Christensen: The people of Israel were commanded to keep their camp pure from all forms of pollution. The individual soldiers were to be “*on guard against any evil thing*” (v 10). In executing their commission they must keep themselves from moral pollution in terms of overt sin or contact with idols and the accursed things found in the camps they plundered. They must also keep themselves from ceremonial and natural pollution of all sorts, such as an “*event in the night*,” which is normally understood to be an involuntary nocturnal emission of semen (cf. Lev 15:16–18). If this were to occur at home, a man needed only to wash himself; but in the army he must “*leave the camp*” and remain outside until after sundown so as to maintain ritual purity (vv 11–12). Since the camp of YHWH must have nothing offensive in it, even the latrine was to be located “*outside the camp*” (vv 13–14).

A. (:9) Call to Maintain Purity in the Military Camp

*“When you go out as an army against your enemies,
then you shall keep yourself from every evil thing.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: Although hidden in the NRSV, this passage opens with *When you go out* (AT), marking it as another in the series dealing with war (cf. 20:1–20; 21:10–14) . . . **Uncleanness** is incompatible with the presence of God.

Daniel Block: in this context the danger is internal and theological; the Israelites are to guard themselves against every spiritual danger.

IVP Bible Background Commentary: Since the army is engaged in a holy war, they must maintain themselves in a state of **ritual purity** consistent with God’s holiness. Thus matters of personal hygiene are elevated to reinforce the need to keep both person (see Lev 15:16–17) and place clean. Obviously, there would be health value in digging latrines outside the camp, but such mundane activities here are keyed to preventing the ritual impurity that would cause God to abandon them (see Deut 8:11–20+).

B. (:10-14) Call to Avoid Uncleanness in the Military Camp

1. (:10-11) Avoid Uncleanness Due to Nocturnal Emissions

a. (:10) Command of Expulsion from the Camp

*“If there is among you any man who is unclean
because of a nocturnal emission,
then he must go outside the camp; he may not reenter the camp.”*

b. (:11) Conditions for Reentry of the Camp

*“But it shall be when evening approaches,
he shall bathe himself with water,
and at sundown he may reenter the camp.”*

Daniel Block: This policy would obviously exclude those in this state of impurity from military action. However, concern for holiness superseded concern for military

efficiency. Impurity itself is perceived as an active malevolent force whose power can only be checked by ablutions. Even in battle the holy people of Yahweh were to be represented by holy troops.

2. (:12-14) Avoid Uncleaness Due to Uncovered Excrement

a. (:12-13) Hygiene Instructions

“You shall also have a place outside the camp and go out there, 13 and you shall have a spade among your tools, and it shall be when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and shall turn to cover up your excrement.”

Eugene Merrill: The second kind of contingency has to do with defecation, another form of emission. Inasmuch as there is usually forewarning in such circumstances, it must be done in a designated and prepared place outside the camp (v. 12).

b. (:14) Holiness Rationale

“Since the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to defeat your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy; and He must not see anything indecent among you lest He turn away from you.”

Utley: *“the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp”* This is a possible reference to the Levites carrying the **Ark of the Covenant** (cf. **Exod. 25:10–22**), which took the place of the shekinah cloud (e.g., **Exod. 13:21–22; 14:19–20; 16:10; 19:9, 16; Lev. 16:2, 13**) as the symbol of the divine Presence after Israel crossed the Jordan.

Daniel Block: Yahweh’s presence within the camp is the precondition to military victory. These clauses portray him as a divine commander inspecting his troops; if he finds any cause of defilement as he walks about the camp, he will abandon them, forcing them to fight their own battles with their own resources. The expression “anything indecent” expands these instructions to anything that causes contamination: corpses, other bodily excretions, unclean animals, and so on.

Eugene Merrill: The rationale for the legislation in both kinds of impure practices lies in the fact that the Lord was there in the camp with his army, *“moving about”* (*mithall k*) as its commander to bring deliverance and victory. This stem of the verb speaks of the Lord's **intimacy** with his people, his face-to-face encounter with them (cf. **Gen 3:8**) and desire to have fellowship with them (cf. **Lev 26:12**). But even more than this, he is a holy God, one who demands holiness of his people (cf. **Lev 19:1-2**). 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.

Michael Grisanti: The potentially impure activities envisioned in the above verses are not intrinsically sinful or impure. However, since the nation is soon to embark on holy

war against Canaan, they need to take great care to maintain their ritual purity lest they offend their covenantal Lord, who will go before them and fight on their behalf.

Brown: This statement about Israel's holy God provides a threefold testimony to his **omnipresence** (*in your camp*), **omnipotence** (*to protect you*) and **omniscience** (*that he will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you*). For the Hebrew people, their everyday conduct was determined by the nature of God. Because he is holy they were to be like him: 'Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy' (**Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7–8**).

Jack Deere: Even in a person's most private moments the holy God was with him, observing his behavior.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can we take the implications of the holiness of God more seriously?
- 2) How can Christian churches be so careless in their worship practices and in the vetting of those in positions of worship leadership?
- 3) What are the conditions of God being on our side and showing us favor and victory in our spiritual battles?
- 4) What is your response to the knowledge that God watches over even the most private and intimate details of your everyday life?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gerald Gerbrandt: The first group disqualified are men whose genitals have been mutilated (**23:1**). The verse does not indicate whether this applies regardless of whether the mutilation was intentional or accidental, nor does it give a rationale for the exclusion. Is it because the act of coming before God with a blemish profanes the sanctuary and thus is wrong (cf. rejection of animals with a blemish, **17:1**)? Leviticus gives this rationale for why anyone with a blemish is prohibited from becoming a priest, including one who has crushed testicles (**21:16–23**). If so, then this verse may be calling for wholeness and holiness within the worship assembly.

Or is the concern to exclude those who have become eunuchs in order to participate in foreign religious practices? Although probably not practiced in Israel, castration for lifelong dedication to cultic or public service did take place in the ancient Near East. This verse then excludes those who have made lifelong commitments to other religions

and thus would be consistent with Deuteronomy's consistent rejection of practices associated the worship of other gods.

Or is the logic that castration has made fathering future children impossible? Important in Israel's theology is the gift of the land and the passing on of this gift from generation to generation. The inability to contribute to this ongoing receipt of God's blessing may exclude those who cannot father children from full participation in the assembly of God. Unfortunately, the reason for this particular exclusion remains hidden.

David Thompson: You and I are living in a time when most places of worship will do anything they can to bring in the people to participate in what they call their worship services. They will allow anyone to get up on the platform if they think the crowd will like it.

God doesn't operate that way. He carefully monitors what is happening at worship services and He is very much interested in who is participating. Some people should not be participating in worship. They have no business at all being up in front of the people.

To have a practicing homosexual or lesbian or transgender person leading some church service is that which will never bring the blessings of God to that organization.

Gary Kukis: The **rationalization for cleanliness** is remarkable. God is going to be walking throughout the camp when they go to war. The camp is to be holy to him; so God does not expect to see anyone using the restroom in the middle of the street nor does he expect to find human excrement within the camp. Although the phrase **cleanliness is next to Godliness** is not found in the Bible, this passage is one place where such a concept could be inferred. The obvious spiritual analogy is that God cannot have any relation to or contact with human filth or uncleanness. He cannot function within our day to day lives if we carry around with us our filth. This is the whole purpose of rebound is to separate us from our filth, which allows God to work in our lives. When the Jews functioned as they were supposed to, then God walked among them and worked through them. *"Furthermore, I will make My tent with you and My soul will not abhor you. I will also walk among you and be your God and you will be My people."* (**Lev. 26:11–12**). Nothing can be more important than this image of God walking among the Israelites. This is Jesus Christ, who millenniums previous walked through the Garden of Delights during the spiritual part of the day to fellowship with Adam and Eve (**Gen. 3:8**). And this is Jesus Christ, who, 1400 year later, would take upon Himself a human form, and walk among the Jews as one of them. *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth* (**John 1:1–3, 14**)

<https://kukis.org/Pentateuch/Deuteronomy.pdf>

Bethel Church of Ripon: It was surely that they needed to realize that God was living in their camp. **F B Meyer**, a faithful preacher of old, remarked that the tent tabernacle in which the Ark of the Covenant was kept meant that God had pitched His tent alongside their tents. They also needed to remember that they would only win the battles which lay ahead of them if God was on their side – and He would only do that if they kept in mind that He is holy and pure.

That principle is still true for believers today. We will only win spiritual battles with **God on our side**. The apostle Paul wrote to Christians in the Greek city of Corinth – a city well known for promiscuity – to challenge them about the question of sexual behaviour. He said: *“Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You don't belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honour God with your body.”* (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)

Just as God 'lived' in the Israelite camp in the days of Moses, so He now lives by the Holy Spirit in the believer's body. And just as the Israelites were commanded to have nothing shameful in the camp, so we should not have anything shameful in our bodies. We are to put away those things which Jesus said would defile us. Being converted should lead to a cleaning up of our lives, so that we honour God even with our body. <https://www.bethelripon.com/daily-devotion/2021/6/8/day-386-cleaning-up-our-lives-deuteronomy-23-vs-9-14>

TEXT: Deuteronomy 23:15-25

TITLE: FIVE FORBIDDINGS OF GOD'S LAWS FOR ISRAEL

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S LAWS ENSURE THAT ISRAEL REMAINS DISTINCT FROM HER SURROUNDING PAGAN NEIGHBORS IN TERMS OF PERSONAL INTEGRITY AND CONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: Verses 15–25 consist of various instructions whose arrangement appears random. However, they exhibit an A B A B A pattern, with the A elements treating horizontal issues (vv. 15–16, 19–20, 24–25), and the B elements dealing with vertical concerns (vv. 17–18, 21–23).

Meredith Kline: Respect was to be shown to all those dignified by the status of covenant servant to the Lord. This section of stipulations was designed to guarantee this sanctity of the theocratic citizen by regulations which assured peace, prosperity, and liberty within the covenant commitment to all God's people, but especially to those classes whose welfare was jeopardized by various circumstances. The legislation seems to be arranged in groups corresponding to laws six through ten in the Decalogue, but in a slightly different order, as follows;

- Laws of property (23:19-25),
- of family (24:1-5),
- of life (24:6-15),
- of justice (24:16-18),
- and of charity (24:19-22).

Charlie Garrett: Holiness, purity, and justice -- Miscellaneous Laws for Israel --

- a. rights within the land (15, 16)
 - b. prohibitions concerning vows (17, 18)
 - c. you shall not charge interest to your brother (19)
 - x. to a foreigner you may charge interest (20)
 - c. to your brother you shall not charge interest (20)
 - b. mandates concerning vows (21-23)
- a. rights within the land (24, 25)

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/952174206536.pdf>

I. (:15-16) FORBIDDING THE EXTRADITION OF ESCAPED FOREIGN SLAVES

A. (:15) Prohibition against Extraditing an Escaped Slave

“You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you.”

Daniel Block: The prohibited action (lit., “*to shut someone in*”) means to apprehend and imprison the fugitive until the owner arrives, when he would be delivered into the master’s hands.

Duane Christensen: This command runs contrary to all known ancient Near Eastern law codes, which forbade the harboring of runaway slaves. . .

The law of asylum for escaped slaves was intended to remind the people of Israel that they had been slaves in Egypt. Those who have known firsthand the degradation of human slavery understand; we too are in a position to begin to understand why Israel’s policy against extradition flies in the face of other law codes produced by the powerful nations responsible for inflicting slavery on subject peoples.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The ambiguity is whether the slaves of this passage refers to all slaves, both Israelite and external, or only to foreign slaves who have fled to Israel, seeking asylum from their owners and their homeland. The strongest argument for reading the passage as speaking of foreign slaves is that it is hard to imagine such a protection for Israelite slaves. A regulation that allows any and all escaped slaves to be recognized as free would “spell the end of slavery in a short time,” and so “obviously... not every case of slavery is intended here” (Cairns: 206). The language of **verse 16**, which allows slaves to reside with you . . . in any one of your towns, may support understanding these escaped slaves as coming from elsewhere. . .

The highly theological language of this passage, against the background of Israel’s story, raises the possibility that this passage envisions a former slave becoming part of Israel, a “brother” living in their communities, where they please. If so, then this astonishing passage not only challenges all cultural norms of slavery but also puts into question any narrow reading of Deuteronomy that sees it as interested only in an ethnic Israel. Deuteronomy is a book that highlights Israel as a community of “brothers,” of kinfolk, but this provision raises the possibility that foreigners may become those kinfolk.

B. (:16a) Placement of the Escaped Slave

*“He shall live with you in your midst,
in the place which he shall choose in one of your towns where it pleases him;”*

Daniel Block: The magnanimity of **verse 16** is extraordinary. The Israelites must not only let fugitive slaves reside among them, but also allow them to choose a place in any town that seems good to them. Nor may the Israelites exploit and oppress them. The word *hônâ* (from *yānâ*) refers to any kind of mistreatment by which the owner takes advantage of the person’s alien status. In effect, foreign slaves who fled to Israel were free to live anywhere without fear. By calling the Israelites to provide safe haven for fugitives, Moses treats the entire land as **terra sancta**.

C. (:16b) Protection of the Escaped Slave

“you shall not mistreat him.”

II. (:17-18) FORBIDDING THE ABOMINABLE PRACTICE OF CULTIC PROSTITUTION

A. (:17) Prohibition of the Abominable Practice

“None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a cult prostitute.”

Daniel Block: The *qedēšô* and *qedēšî* seem to have been young women and men dedicated for service to the gods at the local shrines. Their service may have ranged from menial janitorial service at the shrine to singing and dancing in public events (cf. **Judg. 21:19–23**). As in the ostensibly religious celebrations of Mardi Gras, cultic events often occasioned orgiastic revelry. . .

If *qedēšâ* designates a female consecrated for service at a shrine but who also functioned as a prostitute serving male worshipers, then *qādēš* denotes a dedicated male involved in similar service. Apparently they combined official roles with unofficial participation in sexual orgies, either with female worshipers, or more likely gross homosexual acts with male worshipers.

Eugene Merrill: 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.

B. (:18) Prohibition of Payment of Vows with Such Dirty Money

“You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog into the house of the LORD your God for any votive offering, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God.”

Daniel Block: Verse 18 suggests the actions of *qedēšâ* and *qādēš* had **economic significance**. The phrase *“earnings of a female prostitute”* involves a word that always refers to the fee for a prostitute’s sexual services. Accordingly, *meḥir keleb* (lit., *“payment of a dog”*) refers pejoratively to fees paid for the sexual favors of a *qādēš*. Although other ancient Near Easterners valued dogs for protection and healing and as symbols of loyalty to a master, the Old Testament views them as dangerous and unclean. As scavengers that consume carrion and return to their own vomit (**Prov. 26:11**), dogs represented the **antithesis to holiness**. Moses’ equation of *qedēšîm* with

“dogs” pejoratively portrays them as engaging in the most disgusting and defiling practices, but also copulating indiscriminately with any available female dog.

Peter Craigie: The second part of the legislation prohibits the payment of a vow to God with “dirty money.” When a vow was to be paid to God, it was not as though God required the money; the payment betokened an attitude of gratitude for God’s gracious provision, but money that had been acquired by sinful means could not be a part of God’s gift, and therefore could not be used in paying a vow to him. A prostitute’s wage—the term translated prostitute (*zōnāh*) indicates a common prostitute, not specifically a cult-prostitute. The hire of a dog—the meaning of these words is doubtful, though they are commonly taken to refer to wages acquired from male prostitution. Because the activities that provided the funds were an abomination, the money could not be brought to the house of God.

Eugene Merrill: The final law concerning purity not only graphically brings the whole collection of such legislation to a conclusion but provides a transition to the next section, that having to do with theft (**23:21–24:7**). This is implicit in the reference to paying vows to the Lord with illegitimate earnings (v. **18**) and explicit in the connection between **keleb** (“dog”; “male prostitute”) in v. **18** and *n ak* (lit., “bite”; “charge interest”) in v. **19**. The placement of this stipulation where it is gives every evidence of careful literary and thematic design, contrary to those scholars who view this and other entries as consisting of miscellanea thrown together in a more or less hodgepodge manner.

Earl Kalland: Whatever is acquired by evil means as well as what is evil in itself is not to be offered to the Lord. Such things do not belong in the house of the Lord; nor are they acceptable to him.

Jack Deere: The payment of a vow allowed an Israelite to express his gratitude for God’s gracious provision in his life. Therefore to use money God did not provide in order to pay a vow was insincere and hypocritical. No wonder it was detestable to the Lord.

III. (:19-20) FORBIDDING THE CHARGING OF INTEREST TO COUNTRYMEN

A. (:19-20b) The Prohibition of Charging Interest

1. (:19) Applies to Fellow Countrymen

*“You shall not charge interest to your countrymen:
interest on money, food, or anything that may be loaned at interest.”*

Daniel Block: Prohibiting Israelites from charging interest on loans to their countrymen was driven by the sense of community and the desire to inhibit economic stratification, which often resulted in debt-slavery. By addressing would-be lenders rather than borrowers, Moses makes interest-free loans a matter of responsibility for those with means rather than a right of the poor. True righteousness (cf. **16:20**) is demonstrated

when the rich lend willingly to those in need, without compulsion or desire to profit from someone else's misfortune.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Deuteronomic regulations address the economic realities and practices of Israel, exhorting the people how to treat needy neighbors. Money was used in ancient Israel, but its economy was not based on money. Commercial activity tended to be the exchange of labor and products. In this simple subsistence economy, borrowing was an act of desperation in the face of great need. Those in desperation would borrow food or seed for the field. It is unclear exactly how pledges worked, whether they were part of the arrangement from the beginning or only used in cases of repayment default. But at some point the lender could request or demand a pledge, some piece of property belonging to the person who had borrowed. Given that those borrowing tended to be the very poor, with little property, this pledge commonly had little commercial value. The taking of the pledge thus was a way of pressuring the person to pay rather than a substitute way of paying off the loan (**Tigay**: 223).

Andrew Webb: What of us, what should we think of **usury**? Well any exorbitant interest charged on a loan, merely because one can get away with it is clearly theft, and the greater the interest above normal levels, the greater the theft.

What I would say, is we would do well to be as circumspect as possible in this regard, as a general rule we should never charge interest to our brothers and sisters in Christ, especially in their **times of need**. If we must charge interest, we must not allow the dire need of the person we are loaning to, to cause us to jack up the rate, and to basically agree in advance on a premium and rate of repayment that all reasonable men would regard as fair.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/9109137314.pdf>

2. (:20a) Does Not Apply to Foreigners

“You may charge interest to a foreigner,”

Daniel Block: Unlike the “alien” who lived among the Israelites, albeit with limited rights, the “foreigner” remained an outsider with no intention of settling down in Israel. The persons envisioned here might have been merchants who bought and sold goods for profit rather than the sheer need for survival. If their business ventures did not succeed, they could always go home.

Gerald Gerbrandt: In the case of the foreigner (cf. **14:21; 15:3**), a loan is more probably a commercial transaction with a business person or traveling merchant, an example of international trade rather than a desperation loan, and so interest may be charged.

3. (:20b) Applies to Fellow Countrymen

“but to your countryman you shall not charge interest,”

Peter Craigie: The man wealthy enough to make a loan would be wealthy only because of the gracious provision of God; if, then, he lent something on interest (money, food)

to a fellow in crisis, he would be abusing God's provision. He should lend freely, without interest, reflecting thereby his own thankfulness to God, and receiving the continued blessing of God.

B. (:20c) The Promise of Future Blessing

“so that the LORD your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land which you are about to enter to possess.”

Michael Grisanti: Since Yahweh is the source of blessing for his people, financial profit is not to be the ruling standard for the way they treat their Israelite kinsfolk.

IV. (:21-23) FORBIDDING THE DELAY OR BREAKING OF VOWS

A. (:21) Vows Must Be Kept on a Timely Basis

“When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: A vow is a voluntary promise or commitment made by a person or people to God, frequently to praise God in public for what God has done. It is distinguished from oaths in that oaths normally are commitments made between people supported by a formula of self-cursing. . . . Most frequently a vow is made in a time of crisis or need when an individual promises to give God something in exchange for deliverance from the crisis. The kinds of predicaments that can precipitate a vow are wide ranging, from sickness to physical danger, from barrenness to familial alienation. A natural setting for making vows is worship. A psalm of petition can include a vow to praise God if God delivers the person from the particular situation of need (e.g., **Pss 22:25; 56:12; 61:8**), with a psalm of thanksgiving declaring that the praise being offered is in fulfillment of a vow (e.g., **Pss 66:13–15; 116:14, 18**).

B. (:22) Vows (Before Being Made) Are Optional

“However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you.”

C. (:23) Vows (Once Made) Are Obligatory

“You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God, what you have promised.”

Michael Grisanti: The importance of doing precisely what one has promised is modeled and demanded by Israel's covenantal Lord. The word he has spoken to his covenantal nation is totally reliable and sure to find fulfillment. His character is at stake where his promises are concerned. He has not made promises or vows just to stimulate a certain kind of conduct (i.e., offer a bribe). He has made them because he is totally committed to doing (and is able to do) exactly what he has said. For his covenantal people to make vows and not keep them would be to provide their fellow Israelites and the pagan nations around a corrupt picture of the character of the God whom they serve and whose name they bear.

V. (:24-25) FORBIDDING UNACCEPTABLE AGGRESSIVE GLEANING PRACTICES

A. (:24) Regarding Harvesting Fruit on the Vineyard

“When you enter your neighbor's vineyard, then you may eat grapes until you are fully satisfied, but you shall not put any in your basket.”

Meredith Kline: The law of crops (vv. 24, 25) provide such liberty as to satisfy the principle of brotherly hospitality, but prohibited the changing of liberty to license in violation of the property rights of the theocratic citizen.

B. (:25) Regarding Harvesting Standing Grain

“When you enter your neighbor's standing grain, then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor's standing grain.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The instructions directed to the gleaner give permission to glean, stated twice (*You may eat your fill.... You may pluck the ears*), but they also impose a limitation (cf. **Mark 2:23**, par.). The gleaner is not to carry away grapes ... in a container, nor put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain. To take from someone's field for eating is acceptable as a form of mutual support, but to take grapes away from the field or to begin the harvest process presumably in order to take away from the field is unacceptable, and thus a form of theft.

Deuteronomy's emphasis that all of Israel is to participate in receiving the blessings of the land does not lead to a simplistic “Everything belongs to everyone.” The farmer has developed the vineyard and seeded the field. The farmer has a certain right to the produce even if elsewhere the farmer is challenged to remember always that the produce is a gift from God and not the result of human effort (**8:11–20**). This the gleaner recognizes by not taking produce away from the field. The tradition of gleaning in order to meet the need of hunger, however, is an appropriate way in which the community helps those in need. The poor are given some freedom (i.e., they can glean), but at the same time the text places a clear limitation on them, protecting the farmer.

Michael Grisanti: He may eat until his hunger is satisfied. In ancient days, travelers had no means to prevent perishable food from spoiling during their journey. This requirement seeks to create an atmosphere of compassion between fellow members of Yahweh's people (cf. **Mt 12:1–8; Mk 2:23–28; Lk 6:1–5**), for after all, Yahweh is the one responsible for the abundance of any given field. This permission does not, however, include taking some of a fellow Israelite's harvest for personal advantage. The property and its produce belong to the owner of the land, and those passing through his property must respect his ownership.

Peter Wallace: Now, in our day, we no longer live in an **agrarian society**. Moses' law could work well in an agrarian society, where the widows and orphans could glean the fields, but an urban, post-industrial society must care for the poor in a different way.

What are the **principles** involved?

- 1) there will always be poor people who need assistance
- 2) everyone who has substantial wealth (in those days it was land) must contribute a portion of their harvest/income.
- 3) those who receive this must work to get it (in those days, by gleaning).
(Although remember that Naomi did not glean—only Ruth)

In other words, the equity of the Mosaic law suggests that we honor the poor in the land, by giving a portion of our income for their benefit. We ought to encourage welfare reform that discourages laziness, but the principle of welfare is in fact thoroughly biblical, so long as they are required to work in some form to get it.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Given the cultural practices of the times, how surprising do you find the gracious treatment of runaway foreign slaves?
- 2) Are we ever tempted to present to the Lord any type of tainted offering?
- 3) What are the differences between charging interest on a loan to a fellow Israelite vs. a loan to a foreigner?
- 4) How does the right to own private property mesh with the responsibility to be generous to those in need?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Paul Archbald: Don't Delay to Pay

First Point: The 3rd Commandment Does Not Forbid Oaths/Vows

- 1) Oaths Versus Vows: An “oath” is a declaration, calling God as Witness to the truth of what someone is saying. A “vow” is calling God as Witness to a promise that someone will do something in the future. Both involve the 3rd commandment, since in both cases God’s Name – God Himself – is invoked as Witness.
- 2) Oaths and Vows Are Permissible in Both OT and NT: Oaths and vows were clearly permitted in the OT. See **Lev. 19:12, Num. 30:2** and **Dt. 23:21-23**. They were essential for members of the covenant, since God’s people had to respond to God’s covenant-oath by swearing to keep His covenant-law. The 3rd commandment warned against breaking these oaths and vows. Marriage was also a covenant – an “oath-bound promise. There were also Nazirite vows, pledges, and vows made when asking God for

help or expressing thanks to Him. See **1 Sam. 1:1**. The same is true in the NT, which is still a “covenant.” Baptism, profession of faith, ordination and marriage still involve vows. The NT has quite a few examples of the practice (**Mt. 26:63-64; Acts 18:18, 21:23-24; Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23**).

3) The Apparent Prohibition: **Mt. 5:33-37** and **Jam. 5:12** do not forbid oaths and vows. They forbid making them by calling something creaturely as witness. They argue that even our “yes” and “no” should be kept, let alone an oath or vow in God’s Name.

4) The Voluntary Nature: **Dt. 23:21-23** makes it clear that it is not sinful to refrain from vowing – oaths and vows are voluntary; you “may swear”. This is because all calling on God’s Name should be from the heart.

Second Point: The 3rd Commandment Does Imply Care with Oaths/Vows

1) Reverent Swearing: Oaths and vows are to be done carefully – since His Name is holy. That means they should be done in the fear and awe of the Lord. The opposite is to do so lightly, hastily or foolishly.

2) Performing What We Swear: We are commanded to be careful to perform what goes out from our lips. That includes simple promises as well as oaths and vows – even our “yes” and ‘no” should be adhered to. Even unnecessary delaying to perform is a sin.

3) Required by the Lord: The Lord “requires it of us” if we do not perform what we have sworn. This means He holds us accountable. The word has disciplinary undertones. However, our chief motive for keeping oaths and vows should be love of God rather than fear of punishment. If we love God, we will be characterized by keeping to what we have sworn, even if it hurts us to do so (**Ps. 15:4**).

4) Hope for Imperfect Promise-Keepers: Should we refrain from making oaths or vows, since we know we will never keep them perfectly? No, as with all God’s commandments, God’s imperfect people need to seek forgiveness in Christ, but also His help to keep striving to be obedient, while we continue to trust in His grace.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/3222092543962.pdf>

Charlie Garrett: vs. 16 -- For the escaped slave now being referred to, Moses next says...

16 *He may dwell with you in your midst,*

The words continue in the singular, demonstrating that this is the slave of an alien, not one who was enslaved in Israel. He is allowed to dwell within the midst of Israel. No restrictions are placed upon him in this regard, as is seen in the next words...

16 (con’t) *in the place which he chooses*

These words further express his freedom. He is given complete freedom as to where he will reside. He is not restricted from any tribe of Israel, nor is he mandated to reside in a

particular tribe of Israel. He is to be considered accepted in whatever tribe he settles in, which is...

16 (con't) *within one of your gates,*

Not only is he not restricted to, or from, any tribal inheritance, he is also not restricted from the security of living within a city in any given tribal inheritance. He is to be accepted into the gates of whatever city he chooses. One must remember that this is a matter of law. Moses has penned it, and therefore, the people must comply in the same manner as any other law. This cannot be denied without violating the very law and covenant that has established them as a people. To ensure the precept was fully fleshed out, and to avoid any ambiguity at all, he next says...

16 (con't) *where it seems best to him; ba'tov lo – “in the good to him.”*

The decision is at his pleasure alone, and no person was to interfere with it. In essence, he has all the rights of a member of the nation to determine his own place and circumstance. Anything else would be considered a hindering influence upon him, and Moses forbids that, saying. . .

16 (con't) *you shall not oppress him. lo tonenu – “no you shall suppress him.”*

The word is *yanah*. Most translations say “*oppress*.” That would mean, “*you shall not keep him in subservience*.” And that very well may be the meaning. He was a slave, and you shall not place him back into that state.

However, the previous clauses speak of his freedoms in choice:

- 1) He may dwell with you in your midst;
- 2) in the place he chooses;
- 3) within one of your gates;
- 4) where it seems best to him.

Because of this, I would suggest that this is referring to **suppression** rather than oppression. They are not to suppress him or stop him from making the choice that suits him best.

Regardless of this, one can see Israel as a type of life in Christ. Outside of Israel, the person is in bondage. A person that comes to Christ (as we saw in **1 Corinthians**) is the Lord's freedman.

However, and having that in mind, a person who comes to Israel from slavery is then made a slave to the law. Likewise, a person that comes to Christ, even if the Lord's freedman, becomes a slave to righteousness, as Paul says, “*And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness*” (**Romans 6:18**). As already said, one must choose who or what he will be a slave to.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/952174206536.pdf>

Peter Wallace: vv. 19-20 -- You may charge interest to a foreigner, but not to a fellow Israelite. You should not seek to make money at the expense of your brother. This has

led to all sorts of interesting debates in the history of the church. This is why Jews became the chief bankers of Europe. Since Christians could not charge interest of other Christians, money-lending was only possible across religious lines.

At the time of the Reformation, this became a heated debate. The early modern economy was beginning to move in mercantile directions. Investing was becoming a way of making money for a broader range of people. The Reformers were divided over the question of interest (or usury).

Some defined usury as any charging of interest but others insisted that usury was only exorbitant interest.

Calvin argued that there were three sorts of people:

- to the very poor you should give—and don't even expect to get the money back;
- to those in temporary need, loan them money, but without interest;
- to those who are wealthy, and are using the money as a business deal, you may charge interest (the standard rate was 6%—anything more was considered usury).

Many Reformed theologians and pastors were deeply concerned about this new economy. It seemed right to them that a man should make money through using his talents, --whether physical or intellectual—doing something productive. Those who made money on interest, however, were not adding anything to society.

Part of it was that they were convinced that the economic pie was only so big. If one person gains, another person loses. If you make shoes, then you gain money and the other person gains shoes. That's a fair trade. But if you charge interest, then you gain money and the other person loses money, gaining nothing in return.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/725172122483.pdf>

TEXT: Deuteronomy 24:1-4

TITLE: *PROTECTING WOMEN FROM THE ABUSE OF REMARRIAGE IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS*

BIG IDEA:
THE PROHIBITION OF REMARRIAGE IN SPECIFIC SITUATIONS PROTECTS THE DIGNITY OF THE FORMERLY REJECTED WIFE

INTRODUCTION:

Gerald Gerbrandt: The passage takes the practice of divorce for granted and is attempting to regulate a particular variation of it. Divorce was a reality, in Israel and elsewhere. How common it was is unclear, but enough passages in the Old Testament refer to it that we must conclude it was not uncommon. The Old Testament does not provide general procedures for divorce. . . . Our passage can be divided into two parts: **verses 1–3** describe the particular situation, and **verse 4** gives the regulation.

Duane Christensen: Perhaps, once again, we are dealing with a law intended primarily as a teaching device on the deterrence of divorce in the first place.

Michael Grisanti: The way a person views the **structure** of the passage can influence his or her interpretation. In OT legal material (as it occurs in ancient Near Eastern law codes), the legislation is commonly arranged in an “if . . . then” format (called “case law” or “casuistic law”). This kind of law often has three parts: **protasis** (description of condition[s]), **apodosis** (the actual legislation), and a **motive clause** (explaining the fundamental **rationale** for the law). Some early English translations located the protasis or conditional circumstance in the first half of **v.1**, with the apodosis or the potential result in **24:1b–4** (cf. KJV, ASV). In this case, the provision of a bill of divorce played an integral role in the legislation proper. Most modern English translations regard **24:1–3** as the protasis, with the legislation proper found in **24:4** (cf. ESV, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJV, NLT, NRSV). In this instance, the required conduct focuses on the husband’s non-permission to remarry his ex-wife after she has been married to another man (the scenario depicted in **vv.1–3**).

In other words, the divorce is not the focus of the law but the circumstance in which God gives his requirement through Moses. This law deals with a **specific case** and does not provide a general rule governing all possible instances of divorce and remarriage. These verses do not establish divorce either as a right or as a requirement; they do not encourage Israelite husbands to put away their wives because of “*uncleanness*” but merely recognize that contemporary practice. This passage focuses on one issue: A woman who was divorced because of “*uncleanness*” and married to a second man may not return to her first husband after divorce from or the death of her second husband. Moses is regulating a current practice in Israel—a practice Yahweh regards as “detestable” and one that all Israelites must avoid, lest they bring sin upon the land God

has graciously given to them as an inheritance. In other words, Moses is not in any sense saying that in the scenario addressed, divorce is required, legitimated, sanctioned, or even encouraged (**Murray**, Divorce, 14).

In fact, the legislation hinders the husband from divorcing his wife rashly, since a divorce will likely occasion her ritual defilement, which will, in turn, make it religiously illegal to take her back (cf. the preceding warning against making vows to God rashly; **23:21–23**).

J. Carl Laney: The problem facing Moses was that the absence of any divorce regulations actually encourage rampant divorce. Men were divorcing their wives for a “weekend fling” and then taking them back again when the dirty laundry had piled up and the house needed cleaning! It was in light this situation that Moses delivered God’s legislation recorded in **Deuteronomy 24:1–4**.

Jack Deere: The purpose of this law seems to be to prevent frivolous divorce, and to present divorce itself in a disparaging light. Jesus’ interpretation of this passage indicated that divorce (like polygamy) went against the divine ideal for marriage.

I. (:1-3) DESCRIPTION OF THE CONDITIONS PROMPTING THE LEGISLATION (PROTASIS)

A. (:1a) Divorce Situation Due to Discovering Some Indecency In the Wife

*“When a man takes a wife and marries her,
and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes
because he has found some indecency in her,”*

Michael Grisanti: Although several writers suggest that “*something indecent*” refers to **adultery**, the Pentateuch presents several reasons why that interpretation is unlikely. The most important of these reasons is that the Mosaic law prescribed death for both adulterous partners (**Lev 20:10; Dt 22:22**; cf. **J. Murray**, Divorce [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1961], 10–11, where he offers five other reasons for the Pentateuch’s ruling out adultery). If this expression does not refer to adultery, what does it signify?

David Whitcomb: As we can see in this case, the man is not pleased with his wife because of *some indecency*. What is that? Conservative Rabbis interpreted indecency as fornication or adultery. Liberal Rabbis applied the word to everything from the wife burning the husband’s meal to the wife caught talking to another man in public. The Hebrew word literally means “*the nakedness of a thing*.” If it only meant adultery, the wife in this case was supposed to be stoned and conflict became a mute issue. Either this law assumed stoning was not going to be enforced or **indecency means something else**.

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Daniel Block: Opinions on the meaning of this phrase range from “anything at all,” to adultery, to a physical defect. Literally, *’erwat dābār* means “*nakedness of a thing.*” The proximity of this statement to **Deut. 23:14[15]**, the only other place where this phrase occurs, invites the reader to link these two texts. In the earlier passage *’erwat dābār* refers to unburied human excrement, which defiles the Israelite military camp. Obviously defecation is not an immoral act. Since *’erwā* usually involves the genitals (**Ex. 20:26**; cf. **28:42**), and since this is the woman’s problem, the expression is best interpreted as some **menstrual irregularity** (cf. **Mark 5:25–34**). The result is a constant state of **impurity**, curtailing many normal marital activities (cf. **Lev. 12:2–8**) and rendering her incapable of bearing children. The husband may have learned of her condition after he married her and sought to consummate the marriage. But instead of responding with compassion, he divorced her.

B. (:1b) Divorce Procedure

“and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house,”

Utley: This was a **legal document** of separation. It may have involved giving back the dowry. This later required an involved legal procedure which hopefully gave time for the partners to reconcile, but here it seems to be written by the husband or his representative (i.e., a Levite).

C. (:2) Remarriage of the Divorced Woman to Another Man

“and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man’s wife,”

D. (:3) Dissolution of the Second Marriage

1. Via Divorce Proceedings Initiated by the Second Husband

“and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house,”

Daniel Block: The certificate was vital for the woman, especially if the document relinquished the husband’s rights to her and her dowry and authorized her to return to her family of origin or to marry another man. From the man’s perspective, the record of the returned dowry would prevent the woman’s family from making further claims against him.

2. Via Death of the Second Husband

“or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife,”

Daniel Block: As in most cultures, the death of a spouse frees a person to remarry. Since widows were economically vulnerable unless a woman was independently wealthy, it would have been in her best interest to remarry, especially if she did not have grown sons.

Gerald Gerbrandt: That the divorce itself is not the issue is evident from the phrase put in parentheses in the NRSV: *or the second man who married her dies*. The key element here is that she has been married a second time, now no longer is married, and is quite properly free.

II. (:4a) THE ACTUAL LEGISLATION (APODOSIS)

*“then her former husband who sent her away
is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled;”*

Daniel Block: As in **Deuteronomy 21:14**, the issue is the degradation of the woman. The man has already degraded her, first by refusing to be gracious to a needy spouse ritually defiled through no fault of her own, and second, by publicizing her personal issue through the divorce proceedings. The preposition “*after*” suggests the defilement derives not from remarriage to her former husband but from previous events. Even if he regrets having divorced her earlier, she must be protected from further degradation by the man who had forfeited his right to her.

Peter Craigie: Now comes the specific legislation: under all these circumstances, the first man may not remarry his former wife. After she has been defiled—the language (*defiled*) suggests **adultery** (see **Lev. 18:20**). The sense is that the woman’s remarriage after the first divorce is similar to adultery in that the woman cohabits with another man. However, if the woman were then to remarry her first husband, after divorcing the second, the analogy with adultery would become even more complete; the woman lives first with one man, then another, and finally returns to the first. Thus the intent of the legislation seems to be to apply certain **restrictions** on the already existing practice of divorce.

Mark Dunagan: Carefully observe that the woman is said to be presently defiled even if her second marriage had ended (the husband died). This seems to suggest that there was indeed something wrong with the initial divorce and subsequent remarriage.
<https://www.beavertonchurchofchrist.net/sermons/sermons/2005/06/12/deuteronomy-241-4>

III. (:4B) THE MOTIVE CLAUSE (RATIONALE FOR THE LEGISLATION)

*“for that is an abomination before the LORD,
and you shall not bring sin on the land
which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.”*

Eugene Merrill: Why the remarriage of the original partners was thus described while the divorcée's marriage to a second husband was not is not clear. Most likely it is because the original divorce was not for adultery (otherwise the death penalty would apply) whereas remarriage after an intervening marriage and divorce would be construed as adultery because of the woman's moving from one man to the next and

back again. She had thus become an adulteress, and for this reason it was she (and not the act) who was referred to as detestable (*tô bâ hîw*, v. 4).

Van Parunak: Now the reasoning behind the law of reconciliation is clear. A husband may take back his divorced wife if she has not remarried, for the divorce is only a man-made institution and does not change their union in God's eyes. However, once she marries someone else, she commits **adultery** against her first husband. Now he is responsible to prosecute her sin. If he accepts her back, he effectively pardons the sin. Yet he has no authority to pardon her, for it is God's law, not his, that demands satisfaction. By refusing to satisfy that law, he leaves the land polluted with adultery.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is it so important to understand that Moses is not commanding divorce in this passage?
- 2) Does this passage place God's stamp of approval on remarriage after divorce?
- 3) Why would the wife need protection under these conditions?
- 4) What would make this remarriage to the initial husband so detestable under these circumstances?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: Following longstanding rabbinic tradition and the question put to Jesus in **Matthew 19:7**, some argue that **Deuteronomy 24:1b** serves not just as a description of divorce procedures but as a ruling on the matter. But several factors raise doubts about this interpretation.

- (1) Based on ancient Near Eastern divorce laws, it should then have included financial stipulations to the divorce, particularly a statement of the husband's obligations to repay the dowry or the conditions under which he would have been exempt.
- (2) Later use of a prior text is not determinative for the contextual meaning of the earlier text. In fact, Jesus disputed the Pharisees' reading of the text. That Moses permitted divorce may simply mean that he left customary procedures in place; he was not making a (new) ruling on this matter.
- (3) Although the first husband receives more attention, our text presents the two men in

the woman's life as parallel cases (vv. **1b, 3**). The repetition of the last three lines in **verses 1b** and **3** suggests the preceding actions are equivalent, which means that if we interpret the second series conditionally, the first is neither a command nor permission.

(4) The structural parallels between **21:10–14** and this text offer clues on how to interpret this text. Both texts contemplate situations in which a woman is **vulnerable to abuse** within a marital relationship, and both seek to protect the dignity of a woman who has been rejected by her husband. On this analogy, our text is not intended as a law on divorce but as a **prohibition on remarriage**, the primary concern being to protect wives from abuse by men, specifically a first husband. Moses does so by reiterating existing procedures for releasing wives from the bonds of marriage and insisting that when a husband divorces his wife, he relinquishes his authority over her.

Dave Miller: Did Moses Command Divorce?

If this Old Testament passage [**Deut. 24**] provides a suitable answer to the Pharisees' question [in **Matt. 19**], Jesus undoubtedly would have alluded to it. Instead, His response to their quibble clearly demonstrates that this passage does **not** provide the proper answer to their question concerning the propriety of divorce. He discounted the passage by offering a rebuttal to its applicability to the question at hand.

First, the Mosaic legislation, which included an acknowledgment that divorce was occurring in Israelite society, was a reflection of the **hard hearts** that existed at the time. No doubt, Egypt's influence on the first two generations of Israelites included a relaxed view of divorce, establishing a practice that was underway even before God gave His covenant at Sinai. This acknowledgment in no way provided divine sanction for or approval of divorce. The Law neither commanded divorce nor established divorce as a right. After all, who would argue that God would overlook, sanction, or save those who possess **hard hearts**? Will anyone be in heaven that possesses a hard heart? To ask is to answer. Hence, Jesus' pronouncement that the Mosaic provision pertained to "hard hearts" underscores the fact that it was not intended as a divine sanction of divorce—let alone a **command** (*eneteilato*) to do so.

But if Moses did not "command" divorce, why did Jesus assert that Moses "*allowed*" it? What did He mean by His use of the term "*allowed*" (ESV/RSV), "*suffered*" (KJV/ASV), or "*permitted*" (NKJV/NASB)? The underlying word provided by Matthew is *epetrepsen*. This Greek word means "to allow someone to do something, *allow, permit*,"¹ "to give over, to leave to the entire trust or management of any one; hence, to permit, allow, suffer." The English words "allow" and "permit" do not necessarily imply permission or approval. For example, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines "allow" as "1a: permit; 1b: **to fail to restrain or prevent**." For the latter definition, this example of usage is given: "allow the dog to roam." You may not want your dog to roam the neighborhood, yet do nothing to prevent it. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines "allow" as "to give permission for someone to do something, or **to not prevent something from happening**." And the *American Heritage Dictionary* gives as the first meaning of "allow": "**To let do or happen**; permit." The word does not include the idea of sanction, authorization, or approval—let alone

forgiveness. God **allowed** divorce in the sense that He **tolerated** it—like He does the wicked behavior of the world’s population throughout history. He “*puts up with it.*” He allows it to go on—without implying endorsement. As Greek expositor **Alexander Bruce** clarified—“**permitted, not enjoined.**” . . .

Second, observe that Jesus next redirected His questioners’ attention back to the two verses given in His initial response to their question—verses that pertain to the very “beginning” of the human race when God articulated His intention regarding marriage. His remark (“*from the beginning it was not so*”—**vs. 8**) presses the fact that God’s will for marriage is ultimately seen at the Creation when God articulated the guiding principle that answers the Pharisees’ question. **Genesis 1:27** and **Genesis 2:24** are intended to be normative injunctions enjoined upon all people for all time. Greek scholar **Marvin Vincent** presses this very point when he observes that the use of the perfect tense in **Matthew 19:8** indicates a past action that continues to be active: “Notwithstanding Moses’ permission, the case *has not been* so from the beginning until now. The original ordinance has never been abrogated nor superseded, but continues in force.” . . .

Far from providing authority for divorce, **Deuteronomy 24** was intended to be a **limitation** on divorce—an attempt to minimize and lessen its frequency. In the process, it served as a measure designed to address the mistreatment of women: “It prevented the husband from later claiming rights over this ex-wife.” . . .

John Schultz: Reinstallation of the first marriage would be detestable in the sight of the Lord and would bring sin upon the land. Yet, God commanded the prophet Hosea to commit the very act that is forbidden by this law. We read in Hosea’s prophecy: “*When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, ‘Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD.’*” And: “*The LORD said to me, ‘Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.’*” It seems that this law was put in the book in order to establish how illegal Israel’s broken relationship with God actually was. In Hosea’s prophecy, marriage is clearly an image of the spiritual relationship between God and the people of Israel. All marriages express this spiritual relationship. Paul writes in his Epistle to the Ephesians: “*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church.*” In giving this law, the Holy Spirit pointed to the spiritual relationship of which marriage is a physical and emotional expression. This is the reason the author of the Hebrew Epistle writes: “*It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.*” People who tear up the picture defile the original. Burning God in effigy is an expression of hatred toward God.

Phil Schlamp: In **Church history**, the majority position until the 1500's was 'no divorce at all'! There were only very rare exceptions that I can find. Then, along came **Desiderius Erasmus** (1466-1536). He was, as all history students know, a humanist. The Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary of the Church starts its article on Erasmus like this, "Dutch humanistic scholar of Greek." He popularized the view that today is so prevalent in Evangelical circles. I believe it was his teaching that affected our early Mennonites, who also allowed for divorce and remarriage, as does our own Catechism. It must be recognized that the true Church, for the most of its existence, has stood almost unanimously against any kind of divorce. **Marriage was for life**, not ideally, but really.

The most important passage on divorce and remarriage is **Genesis 2:21-25**. Here you will find God's perfect will for marriage. A man will leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, for life! That is how marriage should be, not ideally, but really!

Now when **Genesis 2:21-25** is obeyed, there is no need for teaching on divorce and remarriage, because it will never happen. There is no need to teach on polygamy, because it will never happen. God made one man and one woman, and they are to leave and cleave.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/418091738492.pdf>

[His view involves the unfaithfulness during betrothal period]

Divorce was allowed in one case, and one only. If a young woman had been unfaithful during betrothal, and it had never been discovered until during her betrothal or right after marriage. In such a case the husband had three choices:

1. He could choose to accept her.
2. He could choose to divorce her.
3. He could press charges, and if the charges were proven true, she was to be stoned. If the charges were not true, he could never divorce her.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/1014162219507.pdf>

TEXT: Deuteronomy 24:5-22

TITLE: DEMONSTRATE RIGHTEOUSNESS TO THE POOR AND VULNERABLE

BIG IDEA:

YOUR HISTORY OF BEING REDEEMED FROM SLAVERY IN EGYPT SHOULD MOTIVATE YOU TO SHOW COMPASSION, DIGNITY AND RIGHTEOUSNESS TO THE POOR AND VULNERABLE

INTRODUCTION:

Albert Barnes: In this and the next chapter certain particular rights and duties, domestic, social, and civil, are treated. The cases brought forward have often no definite connection, and seem selected in order to illustrate the application of the great principles of the Law in certain important events and circumstances.

Daniel Block: The instructions regarding marriage and family issues in **verses 1–5** are followed by a series (14 = 2 x 7) of short paragraphs dealing with a range of issues and only loosely linked thematically. The overarching concern is to develop sensitivity to the plight of the vulnerable in society and instill in persons with means a sense of responsibility for their well-being. This collage of instructions continues the trajectory of compassion found in earlier texts (esp. **15:1–11** and **23:19–20[20–21]**), an observation strengthened by reminders of Israel’s experience as slaves in Egypt in **24:18** and **22**, which echo similar statements in **15:15**.

L. M. Grant: God's laws were not merely arbitrary exactions: rather they were for the greatest good of His people Israel, whether they realized it or not.

C. H. Mackintosh: [**Chaps. 22-25**] The portion of our book on which we now enter, though not calling for elaborate exposition, yet teaches us two very important practical lessons. In the first place, many of the institutions and ordinances here set forth prove and illustrate, in a most striking way, the terrible depravity of the human heart. They show us, with unmistakable distinctness, what man is capable of doing, if left to himself. . .

But, we have said, there is another valuable lesson furnished by this section of our book which now lies open before us. It teaches us, in a manner peculiar to itself, the marvelous way in which God provided for everything connected with His people. Nothing escaped His gracious notice; nothing was too trivial for His tender care. No mother could be more careful of the habits and manners of her little child, than the Almighty Creator and moral Governor of the universe was of the most minute details connected with the daily history of His people. By day and by night, waking and sleeping at home and abroad, He looked after them. Their clothing, their food, their manners and ways toward one another, how they were to build their houses, how they were to plough and sow their ground, how they were to carry themselves in the deepest

privacy of their personal life - all was attended to and provided for in a manner that fills us with wonder, love and praise. We may here see, in a most striking way, that there is nothing too small for our God to take notice of when His people are concerned. He takes a loving, tender, fatherly interest in their most minute concerns. We are amazed to find the Most High God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, the Sustainer of the vast universe, condescending to legislate about the matter of a bird's nest; and yet why should we be amazed when we know that it is just the same to Him to provide for a sparrow as to feed a thousand millions of people daily?

Peter Pett: [Chaps. 22-25] We have all heard sermons where the experienced preacher suddenly begins to roam far and wide, jumping swiftly from one subject to another in rapid succession, picking out information here and there, in order to present an overall picture. Sometimes there may seem to be no logic to it, but there usually is. And that is partly what Moses was doing here. The regulations that follow may not seem to come in any discernible overall pattern, although Moses probably had one in his mind. But items are grouped together, or joined by key words and thoughts. Moses had a wide collection of laws from which he here extracted examples covering a wide range of circumstances so as to turn their thoughts back to Yahweh's written Instruction. It was not intended to be comprehensive or detailed, but to convey an impression. (In the same way a similar lack of connections was found in many law codes).

I. (:5) DEMONSTRATE RIGHTEOUSNESS TO YOUR NEW WIFE = THE WEAKER VESSEL

A. Free From Community Responsibilities (Like Warfare)

“When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army, nor be charged with any duty;”

Jack Deere: If he were killed in combat he would probably have no posterity to preserve his name in Israel (on the significance of this see **25:5-10**).

Thomas Constable: The reason for this provision was so the man could establish a strong relationship with his wife and perhaps begin producing descendants. Both strong homes and descendants were essential to God's purposes through Israel. Going into war and dying amounted to **stealing** from his new bride or fiancée.

B. Free to Bring Joy to His Wife as He Establishes His New Household

“he shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken.”

Daniel Block: The awkward clause “*have any other duty laid on him*” refers to duties that might be imposed on him for the good of the community. He must invest his energies in establishing solid economic and social foundations for his household. Indeed, the exemptions are to apply for one full year.

The verse ends with a remarkable rationale: husbands of new brides are exempt from all communal obligations so they may devote themselves to the happiness of their wives. With keen pastoral insight Moses has painted a picture of marriage that contrasts sharply with that portrayed in **verses 1–4**. Whereas the two husbands had caused their wife extreme stress, a husband is to pursue righteousness by bringing **joy** to his wife.

Duane Christensen: The man is to “*remain at home one year*,” presumably to conceive a child. According to **Tigay** -- Hebrew “*bring happiness*,” could also be translated “*gratify*” in the sense of giving the wife conjugal pleasure ([1996] 223). . . As shown in the previous section, 24:5 functions as a bridge, serving as the conclusion to **23:2—24:5** and the introduction to what follows in **24:5—25:19**.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The logic of the exemption may relate to the ancient concern that an action once started should be allowed to be completed: the time frame of a year would allow the marriage to be made complete through the joy of a child (cf. **Jer 29:6**). But the focus of the text is on the joy and happiness that the couple should have during this time, whether the correct translation is that of the NRSV, *to be happy with the wife* (cf. RSV), or of the NIV, *bring happiness to the wife* (cf. KJV, NABRE, NJB). Certainly included in this happiness is the joy of sexual activity (**Nelson** 2002: 289, cf. **Prov 5:19**).

John Schultz: A country is not made safe by the strength of its army but by the solidity of its families. In the same way is a church not made strong by the ministry of its pastors but by the marital love and fidelity of its members. The breaking apart of families is the undoing of a nation, and particularly of the church of Jesus Christ.

II. (:6-7) DEMONSTRATE RIGHTEOUSNESS IN SUPPORT OF THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

A. (:6) Don’t Deprive Someone of Their Ability to Subsist

“No one shall take a handmill or an upper millstone in pledge, for he would be taking a life in pledge.”

Daniel Block: The handmill, which consists of an upper millstone and a lower stone slab on the ground, provides an apt illustration of the principle. To demand a millstone as a pledge meant depriving a household of the basic instrument for making essential food (bread), which was tantamount to claiming the debtor’s life as a pledge.

Duane Christensen: A handmill or an upper millstone”, a necessary item in food preparation, was made of basalt or other hard stone able to withstand constant rubbing. Millstone sets were used to make flour for bread and thus were part of the necessary “kitchen utensils” in every home. To dispossess a family of its grain mill would amount to taking away its means of sustenance. It would appear that creditors took only the upper stone, which usually weighed about four or five pounds (Tigay [1996] 223; cf. idem, FS J. Milgrom, 374–76). . .

No matter what the circumstances may be, we do not have the moral right to take from another person their means of livelihood, however much they may owe us for loans made in times past.

Michael Grisanti: A millstone consisted of two pieces of rock, the top one resting on the lower one, and was used to grind grain to flour for bread. The bottom stone (“nether stone”) could weigh ten to twenty pounds, and the upper stone (“rider stone”) would weigh much less (about five pounds; **van der Toorn**, ABD, 4:831; cf. **Tigay**, “Some Archaeological Notes,” 374–76). Though taking both stones would be difficult, taking the upper stone would be relatively easy. But by taking just the upper stone, a person could render a millstone worthless and thus “take the life” (i.e., the livelihood) of the debtor.

B. (:7) Execute a Violent Kidnapper Who Has Stolen a Life

“If a man is caught kidnapping any of his countrymen of the sons of Israel, and he deals with him violently, or sells him, then that thief shall die; so you shall purge the evil from among you.”

Duane Christensen: no one has the right to “steal a person [life]” by treating a fellow human being as **merchandise**. Though the text here refers directly to the circumstance of kidnapping, the principle applies to the matter of selling someone into slavery as well. In either case the culprit was condemned to death in ancient Israel. We do well to remember that there are many ways to “enslave” a fellow human being. Those who traffic in addicting drugs, including tobacco and alcoholic beverages, or encourage other addictions such as gambling, pornography, and illicit sex, are often guilty of stealing the life of a fellow human being. In biblical law there is no comparison between those who would steal livestock, or property of any sort, and those who would “steal” a human life. The punishment for the latter was death.

Eugene Merrill: To steal a fellow member of the covenant community was, in effect, to rob God of his most precious possession, a human life. Respect for possessions of another thus reaches its climax in respect for another's life and independence before God.

Peter Craigie: Stealing the life—the crime is social murder, for though the victim does not literally die, by being sold into slavery he is effectively cut off from the covenant family of God. Hence the penalty for the crime is severe—death! To **cut a man off** from the covenant community was to cut him off from sharing in the blessing of God for his people in the Promised Land.

III. (:8-9) DEMONSTRATE RIGHTEOUSNESS IN DEALING WITH INFECTIOUS SKIN DISEASES

A. (:8) Obey the Levitical Regulations

“Be careful against an infection of leprosy, that you diligently observe and do according to all that the Levitical priests shall teach you;

as I have commanded them, so you shall be careful to do.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: As generally recognized, the term translated leprous skin in this passage does not refer narrowly to the disease now called “leprosy,” or Hansen’s disease, but to a larger category of skin problems, especially those with a communicable nature. This particular word of warning, really not a law in any sense, is striking since it assumes instructions given elsewhere, which it then encourages the people to follow.

Eugene Merrill: The instruction here then serves a double purpose:

(1) to prescribe treatment of those who contracted leprosy by placing them under the care of the Levites (cf. **Lev 13:1-14**) and

(2) to warn against usurpation of divinely authorized leadership, particularly by bearing false witness. Moses was unmistakably in view here as the theocratic administrator, but he represented any leader of the community, including the Levitical priests to whom the leper submitted himself for treatment. To speak evil against such leadership was to challenge the sovereignty of God himself and thus to invite his swift and sure retribution.

B. (:9) Remember the Judgment on Miriam

“Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam on the way as you came out of Egypt.”

Duane Christensen: There is a significant lesson here for anyone who would presume to challenge the role of a leader God has raised up within a given community. Such action is sinful and brings pollution in its wake that must be dealt with. No one in leadership, however high the rank or position, is immune from the danger of committing Miriam’s sin of hubris. When such a matter occurs, the law is clear: God himself will bring punishment in the form of “leprosy”—a symbolic way of saying that a contaminating disease will become evident on that person, and that disease must be dealt with according to God’s own instructions. The afflicted person is to be excluded from the “camp” for a season, until such time as the proper rites of purification have removed the pollution, and the guilty party submits once again to proper authority under God.

IV. (:10-13) DEMONSTRATE RIGHTEOUSNESS TO POOR DEBTORS

A. (:10-11) Don’t Intimidate Debtors by Aggressive Behavior but Demonstrate Patience

“When you make your neighbor a loan of any sort, you shall not enter his house to take his pledge. 11 You shall remain outside, and the man to whom you make the loan shall bring the pledge out to you.”

Daniel Block: here we find additional instructions on how creditors may lend to the poor. Elaborating on **Exodus 22:25–27[24–26]**, Moses sets the context and presents the case as a general principle. Whereas in the earlier text the loan involved silver and

prohibited Israelites from capitalizing on the misfortunes of others, here Moses casts the net more broadly and seeks to limit the psychological damage caused by economic stress. He prohibits creditors from intimidating debtors by entering their houses to demand the pledge. Instead, lenders are to stand outside and wait for borrowers to bring them the pledge. As elsewhere, the goal is a community built on ethical values of trust and compassion.

Duane Christensen: The reason the creditor is not permitted to enter the debtor's home to distraint property is usually interpreted to mean that "the debtor and his family would be humiliated by another man acting as master in the debtor's domain, and the confrontation could lead to a fight" (Tigay [1996] 225).

Gerald Gerbrandt: This time the question is how far a lender can go to get a pledge from the debtor. The text allows the lender to request the pledge but prevents the lender from entering the home of the debtor to claim the pledge. For the lender to enter the home would be humiliating for the debtor and could suggest that the lender is now in charge of the home. The honor and dignity of the debtor, who remains a neighbor, is to be respected. This process also allows the debtor to determine what the pledge is rather than having the lender barge in and choose it.

Michael Grisanti: First, a lender is to honor the privacy of the borrower. His property is still his property, and he is worthy of respect.

MacArthur: Lending to the poor was permitted, but without:

- 1) interest (**23:19, 20**);
- 2) coercion to repay; and
- 3) extension of the loan beyond the sabbatical year (**15:1, 2**).

IVP Bible Background Commentary: Regulations concerning a pledge.

It was a common business practice in the ancient Near East for a person to "make a pledge" (i.e., offer as **collateral**) a portion of his property as a guarantee of paying off a debt or other financial obligation. For instance, the Code of Hammurabi and Hittite laws stipulate the pledging of land or planted fields. Hammurabi and Middle Assyrian laws both deal with the legal rights of persons who have been taken in pledge for a debt. What is distinctive about the Deuteronomic law, as compared to the older version in the covenant code (**Ex 22:26–27**), is its emphasis on protecting both the humanitarian rights and the personal honor of the debtor. Thus the creditor may not enter the debtor's house to take an object in pledge. Instead, the debtor's dignity is preserved by maintaining the sanctity of his personal dwelling and by giving him the opportunity to choose what will be offered. In this way the poor are treated on a par with all other Israelites.

B. (:12-13) Don't Exploit Debtors but Show Compassion

"And if he is a poor man, you shall not sleep with his pledge. 13 When the sun goes down you shall surely return the pledge to him, that he may sleep in his

cloak and bless you; and it will be righteousness for you before the LORD your God.”

Daniel Block: Moses does not say whether the pledge was to be returned for good or if the lender might return every morning to hold the object during the day until the loan is repaid.

V. (:14-15) DEMONSTRATE RIGHTEOUSNESS TO HIRED SERVANTS

A. (:14) Don't Oppress Them

“You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns.”

B. (:15) Don't Delay Paying Their Wages

“You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he may not cry against you to the LORD and it become sin in you.”

Daniel Block: Having challenged his hearers in principle not to take advantage of day laborers, in **verse 15** Moses explains what he means: day laborers must be paid at the end of the day in which they perform their services. He concludes with four reasons why they should do so:

- (1) The hired hand is destitute, having offered his services because he has no independent access to wealth.
- (2) The man has worked all day in anticipation of payment at the end of the day; he must not be disappointed.
- (3) Heartless failure to pay will cause the hired man to cry to Yahweh against his employer (cf. **10:18; Ex. 22:27[26]**).
- (4) Failure to pay will render the employer guilty of a crime. The declaration that *“it will be [counted] against him as sin”* (pers. trans.) is the opposite of the verdict received by creditors who demonstrate righteousness by being gracious to debtors (v. **13**; cf. **15:9; 23:20[21]**).

Gerald Gerbrandt: The passage does not assume a civil legal system that will enforce this kind of regulation, but rather portrays a world in which God hears the cry of the weak and oppressed and responds to that cry. The cry of Israel in Egypt is the archetypical cry to God (**Exod 2:23–25**). God has responded to then, and God will respond again. The employer who disregards this becomes like the Egyptian oppressor.

Eugene Merrill: here the focus is on **human dignity**, even of the poorest of the people. To view the poor as inferior or as easy victims of oppressive manipulation is to slander them, for they, like anyone else, are created as the image of God.

VI. (:16) DEMONSTRATE RIGHTEOUSNESS REGARDING INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SIN

*“Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons,
nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers;
everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.”*

Daniel Block: This fragment is linked to the preceding by the word “sin” (*het'*).

Patrick Miller: The legal codes and the prescribed legal system found in them never allow for vicarious punishment or corporate punishment unless in fact the whole community is guilty, as in the case of Sodom. The Deuteronomic insistence on this principle is underlined in the Deuteronomistic History in **II Kings 14:6**, where **Deuteronomy 24:16** is quoted directly to explain why the children of royal assassins are not punished. Both the legal corpora and the prophets insist that each person must be held responsible for his or her actions while insisting with equal vigor that no other persons—within the family or outside it—be held accountable or punished for someone else’s sin (cf. **Ezek. 18; Jer. 31:29–30**). Both parts of that principle are fundamental to the nature of biblical law and its understanding of the relation of individual to community and the nature of moral responsibility.

David Guzik: It is wrong for a parent to automatically blame themselves for their wayward children; though they may have a part in the problem, it isn’t always the case. There are instances when God commands that a whole family be punished for sin, such as with the family of Achan in **Joshua 7:16-26**. When God deals with a whole family, it shows that there must have been some conspiracy between family members, for each is responsible for his own sin.

VII. (:17-22) DEMONSTRATE RIGHTEOUSNESS TO THE VULNERABLE IN SOCIETY (ALIENS, ORPHANS, WIDOWS)

A. (:17) General Principle

*“You shall not pervert the justice due an alien or an orphan,
nor take a widow’s garment in pledge.”*

B. (:18) Rationale

*“But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt,
and that the LORD your God redeemed you from there;
therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.”*

Daniel Block: Not only should the memory of their own experience of divine grace stimulate compassion toward all who are disadvantaged, including foreigners, but in so doing they will emulate the character and actions of their God (**10:18–19**).

C. (:19-21) Specific Examples Related to Gleaning Practices – Leave Something for the Poor to Harvest

1. (:19) Don’t Harvest Every Sheaf

“When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.”

2. (:20) Don't Empty Your Olive Tree Completely

“When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow.”

3. (:21) Don't Gather All the Grapes from Your Vineyard

“When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow.”

Daniel Block: Fundamental to Israel's constitution was the notion that Yahweh reserved the right to determine how the land would be used (cf. **Lev. 25**), part of which included the right of all in the covenant community to a share in its produce. These instructions build on earlier legislation (**Lev. 19:9–10; 23:22**), where Yahweh had called on landowners to leave the corners of their fields uncut and leave for the poor and the alien whatever they dropped while harvesting the crop. These instructions are even more pastoral, seeking to instill in the covenant community a spirit of generosity that goes far beyond the original legislation. . .

Since the grain at the edges of fields was often inferior in quality and mixed with weeds, and since grapes and olives on the ground tended to ripen prematurely or have some defect and quickly spoil, the significance of these provisions was limited. So Moses enjoins landowners and harvesters to leave for the poor whole sheaves of grain already cut and tied but which they had neglected to take home, those grapes still on the vines that harvesters had overlooked, and olives that do not fall to the ground when the branches are beaten to shake them loose. The point is, rather than begrudging fallen and inferior fruit to the poor, the oversights of the harvest and late maturing crops and grapes and olives are to be left intentionally for the benefit of aliens, the fatherless, and widows.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The farmer also is given instructions on gleaning. Not only do the instructions assume that gleaning is appropriate; they also encourage the farmer not to be too diligent in the harvesting process lest no produce is left behind for those gleaning. The intent is similar to the directions of Leviticus, where the farmer is asked to refrain from harvesting at the very edges or stripping the vineyard bare (**19:9–10; 23:22**). Care for the disadvantaged and needy again is translated into concrete action. The particular action may not relate easily to contemporary times, but the larger concern applies.

Eugene Merrill: The alien, orphan, and widow then were to be allowed to gather up what remained as a means of sustaining themselves by their own labors. The largess

was thus not an outright gift but a benefit to be gained by the initiative and industry of the needy person as well as the benefactor. This permitted the recipient to salvage his own honor while at the same time delivering the landowner from any sense of arrogant control over the lives of those dependent on him. In a loose manner, at least, the ninth commandment was thereby adhered to because the reputation of the disadvantaged was left intact by those who otherwise might have undermined it by any overly patronizing manner.

D. (:22) Rationale Repeated

“And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are there any special priorities we should insist upon in the first year of marriage?
- 2) How do we uphold respect and honor for individuals while at the same time supporting them in practical ways when they are poor and destitute?
- 3) What considerations should trump the capitalistic profit motivation when engaging in financial contracts with the poor and disadvantaged?
- 4) How does our redemption by God’s grace apart from any merit of our own impact our compassion and mercy shown towards others – especially towards the vulnerable and marginalized in society?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Bruce Hurt: It is good to periodically recall our own redemption from slavery against all odds! It would make us more compassionate in our dealing with others. One way we can remember today is by frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper. . .

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing - NLT = *"Remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt. That is why I am giving you this command."*

This is the verse John Newton printed out in large letters and hung it over his mantle piece as a constant reminder of God's amazing grace!

Andrew Webb: The world is constantly trying to associate themselves with the rich, famous, and powerful. We are constantly name dropping. Even in the Reformed

Community – although there the names we drop are **RC Sproul** and **John Piper**. These are the people we want to know and rub elbows with. But amazingly the Lord doesn't do that, as Peter put it, *he is no respecter of persons*. Instead he does exactly the opposite he associates himself with the weak, the defenseless, the poor, the landless, the orphans and widows and in particular the weakest amongst the brethren.

Psalm 146:9 *The LORD watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; But the way of the wicked He turns upside down.*

Psalm 68: 5 *A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in His holy habitation.*

It is no coincidence that when God the Son and became man and dwelt amongst us, he was born into poor and lowly circumstances, and did not even have his own home. Christ's association with the poorest of God's people is so strong that in the final judgment he will count good deeds done by the righteous to poor and needy believers as good deeds done to Himself:

Matt. 25:34 *"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 'I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38 'When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'*

So here once again it should not surprise us that the Lord established laws in the civil law of Israel like those in these verses designed to defend the least of these my brethren:

1) Laws that protected what we could **day laborers**, laborers who worked as hired labor in the fields and flocks of the rich: These Laborers usually had no land of their own and were likely to be incredibly poor. These laws applied regardless of whether they are Israelites or aliens, that is migrant laborers. . .

2) Parents were not to suffer capital punishment for the crimes of their children, and vice versa, **each man is responsible for his own crime**. . .

3) **The fatherless and the widow** who were the most needy and defenseless had to receive particular protection. In a court of law they would be particularly needy. Protected from creditors, the widow's garment could not even be taken in pledge like an Israelite mans: The reason in particular that they were to be kind to them was that they themselves had once been slaves and oppressed. Although they might be rich now, they

had all once been equally poor and miserable, and yet the Lord had heard their cry and delivered them from their misery. It is particularly grotesque when someone who has received mercy will not extend it to others.

4) **Gleaning:** Though they had no land of their own, yet it was the Lord's desire that they might still benefit from what was left in the land. Note also, the wisdom of this provision. The land owners were not required to hand over a portion of their goods to the poor on a yearly basis. If they had been forced to do this, where would be the righteousness in it, where the charity? Instead of doing it gratefully as an act of worship and gratitude to God for his deliverance and provision, they would do it grumblingly and constantly seek to give less than was required.

Also note that the poor were not simply to be handed the produce as a dole. They had to go into the fields and work themselves gleaning what was left. Thus their dignity was safeguarded and the principle: "*If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.*" (2 Th. 3:10) Several false gospels, most notably Marxism, have overturned both these principles and in doing so do great harm to both charity amongst the wealthy and industry amongst the poor.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/1120091526135.pdf>

TEXT: Deuteronomy 25:1-19

TITLE: ENFORCING GOD'S FAIR STANDARD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

BIG IDEA:

MISCELLANEOUS LAWS REQUIRE ISRAEL TO ENFORCE GOD'S FAIR STANDARD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WHILE INFLECTING SHAME ON THOSE WHO OFFEND

INTRODUCTION:

Duane Christensen: The laws in **Deut 25** are in two parts of unequal length: a group of five laws on humanitarian concerns and social ethics (**vv 1–16**) and the concluding injunction to remember to hate the Amalekites (**vv 17–19**) for their aggression against the people of Israel in the wilderness, as recorded in **Exod 17:8–15**. Though the first two of these laws, putting limits on flogging (**vv 1–3**) and not muzzling an ox when it threshes grain (**v 4**), make up a single literary unit from a prosodic point of view, they are also separate laws within a five-part concentric structure:

- A Limits on flogging (Joseph sold into slavery) **25:1–3**
- B Not muzzling an ox (Joseph in Egypt) **25:4**
- X Levirate marriage (Judah and Tamar) 25:5–10**
- B' Immodest intervention in a fight (Joseph in Egypt) **25:11–12**
- A' Honest weights and measures (Israel in the wilderness) **25:13–16**

The figurative nuance of the **forgotten sheaf** in the previous law, where Joseph himself becomes the sheaf of grain forgotten for awhile and then remembered, is carried over into the law about the ox as well. An Israelite hearer would have puzzled over the requirement as it applies to a treading ox, for if a treading ox is not muzzled or driven by a whip, it will merely consume the seed it is supposed to be producing in the process of treading. “The oddness of a literal reading of the requirement is the clue that the meaning is to be displaced. In switching from one reading to the other, it is crucial to observe that a third party will have to be involved in getting the unmuzzled ox to produce seed. . . . A man, left to himself like the ox with the grain, dies without producing offspring. As with the unmuzzled ox, a **third party** has to be involved. A relative, like the person responsible for attending to the ox, is under an obligation to ensure that seed [progeny] is forthcoming” (**Carmichael**, LNB, 294).

David Whitcomb: The right conclusion after reading these laws is that **God is just**. Regardless of the opinion of mere humans, God will always do what conforms to His righteousness (which is essentially the same idea). Therefore, we can be confident that His law is just and results in the application of justice when we obey Him. While many of these unique laws do not apply to us or our circumstances, we can be sure that it is still good and right to adhere to His standard of justice.

Peter Pett: Doing what is right and avoiding shame –

This chapter continues with the idea of **fairness**, and the thought of consideration and doing right and runs throughout, commencing with the requirement for true justice and a fair hearing with a limitation on beatings, and dealing with not muzzling the ox, surrogate motherhood, decency and right behaviour when quarrelling, and correct weights and measures. There is an **emphasis on shaming** for those who fail (*'vile'* - **Deuteronomy 25:3**; *'spit in his face'* - **Deuteronomy 25:9**; *'cut off her hand'* - **Deuteronomy 25:12**; *'abomination'* **Deuteronomy 25:16**). Thus a beating shames the recipient, and must not therefore be too heavy (**Deuteronomy 25:3**). The woman refused her Levirate rights shames her brother-in-law by spitting in his face (**Deuteronomy 25:9-10**). The violent and unscrupulous woman is to openly bear her shame before all, for they would be able to tell from the mutilation what she had done (**Deuteronomy 25:12**). False weights and measures are an abomination, they bring shame on those who use them (**Deuteronomy 25:16**). It concludes with the fate of Amalek on which comes the greatest shame of all.

I. (:1-3) FLOGGING LIMITATIONS – HUMANE TREATMENT OF CONVICTED CRIMINALS [“PAIN WITHOUT DEGRADATION”]

A. (:1) Decision of the Court

*“If there is a dispute between men and they go to court,
and the judges decide their case,
and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked,”*

Earl Kalland: When a dispute arises between persons, they are to take the matter to court (v. 1). The alternative would be to take matters into their own hands, and that is not acceptable in a nation governed by law. Moreover, the judge has been given the responsibility and the authority to make decisions and to make sure that the punishment, if any, is inflicted on the guilty party.

B. (:2-3) Description of the Appropriate Punishment

“then it shall be if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall then make him lie down and be beaten in his presence with the number of stripes according to his guilt. 3 He may beat him forty times but no more, lest he beat him with many more stripes than these, and your brother be degraded in your eyes.”

Daniel Block: To ensure the executioner does not overstep the bounds of the sentence, the punishment must be administered in the presence of the judge, and the number of lashings must be correlated with the severity of the crime. To protect the dignity of the accused and to prevent excessive public humiliation, Moses sets forty lashes as the absolute maximum sentence. While it is unclear what constitutes excessive public degradation, the identification of the convicted person as “your brother” suggests that even though justice was to be administered by objective standards, floggings were never to be carried out heartlessly. After all, even guilty persons are members of the community.

Gerald Gerbrandt: **Flogging** was not unusual in the ancient world and could be imposed on those guilty of offenses like vandalism, nonpayment of debt, fraud, theft, and so forth (**Tigay**: 230). Paying restitution may also be part of the settlement. Enforced confinement or jail, the most common form of punishment in the Western world today, is absent from Israel's system of justice.

This regulation then controls the punishment the guilty party receives by

- (1) having it take place in the presence (lit., unto his face) of the judge,
- (2) having the number of lashes proportionate to the offense, and
- (3) placing an upper limit on the number of lashes permitted: forty.

These restrictions sharply limit the punishment someone could receive in a non-Israelite culture, where some crimes could be assigned up to one hundred strokes (**Tigay**: 230). .

The goals of punishment are restitution and reestablishing community.

Charlie Garrett: The Hebrew reads *l'phanav* – “to his face,” and thus before the face of the judge. The GNT incorrectly translates this as, “*If the guilty one is sentenced to be beaten, the judge is to make him lie face downward and have him whipped.*” In other words, they take the words “to his face” as meaning, “with his face to the ground.” That is not the intent, even if that is what the man does. The words “to his face,” mean “before him,” or “in his presence.” The judge was to **personally watch over** the beating to ensure that it was carried out as determined. Otherwise, he could be overbeaten, mistreated in how the beating was given, not punished enough, and so on. . .

It obviously became an accepted rule in Israel to take away one blow as the maximum penalty in order to ensure the law was never violated. In other words, if the maximum of forty was the sentence, and the punisher miscounted, he would violate the law. Hence, the maximum number of thirty-nine was set to avoid this ever occurring.

Duane Christensen: On “lest . . . your brother is degraded in your eyes,” **Tigay** says, “Perhaps the person being flogged would humiliate himself further by crying or begging hysterically for mercy, or by soiling himself from fright or from the severity of the beating” ([1996] 230).

David Whitcomb: The whole process seems barbaric to us. Our laws of punishment for crimes are far more humane. Yes, but it would also appear that modern crime rates all over our humane world are the highest in history. Maybe God who created people understands the nature of people better than people do.

Michael Grisanti: This law does not focus on preventing this person's death but preserving his dignity. As with other Deuteronomic laws (e.g., regarding forgiveness of debt and release of slaves), this law envisions the restoration of an offending member of the covenantal community to a dignified place among his people (**McConville**, 368).

John Schultz: Israel knew only four forms of punishment: The death penalty, fines, flogging, and restitution. Imprisonment was only practiced in cases where judgment was delayed. Whether our modern way of applying justice is any improvement on the biblical paradigm is a matter of debate. . . . But the question here is whether flogging is an acceptable form of punishment. The fact that it is incorporated in Scripture gives it a divine fiat, which ought to close the argument for us. From a practical viewpoint it is probably the best deterrent and a very economical form of punishment.

II. (:4) PROHIBITION AGAINST MUZZLING THE THRESHING OXEN – HUMANE TREATMENT OF PRODUCTIVE ANIMALS [“FEED THE BEAST” REGULATION]

“You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.”

Charlie Garrett: The reason it is placed here is because it adds importance to the law just stated in the previous verse. If an ox is to be tended to, even though it is an ox, how much more should a man not be **degraded** as if he were an animal by beating him beyond what is decent.

Daniel Block: The ordinance assumes the ancient practice of threshing grain by having oxen trample the stalks or pull rock-studded sledges over the stalks spread out on the threshing floor. Greedy farmers muzzled their oxen or donkeys to prevent them from eating instead of working, or simply eating that which he hoped to harvest for himself (cf. **Prov. 14:4**).

Gerald Gerbrandt: Twice in the New Testament this law is mentioned in relationship to proper payment of Christian workers (**1 Cor 9:8–12; 1 Tim 5:17–18**). If oxen working the threshing floor are to receive fair payment, then those working for the church also should receive this consideration.

Pulpit Commentary: This prohibition, therefore, was dictated by a regard to the rights and claims of animals employed in labor; but there is involved in it the general principle that **all labor is to be duly requited**, and hence it seems to have passed into a proverb, and was applied to men as well as the lower animals.

III. (:5-10) LEVIRATE MARRIAGE – HUMANE TREATMENT OF WIDOWS WHO LACK A FAMILY LEGACY [“NEXT MAN UP” REGULATION]

A. (:5-6) Consummation of the Levirate Marriage

“When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. 6 And it shall be that the first-born whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out from Israel.”

Duane Christensen: On the basis of **Gen 13:6** and **36:7**, **Tigay** says “*dwelling together*” means living close enough to share the same pastureland, and that “this may mean that in biblical times the marriage was obligatory only if the levir’s home, where the widow and her future child would reside, was close to that property” ([1996] 231).

Charlie Garrett: The code is silent on whether this brother is already married or not, and so reading into it that he must be single [cf. **MacArthur**] is therefore not a reliable thought. It simply states as a point of law that a brother in such a matter is to perform this function.

Daniel Block: As we have observed in earlier texts, **verses 5–10** subdivide into a main case (**vv. 5–6**) and a corollary issue (**vv. 7–10**). Both concern the social institution of “levirate marriage.” A levirate marriage is a legally sanctioned union between a widow, whose husband has died without having fathered offspring, and the brother of the deceased. Although **Deuteronomy 25:5–10** provides the only formal instruction on the institution in the Old Testament, variations of this type of marriage are widely attested in the ancient world (cf. **Gen. 38; Ruth 4**).

The levirate institution actually addressed two problems arising from the death of a man without an heir.

- (1) By marrying the deceased’s widow, the *yābām* (“brother-in-law”; Lat. *levir*) offered her economic security and physical protection.
- (2) However, the primary concern here is not the material well-being of the widow, but securing progeny for her deceased husband. Grounded in the conviction that parents lived on in their children and children perpetuate the “name” of their fathers, the levirate addressed the worst curse imaginable—to have one’s “seed” cut off and one’s name forgotten.

Michael Grisanti: The purpose of this legislation is not simply to provide an heir for the deceased brother (the heir’s legal father), but also to ensure the welfare of his (otherwise economically destitute) widow; for the heir fathered by the deceased man’s brother and born to the man’s widow would not be able to care for the landed inheritance for many years. That task was left to the brother (the heir’s biological father) in the interim.

B. (:7-10) Rejection of the Levirate Marriage

“But if the man does not desire to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to establish a name for his brother in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.' 8 Then the elders of his city shall summon him and speak to him. And if he persists and says, 'I do not desire to take her,' 9 then his brother's wife shall come to him in the sight of the elders, and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face; and she shall declare, 'Thus it is done to the man who does not build up his brother's house.' 10 And in Israel his name shall be called, 'The house of him whose sandal is removed.’”

Charlie Garrett: Despite this being a precept of law, Moses does not make it **mandatory**. On the other hand, he does make the consequences for not following through with it repugnant enough so that a person in such a position would carefully consider the **repercussions**...

Eugene Merrill: Modern scholarship refers to the practice in view as “**levirate** [from Latin *levir*, “brother-in-law”] marriage,” for it not only allowed but prescribed that a widow whose deceased husband had died without male heir marry one of his brothers, presumably the next eldest one who was himself unmarried. The first son born of that relationship would take the name of the first husband, thus assuring the latter of an ongoing remembrance by the community. For this reason the widow was to marry within the family (lit., “not to the outside, to a stranger”). . .

The sandal, again, represented forfeiture by the derelict brother of any claims he might have had to his departed brother's estate. The act of spitting displays the utmost disdain or contempt. In the only other instance with this verb (*y raq*) recorded in the Old Testament, the Lord asked Moses if Miriam would be ostracized from the camp if her father had spit in her face (**Num 12:14**). If so, how much worse that she had contracted leprosy because of her insolence toward Moses. The same sense of disgust is communicated by the terms *tûp* (**Job 17:6**) and *r q* (**Job 30:10; Isa 50:6**). The levirate duty might not have been mandatory, but it certainly was expected.

Daniel Block: The instructions for the corollary case (vv. 7–10) assume the possibility of **exemption** for men who prefer not to perform the duties of a *levir*, though this refusal was not to be taken lightly and involved the stigma of shame. . . Described in considerable detail, the procedure for dealing with an unwilling “brother” allows for a virtuous and assertive response by an aggrieved widow.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The custom has three purposes:

- (1) The widow is served: she is provided a place in her husband’s home, receiving financial security and the prospect of having children with her husband’s brother.
- (2) The family is served, although exactly what the widow’s inheritance rights are is not clear: her marriage to someone in the same family assures them that the husband’s land remains with the larger family.
- (3) The deceased man is served: through his brother his own name and posterity are preserved.

Michael Grisanti: Various scholars posit that the removal of a sandal signifies the **forfeiture of some right or authority** (cf. **Pss 60:8 [10]; 108:9 [10]**, where putting a sandal over something indicates ownership; HALOT, 705). It may indicate that the brother-in-law has no right to conjugal relations with the widow (**McConville**, 370) or may emphasize her right to freedom, i.e., full control of her destiny (**Hamilton**, ABD, 4:567). The man has shirked his responsibility to his brother (**Craigie**, 315; **Driver**, 283; **Tigay**, Deuteronomy, 233). **Kruger** (“The Removal of the Sandal,” 536) suggests that

the removal of the sandal represents a sort of **bill of divorce** providing protection of the widow by freeing her from any obligations to her dead husband's family. . .

The other primary interpretation views both the sandal's removal and the spitting as **acts of derision** (Hall, 376–77). Since no property changes hands and the following statements emphasize the despicable nature of the man's choice, it may be that no legal notion is in mind. Hoffner ("Some Contributions of Hittitology to Old Testament Study," *TynBul* 20 [1969]: 44) has pointed out a Hittite parallel in which the removal of a sandal "constitutes a **public stigmatization**." Several scholars suggest that the sandal imagery and the spitting may carry **sexual overtones** (and they link this law with the next one; C. Carmichael, "A Ceremonial Crux: Removing a Man's Sandal as a Female Gesture of Contempt," *JBL* 96 [1977]: 329–32; L. Eslinger, "More Drafting Techniques in Deuteronomic Law," *VT* 34 [1984]: 222–25; Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 269).

Duane Christensen: Some translate it "*in his face*," and others interpret it as spitting on the ground in front of the man. Support for the latter reading is found in Carmichael's conclusion: "The shoe represents the female genitals, the foot the male organ, and the spitting semen" (LNB, 296), for Onan spilled his semen on the ground. The name "*house of the unsandaled one*" is a pejorative title to degrade the brother.

The purpose of the law was to keep the inheritance separate and to preserve the genealogies distinct, as well as to provide for the destitute widow when the estate devolved on the next heir. Though the Sadducees cited their law to Jesus in a dispute about resurrection (**Matt 22:23–33**), the law of the levirate marriage concerns matters of social and economic justice in this world brought on by premature death, not in relationships in another world beyond death.

Charlie Garrett: Here the woman is given the right to forcibly take off his shoe, demonstrating first that her hand now has the power over his right. Secondly, it is a contemptible way of saying that he no longer has any claim to, or right in, the matter henceforth. And more, to be unshod is a sign of a miserable and shameful existence. . .

The word is *yaraq*, *to spit*. This is its third and last use. It was used twice in **Numbers 12:14** where it is clearly recognized as a sign of **derision**

IV. (:11-12) UNFAIR FIGHTING PRACTICES – HUMANE TREATMENT OF BRAWLERS [MMA OR WWE REGULATION]

A. (:11) Improper Intervention

"If two men, a man and his countryman, are struggling together, and the wife of one comes near to deliver her husband from the hand of the one who is striking him, and puts out her hand and seizes his genitals,"

Daniel Block: Her **intention** is explicitly declared: She wants to rescue her husband from the "hand" of the person who is beating him up. The scene seems strange, since women would hesitate to intervene in such circumstances. However, the primary issue

here is not the fact that she would defend her husband, but her **tactics**: She reaches out and grabs his genitals. From the grammar and syntax of the passage as well as the severity of the punishment, this is no innocent gesture; her action is deliberate.

B. (:12) Extreme Penalty

“then you shall cut off her hand; you shall not show pity.”

Michael Grisanti: The penalty for this act is the removal of her hand. This law appears to be a somewhat broad application of the principle of *lex talionis*. Since she, as a woman, did not have the same anatomy as a man (hence no exactly corresponding penalty), the removal of her hand (which had seized the man’s private parts) serves as the appropriate penalty (**Craigie**, 316; **Phillips**, *Ancient Israel’s Criminal Law*, 94–95).

Peter Craigie: It may be that this very particular piece of casuistic law is intended as an example of how *lex talionis* was able to be interpreted when it could not be applied literally.

Daniel Block: Whereas **verses 5–10** had involved a man who had wrongfully withheld his genitals from a woman, this case involves a man whose genitals have been shamelessly grabbed, perhaps with the intent of injury so he cannot have children. The admonition “*show her no pity*” highlights the seriousness of the crime and the importance of carrying out the punishment against one who threatens the integrity of the branch of the family tree represented by the man whose genitals were attacked.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The concluding phrase, *show no pity*, suggests that even in ancient times the verdict seemed **extreme**. Perhaps we simply need to admit that in this case we are unsure what the regulation is about. The detailed uniqueness of the case—along with the harshness of the penalty, especially when compared with the usual Deuteronomic tendencies—undercut any clear explanation.

Eugene Merrill: Besides the shame of this, especially in the ancient Eastern world, there was the real possibility that the woman could effectively have emasculated her victim so as to remove any hope of his siring children. This, of course, would have rendered his plight nearly as serious as that of the brother mentioned above who died with no male heir. That this was the implication is supported by the fact that the guilty woman had to lose her offending hand as punishment (**v. 12**).

Jack Deere: This is fourth time in Deuteronomy Moses told the people to **show . . . no pity** in executing punishment for wrongdoing (cf. **13:8; 19:13, 21**).

V. (:13-16) HONEST WEIGHTS – INTEGRITY IN BUSINESS DEALINGS

A. (:13-14) Don’t Cheat

*“You shall not have in your bag differing weights,
a large and a small.*

*You shall not have in your house differing measures,
a large and a small.”*

Daniel Block: The temptation to cheat in business deals by reducing or enlarging measuring instruments to one’s own advantage (vv. 13–16) afflicts every generation. The book of Proverbs raises the issue three times. In 16:11 the sage declares that no one—not even kings—may tinker with balances and scales because Yahweh owns them and establishes the definitions of “honest” instruments. In 20:10 and 23 the sage picks up the Deuteronomic expression of something that “*the LORD detests*”; but instead of applying the expression to the person who cheats this way, he applies it to the instruments used to cheat others.

B. (:15) Practice Integrity

*“You shall have a full and just weight;
you shall have a full and just measure,
that your days may be prolonged in the land
which the LORD your God gives you.”*

Michael Grisanti: Regardless of the precise measuring tool in use at a given place, the professed unit of measurement and the actual unit of measurement are to be identical. A person should receive the exact amount he expects and pay only what he has agreed to. (Money was also weighed out.)

Ancient merchants used weights (“stones”) and measures (baskets or jars for liquids or grains) when buying and selling goods; they could use these tools to their own financial advantage. When buying, they could use a heavier stone or a larger container measure in order to receive more than the fair amount. When selling, they could use a lighter stone or smaller container so that the customer received less than expected for the price paid. God’s people only need one set of weights and measures—a set that is precise and full.

In addition to the fact that using false weights represented deception (a practice condemned by various biblical passages), it was primarily done to take advantage of those who had nowhere else to turn: the poor and needy, the fatherless and widows, and aliens. Yahweh consistently condemns mistreating people at the fringe of Israelite society; he regards such conduct as detestable. Moreover, to use accurate and honest weights is part of a life of covenantal conformity and will bring to the honest merchant longevity in the Promised Land.

C. (:16) Take Sin Seriously

*“For everyone who does these things, everyone who acts unjustly
is an abomination to the LORD your God.”*

VI. (:17-19) REMEMBER AMALEK AND DO NOT FORGET

A. (:17-18) Remember

“Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, 18 how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God.”

Duane Christensen: Chiastic structure:

- A “Remember what Amalek did to you” **25:17a**
- B “when you went forth from Egypt” **25:17b–18a**
- X “*And he did not fear God*” **25:18b**
- B’ “When YHWH grants rest . . . in the land” **25:19a**
- A’ “Blot out the remembrance of Amalek . . . do not forget” **25:19b**

In the center of this structure we find the simple statement that Amalek did not fear God (**v 18b**). The “*fear of God*” in wisdom literature is synonymous with wisdom (**Prov 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Job 28:28; Ps 111:10**). In light of **Deut 10:12**, we know what it means to fear YHWH—it means to love him and to walk in his ways. The inner frame moves from a description of the experience of the people of Israel when they “*went forth from Egypt*” and faced the treachery of Amalek “*on the way*” (**vv 17b–18a**) to a glimpse into the future when YHWH grants them rest and they possess their inheritance in the promised land (**v 19a**). The outer frame reminds the people to remember what Amalek did in times past (**v 17a**) and to blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven in times to come: “*you shall not forget!*” (**v 19b**). . .

The reference to the fact that the Amalekites “*did not fear God*” indicates that they had **no fear of divine punishment**.

Eugene Merrill: Though this closing paragraph may loosely be associated with the idea of interpersonal relationships elaborated throughout the lengthy section **23:19–25:19**, its radically different subject matter (foreigners rather than fellow Israelites) and its apparent lack of reference to the Decalogue pose major problems about its present text location. . . It seems best, however, to view it as a transitional piece between the past and the future, between the experience of Israel in the desert, where attack by Amalek was rather paradigmatic of the years of wandering, and the hope of life in the land of promise, where God's people would enjoy peace and prosperity (**26:1-19**).

The Amalekites, whom the Old Testament traces back to Eliphaz, son of Esau, and his concubine Timna (**Gen 36:12**), lived in the Arabian deserts east and south of the Dead Sea (**Gen 36:16; Num 13:29; 14:25**). They were a fierce **nomadic people**, hostile to Israel as their flagrant attack on the weak and elderly of the Exodus wanderers makes clear (**Exod 17:8-16**). Because of this cowardly act, the Lord placed them under his judgment (**Exod 17:14**), promising to bring them to utter ruin (**Num 24:20**). Eventually this came to pass but long after Israel's settlement in Canaan. Saul was first commissioned to do so (**1 Sam 15:1-3**); but when he failed, the task fell to David, who appears to have been at least largely successful in achieving the long-sought objective (**2 Sam 8:12**). At the best, however, Israel failed to do what the law here commanded—to “blot out” (*m â*) Amalek's very memory “*from under heaven*” (**v. 19**).

Matthew Henry: Amalek's attack upon Israel was considered an **attack upon God**. Amalek must have known under what circumstance Israel had left Egypt. They countered God's miracles with a cold-blooded and dastardly atrocity. . . If they had had any reverence for the majesty of the God of Israel, which they saw a token of in the cloud, or any dread of his wrath, which they lately heard of the power of over Pharaoh, they durst not have made this assault upon Israel. Well, here was the ground of the quarrel: and it shows how God takes what is done against his people as done against himself, and that he will particularly reckon with those that discourage and hinder young beginners in religion, that (as Satan's agents) set upon the weak and feeble, either to divert them or to disquiet them, and offend his little ones.

Daniel Block: He cites three actions by the Amalekites against Israel that demand response.

(1) They opportunistically "*cut off*" the Israelites along the way when they came out of Egypt. The attack signified unprovoked and malicious intervention in Israel's pilgrimage to Horeb for their appointment with Yahweh.

(2) The Amalekites committed barbaric and cowardly atrocities. Fearing to engage the Israelites in a frontal attack, they let the Israelites pass by; then, when they were famished and weary, they attacked powerless stragglers at the rear. These probably involved the weak and the sick, who could not keep up with the main camp and proved easy targets for marauders.

(3) The Amalekites did not fear God. Although "*to fear God*" sometimes bears an ethical sense, the expression should not be limited to the ethical sphere. Moses would never speak of the Amalekites fearing Yahweh, but with this comment he suggests the Amalekite attack involved direct interference in the plan of God. . .

Moses insists on eliminating the Amalekites because they defied God, not only by stifling the fear of divinity that is common to all civilized people, but also by daring to interfere with God at a critical moment in the history of salvation. Yahweh had just rescued the Israelites and was leading them to Sinai, where he would formally confirm them as his covenant people. All this was preparatory to delivering into their hands the land of Canaan so they could flourish there and become his agent of blessing to the whole world. Moses hereby in effect declares, "Woe to any who interfere with the plan of God."

B. (:19) Do Not Forget

"Therefore it shall come about when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget."

Daniel Block: Stylistically, **verses 17–19** do not exhibit the qualities of “law,” which reminds us again to classify Moses’ entire second address as pastoral instruction rather than legislation. Here Moses admonishes the people to take care of some unfinished business. Two imperatives frame this paragraph (**v. 17a; 19c**), which divides into two parts almost equal in length. In the first Moses charges the Israelites to “remember” the Amalekites’ past hostilities (**vv. 17–18**), and in the second he charges them to “blot out” their memory from human history (v. 19).

Duane Christensen: The words “remember” and “do not forget” form an envelope around **25:17–19**. The people are to remember what Amalek did, and they are to remember what Moses has commanded them to do about it—“*you shall blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven.*”

Michael Grisanti: This exhortation to remember (and not forget) past events or realities always had some resultant conduct in view. The remembrance was to motivate (and enable) the Israelites to put into practice some aspect of what Yahweh expected of them. In this instance, the extermination of the Amalekites represents “unfinished business” for Israel, a backward-looking perspective. It provides a transition to **26:1–15**, which looks forward to Israel’s living out their God-given identity as the people of Yahweh once they are established in the land he has sworn to give them.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What principles can we glean here with respect to the validity and usefulness of **corporal punishment**?
- 2) How can we execute legal justice without unnecessarily **degrading** the convicted offender with the goal of restoration to society?
- 3) Where have you witnessed **violations of integrity in business practices** and did you take a stand for righteousness?
- 4) What are some antidotes to Christian amnesia?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: Like the law of the insubordinate son (**21:18–21**) and the law on premarital unchastity (**22:20–21**), there is little evidence that the law on improper intervention in a fight was ever enforced. Once again, we probably have here a law that was primarily **pedagogical** in its intent, though perhaps more in terms of symbolic meaning in relation to the reading of related narrative material in Genesis than a

warning in *terrorem* to shape specific behavior. In this respect the close relationship between the law itself and v 13 on the “*pouch*” with its two stones, one large and the other small, merits reflection and comment.

When understood within the larger context of the telling of YHWH’s Holy War within the context of the festivals of ancient Israel, the law on improper intervention in a fight takes on deeper meaning. If Israel is taken as the wife, and her husband (YHWH) is seen to be engaged in mortal combat with the Enemy in the realm of spiritual warfare, an important lesson emerges. YHWH does not need our assistance in that combat. Moreover, insistence on our part to get involved in the struggle will result in great pain and suffering on our part, which will leave us permanently maimed. The battle belongs to YHWH; and we must learn to trust him and remain as an observer to that conflict, even when the immediate course of the titanic struggle appears to be going against our self-centered interests.

Earl Kalland: Moses in Deuteronomy spoke of the Lord as a God of love, with concern not only for his people but for others – even for animals. Yet the Amalekites and the nations of Canaan were to be rigorously destroyed. This destruction rests on the same basis as the destruction of the pre-Noahic people (**Gen 6:5-7**) and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (**Gen 18:20-21; 19:24-25**). Their incorrigible wickedness was such that annihilation was necessary. Besides this the Amalekites, by their attacks on God’s people – and that against the weak and worn-out ones – indicated that “*they had no fear of God*” (**v. 18**).

L. M. Grant: Why was such a total judgment **necessary**? Because Amalek pictures “*the lusts of the flesh*” which war against our souls. God will not allow such things to be spared, and it is important that we take sides with God against the lustful desires that both dishonor God and harm our own souls. When King Saul was told by God through Samuel to attack and utterly destroy Amalek (**1 Samuel 15:2-3**), he gained the victory over them, but spared their king, Agag (**v.8**) and the best of the livestock (**v.9**). He was not only solemnly reprovved for this, but told, “*Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king*” (**1 Samuel 15:22-23**). If we spare our own sinful lusts, we are in no condition to lead others.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 26:1-15

TITLE: TWO INITIATION TITHES UPON ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND

BIG IDEA:

THE INITIAL PRESENTATION OF FIRST-FRUITS AND OF THE THIRD-YEAR TITHE CELEBRATED GOD'S PAST FAITHFULNESS AND CALLED FOR CONTINUED BLESSING AS THE PEOPLE FULFILLED THEIR COVENANT OBLIGATIONS

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: Moses concludes his exposition on the **principles of covenant relationship** with an exciting flourish in **chapter 26**. This chapter divides into two unequal parts. Exhibiting numerous links with **12:2–28**, **26:1–15** contains instructions for liturgical expression of covenant fidelity in the presence of Yahweh. **Verses 16–19** function as a **formal conclusion** to the second major part of the second address (**chaps. 12–26**). The reference to “*decrees and laws*” in **verses 16** and **17** echo **12:1**, framing **chapters 12–26** as a grand exposition of the laws and regulations. By placing instructions on cultic worship at the boundaries, Moses issues a profound theological message: meaningful and acceptable cultic worship provides the framework for life. Although prescribed direct speech dominates **verses 1–15**, this segment divides into two parts. **Verses 1–11** focus on celebrating Yahweh’s faithfulness, and **verses 12–15** on affirming the worshiper’s fidelity to Yahweh when he worships at the central sanctuary.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The point of the chapter is not spelling out further directions for the cult but a dramatic presentation of Israel’s faith and ethics through worship of the Lord your God, incorporating symbolic action and liturgical declaration. God has taken a wandering Aramean, made his descendants into a great nation even as they were oppressed by the Egyptians, brought them out of Egypt, and given them the Promised Land. In response the Israelite presents his first-fruits to God and shares the bounty of a land flowing with milk and honey, celebrating and sharing with the less fortunate.

Deuteronomy 26 consists of three distinct parts,

- the first developed around the presentation of first-fruits at The Place (**vv. 1–11**),
- the second largely a speech regarding the third-year tithes (**vv. 12–15**),
- and the third a narrative climax not only to the chapter but also to all of **chapters 12–26 (vv. 16-19)**.

The first two parts are bound together by numerous common features. Both these parts are framed by brief narrative comments, they include ceremonial offerings and action, at their center is a longer formal speech by an individual Israelite that is to be recited before the Lord your God, and they characterize the land given to Israel as flowing with milk and honey. God’s actions are foundational to both, but in the first the Israelite responds by presenting to God a gift from the first-fruits of the land, and in the second

the Israelite shares some produce of the land with the disadvantaged. One might speak of the two responses together as balancing the vertical relationship (God-human) with the horizontal (human-human). God's gifts are for all. The Israelite's response is directed both to God and to neighbor.

The chapter and core of the second speech then conclude with a return to the today of Moab, formalizing the particular relationship between God and the people of God.

MacArthur: As the stipulation section of Deuteronomy came to an end (**chaps. 5-25**), Moses commanded the people to keep two rituals when they had conquered the Land and began to enjoy its produce. These two rituals were the initial first-fruits offering (**26:1-11**) and the first third-year special tithe (**26:12-15**). In both cases, there is an emphasis upon the prayer of confession to be given at the time of the rituals (**26:5-10, 13-15**). These special offerings were given in order to celebrate Israel's transition from a nomadic existence to a settled agrarian community, made possible by the Lord's blessing.

I. (:1-11) PRESENTATION OF FIRST-FRUITS -- CELEBRATING THE LORD'S PAST COVENANT FAITHFULNESS TO THE NATION OF ISRAEL

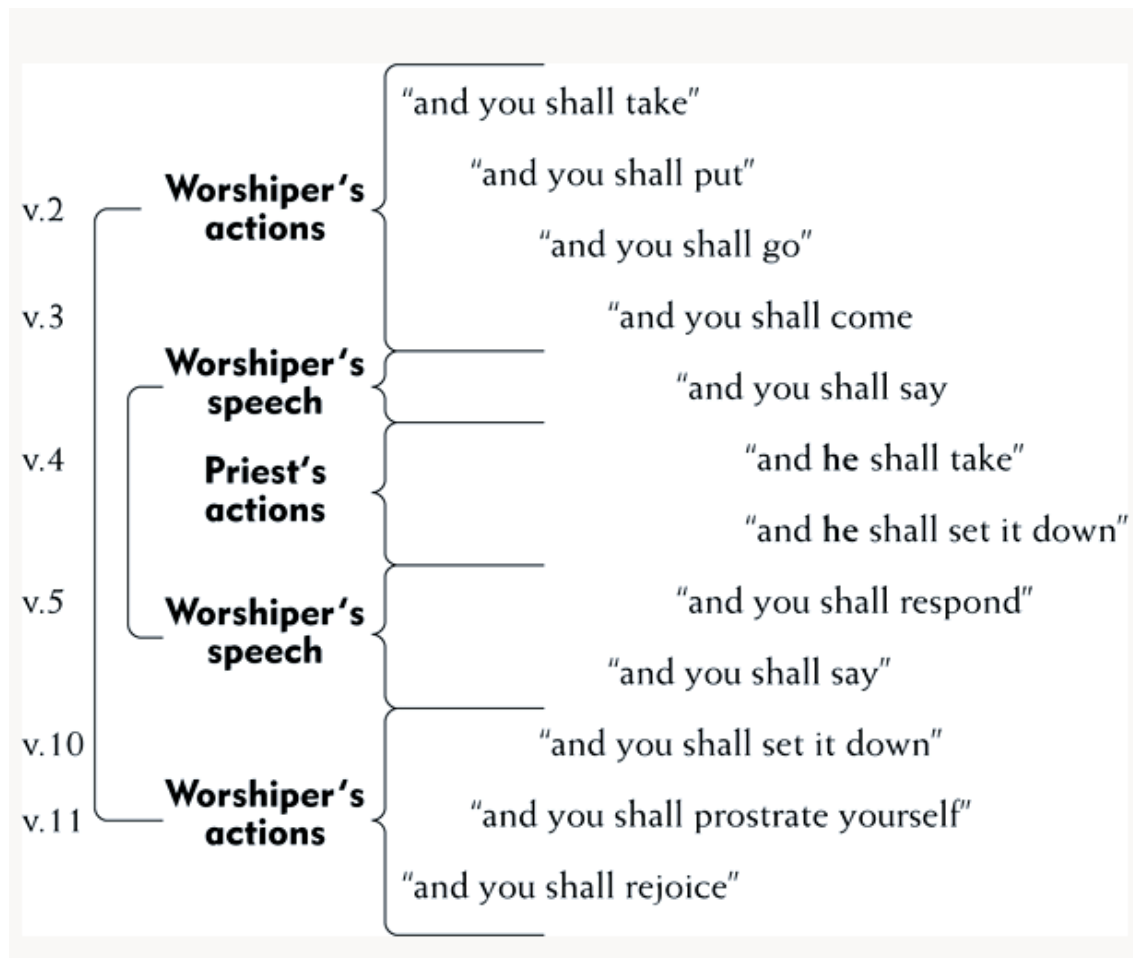
Duane Christensen: On the basis of prosodic analysis, vv 1–11 may be divided into five subunits:

- A You shall bring the first-fruits to the central sanctuary **26:1–2**
 - B Presentation of first-fruits to the priest with declaration **26:3–4a**
 - X **Presentation at the altar with recitation of Magnalia Dei
26:4b–9**
 - B' Presentation of first-fruits to YHWH by the worshiper **26:10a**
- A' You shall put it down before YHWH and rejoice **26:10b–11**

Eugene Merrill: As with all such ritual, there must be both **act** and **word**, the act consisting here of the offering of the produce (vv. **1-3a, 4-5a, 10b-11**) and the word a statement of the present occasion (v. **3b**), a recitation of Israel's "sacred history" (vv. **5b-9**), and an explanation of what the offerer had done (v. **10a**). It may be helpful to discuss the passage according to this analysis.

Daniel Block: **Chiastic structure of vv. 1-11**

Moses' primary intent here is to provide a means by which Israelites may regularly celebrate the goodness Yahweh has lavished first by giving them this good land and then by causing it to yield its produce for their benefit. Responding to the harvest, God's people were to present to Yahweh offerings selected from the first yields of the produce (vv. **2, 10**; cf. **18:4**).



A. (:1-2) Collection of Produce for Offering of First-Fruits

1. (:1) Timing of the Offering

"Then it shall be, when you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and live in it,"

Michael Grisanti: Israel's conquest of and settlement in the land of Canaan serves as the **chronological point** (cf. **17:14; 18:9; 27:3**) after which God's people must celebrate Yahweh's provision for them through offerings.

2. (:2) Taking of the Offering

"that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground which you shall bring in from your land that the LORD your God gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name."

Peter Craigie: Unlike Passover and the covenant ceremony, the offering of first-fruits would be a new religious institution in Israel; before taking possession of the land, they were not an agricultural people and therefore had no harvest festival. Thus this first offering of the first-fruits by the Israelites, once they had taken possession of the land,

would mark the **inauguration of the new life** which had been anticipated for so long on the basis of the covenant promise of God.

B. (:3-4) Consecration of the Offering

1. (:3) Presented by the Offerer to the Priest

“And you shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, ‘I declare this day to the LORD my God that I have entered the land which the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.’”

Daniel Block: The remainder of **verse 3** shifts attention from prescribed **ritual actions** to **ritual declaration**. With this declaration, the worshiper recognizes the priest “*in office at that time*” (v. **3a**) as both a symbol of divine presence and the official witness to his declaration.

Peter Craigie: The declaration was a **personal testimony** that the man had entered the Promised Land, and the basket he earned symbolized that already he was beginning to experience the blessing of the new land and the new life given by God. But the declaration did not only reflect man’s experience; it was a testimony also to the **faithfulness of God**, who had promised the land long ago and now had fulfilled that ancient promise by giving the land to his people.

2. (:4) Presented by the Priest to the Lord at the altar

“Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God.”

Daniel Block: The priest’s actions declare symbolically that Yahweh has accepted the worshiper’s expression of devotion.

C. (:5-10a) Confession Recounting God’s Faithfulness to the Nation

“And you shall answer and say before the LORD your God,”

Daniel Block: Many have recognized that what follows is an early **creedal statement** (cf. **6:20–25; 11:2–7**), cast in celebrative prose, summarizing the Israelites’ basic beliefs concerning their origins. Structurally this speech is divided into three parts:

- (1) an opening statement concerning the social and/or economic status of Israel’s ancestor (v. **5b**);
- (2) a survey of Israel’s history (vv. **5c–9**); and
- (3) a declaration by the worshiper concerning his present offering (v. **10**).

1. (:5b) Testimony of the Relative Insignificance of the Father of the Nation

“My father was a wandering Aramean,”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The reference probably is to Jacob, renamed Israel, the traditional father of the twelve tribes. After his alienation from his brother, he flees to Paddan-aram, where he spends time with the extended family of his father, people called

Arameans in the Old Testament (**Gen 28:5**). But it may also be a more general reference, perhaps to Jacob's family or the whole group of ancestors.

Daniel Block: Since the narratives of Genesis associate all three patriarchs with Aram (**Gen. 11:31; 12:4; 28:1–7; 31:16**), “*my father*” may function as a **collective**, referring to all three ancestors.¹⁶ In any case, the multiplication of the nation represents Yahweh's fulfillment of his promise repeated to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But the modifier “*wandering*” remains a riddle. Based on the range of meanings of the root of this word, the clause could be translated, “*an Aramaean on the point of death.*” However, since the rest of this credo emphasizes the patriarchs' homelessness rather than their threatened existence, the word may refer to their status as **aliens**, as reflected explicitly in the verb *gûr* (“*to sojourn, live as an alien*”), which is used of all three patriarchs. Nonetheless, since both insecurity and wandering are associated with the patriarchs (cf. **Gen. 20:11–13; Ps. 105:12–13**), it is difficult to decide whether the term translated “*wandering*” means “*perishing*” or “*wandering.*” The ambiguity is probably intentional; when ancient Israelites recited this credo in Hebrew, they perceived the full range of meanings of the word.

Michael Grisanti: Israel's “*father,*” Jacob (renamed “*Israel*” in **Ge 32:28**), moved his entire (extended) family to Egypt and settled there, where “*he lived as an alien*” (*gwr*; in contrast with the worshiper who has settled in Canaan). Although they were originally few in number (“*seventy souls*”; **Dt 10:22**; cf. **Ge 46:27**), Yahweh has multiplied their population in the intervening years in fulfillment of his promise to the patriarchs (**Ge 15:5; 22:17**). They had been an inconsequential people but have become a powerful and numerous nation.

2. (:5c-9) Testimony of God's Amazing Providence in Israel's History

a. (:5c) Exponential Growth in Egypt

*“and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there,
few in number;
but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation.”*

b. (:6) Painful Affliction in Egypt

*“And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us,
and imposed hard labor on us.”*

c. (:7-8) Powerful Deliverance from Egypt

*“Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the
LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and
our oppression; 8 and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a
mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and
with signs and wonders;”*

d. (:9) Gift of the Fruitful Promised Land

“and He has brought us to this place, and has given us this land,

a land flowing with milk and honey.”

3. (:10a) Testimony to Covenant Obedience in Response to God’s Grace

“And now behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which Thou, O LORD hast given me.”

Daniel Block: Moses hereby calls on the worshiper to speak directly to Yahweh, to declare his gratitude, and to acknowledge Yahweh’s gracious provision, symbolized by the container of first-fruits he has brought.

Gerald Gerbrandt: By the end of the declaration, the contrast with the wandering Aramean is complete. No longer are they wandering, about to perish, but they can say, *I have come into the land (26:3, 9)*. It is the story of Israel, but even more it is the story of what God has done in response to the cry of aliens oppressed in a foreign land and about to die. After reciting the credo before the priest at the central sanctuary, the people symbolically and literally celebrate the bounty God has given them.

Eugene Merrill: The peace and stability that would permit the inauguration of regular agricultural patterns would be irrefutable evidence that the Lord had indeed accomplished his word to the fathers. In recognition of this and in tribute to the Lord's electing and saving grace, the farmer would come to proffer the first-fruits of his fields (**v. 10a**).

D. (:10b-11) Celebration of the Offering

1. (:10b) Celebration in Thankful Worship

“And you shall set it down before the LORD your God, and worship before the LORD your God;”

2. (:11) Celebration in Communal Rejoicing

“and you and the Levite and the alien who is among you shall rejoice in all the good which the LORD your God has given you and your household.”

II. (:12-15) PRESENTATION OF THIRD YEAR TITHES – CALLING ON THE LORD FOR FUTURE BLESSING BASED ON ISRAEL’S COMMITMENT TO COVENANT FAITHFULNESS

A. (:12) Application of the Tithe to Specific Classes of Needy People

“When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns, and be satisfied.”

Eugene Merrill: The benevolence of God's people was to operate in two dimensions, the vertical and the horizontal. Thus the offering of first-fruits to the Lord (**26:1-11**) could not be separated from the beneficence to be shown to fellow kingdom citizens (**vv. 12-15**).

Michael Grisanti: Scholars have debated whether this triennial tithe referred to the normal tithe that would be diverted for these needy people every third year, was a second tithe required every third year, or was a third tithe.

Peter Craigie: If the first offering of first-fruits took place in the first year of full settlement in the land, the ceremony described in vv. 12–15 would take place two years later during the third year of full settlement. The tithe of the third year took place in the Israelite towns or settlements, and that which was tithed was to be distributed among various classes of underprivileged persons (v. 12);

B. (:13-14) Affirmation of Obedience in Executing the Tithe

“And you shall say before the LORD your God,”

1. (:13b) Managed the Tithe in Appropriate Fashion

a. Separated the Tithe for its Intended Purpose

*“I have removed the sacred portion from my house,
and also have given it
to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow,”*

Michael Grisanti: The giver begins by declaring that he has, in fact, “*removed*” this tithe from his home and turned it over to the needy people for whom it was intended. This form of the verb (Piel of *b’r*) occurs thirteen times in Deuteronomy, eleven of which are part of the statement “*purge the evil from . . .*”. Clearly, it indicates a rigorous separation (McConville, 381) to emphasize that the worshiper has kept absolutely none of the tithe for personal consumption. In his “global” affirmation, he declares that he has not *turned aside* from nor *forgotten* (two common verbs for covenantal treachery) Yahweh’s expectations in this area of his life. The worshiper then states what he has not done with the “sacred offering.”

b. Acted in Obedience to the Lord’s Commands

*“according to all Thy commandments
which Thou hast commanded me;
I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Thy commandments.”*

2. (:14) Maintained Ritual Purity

a. Avoided Potential Pitfalls

*“I have not eaten of it while mourning,
nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean,
nor offered any of it to the dead.”*

Eugene Merrill: The best understanding here is that he had not participated in use of the tithe while engaged in pagan rites of fertility or sympathetic magic. Such rites were characteristic of Canaanite worship as a means of inducing the underworld deities to fertilize the soil and guarantee a bountiful harvest. They would include the presentation

of offerings and a sacred drama in which weeping and lamentation would play a part (cf. **Ezek 8:14**).

Michael Grisanti: All three statements affirm the **ritual purity** of the offered tithe (hence its acceptability for the recipients). The worshiper affirms that he has not touched the tithe when he was unclean, whether as the result of coming into contact with a corpse (**Lev 22:4**) or other reasons, or from some affiliation with pagan practices.

b. Acted in Obedience to the Lord's Commands

*"I have listened to the voice of the LORD my God;
I have done according to all that Thou hast commanded me."*

C. (:15) Appeal for Future Blessing

"Look down from Thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Thy people Israel, and the ground which Thou hast given us, a land flowing with milk and honey, as Thou didst swear to our fathers."

MacArthur: This was the first reference to God's dwelling place being in heaven.

Daniel Block: The worshiper's plea for Yahweh to observe him from heaven is motivated by a desire for his blessing "*on your people Israel.*" After all, the worshiper is part of the greater entity, Yahweh's covenant nation. He completes the relational triangle by extending the scope of the blessing to the land (cf. v. 9). Although the land is indeed a "*good land,*" the people are still dependent on Yahweh to bless them and the land (cf. **28:1-14; 33:13-16**).

Eugene Merrill: Contrary to the frail, ineffectual gods of the nations who could even die and lie beneath the earth, Israel's God reigned from heaven above. But his transcendence did not nullify his interest in and involvement with his covenant nation. He had made solemn promises to their fathers to give them the land of Canaan, one that flowed with milk and honey, not because of fructifying forces attributed to nature gods but because of his providential grace (cf. **Deut 11:8-12**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What would prevent the Levites from resenting having to rely on such offerings for their material provision?
- 2) How should the church demonstrate practical compassion and provision for the needs of orphans and widows and strangers and church leaders today?

3) Do we perceive God's blessings to flow out of both His gracious faithfulness as well as our continued obedience?

4) How can we encourage the proper tone of thanksgiving and rejoicing in our worship assemblies?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: Though **Deut 26** is in three parts, with the boundaries of each section marked by *sētūmā* layout markers after vv **11, 15, and 19**, careful prosodic analysis reveals five major rhythmic structures:

A Worship by offering God the first-fruits **26:1–4**

B Liturgy—declaration at the central sanctuary **26:5–9**

**X Worship in providing for human need—Levites and aliens
26:10–11**

B' Liturgy—declaration at local sanctuaries **26:12–15**

A' Worship and mutual commitments between God and his people **26:16–19**

Michael Grisanti: Set against the backdrop of Israel's conquest of Canaan (by means of Yahweh's enablement), the offering of first-fruits (**26:1–11**) and the tithe offering (**26:12–15**) serve as clear examples of the attitudes of gratitude and obedience Yahweh expects from every member of the covenantal nation (**Miller**, 178) and represent the vertical and horizontal dimensions of Israel's existence as such.

The offering of first-fruits tangibly demonstrates Israel's gratitude for and recognition of God's provision of abundance in the Promised Land. The offering of tithes serves as Yahweh's appointed means to care for the priests and Levites as well as the poor of the nation. Also, these offerings represent the homage Israel must pay to Yahweh in recognition of his sovereignty over them (**Merrill**, Deuteronomy, 331).

Hank Schoemaker: The image of land was to the Old Testament mind and heart of prime importance, not only in reference to the Promised Land but also in the apocalyptic visions of the coming age. Next to God himself, the longing for land seems to eclipse all others. In the Torah the land is at the forefront from the beginning to the end. The book of Deuteronomy has a fully developed theology of the land in which the entire future of the nation has been concentrated.

The land is the place where the covenantal relationship of God's people with their Creator is lived out. The crossing of the Jordan is therefore the most momentous

experience that could happen to Israel. The Jordan crossing represents the moment of the most radical transformation of any historical person or group. There are going to be some drastic changes. They had learned to live precariously in the wilderness for 40 years, but how are they to live as settled farmers or city dwellers? The entry into the Promised Land requires Israel that it ceases to be what it had been in the wilderness and become what it has never been before. They knew how to live as the slaves of a dictator in Egypt, but how to live as freed people of their new Lord? In the wilderness they lived as helpless children but how to live as mature inheritors? God intended his people to be known as a wise and discerning people with a just constitution. By observing the law they will be a blessing to the nations (**Deut 4:6; 28:10**). So it was of the utmost importance that Israel would listen to *“the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan...just as the LORD had commanded him to speak to them”* (**Deut 1:1–3**). Then upon entering the Land God instructed Joshua to be *“careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go”* (**Josh 1:7**). The words that Moses and Joshua spoke will define the shape and character of Israel; they are words of life with Yahweh in the land and for the land and over the land. . .

All Israel’s blessings flow from the gift of land. It is God’s extravagant gift to Israel and not deserved. Once settled in the land a grateful worshipper would come before Yahweh with a basket full of produce as a thank offering in return for the gift of land from the hand of his God, who *“brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey”* (**Deut 26:1–11**). It is purely and simply a gift of love from a gracious God. There is no hint of achievement or merit or planning. Joshua proclaimed, ...

And you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one thing has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you; all have come to pass for you, not one of them has failed (**Josh 23:14**; cf. **21:45**).

Israel will receive many other gifts besides the land: fine large cities, houses filled with all sorts of goods, wells, vineyards, olive groves, herds and everything else (**Deut 6:10–11; 12:21; 20:14**). What Moses is telling God’s people is that Israel cannot and does not need to secure its existence for itself. The Giver who gave manna, quail and water in the wilderness will do it for them. Only now the gifts will be long-term and not so precarious.

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TEXT: Deuteronomy 26:16-19

TITLE: CONCLUSION TO MOSES' SECOND ADDRESS

BIG IDEA:

COVENANT RENEWAL REINFORCES ISRAEL'S COMMITMENT AS GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE TO OBEY GOD'S LAWS

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: The significance of this short paragraph within the flow of Deuteronomy is out of all proportion to its length. These four verses summarize key theological issues of the book and provide a hinge between Moses' lengthy exposition of the specific stipulations and his recitation of the consequences for the nation of their response in **chapter 28**. Whereas **verses 1–15** of this chapter had looked forward to the time when Israel would be well-established in the land, with the opening phrase "*this day*" in **verse 16** Moses refocuses his hearers' attention on the present moment of decision. Although elsewhere the participle construction with "*commanding [you]*" always has Moses as the subject, for the first time Yahweh issues the commands. Moses hereby reminds his congregation that while he has been speaking, they have actually been hearing the voice of Yahweh their God. . .

Duane Christensen: The brief exhortation in **26:16–19** functions as the conclusion to the exposition of the law in Deut 5–26, which was used in a **covenant renewal ceremony** in ancient Israel. It summarizes what has happened in that ceremony, where the words "*this day*" and "*today*" (**vv 16, 17, 18**) refer to both the original day on which Moses spoke and each subsequent time thereafter when the ceremony was held. . .

The recitation of the laws that God revealed to Moses is now complete, and attention shifts to the covenant relationship between God and his chosen people. The people solemnly declare that YHWH is their God and that they will obey him (**v 17**); and God, on his part, affirms that he will set them "*high above all the nations . . . for praise and for fame and for honor*" and that Israel shall be a holy people (**vv 18–19**). . .

To be a holy people is to be a people set apart for God, and for that special task among the nations to which he has called us. The keeping of God's commandments is not the means of our own vindication or justification before God. God chose Israel to be a special people on the basis of his own lovingkindness—it is a matter of God's grace, and God's grace alone. It is our heartfelt response to God's love and commitment to us as his "*treasured possession*" that he desires of us by means of obedience to his commands. That is what will bring forth his praise and honor among the nations.

Eugene Merrill: The **recapitulative** nature of this passage is clear from the repeated use of the technical covenant terms "*decrees*" (*uqqîm*, **vv. 16-17**), "*laws*" (*mi p îm*, **vv. 16-**

17), and “commands” (*mi wôt*, vv. 17-18) and the reference to Israel as a “holy people” (v. 19), the Lord’s “treasured possession” (*am s gullâ*, v. 18).

MacArthur: These 4 verses concluded Moses’ explanation of the law’s stipulations by calling for the total commitment by Israel to the Lord and His commands. These verses can be viewed as the formal ratification of the Sinaitic Covenant between the Lord and the second generation of Israel. In accepting the terms of this agreement, acknowledging that the Lord is their God, and promising wholehearted obedience plus a desire to listen to God’s voice, the Israelites were assured that they were His people and the chosen over all other nations to receive His blessings and the calling to witness to His glory to all the world. See **Ex 19:5, 6**.

David Guzik: Sometimes we need to be instructed regarding the law of God; sometimes we need to be reminded regarding the law of God. But most often, we need to be exhorted regarding the law of God. We know what to do, but we need to be encouraged to actually do it.

I. (:16) EXHORTATION TO OBEY GOD’S LAW IN THE CONTEXT OF COVENANT COMMITMENT

“This day the LORD your God commands you to do these statutes and ordinances. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul.”

II. (:17) DECLARATION OF LOYALTY ON THE PART OF GOD’S PEOPLE

“You have today declared the LORD to be your God, and that you would walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments and His ordinances, and listen to His voice.”

Michael Grisanti: By embracing this covenantal relationship with Yahweh, the nation of Israel affirms a **reality** and an **intention**. The reality is that **Yahweh is their God**. This fact of relationship is not an obligation that Yahweh accepts but a commitment that he makes. The “central covenant reality” (**Wright**, Deuteronomy, 272) is that Yahweh perfectly fulfills his role as the God of his people by caring for their welfare, protecting them, and guaranteeing their future destiny. The other side of that “covenantal formula” is that Israel is his people. **Their promises** to “walk,” “keep,” and “obey” are the means by which they can demonstrate their identity as the people of Yahweh to the surrounding nations.

III. (:18-19) DECLARATION OF LOYALTY ON THE PART OF GOD

A. (:18) God’s Valuation of His Chosen People

1. (:18a) A Treasured Possession in Accordance with God’s Promises

“And the LORD has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you,”

Jack Deere: To be the Lord's **treasured possession** (cf. 7:6; 14:2; Ps. 135:4; Mal. 3:17) meant that He would exalt Israel **high above all the nations** (cf. Deut. 28:1). Through disobedience and rebellion, generation after generation of Israelites forfeited their right to be exalted over the nations. But Isaiah wrote that Israel's rebellion would not continue forever, for the Lord will raise up a generation of faithful Israelites in the future who will enjoy God's grace in a golden age of blessing (**Isa. 60-62**). That age is commonly called the Millennium.

2. (:18b) Called to Obedience to God's Law
"and that you should keep all His commandments;"

B. (:19) God's Vision for His Chosen People

1. (:19a) Elevated above All Nations
"and that He shall set you high above all nations which He has made, for praise, fame, and honor;"

Michael Grisanti: All three terms occur in **Jeremiah 13:11** and **33:9** in a slightly different order (*"fame . . . praise . . . honor"*). In **Jeremiah 13** Yahweh affirms that he commissioned Israel *"to be my people for my renown and praise and honor"* and then indicts his covenantal nation for rejecting this role. In **ch. 33**, which is similar to the present passage, Yahweh looks forward to the day when the city of Jerusalem will bring him *"renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth."* Bringing glory to Yahweh before every inhabitant of the world is the **ultimate goal** of Yahweh's relationship with his covenantal people.

2. (:19b) Consecrated to Holiness
"and that you shall be a consecrated people to the LORD your God, as He has spoken."

Peter Craigie: Israel, remaining faithful to the covenant God, would be renowned among other nations, not because of inherent merit, but because the covenant community would reflect the glory of the covenant God in its national life. This glory was the potential of the community of God's people; but in the two chapters that follow, a solemn warning is issued concerning the natural disasters that would fall upon Israel in the event of unfaithfulness to the covenant God.

Bruce Hurt: This is the **ultimate goal** for Israel, to be a holy people, a people set apart from the profane godless world and unto the true God of this world. They would be His instrument with which He could bless the world and ultimately through whom would come the Messiah, the Savior of the world. So I agree with **Utley's** comment that this passage is Israel's **"GREAT COMMISSION VERSE,"** the OT version of **Mt 28:19-20+**.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are the responsibilities associated with our **election** as God's people and high calling to walk in His ways?
- 2) Why do we need so many reminders and exhortations to **obey God's commands**?
- 3) What does it mean to you to be God's **treasured possession**?
- 4) Why does the **missional component** of Israel's covenant relationship so often get overlooked?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: Deut 26:16–19 as the Connecting Link for the Inner Frame

- A Blessing and curse in a covenant renewal under Moses 11:26–28
 - B Blessing and curse in a covenant renewal at Shechem 11:29–32
 - X Mutual commitments made between YHWH and Israel 26:16–19
 - B' Blessing and curse in a covenant renewal at Shechem 27:1–26
- A' Blessing and curse in a covenant renewal under Moses 28:1–69 (Eng. 29:1)

Daniel Block: These verses obviously involve two declarations, the first by Yahweh (v. 17) and the second by the people (vv. 18–19). The two parts exhibit remarkable grammatical parallelism in that both involve four elements expressed with infinitives construct. While the parallelism is clear, it is not so clear who says what or how it was said. As the presiding officer in the covenant ratification rituals, through indirect speech Moses summarizes the privileges each party accepts and the obligations to which they commit themselves, and in so doing creates some syntactical ambiguities. The respective speeches may be identified as follows:

Moses' voice: Today, you have had Yahweh declare:

God's voice: *"I will be your God,
And you shall walk in my ways,
And you shall keep my ordinances, and my
commands, and my laws,
And you shall listen to my voice."*

Moses' voice: Today, Yahweh has had you declare:

The people's voice: *"We will be your treasured people—
just as you promised us—
And we will keep all your commands;
And you shall set us high above all the nations you*

*have made
for praise, fame, and honor;
And we will be a holy people belonging to Yahweh our God—
just as you promised” (pers. trans.)*

Each speech consists of a declaration of the status within the relationship that the respective speakers accept for themselves, and a commitment to the obligations to which they recognize the others to have committed themselves. Yahweh accepts the status of being Israel’s God, in fulfillment of the oft-repeated promise embodied in the covenant formula, and Israel accepts the status of being Yahweh’s treasured people and a holy people belonging to him. Additionally, the Israelites commit themselves to keeping all Yahweh’s commands, in fulfillment of Yahweh’s charge in **verse 17b**. The obligations to which each party recognizes the other to have committed himself are expressed with active verbs. Yahweh calls on Israel to walk in his ways, to keep all his commands, and to listen to his voice, while Israel recognizes Yahweh’s commitment to set them high above all the nations he has made, for praise, fame, and honor. . .

With these comments on the **missiological significance** of **Deuteronomy 26:16–19** we have touched on the significance of this passage for Christians today. This short text provides a summary statement of the **privileges and obligations of covenant relationship**. In Christ we observe the supreme demonstration of God’s commitment to us. In Christ we hear God say, “*I will be your God and you will be my people*,” a refrain whose echoes are heard in **2 Corinthians 6:16** and **Revelation 21:3**. Through his saving work we have become his treasured possession and his holy people. This is our privilege as the new covenant people.

However, with every privilege come **responsibilities**. If Yahweh required his people Israel to respond to his grace with wholehearted obedience, the same is true for us. In healthy covenant relationships the parties to the covenant commit themselves to acting in the interests of the other person. The same is true of our covenant relationship with God. As Yahweh incarnate, Jesus said, “*If you love me [i.e., are covenantally committed to me], you will keep my commands*” (pers. trans. of **John 14:15**; cf. **14:21**; **15:10**). The charge involves more than simply doing everything Jesus tells the disciples from now on. Rather, “*my commands*” (*entolas*) is shorthand for the divine will revealed in the context of his covenant with Israel. The God who spoke at Sinai is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fruit he calls us to bear is the fruit of righteous conduct, joyful obedience to his will, as revealed in the Torah.

If Yahweh was glorified through the righteous and faithful conduct of his people Israel, the same is true of the new Israel of God. Indeed, Jesus reminds his disciples that his Father is glorified in this—that the disciples prove to be his disciples by bearing much fruit. As we do so, the glory and grace of the heavenly Father will radiate forth from us, drawing people to him like a great magnet. May believers everywhere be faithful in proclaiming his grace, and may many heed his call to go to the ends of the earth, so that everyone may know that Yahweh, incarnate in Jesus Christ, is God and Lord of all—for his praise, fame, and glory.

Gerald Gerbrandt: From Israel's side, God is committing to be its God, Israel is committing to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, his commandments, and his ordinances, and to obey him [lit., to listen to his voice]. From God's side, Israel is committing to keep his commandments, God is committing to making Israel his treasured people, to set Israel high above all nations, and to make it a people holy to the Lord your God, as he promised. As in **Chapter 14**, Israel becomes holy through special action of God, not through its own doing. "Taking the two declarations together, Yahweh commits to bring about and maintain the relationship of God and people ('treasured,' 'promised,' 'set high,' 'holy') and Israel commits itself to obey the law ('walk,' 'keep,' 'obey')" (Nelson 2002: 312). The **unequal** nature of the relationship is clear from the final term in Hebrew and in most English translations: **promised**. It is God's word that can be trusted, that initiates election, and that is foundational to the agreement of these verses.

Earl Kalland: This exhortation and declaration concludes the section on the stipulations of the covenant-treaty covering individual, family, tribal, national, and international relationship. These stipulations were especially important for the Israelites at this juncture in their budding national existence. One relationship towers above all others in importance: Israel must be loyal and obedient to the Lord their God, the Suzerain who presented this covenant to them.

The character of the address is historical, legal, reminiscent, sometimes extemporaneous, and often repetitive, exhortative, or parenthetical.

In this last section (**vv. 16-19**) the treaty form involves the people's acceptance of the Lord as suzerain and Moses' acceptance of Israel as the Lord's vassal people. Moses served as the covenant's mediator.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 27:1-26

TITLE: CHARGE ISSUED TO ISRAEL

BIG IDEA:

COVENANT RENEWAL CEREMONY UPON ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND TO CHARGE ISRAEL WITH CONTINUED OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S LAW WHILE RECITING SPECIFIC CURSES FOR DISOBEDIENCE

INTRODUCTION:

Gerald Gerbrandt: Summary Outline

Covenant Renewal at Shechem, 27:1–26

27:1–8A	Commemorative Monument and an Altar
27:9–10	Exhortation to Obey
27:11–26	Prohibitions in Curse Form

Covenant Blessings and Curses, 28:1–68

28:1–14	Blessings
28:15–68	Curses

Michael Grisanti: Moses exhorts the children of Israel to renew their covenant with the Lord, commands that they provide for the preservation of the covenantal stipulations, and charges that they symbolically place themselves under the suzerainty of the stipulations of the covenant with the Lord by means of a ceremony on Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. The nation is to “act out” this covenant-renewal ceremony shortly after they entered the land God has promised them.

Peter Craigie: The main section of specific stipulations (**Deut. 12–26**) is sandwiched between two sections in which the **future renewal** of the covenant is anticipated: **11:26–32** and **27:1–26**. The structure at this point is significant for understanding the nature of the covenant relationship and the renewing of that relationship on the plains of Moab. The renewal of the covenant in Moab has two focal points: (1) the remembrance of the **past**, specifically the forming of the covenant at Horeb (Sinai); (2) the anticipation of the **future**, when again the covenant would be renewed. This perspective is a part of the Hebrew understanding of history; it is not simply that the Hebrews had a linear concept of time. Rather, they believed that there was a close relationship between the present moment, the events leading up to that moment, and those events still lying in the future, when the essence of God’s ancient promise to the patriarchs would be fulfilled. Thus, throughout the renewal of the covenant in Moab, which had its roots in the past, the focal point and indeed the purpose of the renewal lay in **the anticipation of the future**. The specific details concerning the continuity of leadership in the covenant community are stated in **chs. 29–30**, but in **ch. 27** the general principle is given, namely, that in the future there would have to be a further renewal of obedience and commitment to God’s law, which had just been declared and expounded (**chs. 12–26**).

Eugene Merrill: The Introduction has already set forth the case for Deuteronomy as a **sovereign-vassal treaty text** and for this section as the **curses and blessings element**. The peculiar fact that there are two sections of curses and only one of blessings was there explained as a literary device in which the latter is sandwiched between the former. The curses appear to relate to the specific stipulations and general stipulations respectively, whereas the blessings do double duty, referring to both bodies. The reason for the brevity of the list of blessings is not apparent though one will recall that the later Neo-Assyrian treaty texts contained no blessings section at all. It might be that the blessings section in Deuteronomy is, in effect, the self-imposed obligations of the Lord to his people and, as such, there is no need to spell those out in great detail. A good and gracious God need do no more than pledge himself to the well-being of his chosen ones as they submit to his dominion over them.

The nature of Deuteronomy as a **covenant renewal document** designed especially for life in the Promised Land is evident from this set of instructions given by Moses to the people. They had received the covenant in the here and now of the plains of Moab, but they had to wait until they arrived in Canaan to formalize its implementation by a mass ceremony of **commitment**. This would include the erection of a monument containing the fundamental principles of the Lord-Israel relationship, a covenant meal signifying the harmony of that relationship, and a catalog of curses and blessings appropriate to the maintenance and/or disruption of that relationship.

I. (:1-8) CELEBRATION OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AND COMMITMENT TO FUTURE OBEDIENCE VIA A COMMEMORATIVE MONUMENT AND SPECIAL SACRIFICIAL OFFERINGS

“Then Moses and the elders of Israel charged the people, saying,”

Earl Kalland: **Chapter 27** has an unusual introduction. Not Moses alone, but Moses and the **elders** of Israel commanded the people. Nowhere else in Deuteronomy are the elders associated with Moses as spokesmen to the people. Perhaps this is due to the prospect of the imminent death of Moses and, consequently, to his absence when the ceremony at Gerizim and Ebal was to be enacted. Perhaps it was to enhance their authority at the coming covenant renewal in the land.

Eugene Merrill: The so-called abruptness of the reference to Moses by name in **27:1** loses its force when it is recognized that the great stipulation section of **chaps. 5–26** is enveloped not only by the introduction to and conclusion of that section that shares technical terms and other common devices (**Deut 5:1-5**; cf. **26:16-19**) but by the very name Moses itself. Thus **Deut 5:1** (the last time the name was mentioned) has Moses commanding obedience to the “*decrees and laws*” of the covenant, and here (**27:1**) he instructs that they keep all the covenant “*commands*.” The linkage seems quite apparent.

Duane Christensen: This is the only place in which Moses is joined by the **elders** in commanding the people to observe “*the commandment*” (cf. also v 9, where Moses is joined by the **Levitical priests**).

A. (:1b) Commanding Future Obedience

“Keep all the commandments which I command you today.”

B. (:2-4) Constructing a Commemorative Monument

1. (:2a) Marking the Occasion of Entering the Promised Land

“So it shall be on the day when you shall cross the Jordan to the land which the LORD your God gives you,”

2. (:2b-3a) Memorializing the Law as the Key Covenant Document

“that you shall set up for yourself large stones, and coat them with lime and write on them all the words of this law, when you cross over,”

David Block: The plaster probably involved a white alkaline compound consisting of water and calcium oxide—derived from limestone readily available in the vicinity of Ebal and Gerizim—and readily applied to surfaces. As the moisture evaporates, the plaster hardens, leaving a smooth coating over the object. While the scribes would probably etch the text of the Torah on the stone pillars with a sharp object, they could also write it with ink or paint. In either case, exposed to the elements the text would quickly wear away, and all that would be left as a memorial to this event were the pillars themselves. Though these could have been reused as a rallying point, these instructions call for a one-time ritual use involving the text of the Torah Moses has been promulgating.

Eugene Merrill: The sheer length of the complete covenant text of Deuteronomy seems to preclude its having been in view in the terms “*all the words of this law.*” What more likely was meant was the **Decalogue alone**, the very core and foundation of all the law. Such a view is favored by the fact that only the Ten Commandments were engraved on stone by the Lord (cf. **Exod 24:4, 12; 32:15-16; 34:1, 4**), and only they were laid up in the ark of the covenant for preservation as a witness (**Exod 25:16**).

3. (:3b) Marveling at the Possession of God’s Promised Blessing

“in order that you may enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.”

4. (:4) Marking the Occasion of Entering the Promised Land

“So it shall be when you cross the Jordan, you shall set up on Mount Ebal, these stones, as I am commanding you today, and you shall coat them with lime.”

C. (:5-8) Constructing an Altar for Special Offerings

1. (:5-6a) Building an Altar of Uncut Stones

*“Moreover, you shall build there an altar to the LORD your God,
an altar of stones; you shall not wield an iron tool on them.
6 You shall build the altar of the LORD your God of uncut stones;”*

Michael Grisanti: It does appear that the Canaanites, whose religious practices were proscribed for Israel, made their altars of hewn stones (though they also made some altars with unhewn stones; **Brevard Childs**, *The Book of Exodus* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974], 466; **J. Philip Hyatt**, *Commentary on Exodus* [NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 226). But beyond that presumably forbidden parallel, the prohibition of hewn stones probably signifies the idea that all human effort (devoted to shaping or “improving” the altar’s stones) is unacceptable as a means of approaching God (**J. M. Sprinkle**, *“The Book of the Covenant”*: A Literary Approach [JSOTSup 174; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994], 48).

2. (:6b-7) Burning Special Sacrificial Offerings in a Joyful Celebration

*“and you shall offer on it burnt offerings to the LORD your God;
7 and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and eat there,
and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God.”*

Daniel Block: Like the procedure at Sinai, this ceremony is covenantal. Whereas the Sinai event had sealed the bipartite relationship between people and deity, the third party (the land) was missing. The purpose of this ritual was to integrate the land in this complex of relationships and to secure Israel’s title to that which Yahweh promised long ago. By eating the covenant meal in the presence of Yahweh in the land he has given them, the Israelites celebrate the completion of the triangle.

3. (:8) Blazoning the Words of the Law on the Stones

*“And you shall write on the stones
all the words of this law very distinctly.”*

II. (:9-10) CHARGE TO LISTEN AND OBEY IN THE CONTEXT OF COVENANT RENEWAL

“Then Moses and the Levitical priests spoke to all Israel, saying,”

A. (:9b) Charge to Listen

“Be silent and listen, O Israel!”

B. (:9c) Confession of Covenant Renewal as the People of God

“This day you have become a people for the LORD your God.”

Eugene Merrill: It is obvious that this cannot mean that Israel had to this point not been the Lord’s **chosen ones**, for the whole history of the covenant relationship up until then said otherwise (cf. **Deut 4:20; 7:6-7; 9:26, 29; 10:15; 14:2; 21:8; 26:15, 18-19**). What is suggested is that affirmation of that special relationship must be made over and over again, particularly at strategic moments such as that of covenant renewal. On the eve of

conquest and in anticipation of the covenant ceremony Moses was outlining, he reminded them that once more they had become God's people by confession of that reality. In other words, existential awareness of election and redemption must periodically be invoked so as to make the historical facts behind it personal and ongoing. On the basis of that confession as God's people, they now had to obey his commands and decrees, that is, the covenant stipulations that Moses had been imparting (v. 10).

Peter Craigie: The meaning is that in the renewal of the covenant, the Israelites renewed their status as God's people. They were already the people of God, of course, but the ceremony on the plains of Moab reminded them of that status and renewed its reality. This consciousness of being God's people is used here to reinforce the Israelites' sense of responsibility in renewing again their covenant with God, once they had passed over into the Promised Land.

C. (:10) Charge to Obey

*"You shall therefore obey the LORD your God,
and do His commandments and His statutes which I command you today."*

Daniel Block: Moses cautions the people not to assume that formal rituals of devotion are all that Yahweh demands. **Covenantal fidelity** is demonstrated through listening to Yahweh's voice (v. 10a) and scrupulously observing the commands expounded upon orally by Moses, transcribed on the pillars of stone, and eventually preserved in written Torah (31:9–13). His instructions are not to be treated merely as museum pieces or literary artifacts, but as **guides to life**.

III. (:11-26) CATALOG OF CURSES RECITED

"Moses also charged the people on that day, saying,"

A. (:12-13) Twelve Tribes Positioned on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal

1. (:12) Six Tribes on Mount Gerizim to Bless the People

*"When you cross the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to
bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin."*

MacArthur: The tribe of Levi was to participate in the first group. The tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim were together as the tribe of Joseph.

2. (:13) Six Tribes on Mount Ebal to Curse the People

*"And for the curse, these shall stand on Mount Ebal:
Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali."*

Daniel Block: The tribal sequence reflects both **geography** and **genealogy**. Except for Issachar, the tribes stationed on the northern slope of Gerizim were allocated land to the south of the site of this ritual. Except for Dan, the tribes stationed on the southern slope of Ebal were allocated land either to the north or across the Jordan. The tribes stationed

on Gerizim included those descended from Rachel (Joseph and Benjamin), plus the two Leah tribes destined to dominate Israel's religious and political life (Levi and Judah). To these were added two more Leah tribes, Simeon (closely associated with Judah in the distribution of land) and Issachar, whose territory abutted that of Manasseh (Joseph). The remaining Leah tribes (Reuben and Zebulun) were left to be grouped with the descendants of Jacob's concubines, Bilhah (Dan, Naphtali) and Zilpah (Gad, Asher). . .

Mounts Ebal and Gerizim are present not only as witnesses to the blessings and curses, but as the repository to the Torah itself (the inscribed pillars of uncut stones taken from

the region), and the land of Canaan (now Israel) is also engaged as a vital partner in the covenantal relationship.

Michael Grisanti: Shechem is the place of Yahweh's choice for this important celebration of covenantal renewal. There are at least four potential reasons for the choice of Mounts Ebal and Gerizim as the site for this covenant-renewal ceremony:

- The valley between these two mountains provides a natural amphitheater (the **acoustical factor**);
- Shechem was an important site throughout biblical history (**Ge 12:6–7; Jos 24:32**; the **historical factor**);
- Shechem was centrally located among the tribal allotments (the **geographical factor**); and
- mountains and hills were often appealed to as witnesses in covenantal contexts (the **covenantal factor**).

Peter Craigie: On the basis of the description of the ceremony given in **Josh. 8:30–35**, the ark, together with the Levitical priests who attended it, would be set in the middle of the valley, with the two groups of tribes on either side of it. Although the details of the ceremony are no longer certain, the symbolism seems fairly clear. The ark, containing the covenant tablets, was in the middle. The people were either obedient to the law of the covenant or disobedient; there was no half-way house.

MacArthur: The blessings that were to be recited from Mt. Gerizim were not recorded in this passage, no doubt omitted here to stress that Israel did not prove themselves obedient to the covenant and, therefore, did not enjoy the blessings.

B. (:14-26) Twelve Specific Curses Connected to the Ten Commandments

*“The Levites shall then answer
and say to all the men of Israel with a loud voice,”*

Eugene Merrill: The scene, as described once before (cf. **11:26-32**), would have been that of an antiphony in which the tribes (or more likely their representatives) would affirm the curses and blessings read to them by the officiating Levites (**v. 14**). This they would do by simply responding “Amen” to each as they heard it. In this manner they were not only pledging themselves to obedience but expressing their willingness to

accept whatever judgment might accrue to their disobedience. Thus the representatives did indeed bless and curse their own people as they assented to the covenant requirements (v. 12).

Michael Grisanti: The curses in the present section follow a set formula:

- (1) passive participle (“A *cursed one is*”);
- (2) individual address (“*the man*”);
- (3) objective statement of the offense (“*who does . . .*”);
- (4) national recognition (“*Amen*”).

1. (:15) Private Household Idolatry

*“Cursed is the man who makes an idol or a molten image,
an abomination to the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman,
and sets it up in secret.
And all the people shall answer and say, ‘Amen.’”*

Daniel Block: Unlike the golden calf, which served as a public national symbol (9:12, 16), this curse has in mind small household idols that could be clandestinely manufactured and set up within a house.

2. (:16) Dishonoring Parents

*“Cursed is he who dishonors his father or mother.
And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’”*

Michael Grisanti: God gave parents the role of teaching their children, so parents are to be honored as God’s covenantal representatives. To dishonor one’s parents is to disrespect the authority of God.

3. (:17) Moving a Boundary Marker

*“Cursed is he who moves his neighbor’s boundary mark.
And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’”*

Daniel Block: In Israel moving a boundary stone was viewed not only as a violation of others’ right to their own property, but also as a crime against Yahweh, the ultimate owner of the land (Lev. 25:23), who had through casting the lot personally allotted the land to the respective clans and families.

4. (:18) Exploiting the Handicapped

*“Cursed is he who misleads a blind person on the road.
And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’”*

Michael Grisanti: Although the expression “*leads the blind astray on the road*” can be taken literally, it seems more likely to refer to any treatment of a blind person for personal gain that exploits his lack of sight.

5. (:19) Perverting Justice for the Vulnerable

*“Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow.
And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'”*

Michael Grisanti: The final curse in this trio condemns the perversion of justice, commonly directed against aliens, orphans, and widows (cf. **16:19; 24:17**). Lacking ethnic belonging, a father, or a husband, respectively, these needy people served as tempting targets for unscrupulous Israelites who seek their own gain at whatever cost to others. Not only is any such conduct heartless, it also represents treachery against God’s intentions for his covenantal nation, the relationships between whose members God desires to be characterized by equity and justice (e.g. **Mic 6:8**). Yahweh presents himself as the protector of the disadvantaged (**Dt 10:18**).

6. (:20) Incest with One’s Father’s Wife

*“Cursed is he who lies with his father's wife,

because he has uncovered his father's skirt.
And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'”*

Eugene Merrill: Since it was so apparent that incest involving one's own mother was unspeakably evil, the curse does not address that possibility. The reference here to “*his father's wife*” (v. 20) means stepmother or, less likely, a second wife in addition to the mother.

7. (:21) Sexual Intercourse with Animals

*“Cursed is he who lies with any animal.
And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'”*

Daniel Block: Whereas **Leviticus 18:23** condemns such acts, whether committed by a man or woman, as defiling and perverse, other texts expressly declare them capital crimes (**Ex. 22:19[18]; Lev. 20:15–16**). Apparently bestiality was deemed such a heinous offense because it blurs the boundaries between the creaturely world and humankind created as image-bearers of God (**Gen. 1:26–28**). The roots of this disposition go back to Eden, where God created woman because none of the animals was an appropriate counterpart for the man (Gen. 2:18–25).

8. (:22) Sexual Intercourse with One’s Half-Sister

*“Cursed is he who lies with his sister,
the daughter of his father or of his mother.
And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'”*

Eugene Merrill: Again this refers not to a blood kin, or certainly not to a full sister, but to a **foster sibling** or **half-sister**. Such relations between full brothers and sisters are not explicitly proscribed here or elsewhere in the law, but if they are forbidden between less closely related siblings, then a fortiori they would be all the more intolerable within more closely defined kinships. In any case, such sin borders on incest, a most

abominable practice in the Lord's eyes (cf. **Lev 18:6-18**) but one widely carried on in Israel's cultural environment, especially in Egyptian royal circles.

9. (:23) Sexual Intercourse with One's Mother-in-law

*"Cursed is he who lies with his mother-in-law.
And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'"*

10. (:24) Striking One's Neighbor in Secret

*"Cursed is he who strikes his neighbor in secret.
And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'"*

Peter Craigie: The tenth and eleventh curses have to do with various ways in which murder might be committed, thereby breaking the sixth commandment. First a man might kill his neighbor in secret and therefore he might never be brought to trial for his crime. Second, a man might take a bribe in order to kill an innocent person; a paid assassin of this kind naturally would not commit the crime unless he thought he could avoid the penalty of the law, for otherwise his bribe would be of little value to him. Both types of murder come under the curse.

11. (:25) Accepting a Bribe to Strike Down an Innocent Person

*"Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person.
And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'"*

Daniel Block: Here the case involves either paying a bribe to a witness in court to ensure testimony supporting fallacious charges against an innocent person that lead ultimately to his death, or paying a bribe to a judge so he condemns an innocent person to death—in which case this curse strengthens the ordinance in **Exodus 23:6-7**.

12. (:26) General Transgression of the Torah

*"Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.
And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'"*

Eugene Merrill: The present curse section ends, finally, with a general malediction against anyone who fails to uphold (Heb. *h qîm*, "carry out, give effect to") "the words of this law," namely, the entire covenant text (cf. **Deut 17:19; 27:3, 8; 28:58; 29:29; 31:12; 32:46**). This warning both covers any and all possible covenant infractions not spelled out in the preceding list and serves as a fitting conclusion to this series that began with an admonition to recognize and serve the Lord alone as God (v. 15). The best way one can acknowledge the Lord's sovereignty is to carry out fully his covenant expectations.

Jack Deere: This last curse demonstrates that the preceding list was representative. Perhaps the 11 examples were chosen, as stated earlier, because most of them could be done in **secret** and therefore the offender might not be as easily detected as he would when violating other laws. The summary nature of the 12th curse, however, indicates that God desired a wholehearted obedience to the **Law** both in public and in private.

Paul used this verse to teach that no one could find eternal life by obeying the Law (**Gal. 3:10**). Eternal life is received only through God’s grace when one places his faith in Jesus Christ as his substitutionary sacrifice for sin (**Rom. 3:24-25; Eph. 2:8-9**).

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why the need for such a commemorative ritual upon the occasion of entering the Promised Land?
- 2) How can we focus our attention in heightened fashion on the necessity of obedience to God’s Word?
- 3) In what way do the specific curses correspond to the various Ten Commandments?
- 4) Why the omission here of specific blessings?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: The imprecations exhibit a modified chiasmic structure:

1	Idolatry (secret)	A	Violation of the supreme Command
2	Dishonoring parents	B	Violation of fundamental domestic order
3	Moving a neighbor’s landmark	C	Violation of a neighbor’s rights
4	Misleading the blind		
5	Perverting the rights of the alien, fatherless, and widow	D	Violation of the rights of the economically marginalized
6	Having intercourse with one’s [step]mother		
7	Having intercourse with an animal	E	Violation of domestic sexual boundaries
8	Having intercourse with one’s sibling		
9	Having intercourse with one’s mother-in-law		
10	Striking down a neighbor (secret)	C’	Violation of a neighbor’s rights
11	Accepting a bribe is crime against life	B’	Violation of fundamental social order
12	General disregard of the Torah	A’	Violation of the covenant in principle

Duane Christensen: Much effort was spent in ancient Israel to put the content of Deuteronomy in the hearts and minds of the common people by means of musical

recitation and dramatic performance within the context of public festivals. The text was on public display for all to see, on great plastered stela alongside the altar that was the focus of sacrificial offerings in Mount Ebal. That same text was sung by the Levitical priests and committed to memory by the worshipers as well.

The Christian church can learn much from the example of ancient Israel in this regard. It is not enough merely to hand out copies of the Bible to our children as they move from the third to the fourth grade. We must find ways to get the content of that book into the hearts and minds of all our people by various means, which include the prominent display of the text itself in public worship.

Michael Grisanti: This **focus on the curses to the exclusion of blessings** appears to be an integral part of Moses' theological agenda. Moses understands that the nation, on its own, will fail to live up to Yahweh's expectations and experience the pain of covenantal cursing (**Barker**, "Theology of Deuteronomy 27," 284; cf. **Keil**, 432). **Chapter 27** expects Israel to fail and disobey (**Barker**, *ibid.*, 280). In spite of this "pessimism," the ceremony of covenantal renewal "acknowledges a future for Israel, not premised on Israel's ability but rather on Yahweh's faithfulness" (*ibid.*, 294; cf. 302). Alongside this "pessimism," the erection of the altar and offering of sacrifices points to Yahweh's role in his relationship with Israel. On their own the people of the chosen nation are totally incapable of honoring their covenantal Lord. However, they can obey Yahweh as a consequence of a genuine relationship with him (*ibid.*, 302–3).

Earl Kalland: Paul used **v. 26 in Galatians 3:10** as an indication of the ineffectiveness of the law as a saving instrument. But this is quite contrary to its original intention. Certainly **Deuteronomy 27:26** is a curse, but that curse is meant to forestall the failure to follow the law. One must remember, as **Ridderbos** (p. 113) says, "As for the difference of intention between the use of this passage here in **Galatians** and in **Deut 27**, we ought not to forget that the whole development of Jewish legalism lies between **Deut 27** and **Gal 3**."

The Deuteronomic curses were warnings not to break the law, given with the intent that paying heed to the warning would keep Israel in good relationship with the Lord. Those living in OT times who were faithful to the Lord were not under the curse but rather had the witness from the Spirit of God that they were acceptable to him.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 28:1-14

TITLE: CATALOG OF COVENANT BLESSINGS FOR ISRAEL

BIG IDEA:

**COVENANT BLESSINGS ATTACH TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD
CONDITIONED ON OBEDIENCE**

INTRODUCTION:

Peter Craigie: The blessings are stated first (28:1–14) and then are followed by a much larger section dealing with the curses (28:15–68). In both parts of **ch. 28**, the actual blessings and curses which were pronounced formally in the ceremony are stated very succinctly; the blessings are stated in **vv. 3–6** and find their direct opposites in the curses contained in **vv. 16–19**. . .

The international theme emerges clearly in the sermon that follows and it is given two emphases, (a) There is an emphasis on the internal blessing of God on his people, indicating the health and prosperity of the nation per se. (b) There is also an emphasis on the strength and vitality of Israel vis-a-vis other nations. The converse of both these emphases appears in the following section dealing with curses; Israel not only would experience disaster within her communal life as a result of disobedience, but would be openly humiliated among other nations.

Daniel Block: Deuteronomy 28 divides structurally into two uneven panels, consisting respectively of blessings awaiting the Israelites if they are faithful to their covenant Lord (**vv. 1–14**), and curses if they persist in rebellion against him (**vv. 15–68**). The space devoted to the curses reflects the chapter's paraenetic purpose. Like the imprecations in **27:15–26**, these curses seek to motivate **fidelity** and deter Israelites from violating the terms of the covenant. Moses' aim is **pastoral**: to impress on the minds of his audience **the seriousness of disobedience**. By assenting to the specified consequences in the ratification ritual, for good or ill, the Israelites seal their own fate.

Michael Grisanti: Moses here articulates the blessings Yahweh promises that the children of Israel will experience if they faithfully obey his commandments and do not worship any other gods. Because of the covenantal relationship between Israel and the Lord, he expects certain kinds of conduct from his chosen people and promises to bless them abundantly before the entire world for their obedience. Two emphatic verbal constructions highlight the nature of this obedience.

- First, the combination of two verbs from the same root (*šm'*, "to hear/obey"; GK 9048) carries the idea of full or total obedience.
- Second, the juxtaposition of the verbs "keep" and "do" demonstrates that Yahweh demands diligent or careful obedience of his covenantal nation.

The phrase “*all his commands*” refers, as it does throughout the book, to the totality of Yahweh’s covenantal expectations for his chosen nation. The contents of this “covenantal treaty document” are nonnegotiable.

Gerald Gerbrandt: To speak of the blessings as conditional upon obedience must be distinguished from speaking of the blessings as a reward for obedience. . . The land and its blessings thus always remain an **undeserved gift**. They must never be treated as if deserved or obtained through my power and the might of my own hand (**8:17**). The relationship between obedience and blessing thus is only one way: obedience makes continuing blessing possible, but blessing remains a gift and never becomes the deserved reward for obedience. The relationship between obedience and blessing thus is very different from the relationship between disobedience and curse (**C. Wright** 1996: 280).

I. (:1-2) CONDITION FOR BLESSING = OBEDIENCE

A. (:1a) Condition Introduced

“Now it shall be, if you will diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today,”

Michael Grisanti: Verses 1–2 contain two conditional statements, presented chiasmically (condition [v.1a], result [v.1b], result [v.2a], condition [v.2b]). Verse 1 affirms that total and wholehearted obedience will occasion the nation of Israel’s international prominence.

B. (:1b-2a) Promise

1. (:1b) Elevation above the Nations

“the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.”

Eugene Merrill: The blessing of being exalted above all other nations had already been articulated; in fact, it is the very last promise of the stipulation section of the book (**26:19**) and is in line with the elective purposes of God, who chose Israel out “*from among*” all nations to be his special possession (**7:6; 14:2**; cf. **Exod 19:6**). Ultimately, however, the promise must find fulfillment in an eschatological setting in which Israel (or Zion) would enjoy unrivaled preeminence among the nations as the object of God’s gracious favor (cf. **Num 24:7; Ps 89:28; Isa 2:2**).

2. (:2a) Enjoyment of Blessings

“And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you,”

C. (:2b) Condition Repeated

“if you will obey the LORD your God.”

II. (:3-6) COMPREHENSIVE SPHERES OF BLESSINGS

MacArthur: These beatitudes summarize the various spheres where the blessing of God would extend to Israel's life. God's favor is also intended to permeate all their endeavors as emphasized further in the expanded summary in **28:7, 14**, on the condition of Obedience (**vv. 1, 2, 9, 13, 14**). They will know victory, prosperity, purity, respect, abundance, and dominance – comprehensive blessings.

A. (:3) Where You Live

*“Blessed shall you be in the city,
and blessed shall you be in the country.”*

Michael Grisanti: In every location (totality of space) Yahweh promises to pour out his blessings on Israel (**v.3**).

B. (:4) What You Produce

1. Children

“Blessed shall be the offspring of your body”

2. Crops

“and the produce of your ground”

3. Livestock

*“and the offspring of your beasts,
the increase of your herd
and the young of your flock.”*

C. (:5) What You Eat

“Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.”

Duane Christensen: The “*kneading trough*” was a wide shallow bowl employed for the preparation of dough with which to make bread. The blessing here refers to provision of daily food for the family.

Earl Kalland: Among a desert-dwelling people, food products were scarce (notwithstanding the manna) and hunger and thirst common. An abundance of foodstuffs was a notable blessing indeed!

D. (:6) Where You Go – Daily Activities

*“Blessed shall you be when you come in,
and blessed shall you be when you go out.”*

Earl Kalland: a common descriptive phrase of going out to one's daily tasks and returning home after the day's work is done, whatever that activity entails. Coming in from labor and going out to work have the same meaning.

III. (:7-13a) CHARACTERIZATION AND EXPOSITION OF BLESSINGS

Michael Grisanti: Moses describes the way in which the Lord will bless his vassals by giving them military victories, material abundance, an impressive reputation, and international prominence if they will only obey his commandments.

Notice the chiastic structure:

A Foreign Relations: Yahweh will provide total security (28:7);

B Domestic Affairs: Yahweh will provide prosperity in barns and land (28:8);

C Covenantal Relationship: Yahweh will establish Israel as his holy people (28:9–10);

B' Domestic Affairs: Yahweh will provide prosperity in barns and land (28:11–12);

A' Foreign Relations: Yahweh will provide total security (28:13–14).

Gerald Gerbrandt: The second set of blessings has a different style. Here God is the active subject of the verbs, with the proper name of God occurring nine times in **verses 7–12**. In these verses the more **general blessings** of the opening set are translated into **particular promises** for Israel (Nelson 2002: 329).

A. (:7) Victory over Enemies

*“The LORD will cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you;
they shall come out against you one way and shall flee before you seven ways.”*

Peter Craigie: Any enemies of Israel, whose attack would threaten their peaceful and blessed existence, would be defeated; God would grant his people victory. Here the security granted by God against external threats is stated to emphasize the reality of God's blessing within the community. It was a promise in which the Israelites could trust, for already they had experienced the victory God had provided against the military might of Egypt. On God's provision of victory, see further **7:17–26**.

B. (:8) Prosperity in the Land

*“The LORD will command the blessing upon you in your barns
and in all that you put your hand to,
and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you.”*

C. (:9-10) Holiness as the People of God

“The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you,

if you will keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and walk in His ways. 10 So all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of you.”

Michael Grisanti: In order for the chosen nation to bring Yahweh great glory and so to accomplish their God-given function, they must live in heartfelt conformity to his covenantal expectations (*keep his commands and walk in his ways*; **28:9b**). Their obedience does not help them earn this place of international impact; rather, their conformity to Yahweh’s demands makes them able to have a powerful impact on the surrounding nations. It is only as they wholeheartedly conform their lives to God’s requirements that they will provide the vivid demonstration of Yahweh’s awe-inspiring character that will have a powerful impact on the world. Covenantal obedience does not merit God-glorifying prominence but enables it to happen.

Eugene Merrill: The reason for **fear** is therefore most apparent: That nation called by Almighty God to be his own son falls under his protection and can freely call upon his omnipotent resources. To mistreat God's people is to invite divine intervention and retribution.

Daniel Block: **Verses 9–10** represent the **theological heart** of this paragraph and the climax of all the blessings in **verses 1–14**. Echoing **26:18–19**, Moses articulates Yahweh’s ideal for his people and their privileges as his covenant partner (cf. **Ex. 19:5–6**). Whereas **26:19** had spoken of Yahweh setting Israel high above all the nations, here Moses envisions him establishing Israel as his holy people. That this involves the fulfillment of an earlier commitment is highlighted by the verb “*to establish*” and the addition of “*as he promised you on oath.*” The notion of Israel as Yahweh’s holy people is familiar from **7:6; 14:2, 21**. However, in keeping with **Exodus 19:5–6**, the fulfillment of Yahweh’s covenantal promises will be contingent on their living according to his revealed will, here referred to as “*keeping*” his commands and “*walking in his ways.*” These are shorthand expressions for all that Yahweh requires of Israel (cf. **10:12–13**).

D. (:11) Productivity in Every Arena

*“And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity,
in the offspring of your body
and in the offspring of your beast
and in the produce of your ground,
in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you.”*

E. (:12) Abundance of Provision by Virtue of God’s Providential Blessing

*“The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens,
to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand;
and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.”*

Peter Craigie: One of the roles of God in the Promised Land would be the provision of **fertility**; fertility depended primarily on the rains. Without the rains, the crops could not

grow, and without the crops and the other produce of the field, neither man nor his domestic animals could survive. Thus in v. 12, there is a very rich expression of the blessing of God, for in providing the rains, God was providing what would be the mainspring of life in Israel's land. The language of the verse is poetic and the imagery may serve a particular religious purpose. The heavens are described as God's **storehouse**; whenever he opened that storehouse, the rains would come down to fertilize the land. The imagery at this point is reminiscent of **Ps. 104:3, 13** where God is described as **watering the mountains** from his lofty abode. But both Hebrew passages find a parallel in the Canaanite myth of Baal, as it is known from the Ugaritic texts. According to the myth, when a house was built for Baal, a window or skylight was set in the roof of the house, so that through this opening Baal could release the rains over the earth. The myth points to a primary function of Baal in the religion of the Canaanites; as a provider of rain, he was a **fertility god**. When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they would be faced with the temptations of the fertility cult of Baal, which had served the previous residents in the land. Such temptations were to be resisted, for though the Lord was not a fertility God in the restricted sense, yet fertility was within his power, for he was the creator and sustainer of the world. It may be that the language of v. 12 (and also of **Ps. 104**) deliberately echoes the Canaanite myth in order to emphasize that the Lord, and not Baal, would provide the needed rains.

F. (:13a) Dominance on the World Scene

*“And the LORD shall make you the head and not the tail,
and you only shall be above, and you shall not be underneath,”*

Peter Craigie: Israel would be a prince among nations, rich in produce and harvest, strong against her enemies, glorious in the presence of God in her midst—always provided that the commandments of God were obeyed (v. 13b).

Eugene Merrill: Obedience to the Lord would guarantee that his people would be “*the head [r], not the tail [z n b]*.” Isaiah used the same metaphor to describe the ordinary people as opposed to the leaders (**Isa 9:14 [Heb. 9:13]**), that is, those who bring up the rear. In the future, particularly in eschatological days, the Lord would so promote Israel that it would lead the procession of nations as their head (cf. **Jer 31:7**).

IV. (:13b-14) CONDITION FOR BLESSING = OBEDIENCE

A. (:13b) Stated Positively

*“if you will listen to the commandments of the LORD your God,
which I charge you today,
to observe them carefully,”*

B. (:14) Stated Negatively

*“and do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you today,
to the right or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.”*

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are we comfortable with the need to apply **diligence** in order to fully obey the Lord's commands?
- 2) How could God prophetically **promise these blessings** to the nation of Israel if they were conditioned on obedience?
- 3) How is **holiness** fundamental to the nature of God's people?
- 4) Why was God so concerned about the **reputation** of His chosen people before the watching nations of the world?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: From a prosodic point of view, **Deut 28:1–19** is in five parts (**vv 1–6, 7–10, 11, 12–14, and 15–19**), which are carefully structured in terms of content in a concentric pattern:

- A Six blessings (in three pairs) **28:1–6**
 - B Promises expanding on the blessings **28:7–10**
 - X Threefold blessing (fruit of womb, cattle, ground) 28:11**
 - B' Promises expanding on the blessings **28:12–14**
- A' Six curses (in three pairs) **28:15–19**

The six blessings (**28:1–6**) and six curses (**28:15–19**) are arranged in three pairs using virtually identical language:

1. Blessed/cursed are you in the city **28:3a, 16a**
2. Blessed/cursed are you in the field **28:3b, 16b**
3. Blessed/cursed is the fruit of you womb, . . . ground, and . . . beasts **28:4, 18**
4. Blessed/cursed is your basket and your kneading trough **28:5, 17**
5. Blessed/cursed are you in your coming in **28:6a, 19a**
6. Blessed/cursed are you in your going forth **28:6b, 19b**

There are other ways to show the concentric structure of this passage in matters of detail. **Tigay** presents the relationship between the blessings in **vv 3–6** and the promises of **vv 7–13** as follows ([1996] 490):

- A economic success **28:3a**
 - B fertility of soil **28:3b**
 - C fertility of humans and animals **28:4**
 - D abundant food **28:5**
 - E military success 28:6**

- E' military success **28:7**
- D' abundant food **28:8**
- C' fertility of humans and animals **28:11**
- B' fertility of soil **28:12a**
- A' economic success **28:12b-13**

Jack Deere: Three areas of blessing were singled out. The first area relates to the **nations**. Israel would have supernatural military success (v. 7), and financial prosperity that would cause them to be above other nations (**vv. 12b-13**), lending to them but never borrowing and always their leaders (*the head*) and never their follower (*the tail*). But disobedience would result in the opposite (**vv. 43-44**).

The second area is **agricultural endeavors**. Israel would experience *abundant prosperity* in her farming and family life (**vv. 8, 11-12a**; cf. v. 4). The Canaanites believed that the fertility god Baal sent rain from *the heavens*, but the Hebrews were to know that the Lord gives *rain*.

The third area was her **reputation**. By being God's obedient and holy people (cf. **26:19**), the Israelites would enjoy such an intimacy with God that they would become a testimony *to all the peoples on earth* who would *fear* or stand in awe of Israel (cf. **2:25; 11:25**). Israel would experience blessings in all three areas (military and financial success, agriculture, and reputation) if she did *not turn aside from any of the Lord's commands* or follow *other gods* (**28:14**).

Matthew Henry: The conditions upon which the blessing of God will descend upon the people:

1. It is upon condition that they diligently hearken to the voice of God (**v. 1-2**), that they hear God speaking to them by his word, and use their utmost endeavors to acquaint themselves with his will, **v. 13**.
2. Upon condition that they observe and do all his commandments (and in order to obedience there is need of observation) and that they keep the commandments of God (**v. 9**) and walk in his ways. Not only do them for once, but keep them forever; not only set out in his ways, but walk in them to the end.
3. Upon condition that they should not go aside either to the right hand or to the left, either to superstition on the one hand, or profanity on the other; and particularly that they should not go after other gods (**v. 14**), which was the sin that of all others they were most prone to, and God would be most displeased with. Let them take care to keep up religion, both the form and power of it, in their families and nation, and God would not fail to bless them.

John Schultz: The peak of blessing is reached in the **verses 9 and 10** – “*The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath.*” Holiness can never be produced by human effort; it is an exclusively divine attribute. The Hebrew word translated with “*holy*” is *qadosh*. **Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words** writes

about the holiness of Israel: “They are ‘holy’ by their relationship to the ‘holy’ God.... Based on the intimate nature of the relationship, God expected His people to live up to His ‘holy’ expectations and, thus, to demonstrate that they were a ‘holy nation’.”

God takes responsibility for our holiness. We read in connection with the consecration of the priests: “*Consider them holy, because I the LORD am holy-- I who make you holy.*” And addressing the nation as a whole, God said: “*Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God. Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy.*”

Our understanding of the word “holy” is usually in terms of **absence of sin**. The **Merriam-Webster Dictionary** defines “holy” as:

- 1: worthy of absolute devotion
- 2: SACRED
- 3: having a divine quality synonymous: hallowed, blessed, sanctified, consecrated.

In the Biblical sense, holy also has a **relational connotation**. Besides being the sum of eternal divine attributes, holiness means **belonging to God who is holy**. This is expressed in the definition “**consecrated**.” It is a logical conclusion that God requires purity. He will never associate Himself with things or persons polluted. Purification is part of the relationship. Man may be responsible to perform certain rituals, as the Israelites were required, but the blood of animals, nor the sprinkling with water could produce moral integrity. Only God can produce purity in us. This is clear from Jesus’ words to His disciples: “*You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.*”

The **International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia** writes about Israel’s relationship with God: “The relation between Yahweh and Israel a unique relation. -- Other nations feared their deities; Israel was expected not only to fear Yahweh but to love Him and cleave to Him. The highest privileges are theirs because they are partakers of the covenant blessings; all others are strangers and foreigners, except they be admitted into Israel by special permission.”

The sanctification of Israel intended to be much more than a process of purification of one nation; it was meant to be a **testimony for the world**. God wanted Israel to be a model for the nations which would draw their attention to the fact that there was a people made up of human beings like everyone else in the world, who lived a life that could not be explained in terms of natural phenomena. Israel’s priesthood in the world could only draw other people to the truth of God’s revelation if they lived out that truth in their daily existence.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 28:15-68

TITLE: CATALOG OF COVENANT CURSINGS FOR ISRAEL

BIG IDEA:

COVENANT CURSINGS (THE REVERSAL OF GOD'S BLESSINGS) ATTACH TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD CONDITIONED ON DISOBEDIENCE

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: In **verse 20** we arrive at the longest literary unit in Deuteronomy. Whereas the imprecations of **27:15–26** and **28:15–19** are formulaic in nature, the curses in **verses 20–68** are cast in impassioned rhetorical style and expound in exhaustive detail the reversal of the blessings specified in **verses 7–13**. When heard orally, these curses create **terror** in the mind of the hearer. . .

These hyperbolic expressions declare Yahweh's goal: to destroy the covenantal triangle and in effect "wipe out" the nation itself. Moses highlights Israel's hopelessness by punctuating the litany of disasters with declarations of the absence of any relief. By means of a seemingly endless catalogue of secondary agents of doom, Moses warns that Yahweh will marshal every conceivable agent of destruction against his people. At critical junctures Moses inserts reminders of the causes of these disasters. Although Yahweh is directly involved in Israel's demise, the Israelites will be destroyed because they have been unfaithful to him (**vv. 20, 45, 47, 62**).

Gerald Gerbrandt: If Israel does not obey, well-deserved punishment will follow (**v. 15**). The short opening set of curses (**vv. 16–19**) are the negative counterpart to the opening blessings (**vv. 3–6**) and thus introduce curses as the withdrawal of blessing. As with the list of blessings, after a short general set in the passive voice, stating that Israel will be cursed everywhere and all the time, the text continues with further curses in which God is the active agent against Israel. Only these curses expand much beyond the blessings.

Michael Grisanti: Moses probably made use of certain covenantal curse terminology common in his day to express the potential covenantal judgment. It is likely that there existed a common collection of covenantal curse statements that appear with slight variations throughout ancient Near Eastern treaties.

Peter Craigie: It is more likely that there was a **body of common conceptions** in the Near East associated with curses, whether in treaties, law codes, or other types of texts. Both **Deut. 28** and the Assyrian texts indicate that they have drawn on these resources, but in both texts they have been adapted to their immediate context. . .

The **imbalance** [between blessings and curses] finds an obvious reason in light of the purpose of the exposition of the curses in the address of Moses. The curses come close to the end of the ceremony of covenant renewal; they provide the speaker with an

excellent opportunity for **one final warning** to the people of the dangers of disobeying the law of God. Moses was about to die, the congregation were about to cross the Jordan, and the whole future of Israel depended on faithful obedience to the law of God. Thus the long and solemn sermon on the curse of God provides a final incentive for wholehearted commitment in renewing the covenant.

Warren Wiersbe: This section is predictive; it describes the judgments God promised to send on the nation if the people refused to obey His law. The judgments are given in greater detail than are the blessings and are just the opposite of the blessings. God wanted His people to know that when these calamities struck, they would recognize the hand of the Lord and not think it was a series of coincidences.

I. (:15-19) DAMNATION OVERVIEW

A. (:15) Condition for Cursing = Disobedience

1. Condition Introduced

“But it shall come about, if you will not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today,”

2. Consequences of Disobedience

“that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.”

Michael Grisanti: Moses clearly defines the people on whom the curses will fall, namely, those who do not obey the stipulations of the covenant. This verse is a near replica of **28:1**, except for the last clause. Instead of Israel’s being set high above all the nations of the earth, *“all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you”* (same verbs as **28:2**) The presence of this curse language, also found in various ancient Near Eastern treaties, emphasizes the seriousness of infidelity in Israel’s relationship with Yahweh.

B. (:16-19) Comprehensive Spheres of Cursing

1. (:16) Where You Live

“Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country.”

2. (:17) What You Eat

“Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.”

3. (:18) What You Produce

a. Children

“Cursed shall be the offspring of your body”

b. Crops

“and the produce of your ground,”

c. Livestock

“the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.”

4. (:19) Where You Go – Daily Activities

*“Cursed shall you be when you come in,
and cursed shall you be when you go out.”*

II. (:20-46) DETAILED CURSES DUE TO DISOBEDIENCE

A. (:20) Summary Introduction –

Variety of Curses Leading to Destruction Due to Wicked Covenant Disloyalty

“The LORD will send upon you curses, confusion, and rebuke, in all you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken Me.”

Daniel Block: The opening declaration (v. 20) may be interpreted as a heading for the entire section, summarizing the key issues in the imprecations:

- (1) the source of Israel’s doom;
- (2) the agents of doom;
- (3) the scope of doom;
- (4) the goal of doom; and
- (5) the reason for Israel’s doom.

Verses 20 and 45–46 frame the first volley of woes, announcing the issues involved.

While linked in substance, the styles of these bookends differ.

- Whereas **verse 20** has Yahweh dispatching the agents of Israel’s doom, **verse 45** compares the curses to an animal pursuing and overtaking its prey.
- Whereas in **verse 20** Yahweh commissions a triad of agents of doom against Israel, **verse 45** replaces these with a triad of verbs.
- Whereas **verse 20** identifies the targets of doom as the work of the Israelites’ hands, **verse 45** identifies the Israelites themselves as the targets.
- Whereas **verse 20** declares that Yahweh’s actions against Israel are precipitated by the people’s evil deeds and their abandonment of Yahweh, **verse 45** specifies the offenses as refusing to obey Yahweh, not keeping his commands and decrees.
- The reference to the **long-range effects** of Yahweh’s actions against Israel in **verse 46** represents the most striking difference between these borders: They will be a “*sign*” and “*wonder*” forever.

B. (:21) Pestilence

“The LORD will make the pestilence cling to you until He has consumed you from the land, where you are entering to possess it.”

Eugene Merrill: Most immediately, however, destruction and ruin would come through disease, blight, and unremitting drought. The nature of the sickness is unclear since the generic term *deber* is used (v. 21). Whatever it is, it will be chronic, as the verb form

indicates (*hidbîq*, “cause to cling to”). There will be no relief until the Lord has “finished you off” (lit., “destroyed you,” v. 21) in the land. This no doubt refers to physical disease that would ravage the land from time to time (cf. **2 Sam 24:13**; **1 Kgs 8:37**; **Ezek 5:12**; **Amos 4:10**), but in its finality it speaks metaphorically of the affliction of deportation (**Lev 26:25**) or disinheritance (**Num 14:12**).

C. (:22-23) Overwhelming Difficulties

1. (:22) Seven Destructive Afflictions

“The LORD will smite you with consumption and with fever and with inflammation and with fiery heat and with the sword and with blight and with mildew, and they shall pursue you until you perish.”

Daniel Block: In **verse 22** Moses becomes more specific, listing **seven afflictions** with which Yahweh will strike his people. The catalogue of seven afflictions expresses Yahweh’s sovereignty over all agents of death and destruction. . . “*Blight*” apparently refers to premature drying of grain growing in the fields, perhaps because of the desiccating effect of scorching east wind. “*Mildew*” seems to involve pathological yellowing of grain, attributable to plant disease, inadequate nutrients in the soil, or drought.

Michael Grisanti: **vv. 22-24** -- Moses then lists **seven afflictions**, signifying the comprehensive nature of these curses (as “seven” is commonly the number for completion). The first three are clearly **human diseases** (consumption, fever, and inflammation). The last three describe **climatic or agricultural conditions**. The fourth term, which means “feverish heat,” could refer to either category (an illness [**Craigie**, 343] or severe heat [NIV; **Merrill**, Deuteronomy, 359]). All seven terms can be **associated with heat**. The diseases will plague them personally or their crops “*until you perish.*”

2. (:23) Cosmic Opposition

“And the heaven which is over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you, iron.”

Daniel Block: These verses echo **Leviticus 26:19**, which also portrays the heavens as a sheet of metal preventing moisture above the firmament from watering the earth, and the ground as hardened and resisting cultivation.

Eugene Merrill: As impervious as these metals are to water and tools, so both the heavens and the earth would be in the day of calamity. The rains would not leak through the skies, nor would the earth be able to be broken up to receive the farmer's seed. Instead, the heavens would rain down dust, which would only exacerbate an already hopeless situation on the earth (v. 24; cf. **11:17**).

D. (:24) Crop Failure

“The LORD will make the rain of your land powder and dust; from heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed.”

E. (:25-26) Military Defeat

“The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them, but you shall flee seven ways before them, and you shall be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. 26 And your carcasses shall be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away.”

F. (:27) Incurable Skin Ailments

“The LORD will smite you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed.”

Daniel Block: The curses in **verses 27–29a, 34** threaten the personal health of the Israelites. A pair of identical clauses highlights Yahweh’s role in Israel’s future disaster (**vv. 27a, 28a**, cf. **v. 35a**), to be followed by a list of agents he will engage. The seven listed here correspond to the seven listed after the same principal clause in **verse 22**, though now the first four involve incurable skin ailments, while the last three are psychosomatic and psychological in nature.

G. (:28-34) Psychological Attacks

1. (:28-29a) Psychosomatic Afflictions

“The LORD will smite you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart; 29 and you shall grope at noon, as the blind man gropes in darkness,”

2. (:29b) Material Deprivation and Physical Danger

“and you shall not prosper in your ways; but you shall only be oppressed and robbed continually, with none to save you.”

3. (:30-33) Emotional Frustration Due to Violated Expectations =
Futility Curses

a. (:30a) The Futility of Betrothal

“You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall violate her;”

MacArthur: v. 30 – These 3 curses were in contrast to the exemptions from military service granted in **20:5-7**. The exemptions were possible because God would grant His people victory in battle. Disobedient to the Lord, however, would mean that God would no longer fight for His people. Those normally exempted from military service would be forced to fight and be killed.

b. (:30b) The Futility of Home Construction

“you shall build a house, but you shall not live in it;”

c. (:30c) The Futility of Agricultural Labors

“you shall plant a vineyard, but you shall not use its fruit.”

d. (:31) The Futility of Owning Livestock

1) Ox

*“Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes,
but you shall not eat of it;”*

2) Donkey

*“your donkey shall be torn away from you,
and shall not be restored to you;”*

3) Sheep

*“your sheep shall be given to your enemies,
and you shall have none to save you.”*

Duane Christensen: The center of this structure (vv 30–31) contains a list of calamities that essentially undo the blessings of vv 4, 8, and 11. Everything the people of Israel have will be taken by those who conquer them: their fiancées will be raped, their homes and vineyards taken, their oxen slaughtered, their asses and sheep stolen, their children enslaved, and their produce consumed.

e. (:32) The Futility of Family Relationships

*“Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people,
while your eyes shall look on and yearn for them continually; but
there shall be nothing you can do.”*

Daniel Block: The Israelites’ children will be seized and delivered over to merchants to be sold in the international slave trade. Parents will look on helplessly and spend the rest of their lives “crying their eyes out” for them.

f. (:34) The Futility of Hard Work

*“A people whom you do not know shall eat up the produce of
your ground and all your labors, and you shall never be anything
but oppressed and crushed continually.”*

4. (:34) Unhinged Mental State

“And you shall be driven mad by the sight of what you see.”

H. (:35) Incurable Boils

*“The LORD will strike you on the knees and legs with sore boils, from which
you cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.”*

Earl Kalland: Blow upon blow continues. What the people would see – the devastated land, ruined by drought and marauding armies; their possessions gone; their bodies sickened; the many dead; their children taken captive into a wretched condition – would drive them insane (v. 34).

I. (:36-44) Relentless Opposition

1. (:36) Physical Opposition -- Oppressive Captivity

“The LORD will bring you and your king, whom you shall set over you, to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone.”

2. (:37) Psychological Opposition -- Humiliating Disgrace

“And you shall become a horror, a proverb, and a taunt among all the people where the LORD will drive you.”

3. (:38-44) Productivity Opposition -- Futility Curses

“You shall bring out much seed to the field but you shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it. 39 You shall plant and cultivate vineyards, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes, for the worm shall devour them. 40 You shall have olive trees throughout your territory but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives shall drop off. 41 You shall have sons and daughters but they shall not be yours, for they shall go into captivity. 42 The cricket shall possess all your trees and the produce of your ground. 43 The alien who is among you shall rise above you higher and higher, but you shall go down lower and lower. 44 He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you shall be the tail.”

Michael Grisanti: Verses 38–41 present a painful contrast between a significant expenditure of labor and having nothing to show for it. Notice the repeated pattern:

Sow much seed	harvest little	harvest consumed by locusts
Plant and cultivate vineyards	no wine to drink	grapes consumed by worms
Have numerous olive trees	no oil to use	olives drop off prematurely
Have sons and daughters	no enjoyment of their company	children go into captivity

J. (:45-46) Summary Conclusion

1. (:45) Inescapable Destruction Due to Disobedience

“So all these curses shall come on you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you would not obey the LORD your God by keeping His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you.”

2. (:46) Shocking and Shameful Legacy

“And they shall become a sign and a wonder on you and your descendants forever.”

Michael Grisanti: The pair “*signs and wonders*” commonly signifies anything that testifies to Yahweh’s presence and power (Dt 4:34; 7:19; 26:8; 29:3 [2]; Jer 32:21).

Duane Christensen: The structure of 28:45–68 may be outlined in a similar five-part concentric structure, a “wheel within a wheel”:

- A These curses will pursue you until you are destroyed 28:45
 - B Israel’s utter privation—in lack of everything 28:46–48
 - X Military siege and the undoing of God’s blessings 28:49–52
 - B’ Israel reduced to cannibalism—in lack of everything 28:53–57
- A’ Complete reversal of Israel’s history until you are destroyed 28:58–68

Eugene Merrill: The inevitable calamities that befall the disobedient nation would be indelibly engraved in their memories and forever after would witness to the truth that the Lord and his covenant will cannot be flaunted.

III. (:47-57) DESTRUCTIVE CONSEQUENCES OF A SIEGE BY FOREIGN ENEMIES

Gerald Gerbrandt: In this larger block of curses, the focus is narrowed to portray the catastrophe resulting from siege and defeat at the hand of the enemy. Because Israel did not serve God, it will serve the enemy (vv. 47–48). Conventional images and language are employed with gruesome effect to describe what happens to a people when an enemy comes and besieges a city, causing starvation, cannibalism, and the loss of all dignity. In the process the land and the children God has given will be lost.

A. (:47-48) Root Causes and Summary Consequences

1. (:47) Root Causes

“Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things;”

2. (:48) Summary Consequences

“therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD shall send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in the lack of all things; and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you.”

Eugene Merrill: To fail to serve would result in Israel's being given over to another sovereign whom they would serve until they were utterly decimated (v. 48). The service this time would not be marked by joy (**im â**) and gladness (*b û b l b b*, lit., “with goodness of heart”) but with their very opposite, destitution and deprivation. It would be onerous slavery like that of prisoners of war led about with iron yokes upon their necks.

B. (:49-52) Relentless Tactics of the Lord’s Agents of Destruction

1. (:49-50) Ruthless Resolve of the Attacking Enemy

“The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, 50 a nation of fierce countenance who shall have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.”

Daniel Block: Verses 49–50 characterize Yahweh’s agent of doom with five bold brushstrokes, each of which intensifies the terror of Israel’s demise.

- (1) The enemy will come “*from the ends of the earth.*” What is near is familiar; what is distant is mysterious and fearful.
- (2) The enemy will be fast. Like an eagle swooping down on his prey, he will attack his targets suddenly and without warning.
- (3) The enemy will speak an unintelligible language. This rules out negotiations and contributes to horror.
- (4) The enemy will be “*fierce-looking*” (lit., “*strong of face*”), which expresses both the terror of a victim and the resolve of the attacker.
- (5) The enemy will be heartless, showing no respect for the aged or mercy toward the young.

MacArthur: God would raise up a nation to act as His own instrument of judgment against His ungrateful people. This foreign nation was described as coming from a far distance from Israel, a nation that would arise quickly and one that would completely devastate the Land. This was fulfilled first by Assyria (**Is 5:26; 7:18-20; 28:11; 37:18; Hos 8:1**) and second, by Babylon (**Jer 5:15; La 4:19; Eze 17:3; Hab 1:6-8**).

2. (:51) Comprehensive Consumption by the Attacking Enemy

“Moreover, it shall eat the offspring of your herd and the produce of your ground until you are destroyed, who also leaves you no grain, new wine, or oil, nor the increase of your herd or the young of your flock until they have caused you to perish.”

3. (:52) Suffocating Siege by the Attacking Enemy

“And it shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout your land, and it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout your land which the LORD your God has given you.”

Michael Grisanti: This last indictment (“*walls in which you trust,*” v.52) is Israel’s fundamental problem. Yahweh repeatedly demanded that his covenantal nation trust him. He demonstrated his stupendous power and willingness to intervene in their behalf on numerous occasions. Nevertheless, on too many occasions in the face of an insuperable challenge (humanly speaking), the chosen nation either turned back (cf. **Nu 13–14; Dt 1:28**) or resorted to other sources of strength (political alliances, idolatry, etc.). Their refusal to trust in their covenantal Lord led to their rebellion and idolatry and, eventually, to their experience of covenantal curse.

C. (:53-57) Radical Cannibalism in Desperate Times

1. (:53) Monstrous Cannibalism Described

“Then you shall eat the offspring of your own body, the flesh of your sons and of your daughters whom the LORD your God has given you, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy shall oppress you.”

MacArthur: The unthinkable activity of cannibalism is introduced in v. 53 and then illustrated in the verses that follow (see **2KI 6:28, 29; La 2:20; 4:10**).

2. (:54-55) Monstrous Cannibalism by Even the Most Refined Man

“The man who is refined and very delicate among you shall be hostile toward his brother and toward the wife he cherishes and toward the rest of his children who remain, 55 so that he will not give even one of them any of the flesh of his children which he shall eat, since he has nothing else left, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy shall oppress you in all your towns.”

3. (:56-57) Monstrous Cannibalism by Even the Most Refined Woman

“The refined and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground for delicateness and refinement, shall be hostile toward the husband she cherishes and toward her son and daughter, 57 and toward her afterbirth which issues from between her legs and toward her children whom she bears; for she shall eat them secretly for lack of anything else, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy shall oppress you in your towns.”

Daniel Block: Both panels also depict men and women turning against members of their own families. The image of the woman who becomes hostile even toward her afterbirth is shocking (**vv. 56–57a**). **Verses 55 and 57b** paint two pictures of unspeakable horror. The first image is tragic: Exhibiting no compassion toward his brothers and remaining children, the father refuses to share with them the flesh of his children. The second is grotesque: The mother secretly eats her children, and like an animal she also devours the afterbirth.

Eugene Merrill: The intensity of the distress is emphasized by the fact that parents would eat their children, their only hope of earthly remembrance and posterity (**v. 53**). And not just the most crass or barbaric among them would do so. The gentlest soul would abandon all restraint and loyalty and in his hour of self-preservation would feed upon his own precious loved ones (**v. 54**), not retaining a shred of generosity toward others in similar plight (**v. 55**). The basest human (or animal?) instincts would prevail when choice had to be made between one's own life and another's.

Lest it be thought that the maternal side of womanhood might preclude such abhorrent behavior, the text goes on to reveal, in terms that stagger the imagination, that women so refined and genteel as to avoid touching the ground with unshod feet would not

hesitate to consume their own offspring (vv. 56-57a). In fact, they would keep for themselves their newborn infants and even the afterbirth even if it meant that their husbands and other children had to do without and starve. These they would hoard and eat secretly to preserve themselves in that day of unspeakable horror.

IV. (:58-68) DOUBLEBACK ON CURSES THAT REVERSE ISRAEL'S PREVIOUS BLESSINGS

A. (:58-62) Final Warning – What Will Happen If You Disobey God's Law?

1. (:58) Obligation to Obey and Fear God

“If you are not careful to observe all the words of this law which are written in this book, to fear this honored and awesome name, the LORD your God,”

MacArthur: Significantly, the phrase “*the Lord your God*” is used approximately 280 times in the book of Deuteronomy. The full measure of the divine curse would come on Israel when its disobedience had been hardened into disregard for the glorious and awesome character of God.

Earl Kalland: This glorious and awesome **name** speaks of his essence, character, and reputation as the God of the promises, the true and living God revealed to the people, particularly at Horeb (Sinai).

2. (:59-62) Overturning of Previous Blessings into Extraordinary Curses

a. (:59-61) Severe Plagues and Sicknesses

*“then the LORD will bring extraordinary plagues on you and your descendants,
even severe and lasting plagues,
and miserable and chronic sicknesses.
And He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you.
Also every sickness and every plague which, not written in the book of this law, the LORD will bring on you until you are destroyed.”*

Peter Craigie: First, the general principle is expressed; disobedience to the law of God invites the curse of God (vv. 58–59). The potential actions of God described in the verses that follow are not the mindless or capricious acts of an unknown and malevolent deity; they are the just acts of a righteous God whose covenant love would have been spurned by his own people. The curses following, reversing the blessings of God which the Israelites had already begun to experience, constitute a final, awesome warning to the Israelites who are now engaged in the last part of the renewal of the covenant in Moab.

b. (:62) Severe Depopulation

“Then you shall be left few in number, whereas you were as the

stars of heaven for multitude, because you did not obey the LORD your God.”

Eugene Merrill: The result would be a greatly reduced population. The nation that was “*as numerous as the stars in the sky*” (v. 62) would end up with a comparative handful of people. This was clearly a judgment on covenant violation as the repetition of the conditional protasis clause (“*because you did not obey the LORD your God*”) puts beyond doubt. Moreover, the reduction of numbers from the uncountable stars to the remnant is a deliberate harking back to the covenant promise made to Abraham that his offspring would be as multitudinous as the stars (**Gen 15:5; 22:17**; cf. **Deut 1:10; 10:22**). If increased population is a sign of the blessing of covenant fidelity, population decline is a sign of covenant unfaithfulness. The contrast is further defined by v. 63: just as the Lord had increased Israel's numbers and prosperity, he would, in judgment, decrease them in the day of his wrath. No less tragic and stark would be the reversal of the covenant promise concerning the land. Whereas God at one time had sworn to give the land of Canaan to the patriarchs and their offspring (**Gen 15:7, 18-21; 17:8**), he would in a future day remove them from it because of their disobedience (v. 63). Thus decrease in population and eviction from the land answer point by point (and in the same order) the matching blessings of number and land in the original promise passages (**Gen 15:5-7; 17:4-8**).

B. (:63-68) Hopeless Condition -- How Bad Will It Get?

1. (:63) Torn from the Promised Land

“And it shall come about that as the LORD delighted over you to prosper you, and multiply you, so the LORD will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you; and you shall be torn from the land where you are entering to possess it.”

2. (:64) Scattered and Subjected to Foreign Bondage

“Moreover, the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth; and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone, which you or your fathers have not known.”

3. (:65-68) Destined to Despair of Soul

“And among those nations you shall find no rest, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing of eyes, and despair of soul. 66 So your life shall hang in doubt before you; and you shall be in dread night and day, and shall have no assurance of your life. 67 In the morning you shall say, 'Would that it were evening!' And at evening you shall say, 'Would that it were morning!' because of the dread of your heart which you dread, and for the sight of your eyes which you shall see. 68 And the LORD will bring you back to Egypt in ships, by the way about which I spoke to you, 'You will never see it again!' And there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer.”

Jack Deere: Israel had been permitted to serve the Lord but now she would be compelled to serve idols (v. 64). Once she lived in security, but now she would live in anxiety, despair, and in constant suspense and fear for her life (vv. 65-66). To escape her misery she will long for night to come and then for the daytime. God had delivered her from bondage in Egypt, but the people would voluntarily return to that misery and in such a humiliated condition that no Egyptian would purchase them as slaves.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why such a comprehensive listing of curses that cover every facet of life?
- 2) How can you track these curses as **reversals** of God's previous blessings?
- 3) As the Lord is described as the direct agent in implementing these various curses, how can He be said to **delight** in cursing His chosen people?
- 4) Is the reference to cannibalism hyperbole or borne out in historical reality?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Earl Kalland: After the basic coverage of the curse (vv. 16-19), following the same plan as that of the blessings (vv. 3-6), Moses developed – but with about six times the length – the description of the disaster that would follow when Israel was disobedient to the Lord. Curses, confusion, and rebuke would fall on everything disobedient Israel did – until destruction and sudden ruin enveloped her. Disobeying the Lord is equated with forsaking him, because national and personal commitment to the Lord is the central command, and forsaking him is the central evil.

John Schultz: **Obedience** is the most basic factor in our relationship with God. As our bodies live because of obedience to the **laws of nature**, so our souls depend upon the **moral precepts** God has laid down for us. If we refuse to eat, or drink, or breathe we will die physically. If we lay aside God's moral law, which is the expression of His character and the statement of His love for us, our souls will wither. For Israel, these principles were expressed in terms of a physical presence of God at a geographical location. God revealed Himself to the people of Israel in the land of Israel. To be evicted from the Promised Land would mean the ultimate death. **This eviction forms the central part of the enumeration of curses.**

Duane Christensen: The undoing of the blessings in 28:58–68 is essentially a **final reversal** of Israel's history. The curses reverse the blessings of God and constitute a final and awesome warning for future generations. In Egypt of times past, God afflicted

the Egyptians with severe diseases in order to bring the people of Israel to their blessing. In the curse of God, the diseases of Egypt will be inflicted on Israel, not on their enemies; and for good measure, God will add disease and affliction that even the Egyptians never knew (vv 60–61). In the blessing of God, Israel’s ancestors went down into Egypt few in number and multiplied there according to God’s ancient promises. In the curse of God, they will become few in number once again, their numbers growing smaller and smaller until finally they are destroyed altogether (v 63). In the blessing of God, the people of Israel looked forward to the gift of the Promised Land, a gift that was partially fulfilled for the two and a half tribes who had already gained possession of their land. In the curse of God, the people would be forcibly removed from the Promised Land and scattered abroad among the nations, where they will find no rest (vv 64–65).

The fullness of God’s blessing lay in serving and loving YHWH alone (6:4–5). The emptiness of living under God’s curse will be experienced in serving lifeless gods of wood and stone (28:64b). In the blessing of God, distant nations will fear Israel, who is confident in God. In the curse of God, the people of Israel will be constantly suspended in fear (vv 65–67). The blessing of God meant a long life in the Promised Land. But under the curse of God the people would not know from one moment to the next if they would even be allowed to remain alive (vv 66–67). In the blessing of God, the people of Israel were brought out of Egypt and freed from slavery. In the curse of God, they will return once again to Egypt, where they will offer themselves for sale as slaves; but the Egyptians will consider them of no value (v 68). Having rejected the honor of serving God, they will no longer be fit even to be slaves in Egypt.

Eugene Merrill: Notice also the contrast made between Israel’s experience (or promise) of divine blessings at the end of their sojourn in Egypt and Israel’s promised experience of these covenantal curses (Craigie, 351–52).

<u>Redemption in Egypt</u>	<u>Cursed by Covenantal Treachery</u>
28:60–61 Diseases on Israel’s enemies	Diseases on Israel
28:62–63 Multiplied in numbers	Decimated in numbers
28:64a Anticipation of the Promised Land	Eviction from the Promised Land
28:64b Fullness of life found in serving Yahweh	Emptiness of life seen in worshiping false gods
28:65–67 Nations will fear Israel	Israel will be overwhelmed by fear
28:66 Long life in the Promised Land	Unsure of life in exile
28:68 Freed from slavery in Egypt	Returned to bondage in Egypt

One must not fail to recognize that the strength of Yahweh’s negative response is directly proportional to his positive commitment to the covenant.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 29:1-29

TITLE: *APPEAL FOR COVENANT LOYALTY*

BIG IDEA:

THE PERSPECTIVE OF HISTORY SHOULD MOTIVATE COVENANT LOYALTY

INTRODUCTION:

Michael Grisanti: Moses begins this section by reminding the children of Israel of Yahweh's faithfulness to them in bringing them from Egypt to the plains of Moab, as well as of the covenantal relationship into which they are entering with the Lord—a relationship that promises cursing for disobedience and blessing for obedience. In the light of those realities, Moses challenges Israel to **renew this covenant** and **choose life** and blessing rather than death and cursing.

Peter Craigie: In the concluding charge, Moses returns first of all to dwell briefly on some of the themes already contained in the earlier discourses (vv. 1–8.) The substance of the material presented here in summary form is a recollection of God's acts in history, from the Exodus, through the testing period in the wilderness, and up to the arrival of the people on the plains of Moab. To the reader, the repetition may seem somewhat tedious at first sight, but the significance of the repetition appears in v. 3: *the Lord has not granted you, up to this day, a mind to understand, and eyes to see, and ears to hear.* With the perspective of time, the Israelites could learn to see God's presence in their past experience, but it required insight and perception. God's participation in the course of human events was not always in a dramatic form, such as miracle. When we read today the accounts of Hebrew history, the **divine perspective** has already been provided, and it is easy to forget that for the Israelite in ancient times, beset by anxieties of various kinds, that perspective was not automatically present, but required from him the vision of faith. Hence there is a continual return to the theme in the address of Moses, in order that the audience might be brought to real understanding of the ways of God, real seeing of the acts of God, and real hearing of the words of God. If the days ahead were to be successful, it was necessary to have this profound understanding which was so closely associated with faith in God.

Duane Christensen: vv. 9-14 -- Chiastic Structure

A Present: you are all standing here today before YHWH **29:9–10**

B Stipulations: "*the covenant of YHWH . . . and his oath*" **29:11a**

C Present: YHWH is making this covenant with you today **29:11b**

X Formula: to establish you as his people and he as your God

29:12a

C' Past: the covenant was promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
29:12b

B' Stipulations: “*this covenant and this oath*” 29:13

A' Future: this covenant is also with those not here today 29:14

The inner frame in this structure (vv 11, 12b) focuses on the fact that this covenant, which the people are about to make with YHWH, is the same covenant that was promised to the ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Genesis. The center of this structure presents the unique relationship that this covenant establishes between God and Israel: they are to become his people and he will henceforth be their God.

(:1) TRANSITION – COVENANT RENEWAL

“These are the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the sons of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He had made with them at Horeb.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: The opening verse of **Chapter 29** serves equally as a fitting **conclusion** to the material that preceded it (in Hebrew it is the last verse of **ch. 28**), and as an **introduction** to **chapters 29–30**. The phrase *the words of the covenant* point back to all that has preceded it in the book of Deuteronomy: the historical retrospect and prospect of the opening chapters (**chs. 1–4**), the focus on the Decalogue and the Horeb covenant (**ch. 5**), the preaching on the foundational commandment (**chs. 6–11**), the preaching of the Moab covenant (**chs. 12–26**), and the concluding blessings and curses (**chs. 27–28**). This verse together with the introductory verses of the book (**1:1–5**) form a frame for the preaching in between.

Yet it also **looks forward** as one of a series of verses in Deuteronomy that open the three major speeches of the book (cf. **1:1–5; 4:44–48**). Here it introduces the part of Deuteronomy most strongly influenced by the ancient political treaty structure. The term *covenant* occurs twice in the opening verse, replacing the focus on *torah* of the previous two speech introductions (**1:5; 4:44**), and then five more times in the remainder of the chapter (vv. **9, 12, 14, 21, 25**), highlighting the emphasis of this third speech.

I. (:2-13) UNDERSTANDING THE PROVISION OF GOD’S FAITHFULNESS IN THE PAST SHOULD MOTIVATE COVENANT LOYALTY

A. (:2-9) Review of God’s Faithfulness in the Past

1. (:2-3) Acknowledgement of God’s Mighty Works of Deliverance

“And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, ‘You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and

all his servants and all his land; 3 the great trials which your eyes have seen, those great signs and wonders.”

2. (:4) Absence of Spiritual Perception

“Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear.”

Michael Grisanti: The repetition of the verb “*to see*” and the repeated reference to “*eyes*” emphasizes that God’s people had personally witnessed what Yahweh had done in their behalf. For this new generation, some of whom had not themselves witnessed those events in Egypt or at the Red Sea, Moses makes it clear that this indictment for failing to trust Yahweh was not simply based on hearsay evidence from some previous generation. God had continued to intervene miraculously in Israel’s affairs even after their rebellion at Kadesh Barnea. And they continued to lack the spiritual perception that they should have had.

MacArthur: In spite of all they had experienced (vv. 2, 3), Israel was spiritually blind to the significance of what the Lord had done for them, lacking spiritual understanding, even as Moses was speaking. This spiritual blindness of Israel continues to the present day (Ro 11:8), and it will not be reversed until Israel’s future day of salvation (see Ro 11:25-27).

3. (:5-6) Apologetic Value of God’s Gracious Provision in the Wilderness

*“And I have led you forty years in the wilderness;
your clothes have not worn out on you,
and your sandal has not worn out on your foot.
You have not eaten bread, nor have you drunk wine or strong drink, in
order that you might know that I am the LORD your God.”*

Eugene Merrill: All this he did to manifest his **providential care** and thus, in the face of their total dependence on him, to prove to them that he was the Lord their God (v. 6b [5b]; cf. 4:35). The notion that the Lord can and does prove himself to be God by his mighty works of deliverance and provision is a major biblical and theological motif (cf. Exod 6:7; 7:5,17; 8:10,22; 9:14; 10:2; 14:4; Ezek 6:7,10,13-14; and passim in Ezekiel).

4. (:7-8) Appropriation of the Land of Sihon and Og

“When you reached this place, Sihon the king of Heshbon and Og the king of Bashan came out to meet us for battle, but we defeated them; 8 and we took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of the Manassites.”

Eugene Merrill: From beginning to end, Israel’s covenant history had been a record of miracle, and for this reason alone the present plea for covenant commitment was most reasonable indeed.

Gerald Gerbrandt: This survey focuses on three main events:

(1) the escape from Egypt (**29:2b-3**);
(2) the period of wandering in the wilderness (**vv. 5-6**); and
(3) the defeat of Kings Sihon and Og in the Transjordan, a foretaste of the gift of the Promised Land (**vv. 7-8**). Each of these are well-known themes in Deuteronomy. References to God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the most important of the three, pervade the whole book, consistently providing background to the preaching and motivation for obedience (**1:27, 30; 4:20, 34, 37, 45, 46; 5:6, 15; 6:12, 21, 22; 7:8, 18-19; 8:14; 9:7, 12, 26, 29; 11:3, 10; 13:5, 10; 15:15; 16:1, 3, 6, 12; 20:1; 23:4; 24:9, 18, 22; 25:17; 26:8; 29:25; 34:11**). The period in the wilderness is treated both as a time of miraculous care, with God providing manna and water for Israel (the probably meaning of the clauses *You have not eaten bread, and you not drunk strong drink*; **29:6**; cf. **8:3**) and even taking care of their clothes (**29:5**; cf. **8:4**), and as a time of testing and discipline (**29:6**; cf. **8:2-5**). The defeat of Kings Sihon and Og is described in detail earlier in the book (**2:24 – 3:17**), and then mentioned again in the important Chapter 4 (**4:46-47**). The survey is brief, but it makes the point: covenant stipulations are not the beginning of the story but a framework for response to God after God has delivered them from slavery, provided for them in the wilderness, and started to give them the Promised Land.

5. (:9) Appeal for Covenant Loyalty

*“So keep the words of this covenant to do them,
that you may prosper in all that you do.”*

Michael Grisanti: In the light of God's repeated faithfulness to his children, the Israelites should obey his commands so that they might enjoy the covenantal blessings of the Lord. The exhortation to wholehearted obedience of Yahweh's covenantal demands is again predicated on his abundant acts of faithfulness in behalf of his covenantal nation.

Daniel Block: Within the chapter as a whole, **verse 9** is a **hinge**. Here Moses challenges his audience to continue to prove their faith in Yahweh, keeping the words of this covenant by doing them. The covenant ceremonies Moses is about to supervise involve a reaffirmation of the commitments made earlier by the exodus generation and by the people gathered here in the presence of Moses (**26:16–19**). The clause *“so that you may prosper in everything you do”* highlights the future importance of maintaining the commitment the Israelites had shown in their victory over the Amorite kings. The dimensions of this prosperity are summarized in the blessings of **28:1–14**.

B. (:10-15) Renewal of the Covenant Revitalizes the Relationship between God and His People

1. (:10-11) Present Scope of the Covenant

*“You stand today, all of you, before the LORD your God:
your chiefs, your tribes, your elders and your officers, even all the men
of Israel, 11 your little ones, your wives, and the alien who is within your*

camps, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water,”

Peter Craigie: all the categories of people standing before Moses are enumerated (see also **Josh. 24:1**). The leaders and males are mentioned first, then the women and children, and finally the resident aliens. The wood-gatherers and water-drawers were

probably classes of people within the group resident aliens, on whom many of the more menial tasks would have fallen.

Michael Grisanti: Moses describes the **comprehensive nature** of this covenantal renewal. This listing of diverse individuals demonstrates that the entire believing community, without reference to social, economic, gender, or age differences, has been invited to enter into a covenantal relationship with Yahweh.

2. (:12-13) Substance and Significance of the Covenant

“that you may enter into the covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath which the LORD your God is making with you today, 13 in order that He may establish you today as His people and that He may be your God, just as He spoke to you and as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

Peter Craigie: The emphasis in this passage is upon the **present** (*today* is used five times), not in the sense that a new covenant was being initiated, but rather in the sense that the renewing of the covenant was a **revitalizing of the relationship**. The essence of the covenant is described in v. 12. God would raise up the Israelites to *be a people for himself*; that is, God willingly and freely took upon himself certain obligations toward his chosen people. The people, in response, were bound to him as their God (*he shall be God for you*). Thus both “parties” to the covenant undertook obligations, but the nature of the obligations differed (the relationship was one of “suzerainty,” not one of “parity”). God, in sovereignty and grace, initiated the relationship and in so doing committed himself in a promise to the chosen people; the people’s obligation to commit themselves in the covenant was based not simply on law or demand, but on a **response of love**, for the purpose of the covenant relationship elicited such a response.

Eugene Merrill: It is important to remember that this was not so much a ceremony of covenant making as it was one of **covenant affirmation or renewal**. The original covenant had been made at Horeb, so what was in view here was the Lord's offer of the same covenant (albeit, with necessary amendments) to the next generation of Israelites.

3. (:14-15) Future Scope of the Covenant

“Now not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath, 15 but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God and with those who are not with us here today.”

Peter Craigie: “*those who are not with us here today*” -- the reference is not to those who could not be present for some reason such as ill health. Rather, the words indicate the generations to be born in the future. The reference to **future generations** impressed even more firmly the responsibility incumbent on those who were present on the plains of Moab, for not only their own future, but also the future of their posterity would be contingent upon their obedience to the law of the covenant. The potential failure of any one generation, already potential in the elaboration of curses in **ch. 28**, reintroduces a solemn note in the subsequent discourse in **ch. 29**.

II. (:16-29) UNDERSTANDING THE PAINFUL CONSEQUENCES OF UNFAITHFULNESS SHOULD MOTIVATE COVENANT LOYALTY

Michael Grisanti: Moses describes the painful consequences, for the individual and for the nation, of failing to obey the covenantal stipulations. His warning here suggests that God’s chosen people had been tempted by idolatry and had defected from Yahweh in the past. That reality adds weight to Moses’ concern that Israel might do the same in the future. Moses looks to the future from the perspective of his time (**29:16–21**) and then looks back hypothetically from some future day (**29:22–28**).

A. (:16-21) Present Perspective on the Future – Unfaithfulness by Any Individual, Family Unit or Tribe Will Bring Divine Cursing

1. (:16-17) Familiarity with the Temptation of Idolatry

“(for you know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed. Moreover, you have seen their abominations and their idols of wood, stone, silver, and gold, which they had with them);”

Peter Craigie: The Israelites already had some knowledge of **foreign forms of worship**; they had experience of foreign religion in Egypt and during their travels through the desert and to the east of the Dead Sea. They knew already the nature of that worship, its detestable things and idols, which were made from wood or stone and decorated with silver or gold. Thus, although the Israelites would meet an alien form of worship when they entered the Promised Land, they had already experienced various forms of alien culture and should be equipped to deal with it. Nevertheless, Moses warns the people once again: *beware ... (v. 17)*.

John Schultz: Moses warns the people against idolatry. The Israelites had been familiar with the practices of idolatry in Egypt. Although the majority may not have been eyewitnesses, as their parents were, they must have had sufficient knowledge of the facts to understand what Moses referred to. The countries Israel passed through on their way to Canaan were Moab, Heshbon, and Bashan. The Bible does not give us much information about the practices of idolatry in Egypt, Canaan, and neighboring countries. Moses describes the idols as “*detestable images*.” The Hebrew word used is *shiqquwts* which Strong’s defines as, “disgusting, i.e. filthy; especially idolatrous.” Archeology has brought to light that many idolatrous practices were linked to perverse sexual behavior.

The Bible has coined for us the expression “abomination of desolation” which is used, among others, by Daniel and referred to by Christ when speaking about the coming of the Antichrist.

2. (:18-21) Inescapable Judgment for Idolatry

a. (:18) Significance of Idolatry

1) Perversion of the Heart of the Offender

“lest there shall be among you a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations;”

Gerald Gerbrandt: After stating that the people as a whole have been confronted by the possibility of worshiping other gods, the text turns to the **individual**: *It may be there there is among you a man or a woman . . . (v. 18)*. The phrase continues by including a *family or tribe*, but then concentrates on the individual person. This is more apparent in versions that retain the singular pronouns.

Duane Christensen: The covenant community must be on guard against any member who, having taken the vows to YHWH, then decides that it is safe to do as he or she pleases (**vv 18–19**). The promises of God are conditioned on sincere and continued obedience, and the danger is that defection on the part of one person will infect the whole community. The whole community hence stands responsible for the individuals in their midst who make light of the obligations of the covenant. At the same time, these very individuals, with their reservations about keeping the covenant, stand responsible under the law for their own behavior. If an individual member of the community chooses the path of willful rebellion, *“YHWH will single him out for misfortune from all the tribes of Israel according to all the curses of the covenant (that are) written in this scroll of the Torah”* (v 20). The teaching of individual responsibility inherent in this text is developed further in Jeremiah, and even more so in Ezekiel.

2) Permeation of Evil throughout the Community

“lest there shall be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood.”

Peter Craigie: The metaphor indicates the **permeation of evil** throughout Israel because of the action of an individual, family, or tribe. To express it in another way, “no man is an island”; when a man or group sinned by serving other gods, that sin was like a poisonous branch with bitter fruit, which by its nature spoiled the whole tree. The emphasis is thus placed on Israel’s nature as a **covenant community**, the whole of which was affected, for good or evil, by the actions of its constituents. As a community, Israel would stand or fall; as a community, it would experience blessing or cursing. However, the anonymity of the individual within the community could lead to a wrong attitude of independence and a feeling of false security within the community, regardless of a man’s own righteousness—or lack of it. The theme is developed further in the following verses.

b. (:19) Smugness of Self Deception

“And it shall be when he hears the words of this curse, that he will boast, saying, ‘I have peace though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart in order to destroy the watered land with the dry.’”

Daniel Block: The opening line of the idolater’s utterance is clear (v. 19b), reflecting the smugness of a man who imagines that the blessings listed in 28:1–14 are guaranteed for him unconditionally.

MacArthur: The meaning is that the deceived individual rebel against the Lord follows only his wicked heart and could not hide within the total community. The idolater would stand out and bear the judgment for his idolatry.

Eugene Merrill: To drive home his point, Moses appears to have cited a proverb to the effect that the wet (land?) and the dry alike were unable to escape the scorching heat of God’s wrath (v. 19c [18c]). That is, even if one was a member of the covenant community and sought to protect himself by verbalizing covenant blessings, he would be no safer in his sin than the unbeliever who made no pretense and stood beneath no such contrived shelter. The appropriateness of the proverb is evident in the statements of the burning wrath and zeal of the Lord that follow (v. 20 [19]).

Michael Grisanti: Any Israelite who worships other gods and hopes to escape divine judgment by some deceptive means can expect to experience the full force of covenantal curse. Moses depicts an individual Israelite who, upon hearing the covenantal curses and the judgment they pronounce on idolatry, thinks he can escape that curse and still worship false gods. The clause at the end of this verse can be rendered literally, *“thus destroying the watered with the parched.”* The expression appears to be a proverbial observation employing a figure of speech called a **merism**, which suggests totality by referring to two polar elements. This clause affirms that the Israelite who violates the letter and even the spirit of the covenant will harm not only himself but also everything he touches—*“the watered and the parched”* (NET note). Although the sin might appear hidden and committed by only one person, it will affect the entire nation.

c. (:20-21) Certainty of Judgment – Painful Consequences of Unfaithfulness

*“The LORD shall never be willing to forgive him,
but rather the anger of the LORD and His jealousy will burn
against that man,
and every curse which is written in this book will rest on him,
and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven.
Then the LORD will single him out for adversity
from all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the
covenant which are written in this book of the law.”*

Michael Grisanti: To highlight the **severity** of the divine judgment this person will experience, Moses makes five powerful statements:

- Yahweh will never be willing to forgive him,
- his zealous wrath will burn against him,
- all the covenantal curses will fall on him,
- Yahweh will blot out his name and
- the Lord will single him out for disaster or calamity.

In this covenantal relationship between Israel and Yahweh, there are no secret sins in the ultimate sense.

Daniel Block: Because **verses 19–21** focus on the apostasy and arrogant response of an individual, some argue that this paragraph concerns primarily individual infidelity. However, the quartette of subjects in **verse 18** suggests a corporate interest as well. Furthermore, the sequel (**vv. 22–28**) portrays the effects of corporate and national rebellion. While interest in the individual is obvious, this person is singled out as a **representative of the nation**. The actions he performs, the disposition he expresses, and the fate he experiences represent the actions, disposition, and fate of the apostate nation as a whole.

Peter Craigie: Yet the emphasis on the community did not mean that the **individual** was an anonymous nonentity. The health and vitality of the whole community depended on the health and vitality of the religious commitment of each individual within it. Far from being anonymous, each individual carried a heavy burden of responsibility for the whole community. The element of **responsibility** is emphasized by another metaphor, which may have been an ancient proverb: *the moist along with the parched shall be swept away*. That is, because of the evil acts of one man (the one who thought to himself, *I shall have peace*), the whole community was in immediate danger of God's judgment. The individual, however, would carry the heavy burden of responsibility (**vv. 19–20**); the curse of God would come upon him in its awesome dimensions.

B. (:22-29) Future Perspective on the Past – The Disloyal Generation Has Been Shockingly Devastated and Uprooted from the Land

1. (:22-23) Future Devastation Of Israel Will Shock the Next Generation

*“Now the generation to come, your sons who rise up after you and the foreigner who comes from a distant land, when they see the plagues of the land and the diseases with which the LORD has afflicted it, will say,
23 'All its land is brimstone and salt, a burning waste, unsown and unproductive, and no grass grows in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in His anger and in His wrath.’”*

Michael Grisanti: In a hypothetical scenario in which the nation of Israel has disobeyed the stipulations of the covenant and has been judged appropriately, later generations of Israelites as well as the nations of the world will be amazed at the destruction that has

fallen on Israel. They will learn that the cause of all this sorrow was Israel's violation of their covenant with the Lord by worshiping other gods.

Jack Deere: The future judgment (*calamities and diseases on the land*; cf. **28:22b, 59-61**) would be so severe that it was compared to the judgment that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah, and Admah and Zeboim. These last two cities, near Sodom and Gomorrah, were in a treaty with them (Gen. 14:2). The land would be covered with *salt and sulfur* and therefore be unproductive. This comprehensive judgment must refer to the devastation in the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions.

2. (:24-28) Forsaking the Covenant Brings Angry Divine Judgment

a. (:24) Inquiry Due to the Severity of Devastation

“And all the nations shall say, ‘Why has the LORD done thus to this land? Why this great outburst of anger?’”

b. (:25-28) Idolatry Deserved God's Angry Judgment

1) (:25-26) Spiritual Adultery

“Then men shall say, ‘Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. 26 And they went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they have not known and whom He had not allotted to them.’”

2) (:27-28) Severe Judgment

“Therefore, the anger of the LORD burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book; 28 and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.”

Michael Grisanti: Because of that rebellion, Yahweh (according to the depicted scenario) brought upon his covenantal people the curses delineated in **chs. 27–28**. Using two verbs of violence, he “*uprooted*” them from their land and “*thrust*” them into a foreign land, away from the place of covenantal blessing—all this for the opportunity to worship gods that are lifeless and powerless!

Gerald Gerbrandt: The representative or paradigmatic sin is idolatry, transgression against the foundational commandment: they have *turned and served other gods* (**v. 26**; cf. **v. 18**). As result, the *anger of the Lord was kindled against that land*, bringing upon it *every curse written in this book* (**v. 27**; cf. **vv. 20-21**). The anger of God receives greater attention in these two paragraphs than anywhere else in Deuteronomy. After declaring that God's *wrath and zeal will burn against them* (**v. 20** NIV) in the first paragraph, the second expands this with four further references to God's anger (**vv. 23, 24, 27, 28**; here in **vv. 16-19** are five of Deuteronomy's thirteen uses of this term) and warns of God's *fury and great wrath* (**v. 28**). It is the “fundamental breach of

covenant,” the betrayal of the mutual agreement (26:16-19) that Israel has solemnly sworn to accept that precipitates this heightened sense of passion (McConville 2002: 418). God’s anger in Deuteronomy thus is directed at Israel, the same people God has loved and chosen as *his treasured possession* (e.g., 7:6).

Daniel Block: This speech is filled with **irony**. Like those who had come out of Egypt (cf. v. 4), the future generation of Israelites envisioned here seems clueless about spiritual realities, apparently having forgotten Yahweh their God, his covenant (4:23; cf. 29:25), and the event at which they formally became the people of Yahweh (cf. 4:9–14). Furthermore, they abandoned the one who had revealed himself so dramatically in their rescue from Egypt and at Sinai in favor of other gods that they did not know (v. 26; cf. 11:28; 13:2[3], 13[14]). By contrast, the anonymous speaker is keenly aware of the special covenant relationship that existed between Yahweh and Israel: of Israel’s origins in Egypt and Yahweh’s gracious acts of redemption, of Yahweh’s passion for his people, of his personal involvement in their demise, and of the written Torah and every curse written in it. The concluding note, “*as it is now*,” does not refer to the immediate rhetorical situation, but reflects the context and perspective of the interlocutor. “*Now*” is the day of Israel’s judgment.

3. (:29) Focus on Your Responsibility for Covenant Loyalty

*“The secret things belong to the LORD our God,
but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever,
that we may observe all the words of this law.”*

David Whitcomb: To avoid judgment against sin, God’s people need to pay attention to what God has already revealed. *The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law* (v.29). There was much about the future the people did not know. There was much about God’s covenant relationship they did not grasp (cf. v.4). God held the people responsible for what He had revealed. If God did not reveal it, it was not necessary for them to know.

Peter Craigie: The stark portrayal of the **possible future**, however, was not designed to cause apathy and despair among the people. If such a future was inevitable, the people might ask, then what was the point of obedience? Rather, the dark picture of the future was intended to have the opposite effect: the **revealed things** belong to us and to our children forever, so that we might do all the words of this law. That is to say, one thing was certain and revealed, namely, **the words of this law**. The law placed upon the people the **responsibility of obedience**, the result of which would be God’s blessing in the land they were going in to possess. This general principle was clearly revealed; obedience would lead to God’s continuing blessing, but disobedience would bring about the curse of God. **To go beyond that and speculate about the future things (the secret things) was not man’s prerogative.**

The verse has also broader, theological implications. It would be presumptuous of man to assume that in revelation he has been given total knowledge of God. The revelation

given is adapted to man, so that we might do all the words of this law. The latter clause does not reduce religion to the sphere of law and ethics, as Spinoza would have it, but rather indicates the means by which a living relationship with God might be maintained. It may never be possible to know all things, the secret things, for man's mind is bound by the **limits of his finitude**; though the nature of God's revelation is not such as to grant man total knowledge of the universe and its mysteries, however, it does grant to him the possibility of knowing God. And it is possible to know God in a profound and living way, through his grace, without ever having grasped or understood the secret things.

Eugene Merrill: The main difficulty lies in the identification of "*the secret things*" and "*the things revealed*" and how these phrases (and the whole verse) relate to the overall context.

The best solution, perhaps, is to view the main clause as a proverbial evaluation of the conundrum produced by the fact of the exile of the people of the Lord to whom were given unconditional promises of ongoing existence as his servants. That is, how could Israel, the recipient of the everlasting promises to the forefathers, be destroyed and deported? The ongoing of Israel and their apparent termination seem to be mutually exclusive concepts. This perception, however, was that of the nations only, the unbelievers to whom the Lord's ultimate purposes had not been revealed. It was they who had asked incredulously how God could bring such judgment on his own chosen ones (v. 24 [23]). From an empirical standpoint all was at an end, and there was no hope of recovery. God's own people knew better, however, for he had revealed to them the end as well as the beginning (cf. 30:11-14). The dry bones of Israel in exile would be infused with divine breath that would resuscitate the nation to its role as servant of the Lord and mediator of his saving grace (cf. Ezek 37:1-28). It was this knowledge and hope that should have inspired obedience to "*all the words of this law*" (v. 29).

Michael Grisanti: Primarily, this passage affirms that God has made it clear what he expects from his children. Their responsibility is not to wonder about the future but to live in accordance with his expectations. Yahweh is fully capable of taking care of those issues beyond human comprehension and control. What he expects of his children is that they live in the light of the knowledge he has graciously given to them. Having said that, and secondarily, since the human mind is bound by its finitude, it will never be possible to know all things.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What lessons do you learn here about **spiritual blindness**?
- 2) How does this passage reflect both **individual** and **corporate** accountability for sin?

3) If sin has such a poisonous, pervasive effect, why are evangelical churches so hesitant to exercise **church discipline**?

4) Does our contemporary theology give enough emphasis to the **anger of God**?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Eugene Merrill: Chapters 29 and 30 serve at least four purposes in the larger context of Deuteronomy. They:

- (1) provide a summation of God's past dealings with Israel;
- (2) restate the present occasion of covenantal offer and acceptance;
- (3) address the options of covenantal disobedience and obedience respectively; and
- (4) exhort the assembled throng to covenantal commitment.

Daniel Block: Within the overall flow of Deuteronomy, **chapters 29–30** represent Moses' third and final sermon before he dies (**34:1–12**). The sermon divides into shorter subparts, but it is held together by a series of literary features:

- (1) an emphasis on the immediate rhetorical context ("*today, this day*");
- (2) the vocabulary of the curse (and blessing);
- (3) references to "*the covenant written in the document of the Torah*" (pers. trans. of **29:21**);
- (4) references to the "*heart/mind*" as the seat of the problem and focus of the solution;
- (5) echoes of **chapter 4** that resound throughout these two chapters;
- (6) extensive links to the remainder of the first address (**chaps. 1–3**) and the lengthy second address;
- (7) the adaptation of ancient Near Eastern treaty vocabulary and form, which spans the chapters; and
- (8) the motif of knowledge and ignorance.

Duane Christensen: An important lesson to be learned from **29:1–3** concerns **spiritual blindness**. In spite of great "*signs and marvels*" witnessed by the people of Israel, in which their clothing did not wear out and they ate extraordinary food supplied by God himself, the people were without understanding. They lived in full view of God's marvelous handiwork, and yet they did not have "*a mind to understand, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear*" (v 3). Jesus spoke of this phenomenon by quoting the words of the prophet Isaiah in **Matt 13:13–15** to the effect that God himself must in some way be responsible for spiritual blindness. The text here, however, suggests that the reason is simply that God has not yet given them eyes to see and ears to hear. **John Calvin** once said, "Men are ever blind in the brightness of light, until they have been enlightened by God" (citation from **G. E. Wright**, IB 2:503).

As Paul put it in another quotation from Isaiah, “*All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people*” (**Rom 10:21**). They cannot see because their eyes are blinded through disobedience to what God has already revealed to them (cf. **Rom 11:1–10**).

David Whitcomb: One of the sad traits of sinful humanity is that we are **fickle**. We are often **quick to make commitments and slow to keep them**. A new job always looks so promising that we quickly sign on the dotted line, only to regret our decision when we run head-on into the harsh reality of the job. Before long we are looking at the greener grass of another job. Or we commit to relationships whether they are in marriage, clubs, friendships, or church, only to grow weary with familiarity and let the relationships die.

Because we know this is a propensity of humanity, we can better understand why God told Moses to gather the people of Israel together to remind them of the covenant He had made with their forefathers. As the people were preparing to enter the land that God had promised to give Abraham’s posterity, they needed to **recommit to the relationship** into which God had brought them. The **covenant** was the basis of that relationship. The covenant set the boundaries and expectations of that relationship.

We modern Christians have an even more important covenant that we do well to remember and return to. You know that at least once each month we observe the Lord’s Supper which reminds us of the price our Savior paid to purchase our eternal security. Each month we are reminded that Jesus Christ tells us that He gave us His body and that He established the **new covenant** through His shed blood. Because He paid such a high price, we should be faithful to the covenant. We should disdain our tendency to view our relationship with our Savior lightly. We need those times when we are drawn up short and pulled back into sweet fellowship with the Savior. That happens when we review the terms of the covenant and renew our commitment to it.

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TEXT: Deuteronomy 30:1-20

TITLE: CHOOSE LIFE

BIG IDEA:

THE TWO CONTRASTING CHOICES ARE CLEAR – CHOOSE LIFE

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: Deuteronomy 30 represents the **climax of the gospel** according to Moses as he has proclaimed it in this book. Employing the second person of direct address, Moses brings his present audience into these future events. Much of the theological freight of this section is carried by **key words**. The most important of these is the root *šûb* (“to return, turn back”), which occurs seven times, with some variation in meaning. Since four of the seven involve Israel as the subject (vv. 1, 2, 8, 10) and three involve Yahweh (vv. 3a, 3b, 9), Israel’s future restoration obviously requires a **change in the disposition of both parties**. These along with other repeated elements function as glue holding this literary unit together.

Eugene Merrill: The previous passage (29:16-29 [15-28]) ended with the proverbial aphorism about the secret things of the Lord (v. 29 [28]), a secret about to be clarified in the present text. How Israel could be deported from the land and the very earth itself left desiccated and barren, on the one hand, and how the promises of God for Israel’s eternal ongoing could continue in effect, on the other hand, now finds resolution. It lies in Israel’s repentance and restoration. It was in this sense that “*the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever*” (29:29 [28]). What the nations could not understand on the basis of empirical historical evidence Israel could understand on the basis of God’s covenant promises.

Michael Grisanti: In order to emphasize the need for Israel to obey the Lord in the present, Moses looks forward to a future day in which, after having experienced the covenantal curses for their disobedience, the children of Israel will return to the Lord, will be brought back to the Promised Land, and will enjoy the abundant blessings of a proper relationship with the Lord.

Ron Barnes: **Loving the Lord** is the message to God’s people in **Deuteronomy 30**.

- It is all or nothing.
- It is the difference between life and death, heaven and hell.
- It is a work of Sovereign grace in the heart.

May the Lord help us to follow Him more closely in a wicked and sinful world.

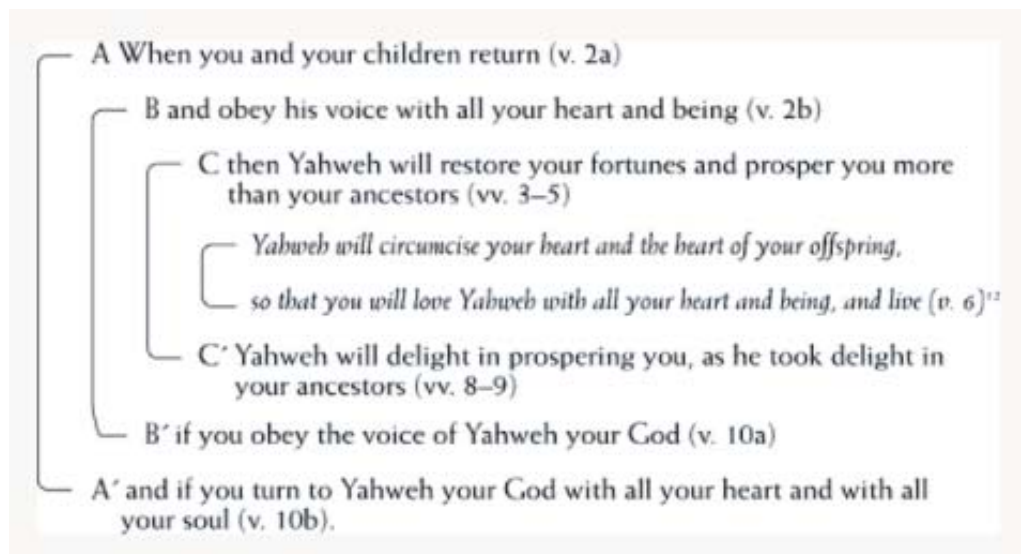
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Cornerstone Bible Commentary: The truth here is precious and profound. The infinite and omniscient God of Israel can reveal and has revealed the mysteries of his saving purposes to a lowly, undeserving, and often hardhearted and unresponsive people.

There is no need for any angelic or even human intermediation apart from the inspired prophets, like Moses, through whom the revelation came. The truth is not so obscure or elusive as to require interpretive savants. Israel's opportunities and responsibilities before Yahweh are not so esoteric that they cannot be apprehended and carried out. Rather, they are transparently clear and personalized. The community and all its members have unfettered access to the very mind and plan of the Almighty....But there must be a response to the proffer of grace. Moses therefore called the assembly to make a decision as to how they would respond to this gracious word of revelation. Using a figure of speech (a metonymy), in which the effect stands for the cause, Moses presented the options of life and good or death and disaster (so the Hebrew text)—that is, he extended choices which, when made, will result in one pair or the other. **The choices are either to love the Lord or to reject him.**

I. (:1-10) FUTURE RESTORATION AND PROSPERITY SHOULD CAUSE ISRAEL TO REFLECT ON THE NEED FOR COVENANT LOYALTY NOW

Daniel Block: The subthemes interwoven throughout this passage exhibit an exquisite chiastic arrangement (pers. trans.):



This is a gloriously holistic text, announcing the full restoration of the triadic covenantal relationship. Based on syntactical and conceptual markers, the text breaks down into the following segments:

- (1) the restoration of the bilateral relationship between Yahweh and Israel (vv. 1-3);
- (2) the divine restoration of the trilateral covenant relationship (vv. 4-7);
- (3) the human proof of the restoration (v. 8);
- (4) the environmental proof of the restoration (vv. 9-10).

A. (:1-5) Promise of Future Restoration and Prosperity

1. (:1-2) Corporate Repentance

a. (:1) Reflecting on the Blessing and Cursing

“So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you,”

b. (:2) Returning Wholeheartedly to the Lord

“and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons,”

Michael Grisanti: The **ultimate restoration** of God’s servant-nation is predicated on their returning to a genuine faith relationship with him (v.2). Here again we encounter the interesting interplay between **divine sovereignty** and **human responsibility**. God expects his chosen people to return to him. Nevertheless, various OT texts speak of God’s bringing about a spirit of repentance and obedience among them (cf. **Lev 26:40–45; Jer 30:3, 18–22; 31:23–24, 31–34; Eze 34:11–16; 36:22–36**).

Duane Christensen: The terrifying list of curses that reaches its climax in the horrors of siege warfare and exile to a foreign land are followed by an affirmation that the door remains open for the return of the prodigal son. Moreover, when the people choose to return to the covenant agreement, God will make them more prosperous and numerous than they were before, provided of course that their obedience to the covenant is sincere and wholehearted.

2. (:3-5) Corporate Restoration and Possession of the Land and Prosperity

a. (:3) Compassionate Regathering and Restoration

“then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you.”

Daniel Block: Additional echoes of **4:29–31** occur in verse 3 as Moses shifts his attention to Yahweh’s new disposition and actions.

(1) Yahweh’s intentions concerning Israel will change; he will restore their fortunes. Here the reversal involves lifting the judgment and restoring the relationship between the people of Israel and their land.

(2) Yahweh’s disposition toward Israel will change; he will show compassion to them (cf. **4:31**). As in **13:17[18]**, the change seems contingent on Israel’s listening to his voice and doing what is right in his sight.

(3) Yahweh’s orientation regarding Israel will change; he will “*turn around*.” The verb

here expresses Yahweh's fundamental reorientation. Instead of turning from Israel and operating as their enemy, he will turn toward them and act on their behalf.

(4) Yahweh's treatment of Israel will change. Whereas previously he had scattered them among the nations, now he will gather them (cf. **4:27; 28:64**). While we hear nothing yet of the restoration of the people to the land, this divine action represents a necessary first step in reversing their uprooting (29:28[27]).

Harrison: After full conversion the Jews will never again turn from God, they or their descendants. This view of the conversion of Israel is supported by other evidences. Christ will not return to the Jews until they say *Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord*, (**Matthew 23:39**). It is when Christ returns and they see Him that they shall know that the crucified Jesus is their long expected Messiah (**Zech. 12:9-14+; Ezek. 39:21-22+**). It is in the day of His power that they will be willing (**Ps. 110:3**). This psalm surely points to the glorious advent of the Son of Man in power and glory (**Luke 21:27+; 1 Tim. 6:14-16**).

b. (:4) Comprehensive Return

*"If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth,
from there the LORD your God will gather you,
and from there He will bring you back."*

MacArthur: The gathering of Jews out of all the countries of the earth will follow Israel's final redemption. Restoration to the Land will be in fulfillment of the promise of the covenant given to Abraham (see **Ge 12:7; 13:15; 15:18-21, 17:8**) and so often reiterated by Moses and the prophets.

c. (:5a) Confident and Secure Possession of the Land

*"And the LORD your God will bring you into the land
which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it;"*

d. (:5b) Compounded Prosperity

*"and He will prosper you and multiply you
more than your fathers."*

Keene: He will restore Israel's fortunes, a theme frequent in the prophets (cf., e.g., **Jer. 30:18; 32:44; 33:11, 26; Joel 3:1**). The prophets made it clear that this great restoration to the land would not take place until the Second Advent of the Messiah just before the beginning of His millennial reign on the earth (e.g., **Isa. 59:20-62:12**; cf. Jesus' teaching of the regathering in **Matt. 24:31; Mark 13:27**). This will be a time of spiritual and material prosperity greater than the nation has ever known (**Deut. 30:5**).

B. (:6-10) Process of Appropriating God's Promised Blessings

1. (:6-8) Divine Initiative to Secure Covenant Loyalty

a. (:6) Circumscribed Heart to Love and to Live

“Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.”

Daniel Block: The metaphor refers to removing all psychological, moral, and spiritual barriers to true devotion to Yahweh, resulting in undivided love and obedience. . .

Moses declares that Yahweh will secure permanent and total devotion through circumcising the hearts of those whom he brings back from the exile and of their descendants. He expresses the goal of this surgery with a simple infinitive phrase: *“to love the LORD your God.”* As elsewhere, “love” denotes **commitment demonstrated in actions that serve the interests and pleasure of one’s covenant partner**. This could not be achieved by legislation; it required a radical new act, the surgical removal of the symbols of the old affections. With this act, the goal of life and the ideal expressed by the Shema (6:4–5) will be realized.

Michael Grisanti: vv. 4-7 -- these verses delineate the blessings Yahweh will bestow on his repentant people. Regardless of their location of exile, the Lord will regather them (v.4) to the land of his promise and will bless them even more abundantly than their ancestors (v.5). Once the Lord reinstates them in the land, he will reconstitute Israel and give them the ability to obey him and to enjoy his continued blessings. By an act of God alone, these returned Israelites and their descendants will be given the ability to love the Lord (*“circumcise your hearts”*) and consequently experience the abundant blessings of the covenant (v.6). In addition to this great blessing, he will transfer the curses endured by the children of Israel to the nations that brought about Israel’s exile (v.7). . .

The OT teaches that Israel rebels against God for a large segment of her history. As a whole, Israel remains unregenerate until the last part of redemptive history (**Jer 31:31–34; Eze 36:22–28; 37:14**). . .

Moses makes use of past experience and the notion of the potential future to drive home Israel’s need to obey Yahweh in the present.

MacArthur: Cf. **10:16**. This work of God in the innermost being of the individual is the true salvation that grants a new will to obey Him in place of the former spiritual insensitivity and stubbornness (cf. **Jer 4:4; 9:25; Ro 2:28, 29**). This new heart will allow the Israelite to love the Lord wholeheartedly, and is the essential feature of the New Covenant (see **29:4, 18; 30:10, 17; Jer 31:31-34; 32:37-42; Eze 11:19; 36:26**).

b. (:7) Curses Deflected onto Your Enemies

“And the LORD your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you.”

c. (:8) Covenant Loyalty Renewed

“And you shall again obey the LORD, and observe all His commandments which I command you today.”

Daniel Block: Yahweh’s people will exhibit a new orientation, a new receptiveness, and a new obedience in compliance with Moses’ teaching. Moses’ optimism regarding Israel as a nation presupposes a divine act of heart circumcision. He expresses no confidence in the human will to maintain the course.

Duane Christensen: The power to change comes from God. There is an old saying that “God does not make us to go ’gainst our will, he just makes us willing to go!”

2. (:9-10) Delight of the Lord in Responding to Obedience with Blessing

a. (:9) Renewed Prosperity (in response to)

“Then the LORD your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the LORD will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers;”

b. (:10) Renewed Covenant Loyalty

“if you obey the LORD your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul.”

Eugene Merrill: The question here is not **when** Israel would obey and turn to the Lord but **if**. That is, the issue here (as opposed to **vv. 1-6**) is not the eternality of the covenant relationship itself—a matter never denied in Scripture—but the **benefits** and **blessings** attached to covenant obedience in the present. If Israel historically did all that the Lord required by way of covenant observance (**v. 10**), they could expect all the results listed earlier (**vv. 7-9**). When Israel did **eschatologically** all that the Lord made possible by way of covenant observance (**vv. 1-2**), they could expect all the results that followed (**vv. 3-6**).

II. (:11-14) REVELATION MAKES GOD’S WORD ACCESSIBLE, UNDERSTANDABLE AND DOABLE

A. (:11) Accessibility of God’s Requirements

“For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach.”

Duane Christensen: The content and demands of the covenant are not too difficult to understand and achieve. The covenant is something that can and should be acted on now—“*I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; . . . I the Lord speak the truth, I declare what is right*” (Isa 45:19). It is not a matter of erudition. As Saint Bonaventura put it long ago, “Any old woman can love God better than a doctor of theology can!”

The apostle Paul found inspiration in the text of **Deut 30:11–14** to argue his case that salvation is not for the privileged few, based on some elaborate system of works.

Salvation is for all who choose to believe “*the word of faith.*” In short, “*The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart*” (**Rom 10:6–9**). Paul, and Jesus before him, understood the message of Deuteronomy, which declares that the heart of the matter is found in two commandments: *to love God and to love one’s neighbor as oneself*. God’s word is not esoteric, hidden away in heaven or beyond the sea, to be apprehended only at great cost and human effort.

Eugene Merrill: Contrary to the inscrutable and enigmatic ways of the pagan gods, the Lord’s purposes and will for his people are crystal clear. They are not “*too difficult*” (*l’ nipl ’t, lit., “not too wonderful,”* i.e., beyond comprehension) or beyond reach (**v. 11**). That is, they can be understood by the human mind despite its limitations.

B. (:12-13) Nearness of God’s Requirements

1. (:12) Not in Heaven

“It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’”

Peter Craigie: metaphorically the commandment is not inaccessible because of its height or loftiness, so that some especially qualified person would be needed to make it all clear.

2. (:13) Not beyond the Sea

“Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’”

Peter Craigie: the verse indicates in another way that the commandment was practical and realistic. The objective of the commandment, and obedience to it, was life (cf. **vv. 15–20**); and the emphasis on the immediacy and the practical nature of the commandment is in striking contrast to Near Eastern literature and religion at this point. The Mesopotamian hero Gilgamesh, following the death of his intimate friend Enkidu, set out on a quest for life, a quest that was in many ways fruitless. In the course of his quest, he had to cross the sea, searching for Utnapishtim, the survivor of the flood, whom Gilgamesh hoped might provide him with an answer to his quest. In contrast to this heroic yet tragic quest, life was to be found by the Hebrews in the law of the covenant which Moses set before them: *it is in your mouth and in your mind* (lit. “*heart*”), *so that you may do it*.

C. (:14) Accessibility Should Lead to Performance

“But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Now the focus is the **accessibility** of Israel’s law as preached in Deuteronomy, and as affirmed in the covenant ceremony (*in your mouth*, **30:14**).

“The argument is that the law is not beyond human capacity to understand nor is it undisclosed and remote. This is a user-friendly law, easy to grasp and freely available.

The essential point is simply to ‘do it’ (*the last words of vv. 12, 13, 14*)” (Nelson 2002:349). The law is neither too complex or complicated for people to understand nor too demanding or ideal that obedience is not possible. Obedience is realistic (30:1-10), and choosing life is not some unachievable pipe-dream (30:15-20). Here is a word of encouragement.

MacArthur: After remembering the failures of the past and the prospects for the future, Moses earnestly admonished the people to make the right choice. . . All the truth necessary for choosing to love and obey God and thus avoid disobedience and cursing, they had heard and known (v. 15).

III. (:15-20) CHOICES HAVE CONSEQUENCES

Michael Grisanti: With clarity and urgency the first and third sections of this pericope (vv. 15–16, 19–20) present Israel with the choice they are facing (obedience or treachery), with a focus on the potential blessings. The middle section (vv. 17–18) spells out the negative side, the curses that God will send against his people if they rebel against him.

Peter Craigie: The options in the choice set before the people are the most important that any man—whether in the plains of Moab or in the modern world—has to face: life and good on the one hand, or death and evil on the other. The choice had been set down in the clearest terms: the law had been stated and expanded; the history of God’s dealing with his people had been called to mind; the basic operating principle of love had been enunciated; the potentialities of the future, with both blessing and cursing, had been declared. But in the last resort, the matter came down to a decision that had to be made. God and his ability were not for one moment in question; the responsibility now rested on the people themselves.

The making of a decision, however, involved more than simple affirmation; it involved a whole way of life based upon that decision.

A. (:15-16) Two Clear and Contrasting Choices

1. (:15) Presentation of the Two Choices

“See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity;”

2. (:16a) The Essence of the Right Choice

“in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments,”

3. (:16b) The Consequences of Making the Right Choice

“that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it.”

B. (:17-18) Warning against Choosing Disobedience and Idolatry

1. (:17) The Essence of the Wrong Choice

*“But if your heart turns away and you will not obey,
but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them,”*

2. (:18) The Consequences of Making the Wrong Choice

*“I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You shall not
prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to
enter and possess it.”*

C. (:19-20) Advocating for the Right Choice

1. (:19a) Two Clear and Contrasting Choices

*“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set
before you life and death, the blessing and the curse.”*

2. (:19b) The Only Choice that Makes Sense

*“So **CHOOSE LIFE**”*

3. (:19c-20) The Consequences of Making the Right Choice

*“in order that you may live, you and your descendants, 20 by loving the
LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for
this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land
which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to
give them.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: The passage and speech thus closes with a final reference to the gift of land and the promises to the ancestors. Despite the emphases on curses in these final chapters, and despite the fact that the choice before Israel is between life and death, the closing words speak of **life** and **promise**.

Duane Christensen: When I was first asked to write this commentary on Deuteronomy, a friend said she wanted to share something with me that she thought might be useful at some point. It was a personal experience with this text, one that she had shared with no one, not even her husband. It seems that she was struggling with great depression to the point that she finally decided to end her life by suicide. As a final attempt to find some kind of direction or meaning in her life, she opened a Bible at random and placed her finger on the text of **Deut 30:19**—“*life and death I set before you, the blessing and the curse, so **choose life**.*” She said, “That’s what I did. If it were not for the book of Deuteronomy, I wouldn’t be here today.” I am sure that this is not a model of how we are to make use of Scripture in seeking guidance and direction in our lives; but I am also sure that God chose to use the biblical text in that particular way on that specific occasion.

Michael Grisanti: Israel’s choice to obey or disobey Yahweh will have far-reaching implications: life or death, blessings or curses (cf. **ch. 28**). **Choosing life** (for them and

their descendants) is equated with wholehearted commitment to a genuine covenantal relationship with Yahweh. **Verse 20** delineates that commitment by employing stock “**covenantal**” verbs: “*love,*” “*listen,*” “*hold fast*”. Moses concludes this section by affirming that Yahweh, Israel’s covenantal Lord, will give them long tenure in the land if they live as loyal citizens. Just prior to that statement he declares a powerful reality: “*For the LORD is your life.*” True life is only to be found in God, i.e., in an intimate relationship with him.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this passage refute the approach of replacement theology which equates Israel with the church? What type of future program for the nation of Israel is revealed here?
- 2) What is the connection between repentance and the Lord circumcising the hearts of the people of Israel?
- 3) What is the connection between obedience and love in this passage?
- 4) How important is the literal possession of the physical Promised Land by the physical descendants of the patriarchs?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: vv. 1-10 -- The key word in this text is the Hebrew root “*return,*” which appears in seven clauses within the following menorah pattern:

A *Recall these words and return to YHWH 30:1–2*

B *YHWH will restore you and he will return 30:3*

C *YHWH will bring you back to the land of your fathers 30:4–5*

X Love God with all your heart and with all your soul 30:6–7

C’ *You will return and heed the voice of YHWH 30:8*

B’ *YHWH will return to take delight in you 30:9*

A’ *You will heed YHWH’s voice when you return to him 30:10*

Gerald Gerbrandt: As in the previous paragraph, the people are in exile, having experienced both the blessings that life in the Promised Land has provided and the curses that have resulted in their expulsion from the land: they are living *among the nations where the Lord your God has driven you* (v. 1; cf. 29:28). But here the tone is dramatically different. Whereas the previous paragraph looked backward from exile and highlighted the passionate anger of God in response to Israel having *abandoned the covenant* (29:25), with the result that the land was devastated and the people cast out, this paragraph changes direction and looks into the future. The implicit question of 29:28 – does Israel indeed have a future now that the curses have been implemented and Israel is *in another land?* -- is answered with a resounding yes!

That future has two sides to it. One side is Israel taking the blessings and curses to heart (*call them to mind*, 30:1), returning to God by obeying God with heart and soul (v. 2; cf. the Shema, Deut 6:4-5). The phrase *blessings and curses* does not have a narrow meaning but refers to the covenant as a whole, and indeed the whole story of God and Israel (30:1). Responding to this story as summarized in Israel's faith statements (e.g., 6:20-25; 26:5-10) means doing what God has commanded. The other side is God's action: *God will restore your fortunes, have compassion on you, gather you, and bring you into the land that your ancestors possessed* (30:3-5). Just as the curses threatened the reversal of the gift of the land, this announcement now promises a new action of God that will reverse the curses. This is not simply blessing but a new *salvation* (cf. 32:15).

Charlie Garrett: When the addressees or the dispensations are mixed, error in theology is the natural and inevitable consequence. The restoration of Israel, as spoken by Moses now, is **still future to us at this time**.

5 Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it.

It is those who heed the words of Moses, and who thus heed the words of Jesus that will be brought into this land to possess it. This then speaks of the **millennial kingdom**, not of what is going on in Israel today.

Again, it is true this is the same body of people, obviously, because Jesus tells those who are of this body (**meaning Israel**), but who are also willing to pay heed to His words (meaning the elect), to flee to the mountains. It is these who are referred to with the words...

5 (con't) He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.

The reference here cannot be speaking of Israel at this time. It is true they are prospering and multiplying, but it is also true that the Lord prospering them (literally "do you good") more than their fathers is not true at this time.

The state of peace described in Israel at the time of Solomon has never been realized in modern Israel, and that must be taken into consideration along with all other points. This will truly only be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom. What Moses next says clearly reveals this...

6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants,

The words of this verse cannot be speaking of the time after the Babylonian captivity. Hence, none of what is said here can. This is speaking to Israel the nation, in the singular, and therefore it can only be referring to them. The promise of circumcision of the heart is the same basic thought as the Lord writing His law on the heart.

The two concepts are set in parallel. One speaks of a change in heart, the other speaks of what that change in heart signifies. It is an action of the Lord, and it is something that only occurs in conjunction with the New Covenant. Thus, replacement theology has no standing. **This can only be speaking of Israel, not the church. . .**

9 (con't) as He rejoiced over your fathers,

The question that must be asked in order to understand this is, “Who are ‘*your fathers?*’” The answer is found in the **singular**. Moses has not spoken in the plural even once so far. Therefore, it is speaking of **the fathers of Israel**, not the fathers of the people of Israel.

It is a clear indication that the previous verse is not speaking of the people obeying the Law of Moses, but of following Christ who obeyed (and thus fulfilled) the Law of Moses.

The fathers, those before the law – **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** – who are being referred to here, did not have the law. They lived by faith, just as is recorded in **Hebrews 11**. In this, the Lord *rejoiced over them*. It is not **observance of the law**, but the **obedience of faith** that pleases the Lord.

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Earl Kalland: vv. 15-20 -- In this peroration the issue is set out plainly: life and prosperity or death and destruction (**v. 15**). Starkly clear, the Lord through Moses set the choice before his people. Will it be obedience or disobedience – life and prosperity or death and destruction? Which will it be? The route of obedience itself is twofold: It requires one “*to love the Lord*” and “*to walk in his ways*” (**v. 16**). As in a covenant-treaty, the “*love*” required is that set of the soul that involves the committal of one’s self in loyal devotion to the Lord. It relies on faith in his saving grace and goes hand in hand with obedience as walking “*in his ways*,” that is, obeying his precepts. That route will lead to life; it will increase the size of the nation and bring the Lord’s blessing on them in the land.

The obverse, however, will be Israel's lot if the people turn their hearts away from the Lord in disobedience, if they are drawn away from him to bow down to other gods and to worship them (v. 17). Disobedient Israel, Moses declared, will be destroyed; the nation separate from the Lord will not live long in that land across the Jordan, which they were contemplating to enter and take for themselves (v. 18).

After invoking both heaven and earth to witness that he has placed the options of life and death, blessings and curses, before Israel (4:26), Moses made his final appeal to his people.

Choose life!" he exhorted (v. 19).

Why? Because they and their children will then live; and they will love the Lord, listen to him, and hold fast to him (v. 20).

As elsewhere, now at the end of his addresses, Moses stressed the personal involvement of the people with the Lord. When they are committed wholly to him, he will give the nation many years in the land he promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 31:1-29

TITLE: CONTINUITY OF LEADERSHIP IN THE TRANSITION
FROM MOSES TO JOSHUA

BIG IDEA:

**DURING ANY CRISIS TRANSITION TIME, WE NEED ASSURANCE OF
GOD'S ONGOING PRESENCE AND ULTIMATE LEADERSHIP**

INTRODUCTION:

Eugene Merrill: There is a strong sense of **transition** at this juncture in Deuteronomy, signs that the era of Moses' leadership is ending and that of his successors beginning. Moreover, the covenant text has been fully revealed, its stipulations offered to and accepted by the assembly, and its blessings and curses invoked as testimony to their pledge to obey it. Finally, the time has come for the community that is about to leave its encampment on the way to conquest to embrace the covenant as its guiding principle. This must be personal and interior, to be sure, but symbol and custom also dictated that the **text of the covenant** be publicly placed on deposit as a witness to its abiding relevance and authority. Israel was not to be a nation of anarchists or even of strong human leaders. It was a **theocratic community** with the Lord as King and with his covenant revelation as fundamental constitution and law. The theme of this section is

- the enshrinement of that law,
- the proper role of Mosaic succession, and
- the ultimate authority of covenant mandate over human institutions.

Daniel Block: This death story itself divides into two parts. The first describes Moses' actions to ensure Israel's future well-being (**31:1–32:47**). The second concerns the account of his death and burial (**32:48–34:12**). Lengthy poems represent the center of gravity in both segments (**32:1–43; 33:2–29**). . .

Michael Grisanti: In preparation for Israel's entrance into the Promised Land subsequent to his death, Moses appoints Joshua (before all Israel) as the next national leader. He arranges for the reading of his addresses, given on the plains of Moab, every seven years and for the deposition of the law. The Lord commissions him to write a final poem that will serve as a witness against Israel when they forsake him.

Jack Deere: Moses provided for the continuity of the covenant during the change in national leadership from himself to Joshua. Certain features of this section were also found in the vassal treaties of the ancient Near East:

- the depositing of the treaty document in a sacred place (**31:24-26**),
- provision for dynastic succession (**31:7-8**), and
- provision for future reading of the covenant ceremonies (cf. **31:9-13**).

Pulpit Commentary: Moses had now finished his work as the legislator and ruler and leader of Israel. But ere he finally retired from his place, he had to take order for the carrying forward of the work by the nomination of a successor to himself in the leadership; by committing the keeping of the Law to the priests; and by anew admonishing the people to obedience, encouraging them to go forward to the conquest of Canaan, animating them with the assurance of the Divine favor and blessing, and pronouncing on them his parting benediction.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The loss of a great leader inevitably leads to anxiety and doubt among the people. . . In the face of such doubts, **Chapter 31** affirms that on the macro-level nothing will change: God will still lead the way and give Israel the land as promised, just as he has begun to do in the Transjordan. Israel need not fear since *it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you (v. 6)*.

General words of assurance may be fine, but they require concrete content to persuade. This chapter introduces three ways in which God’s ongoing presence will remain with them.

- First, Joshua will succeed Moses and have the specific assignment to *bring the Israelites into the land that I promised them (v. 23)*.
- Second, the torah God has given Israel through Moses is to be recorded (**vv. 9, 24**), permanently safeguarded (**vv. 25-26**), and regularly read to the people (**vv. 10-13**).
- Third, Moses is to write a song (see **ch. 32**) that the people are to learn, memorize, and pass on to their children as a witness and reminder of their tendency to forsake God (**vv. 16-22, 30**).

Through a series of intermingled speeches, the chapter unites these three into one whole, assuring Israel that God’s presence will still be experienced after Moses is gone.

OUTLINE:

Moses to Israel:	God Will Cross Over before You,	31:1-6
Moses to Joshua (before Israel):	God Will Be with You,	31:7-8
Moses to Priests and Elders:	Read the Law to Israel,	31:9-13
God to Moses:	Prepare for Joshua’s Commissioning,	31:14-15
God to Moses:	Write This Song for Israel,	31:16-22
God to Joshua:	I Will Be with You,	31:23
Moses to Levite:	Place the Law, Assemble the People,	31:24-30

I. (:1-8) LEADERSHIP TRANSITION MAINTAINS A STRONG CONTINUITY BASED ON GOD’S ULTIMATE ROLE AS COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

Daniel Block: These eight verses consist of two speeches united by subject and by genre. Both are classified as “**encouragement speeches**”—a designation suggested by

the repeated charge (vv. 6, 7), and reinforced by negative imperatives (vv. 6, 8), as well as by reminders of Yahweh's covenant faithfulness. The first speech (vv. 2–6), referring to Joshua in the third person, is addressed to the people. The second is addressed to Joshua (v. 7b).

A. (:1-6) Address to All the People: Divine Leadership Remains Undiminished

“So Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel.”

MacArthur: Though some interpreters view this verse as the conclusion to the foregoing address in chaps. 29, 30, it is better to see these words as an introduction to the words of Moses which follow, based upon the general pattern of Deuteronomy.

Daniel Block: It divides into three parts:

- (1) Moses' announcement of his impending demise (v. 2);
- (2) Moses' promise of Yahweh's continued presence (vv. 3–5);
- (3) Moses' appeal for courage and confidence (v. 6).

The middle section is the center of gravity.

1. (:2) Time for New Human Leadership

“And he said to them, ‘I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I am no longer able to come and go, and the LORD has said to me, ‘You shall not cross this Jordan.’”

Eugene Merrill: With his admission that he was a hundred and twenty years old, Moses was tacitly preparing the people for his death. He was forty when he fled Egypt to find refuge in Midian (**Acts 7:23**), eighty at the time of the exodus (i.e., forty years earlier than the present time; cf. **Deut 2:7; 29:5**), and now three times forty. There was no mistaking the meaning of this periodizing of Moses' life. The first two eras culminated in escapes from mortal danger into the deserts. This time, however, there was no escape, for his sin in the desert had effectively closed that door (cf. **Num 20:12; 27:12-14**). The urgent need for **orderly succession** was most apparent.

2. (:3-5) The Commander-in-Chief Remains the Same

a. (:3) Decisive Role of Yahweh

1) (:3a) Yahweh Still Leads the Way

“It is the LORD your God who will cross ahead of you;”

2) (:3b) Yahweh Still Grants the Victory

“He will destroy these nations before you, and you shall dispossess them.”

3) (:3c) Joshua Will be the New Human Leader

“Joshua is the one who will cross ahead of you, just as the LORD has spoken.”

Michael Grisanti: vv. 3-6 -- Moses' capacity for leadership of the nation may have diminished, but Yahweh remains their ultimate leader (cf. 1:30; 3:18-21; 7:1-2, 17-24; 9:3-4; 20:1-4). As is affirmed previously in Deuteronomy, Yahweh is the commander-in-chief who will lead their army, destroy the Canaanites, and deliver the land to his chosen people. Although Joshua may be stepping into Moses' shoes, his role is still a subordinate one. Yahweh's role, not Joshua's, is decisive (**Tigay**, Deuteronomy, 290). The primacy of Yahweh's leadership is seen in the chiastic pattern:

Yahweh crosses (v.3a),
Joshua crosses (v.3b),
Joshua goes (v.7),
Yahweh marches (v.8).

b. (:4-5) Destruction of Enemy Nations Assured –
Remember Past Victories

“And the LORD will do to them just as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when He destroyed them. 5 And the LORD will deliver them up before you, and you shall do to them according to all the commandments which I have commanded you.”

3. (:6) Trust in the Lord' Presence with You

a. Exhortation to Embrace Courage and Banish Fear

*“Be strong and courageous,
do not be afraid or tremble at them,”*

Peter Craigie: They are urged to *be strong and be courageous* (v. 6); the strength and courage would come not from confidence in their own abilities, but from confidence in God, the one marching with you. The strength and courage of the warriors of God would lie in the disposition of their minds during the battle. Though they would be engaged physically in the fighting, their minds would not be focused on the enemy, whose threatening presence could easily undermine confidence, but rather their minds would be fixed on God, who would not fail or forsake them (v. 6b). With full confidence in the presence of God in their midst, the army of the Lord could not fail to be victorious in the conquest, and soon the land which had been promised so long ago would become their possession in reality.

John Schultz: The conquest of Canaan was a **frightening undertaking**. From a military viewpoint the campaign was doomed to fail. The chances of an army of nomadic people conquering a land with strongly defended cities inhabited by people who would be fighting for their lives was nil. Were it not for the two previous experiences in which the people saw the unlikely defeat of the kings Sihon and Og, they would have utterly despaired to succeed. It is not without reason that we find the encouragement: *“Be strong and courageous”* three times in this chapter.

b. Assurance of the Lord's Personal Presence
"for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you."

c. Assurance of the Lord's Persistent Power on Your Behalf
"He will not fail you or forsake you."

B. (:7-8) Address to Joshua: Charge to Lead with Courage and Confidence

"Then Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel,"

1. (:7b) Exhortation to Embrace Courage

"Be strong and courageous,"

2. (:7c) Assurance of Victory

*"for you shall go with this people into the land
which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them,
and you shall give it to them as an inheritance."*

Bruce Hurt: Obviously God was the ultimate Giver, but Joshua would be His instrument to dispense the gift of the land.

Daniel Block: His summary commission focuses on two phases of the events that await him and the Israelites: Joshua will bring this people into the land Yahweh had sworn to give to the ancestors, and Joshua will distribute among the Israelites the land Yahweh had reserved for them as their special grant.

3. (:8a) Assurance of the Lord's Personal Presence and Persistent Power

*"And the LORD is the one who goes ahead of you;
He will be with you.
He will not fail you or forsake you."*

4. (:8b) Exhortation to Banish Fear

"Do not fear, or be dismayed."

**II. (:9-13) LEADERSHIP TRANSITION MAINTAINS A STRONG
CONTINUITY BASED ON THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S LAW**

A. (:9) The Foundation of the Law was Established by the Mediation of Moses

1. Moses Received and Inscribed the Law

"So Moses wrote this law"

2. Moses Delegated its Preservation and Exposition to the Priests and Elders

*"and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi who carried the ark of the
covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel."*

Michael Grisanti: As a written document, the Mosaic law will be preserved for the benefit of future generations. It makes the law more permanent and less susceptible to

revision. Throughout Israel's history it was primarily Israel's kings and priests who had direct access to this law. Yahweh commissions the priests and Levites to teach the law of Moses to their fellow Israelites. Although many copies of this written law were not produced, its existence was essential as a covenantal witness to the nation (cf. **31:26**).

Meredith Kline: Moses assigned the priests and elders the duty of regularly republishing the law of the covenant. The effect of this was to associate the priests and elders with Joshua in the responsibility of rule and in the esteem of Israel. More important, all the covenant people, together with all human authorities in the covenant community, were placed under the lordship of the Giver of the law.

B. (:10-13) The Faithful Perpetuation of the Law Requires Systematic Reading and Instruction with the Goal of Obedience

"Then Moses commanded them, saying,"

1. (:10b-11a) Renewed Focus at the Feast of Booths Every 7 Years

*"At the end of every seven years,
at the time of the year of remission of debts,
at the Feast of Booths, 11 when all Israel comes to appear before the
LORD your God at the place which He will choose,"*

2. (:11b) Reading of the Law in Public

"you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing."

Duane Christensen: **John Maxwell's** quotation from the writing of **George Mueller** is worth repeating: "The vigor of our spiritual life will be in exact proportion to the place held by the Word in our life and thoughts. I solemnly state this from experience of fifty-four years. I have read the Bible a hundred times and always with increasing delight. Each time it seems like a new book to me. Great has been the blessing from consecutive, diligent, daily study" (**Maxwell** [1987] 326). Moses was of the same mind.

3. (:12-13) Response to the Law

a. (:12) Process of Indoctrination Leads to Present Obedience

1) Focusing the Attention of All the People

*"Assemble the people, the men and the women
and children and the alien who is in your town,"*

2) Forming Godly Attitudes

*"in order that they may hear and learn
and fear the LORD your God,"*

3) Fostering Godly Actions

"and be careful to observe all the words of this law."

Michael Grisanti: Although Yahweh clearly wants the conduct (external) of his people to manifest practically their reception of his expectations, a life of external conformity

without internal reality (fear of Yahweh) is unacceptable to Yahweh. Israel's obedience to this requirement of reading the Mosaic law to the nation every seven years is part of Yahweh's plan to keep reminding his chosen nation of the blessings and responsibilities of their intimate covenantal relationship.

- b. (:13) Perpetual Repeating of the Process Leads to Future Obedience
“And their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.”

Daniel Block: Moses charges the Levitical priests and elders to read the Torah regularly before the people. This charge, which takes up the bulk of this paragraph, consists of three principal declarations:

- read this Torah (v. 11);
- assemble the people (v. 12);
- let their children hear and learn to fear Yahweh (v. 13).

The links between this speech and Moses' account of what happened at Sinai in **4:10** are striking. Apparently future readings of the Torah will provide succeeding generations with regular opportunities for renewal and actualization of their covenant relationship with him.

Peter Craigie: As each generation learned to fear God and to obey him, so would the continuing community of Israel ensure their lasting possession of the Promised Land.

Earl Kalland: This reading of the law once every seven years would not be sufficient to inculcate its teachings in the minds of either the children or the adults. This septennial reading does not obviate the teaching ministry of the home (**6:1-9**) or that of the priests (**17:11; 24:8; Lev. 10:11**). It is meant, rather, to strengthen these other teaching procedures, to focus the attention of the people as a nation on the revelation of God on a dramatic and joyful occasion. It would also dramatize the learning of the law for those children and others who had not been reached by the other teaching procedures in home and tabernacle.

III. (:14-15) LEADERSHIP TRANSITION MAINTAINS A STRONG CONTINUITY BASED ON DIVINE COMMISSIONING AND LESSONS FROM HISTORY

A. (:14-15) Theophany of Divine Commissioning of Joshua

1) (:14) Presence of Moses and Joshua Awaits the Commissioning

*“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, the time for you to die is near; call Joshua, and present yourselves at the tent of meeting, that I may commission him.”
So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves at the tent of meeting.”*

2. (:15) Presence of the Lord Authenticates the Commissioning
*“And the LORD appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud,
and the pillar of cloud stood at the doorway of the tent.”*

B. (:16-22) Treachery of Spiritual Adultery Requires Reminders of God’s Faithfulness

“And the LORD said to Moses,”

1. (:16b-18) Anticipating Future Spiritual Adultery

a. (:16b) Israel Will Forsake the God of the Covenant

1) Follows the Death of Moses

“Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers;”

2) Features Familiar Idolatry

*“and this people will arise and play the harlot with the
strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are
going,”*

Eugene Merrill: The possibility of Israel's falling away after Moses' death had already been anticipated (cf. **4:25-31; 7:1-4**), but here it is presented as a foregone conclusion. With Moses' departure the Lord said, *“These people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering”* (v. 16). The imagery of **prostitution** (*z nâ*) conveys the very essence of covenant violation, namely, to forsake the Lord and embrace other gods (cf. **Exod 34:15-16; Lev 20:5; Judg 2:17; 8:27; Ezek 6:9; 20:30; Jer 3:1; Hos 2:7; 4:15**). Nothing could more clearly communicate **disloyalty**.

3) Forsakes the Covenant Relationship

*“and will forsake Me
and break My covenant which I have made with them.”*

b. (:17-18) God Will Forsake His Covenant People

1) (:17) Consequences of Divine Judgment

a) Unleashing of God’s Anger

*“Then My anger will be kindled against them
in that day,”*

b) Hiding of God’s Face

*“and I will forsake them and
hide My face from them,”*

Daniel Block: The three expressions Yahweh uses to describe his response to Israel’s apostasy reflect the intensity of his rage (v. 17a). While Moses had spoken earlier of Yahweh’s anger and his abandonment of his people, the idiom *“to hide the face”* occurs here for the first time. The expression signifies the withdrawal of favor. In ancient courtly contexts, for a king to turn his face from a subject signaled disaster, though the idiom was often applied to gods as well.

c) Suffering Severe Hardships

*“and they shall be consumed,
and many evils and troubles shall come upon
them;”*

d) Blaming God Instead of Taking Responsibility

*“so that they will say in that day,
'Is it not because our God is not among us
that these evils have come upon us?’”*

2) (:18) Certainty of Divine Judgment

*“But I will surely hide My face in that day because of all
the evil which they will do, for they will turn to other
gods.”*

MacArthur: vv. 16-21 – After Moses’ death, the Lord Himself predicts that in spite of what He has commanded (**30:11, 20**), the Israelites would forsake Him by turning to worship other gods and thereby break the Sinaitic Covenant. Having forsaken God, the people would then be forsaken by God with the inevitable result that disaster would fall upon them at every turn. This is one of the saddest texts in the OT. After all God had done, He knew they would forsake Him.

2. (:19-22) Addressing Failure with a Memorable National Anthem –
Reminding the People of God’s Faithfulness and Their Culpability

a. (:19) Song Writing Commanded

*“Now therefore, write this song for yourselves,
and teach it to the sons of Israel;
put it on their lips,
in order that this song may be a witness for Me
against the sons of Israel.”*

Daniel Block: Indeed **verses 19–21** suggest that Yahweh’s primary reason for calling Moses and Joshua to the Tent of Meeting was to communicate to them this Song, which would serve as a sort of **national anthem** for the people.

b. (:20) Prosperity Breeds Disloyalty (Should be the Opposite)

*“For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and
honey, which I swore to their fathers,
and they have eaten and are satisfied and become prosperous,
then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me
and break My covenant.”*

c. (:21) Memorialized Song Testifies to God’s Faithfulness

*“Then it shall come about, when many evils and troubles have
come upon them, that this song will testify before them as a*

witness (for it shall not be forgotten from the lips of their descendants); for I know their intent which they are developing today, before I have brought them into the land which I swore.”

- d. (:22) Song Writing Completed
*“So Moses wrote this song the same day,
and taught it to the sons of Israel.”*

Jack Deere: However, even in their rebellion they would find the **grace of God**. In the song that Moses would teach them they would find the reason for their judgments and the path of repentance (vv. 19-22). The song would also serve as a warning of the judgment to come for apostasy. God is fully aware of the tendency of the human heart to stray from Him: *I know what they are disposed to do.*

Meredith Kline: Lest the Israelites should then recall the divine promise not to forsake them (cf. v. 6) and impute unrighteousness to him, God appointed for them the Song of Witness, which places the promised blessings and the threatened curse in their proper perspective within the covenant. This song would proclaim the perfect righteousness of God and convict the Israelites of the justice of their afflictions (cf. 32:4, 5).

C. (:23) Charge of Divine Commissioning

*“Then He commissioned Joshua the son of Nun, and said,
‘Be strong and courageous,
for you shall bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them,
and I will be with you.’”*

Peter Craigie: Of the forms of loneliness that a man can experience, there are few so bleak as the **loneliness of leadership**. But Joshua assumed his lonely role with an assurance of companionship and strength. **God’s presence with him** would be sufficient to enable him to meet boldly every obstacle that the future could bring. See also **Josh. 1:5** and **3:7**.

Michael Grisanti: Just as Moses commissioned Joshua, the Lord himself exhorts Joshua to be courageous in the light of his promise to install the chosen people in the land he has promised them (cf. **Jos 1:6–7**), just as he had sworn to their ancestors. God’s promise of his continued presence will serve as the ultimate foundation for Joshua’s hope.

IV. (:24-29) LEADERSHIP TRANSITION OPENS THE DOOR FOR INCREASED REBELLION AND DISLOYALTY

Daniel Block: Based on the subject matter, this short paragraph divides into three parts:

- (1) a preamble to Moses’ speech (vv. 24–25);
- (2) final instructions regarding the Torah (vv. 26–27);
- (3) instructions regarding Israel’s national anthem (vv. 28–30).

A. (:24-25) Prepping the Levites for their Future Role

“And it came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete, 25 that Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying,”

B. (:26-27) Prosecution of Israel Initiated

1. (:26) Testimony of the Standards of the Law

“Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you.”

2. (:27) Tendency Towards Rebellion and Disloyalty

“For I know your rebellion and your stubbornness; behold, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the LORD; how much more, then, after my death?”

Michael Grisanti: vv. 27-29 -- Moses is well aware of Israel’s penchant for rebellion. By drawing on expressions employed earlier in the book, he piles up terms to emphasize the darkness of the Israelites’ hearts (“*rebel*” [1:26, 43; 9:7, 23–24], “*stiff-necked*” [9:6, 13; 10:16], “*corrupt*” [4:16, 25; 9:12; 32:5], “*turn away*” [11:28; 28:14], “*do evil*” [4:25; 9:18; 17:2], and “*provoke to anger*” [4:25; 9:18; 32:16, 21]). Moses also knows that the intensity of Israel’s rebellion will only increase after his death. Consequently, he calls for Israel’s leaders to gather before him so that he can give them another weighty exhortation. He wants to make sure they understand that their choices and conduct will have far-reaching implications.

By calling heaven and earth as witnesses against Israel, Moses sets before the nation’s leaders the options of covenantal acceptance or repudiation (cf. 30:19; Merrill, Deuteronomy, 404). Covenantal treachery will face nothing less than disaster! Moses does not intend that the negative flavor of this exhortation will make the Israelites give up on the idea of obedience; rather, it serves to confront them with the predilections of a nation not totally comprised of believers in Yahweh. In the light of what Yahweh has revealed to his people through Moses, they are without excuse.

C. (:28-29) Prosecution of Israel Concluded with Convicting National Anthem

1. (:28) Calling Witnesses to Hear the Case against Israel

“Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call the heavens and the earth to witness against them.”

2. (:29) Charging Israel with Corruption Resulting in Judgment

“For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How important is it for God's people to trust in His invisible leadership rather than invest their confidence in visible human leadership?
- 2) What lessons should we be learning from God's past faithfulness and the spiritual victories He has already granted us?
- 3) How can we avoid the self-deception of the depraved human heart with its tendency towards rebellion, stubbornness and disloyalty to God?
- 4) What do you find significant about the events and words surrounding the divine commissioning of Joshua?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen:

- A Moses announces his departure and replacement by Joshua **31:1–6**
- B Moses appoints Joshua as his successor **31:7–8**
- C The writing and the reading of the Torah at the Feast of Booths **31:9–12**
- D Future generations shall learn to fear YHWH **31:13**
- X **Theophany in the tent of meeting with Moses and Joshua 31:14–15**
- D' Israel's future apostasy and its consequences **31:16–18**
- C' The writing of the song as a witness to future generations **31:19–22**
- B' YHWH appoints Joshua to succeed Moses **31:23**
- A' The Torah and song are given as witnesses to future generations **31:24–30**

Daniel Block: The Writings of Moses --

Although **chapter 31** is a complex literary piece, it offers remarkable insight into ancient Israel's view of the nature and importance of their written Scriptures,

particularly the Torah. The Deuteronomic Torah in its entirety was divinely inspired, **authoritative, canonical, and sacred**. Announced by the narrator in the introduction (1:3) and reiterated throughout, Moses has been instructing the people just as Yahweh had commanded him. Having presented his profoundly theological interpretation of Yahweh's revelation in the great events of the exodus from Egypt, covenant-making at Sinai, provision and guidance in the desert, victory over the Amorite kings, and the imminent conquest of the Promised Land, on the one hand, and the specific revelation associated with the covenant at Sinai, on the other hand, Moses has transcribed his speeches, handed them to the priests for safekeeping next to the ark of the covenant, and then charged them to read them to all the people regularly when they gather for worship.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The text deals with Moses' role as the one whom God has used to convey the torah to Israel. This role of Moses is not transferred to Joshua. The passing on of this role is less tidy and more diffuse, perhaps consistent with Moses' unparalleled prominence in preaching torah. God's commandments and regulations are recorded in a book that is stored next to the ark of the covenant, under the responsibility of the priests (31:9, 24-27), to be read regularly to all people, every seven years, at the Festival of Booths (31:10-13). Additionally, Moses prepares a song that is to be memorized and recited *as a witness against you today, . . . so that [your children] may diligently observe all the words of this law*. (32:1-43, 46). The book, including the Song, serves as a reminder and instrument of encouragement to the people to remain faithful to the torah God has taught through Moses. Moses thus leaves behind the torah of God, his song, and a blessing for the people (33:1-29). Life will never be the same once Moses is gone (e.g., 31:16-22), but these chapters highlight the measures God and Moses take to prepare the people for a Moses-less life in the land. And there is hope for the future: *The Israelites obeyed him [Joshua], doing as the Lord had commanded Moses* (34:9).

G. Campbell Morgan: For forty years Moses had led the people. During that time he had constantly communed with God, and in the course of that communion had received many changes. This was one of the last things he was told to do. He was to write a song, and the purpose of it was distinctly stated. A great song once embodied in the life of a people will remain from generation to generation. In days of disaster it will be a haunting memory testifying to truth concerning God. In days of difficulty it will be a messenger of new courage. In days of victory it will be a means of expression. Songs often remain after commandments are forgotten. Therefore Moses was commanded to write a song and teach it to the people. The song itself is found in our next chapter. This is a very suggestive story, bringing to our hearts anew a sense of the value of poetic expression, and showing that it is also a gift of God. There are people who seem to imagine that if we speak of poetry, we are referring to some-thing speculative, imaginative, probably untrue. As a matter of fact, poetry is the highest method of human language, giving expression, as prose never can, to the deepest and truest things of the soul. The Church is more enriched in her catholic songs, than in all her systematic theologies. In the former she realizes her unity, where-as in the latter she too often creates her divisions. The Wesleys did more for experimental Christianity in their

hymns, than in all their printed explanations. A great song is a great possession, and not for Israel only, but for us also this song of Moses is among the most beautiful and most strong.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 31:30 – 32:43

TITLE: ISRAEL'S NATIONAL ANTHEM EXTOLS GOD'S JUSTICE AND MERCY

BIG IDEA:

REJECTING THE ROCK OF ISRAEL RESULTS IN GOD FORSAKING HIS PEOPLE – BUT NOT UTTERLY

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: Although the NIV labels this chapter as “*The Song of Moses*,” it should really be called “*The Song of Yahweh*,” because Yahweh inspired it and dictated it to Joshua and Moses in the Tent of Meeting (31:14–21). Whereas in Moses’ preaching we hear the voice of God refracted through the orations of a man, this song was composed by God and then performed by Moses precisely as he had heard it (31:30; 32:44). Even more directly than Moses’ sermons, this is “*the word of God*.”

Whatever technical term we ascribe to the poem, its **didactic function** is clear. In addition to proclaiming the greatness of Yahweh, the Song provides a constant reminder to the Israelites of their origins (rooted in Yahweh’s grace) and their demise (rooted in their perfidious response to grace), which demonstrates Yahweh’s justice in punishing them and points to the resolution of the broken relationship through Yahweh’s future acts of grace. . .

As suggested earlier, this song serves as a sort of **national anthem**, intended to function as a “*witness*” in perpetuity (31:21) by **reminding** the people that they owed their existence to Yahweh and warning against abandoning him in favor of other gods. Moses had personally performed these functions for the past forty years, but once he is gone, the Song must take over and keep the people on spiritual course. This anthemic function accounts for the absence of specific historical references: to be perpetually relevant required removing time-bound details. As an anthem, this song would have been recited, sung, or performed when the people assembled for worship.

David Whitcomb: In this song, we do discover Moses’ testimony about God’s goodness and majesty. But as we read through the entire song, we might be a bit surprised to discover that this is a song about **God’s vengeance against His people’s rebellion**. Not only is this not a happy song. It is a scary song. Here Moses, under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, teaches us that just vengeance belongs to God. That is a message that bluntly cuts across the grain of our religious culture that is all about God’s kindness, mercy, and grace. Of course God is kind. He is more merciful than we can imagine. His grace is immeasurable. But when His people replace Him with their handmade idols, it does not make God very happy. We do well to learn from this song to be very careful about setting God aside to make room for our own idols.

Jack Deere: This song was to be taught to Israel for use in the covenant-renewal ceremony. . . Israel's future is depicted in rather gloomy terms for her newly acquired wealth would lead her into apostasy. However, after she underwent severe judgment from the Lord He in compassion would deliver His people and take vengeance on their enemies. So in singing this song the Israelites would be acknowledging two things:

- (a) their obligation to obey the Lord, and
- (b) the righteous and certain character of their judgment if they fell into apostasy.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The Song is written in ancient **Hebrew poetry** and thus represents a significant shift from the narrative and legal format of Deuteronomy thus far. Most versions reflect this shift in the way they format the text on the page. Fortunately the essence of Hebrew poetry is not lost in translation. The key characteristic of Hebrew poetry is **parallelism**, a style in which a second, or sometimes third, clause repeats what has been said in the first clause. This repetition may take place by expressing the same thought through different wording (synonymous parallelism), through saying something similar in the opposite way (antithetic parallelism), or through expansion of an idea (complementary parallelism). That style is common in the book of Psalm.

Michael Grisanti: In addition to the heavens and the earth (**Dt 30:19; 31:28**) and the book of the law (**31:26**), Yahweh gives this song to Israel through Moses as a witness to them. These witnesses are given to remind Yahweh and Israel of their mutual commitments. This song recites Yahweh's many gracious acts in their behalf, as well as his demand for absolute loyalty. Any long-term departure from genuine obedience will invite the experience of covenantal cursing.

Duane Christensen: The poem begins with what **Tigay** calls an "exordium" (**vv 1–6**), in the form of a summons to heaven and earth to pay attention to "*the words of my mouth*" (**v 1**). Those words focus on the **righteousness of God** (**vv 3–4**) and the **disloyalty of his people Israel**, who are described as "*a crooked and perverse generation*" (**v 5**). The poem ends on a note of celebration in which the heavens are summoned once again to praise God's people and to worship God, together with the (seventy) "*sons of God*" (**v 43**). In the center we find the theme of **God's mercy** in which he chooses to limit the punishment meted out to his people Israel (**vv 26–27**), in spite of the fact that they are "*a nation void of sense*" and without understanding (**vv 28–29**). They do not deserve God's mercy.

Jamieson-Faucet-Brown: The magnificence of the exordium, the grandeur of the theme, the frequent and sudden transitions, the elevated strain of the sentiments and language, entitle this song to be ranked amongst the noblest specimens of poetry to be found in the Scriptures.

(31:30) INITIAL RECITATION OF THE SONG

"Then Moses spoke in the hearing of all the assembly of Israel the words of this song, until they were complete."

Peter Craigie: These words serve as the prose introduction to the Song of Moses, which follows in its entirety in **32:1–43**. Normally, ancient Hebrew poetry is introduced as having been sung (see **Exod. 15:1; Judg. 5:1**); here, the song is said to have been spoken. It may be that the song was recited initially and that in this manner it was taught to the people (cf. **31:19**), with a view to being sung by them subsequently. The recital (or subsequent singing) of the song would be a part of the **covenant renewal ceremony**, and it should not be considered simply as an appendix to the book of Deuteronomy. The song functions as a part of the witness to the renewal of the covenant; when the Israelites sang it, they would bear witness to their understanding and agreement to the full terms and implications of the covenant. This part of the renewal ceremony, however, is related in particular to the approaching demise of Moses and Joshua’s assumption of leadership. In this context, the song was not only a song of witness for the present, but one that would continue to be sung in the future, thus bearing a continuing witness of the covenant commitment and reminding the people of the implications of a breach of the covenant.

I. (:1-4) INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG – RELEVANCE, VALUE, THEME AND FOCUS

A. (:1) Universal Relevance

*“Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak;
And let the earth hear the words of my mouth.”*

Jack Deere: The appeal to the heavens and the earth meant that the song had significance for the entire created order.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The role of the heavens and the earth may be that of formal witnesses to a lawsuit (cf. **Isa 1:2-3; Jer 2:12-13**), but the term “witness” is not used anywhere in the Song, and according to the words of the summons, that which the heavens and earth are to hear is not an indictment but the proclamation of the greatness of Israel’s God (v. **3**). One is reminded of psalms that regularly call on others to hear or join in the praise. Similar to the *peoples* of **4:5-8**, and the *nations* of **29:24**, *the heavens and the earth* will marvel and wonder at the greatness of the God of Israel and the obstinacy of the people of Israel.

B. (:2) Life-Giving Value

*“Let my teaching drop as the rain,
My speech distill as the dew,
As the droplets on the fresh grass
And as the showers on the herb.”*

Michael Grisanti: Moses uses four similes to describe the life-giving and growth-inducing results of Moses’ teaching. Both rain (**Dt 11:14; 28:12; Job 5:10; Ps 72:6**) and dew (**Dt 33:13, 28; Ps 133:3; Pr 19:12; Isa 26:19; Hos 14:5 [6]**) are part of God’s beneficent provision for his vassal nation.

C. (:3) Majestic Theme = Great Name of the Lord

*“For I proclaim the name of the LORD;
Ascribe greatness to our God!”*

Daniel Block: The Song does this by

- reciting his attributes (v. 4),
- his gracious deeds on behalf of his people (vv. 5–14),
- his righteous anger in response to their rebellion (vv. 15–25),
- his justice in dealing with Israel’s enemies (vv. 26–35), and ultimately
- his compassionate atonement for his own people (vv. 36–43).

Michael Grisanti: God’s greatness is a trait that sets him apart from all the gods worshiped by other peoples. He is totally transcendent.

Duane Christensen: To ascribe **greatness** to God (v 3) is to acknowledge his eternity, his matchless power, and his absolute authority. The prayer of David in **1 Chr 29:10–14**, when the offerings were brought for the building of the temple in Jerusalem, stands as a moving example of the power of praise (cf. also **Dan 4:31–34 [Eng. 34–37]**), in a prayer of Nebuchadnezzar(!) and **Rom 11:33–36**).

David Whitcomb: He proposed to declare all the character, works, and attributes of the LORD (that is what name means). That would be to offer to God the truth about His greatness, which is actually what it means to praise God

D. (:4) Faithful Focus = the Righteous Rock

*“The Rock! His work is perfect,
For all His ways are just;
A God of faithfulness and without injustice,
Righteous and upright is He.”*

Jack Deere: Unlike the gods of the ancient Near East whose followers believed they were often immoral and capricious, the Lord can always be counted on. He is **faithful** (cf. **Deut. 7-9**) and always does what is **morally right** (He does no wrong).

Earl Kalland: The rest of the song suggests that the main “works” of the Lord are activities of crating, aiding, and guiding Israel. These “works are perfect, and all his ways are just” (cf. **Ps 18:30**). His character is marked by faithfulness; no wrongdoing exists in him. He is upright and straightforward.

II. (:5-18) FORSAKING GOD CONTRADICTS ISRAEL’S FAMILY PRIVILEGES

A. (:5-6) Unnatural Perversion of the Children of God

1. (:5) History of Perversion

“They have acted corruptly toward Him,

*They are not His children, because of their defect;
But are a perverse and crooked generation.”*

Peter Craigie: Israel, unlike its Rock, is perverted and tortuous. The perversity of the Israelites was all the worse in that it was totally out of harmony with the Lord’s dealings with them: *Is this what you render to the Lord? (v. 6)*. In their foolishness, they failed to recognize him as their father and failed to recognize that all his dealings with them were not onerous impositions, but a reflection of God’s covenant love. He created you, He made you and he established you.

2. (:6) Contrasted with History of the Father’s Gracious Dealings

*“Do you thus repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people?
Is not He your Father who has bought you?
He has made you and established you.”*

Earl Kalland: The effect of these questions is to magnify the position of the Lord as the one who brought Israel into existence and to stigmatize Israel for her failure to recognize him in this position.

B. (:7-14) Unsurpassed Provision and Protection from the Supreme God

1. (:7) Testimony of Preceding Generations

*“Remember the days of old,
Consider the years of all generations.
Ask your father, and he will inform you,
Your elders, and they will tell you.”*

2. (:8-9) Treasured Status of Israel among the Nations

*“When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance,
When He separated the sons of man,
He set the boundaries of the peoples
According to the number of the sons of Israel.
For the LORD’s portion is His people;
Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance.”*

Michael Grisanti: When the Lord set up boundaries for all the nations and allocated to them spreads of land as part of his plan for the world, Israel was at the center of his efforts. He sets his election of Israel as an essential part of his plans for the entire world.

David Whitcomb: Consider demonstrations of the **Creator’s authority**. Stop to think about and talk about what He has done. Or in the words of Moses, *“Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you” (v.7)*. In remembering, we will discover that our Creator has the right to decide who lives, who lives where, and when. *“When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God” (v.8)*. Our Creator also has the right to show special love. He chose Jacob. *“But the LORD’s portion is his*

people, Jacob his allotted heritage” (v.9). Because of God’s choice, Jacob’s lineage is the LORD’s portion.

Earl Kalland: the boundaries of the nations were determined with the intent that Israel would have Canaan because her numbers could be supported in that area. This was done because Israel was central in the Lord’s affection and sovereign planning.

3. (:10-12) Tenderly Caring for and Guiding the Young Nation

a. (:10) Encircling Love

*“He found him in a desert land,
And in the howling waste of a wilderness;
He encircled him, He cared for him,
He guarded him as the pupil of His eye.”*

Daniel Block: The simile in the last line of this verse intensifies the image of Yahweh’s protection; he guarded them as his precious treasure. This interpretation of the literal expression “*the apple of his eye*” has a long history. Whatever its derivation, this became a fixed expression for “*to treat with love and care*” (cf. **8:15–16**).

Eugene Merrill: Israel's lack of initiation of and total dependence in the covenant relationship is seen in their description as a foundling, an infant abandoned in a desert place and left to die. This does not mean that Israel was indigenous to the desert or even that it was there that the Lord first came to know them. The Old Testament tradition traces their origin back to Abraham, and from those ancient patriarchal times Israel had been the focus of the Lord's redemptive design (cf. **Deut 26:5b-9; Josh 24:2-13**). What was in view here was Israel's post-exodus experience in the Sinai deserts, the “*barren and howling waste*” where the Lord made covenant with them and through which he guided them to the present moment.

b. (:11) Hovering Protection

*“Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,
That hovers over its young,
He spread His wings and caught them,
He carried them on His pinions.”*

Peter Craigie: The simile of the eagle may have been prompted by the language of the wilderness in the previous verse; the picture in this verse is that of the eagle’s nest, perhaps located in some remote place in the wilderness. As an eagle stirs up (or perhaps “*guards*”) its nest — see also **v. 10b** for the protective character of God’s love. Apparently the eagle taught its young to fly by throwing one out of the nest, and then swooping down and allowing the young bird to alight on its mother’s wings. The poetry illustrates vividly God’s dealings with his people, casting them from security to the fierce wilderness, but remaining beneath them to give them strength for the fearful experience, and gradually teaching them to “fly” on their own. It is implied that Israel is still in its youth, brought out of Egypt as a child and still learning to stand and walk during the years in the wilderness.

c. (:12) Solitary Guidance

*“The LORD alone guided him,
And there was no foreign god with him.”*

4. (:13-14) Tremendous Provision of Food and Drink

*“He made him ride on the high places of the earth,
And he ate the produce of the field;
And He made him suck honey from the rock,
And oil from the flinty rock,
Curds of cows, and milk of the flock,
With fat of lambs, And rams, the breed of Bashan, and goats,
With the finest of the wheat—
And of the blood of grapes you drank wine.”*

Daniel Block: Yahweh provides food through the soil. Just as fat around kidneys was the most desirable product of rams (**Lev. 3:3–4; Isa. 34:6**), so “*fat of the kidneys of wheat*” (pers. trans.) refers to the highest quality wheat or flour. The phrase “*blood of grapes*” refers either to common red or specialty wine. The stanza ends with a surprising verbal clause: “*You drank foaming [wine].*” Here wine in the fermentation stage highlights the Israelites’ joy in the produce provided by the land that Yahweh had given them.

Michael Grisanti: Not only did Yahweh protect and guide his chosen people, but he also abundantly provided for them (**vv.13–14**). The clause “*he made him ride on the heights of the land*” highlights Yahweh’s absolute sovereignty over the land and his ability to lead his people wherever they needed to go (cf. **Isa 58:14; Job 9:8; Am 4:13; Hab 3:19**). He enabled them to eat the produce of the fields and to “suck,” like an infant nursing at his mother’s breast, all that they needed and more: honey and olive oil, curds and milk, lambs, goats, and rams, and wheat. They were able to drink their fill of wine. Moses piles up these terms to highlight Yahweh’s superabundant provision for his vassal nation. The phrases “*from the rock*” and “*from the flinty crag*” demonstrate that Yahweh will even provide for his children from places where one would not expect abundance.

C. (:15-18) Unimaginable Provocation of Israel’s Divine Creator and Savior

Michael Grisanti: In spite of enjoying Yahweh’s abundant provision, the Israelites abandoned their Father and Maker in order to worship pagan gods that were powerless. These verses present three sad contrasts.

- First, Israel responded to Yahweh’s abundant provision by rejecting his authority and treating him with contempt (*nbl*; **v.15**). Unlike most animals, which are docile when fed, Israel kicked at Yahweh, their Maker and Protector, and resisted his directives.

- Second, even though Yahweh had chosen and flawlessly guided his people to the brink of the Promised Land, Israel often turned to pagan (“*strange*”), do-nothing gods (**vv.16–17**)—behavior prohibited by Yahweh and regarded as vile. The incomprehensible part consisted in the fact that there was nothing about these “gods” to compel Israel to worship them. Israel had not experienced any blessings through their activity, and Israel’s forefathers knew nothing about them. This horrific treatment of Yahweh provoked his jealousy. As **Ortlund**, 30, n. 16, points out, “God’s morally perfect jealousy arises out of his joint longings both to vindicate his own glory and to enjoy true love with his people.”
- Finally, they deserted and forgot the God who brought them into existence (**v.18**).

1. (:15) Forsaking God Due to Prosperity

*“But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked—
You are grown fat, thick, and sleek—
Then he forsook God who made him,
And scorned the Rock of his salvation.”*

Daniel Block: The rich food and prosperity (**vv. 13–14**) have obviously had an effect on the consumer’s disposition. In **verse 15a** Israel kicks like an animal, a colorful image of revolt against its provider. With elegant parallelism, in **verse 15b** the poet laments Israel’s **abandonment** of her divine Creator and Savior. The choice of *nāṭaš* rather than *‘āzab* for “*abandon*” is striking. While usually used of Yahweh giving up on his people, here *nāṭaš* speaks of the people abandoning him (cf. **Jer. 15:6**). The second verb (*nābal*) (Piel) means to treat with contempt, as if the object is a fool (cf. **v. 6**). Instead of honoring Yahweh their father and generous divine benefactor, they **despise him**.

2. (:16) Provoking God to Anger and Jealousy with Idolatry

*“They made Him jealous with strange gods;
With abominations they provoked Him to anger.”*

3. (:17) Sacrificing to False Gods

*“They sacrificed to demons who were not God,
To gods whom they have not known,
New gods who came lately,
Whom your fathers did not dread.”*

4. (:18) Abandoning their Creator

*“You neglected the Rock who begot you,
And forgot the God who gave you birth.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: The concluding verse combines the image of God as the protecting dependable Rock with that of a parent giving birth (**32:8**). The language of the latter image is striking because it combines masculine pronouns with verbs normally associated with mothers. The first verb, *bore*, refers to giving birth, and the second

literally speaks of a mother's labor pains (**Tigay**: 307). Israel's abandoning God is as reprehensible as someone forgetting both mother and father in a culture where children are responsible to take care of their parents.

Eugene Merrill: Israel's rebellion to that point did not bode well for the future. It was all the more urgent, then, that this recital of past failure be recalled regularly in the singing of the song so that the hard lessons of judgment that followed sin might act as a deterrent to future disobedience.

III. (:19-35) FORSAKING ISRAEL IS CONSISTENT WITH GOD'S DEMAND FOR COVENANT LOYALTY

A. (:19-25) Description of God Forsaking Israel

1. (:19) Rejecting Israel Due to Provocation

*“And the LORD saw this, and spurned them
Because of the provocation of His sons and daughters.”*

2. (:20) Turning Away from Israel Due to Perverse Unfaithfulness

*“Then He said, 'I will hide My face from them,
I will see what their end shall be;
For they are a perverse generation,
Sons in whom is no faithfulness.”*

Daniel Block: **Verses 20c–21b** summarize the basis for Yahweh's rejection of his people, presenting first the **external** (v. **20c–d**) and then the **internal** grounds (v. **21a–b**). Externally, Israel's punishment is justified because they are “*perverse*” and totally lacking in fidelity. Internally, Yahweh's rejection of Israel is fueled by his fury.

3. (:21-22) Unleashing Consuming Fire of Jealousy Due to Israel's Idolatry

*“They have made Me jealous with what is not God;
They have provoked Me to anger with their idols.
So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people;
I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation,
For a fire is kindled in My anger,
And burns to the lowest part of Sheol,
And consumes the earth with its yield,
And sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: God's profound and intense love for Israel, as reflected in the election, is one side of the coin (**7:6-8; 32:8-9**). But the other side is the deep pain and jealousy and anger when this love is rejected.

4. (:23-25) Heaping Calamities on Israel

*“I will heap misfortunes on them;
I will use My arrows on them.
They shall be wasted by famine, and consumed by plague*

*And bitter destruction;
And the teeth of beasts I will send upon them,
With the venom of crawling things of the dust.
Outside the sword shall bereave,
And inside terror—
Both young man and virgin,
The nursling with the man of gray hair.”*

Daniel Block: Verse 23 serves as a **thesis statement**, highlighting Yahweh’s role and identifying the genre of calamities that follow. Verse 23a classifies the gathering storm as “*evils*,” a general expression for “*calamities*” (NIV). The second colon casts the theme in metaphorical form, employing “*arrows*” as shorthand for all the ammunition at Yahweh’s disposal. Many of these weapons are associated with ancient conceptions of the demonic world.

B. (:26-35) Determination of God Executing Vengeance but not Removing Israel

1. (:26-27) Forbearance of God in Not Utterly Forsaking Israel

*“I would have said, ‘I will cut them to pieces,
I will remove the memory of them from men,’
Had I not feared the provocation by the enemy,
Lest their adversaries should misjudge,
Lest they should say, ‘Our hand is triumphant,
And the LORD has not done all this.’”*

Jack Deere: Though the nation deserved to be wiped out, the Lord would not allow it, for it would cause her enemies to question His sovereignty and power (v. 27).

2. (:28-29) Foolishness of Israel in Not Discerning Sin’s Consequences

*“For they are a nation lacking in counsel,
And there is no understanding in them.
Would that they were wise, that they understood this,
That they would discern their future!”*

Earl Kalland: Because of their lack of wisdom, the people could not detect or understand their destiny (v. 29). It is a very singular obtuseness that is here attributed to Israel. This obtuseness could only result from total unbelief in what Moses had already told them and from a lack of faith that it really was the Lord who was the source of the miracles that brought them out of Egypt and through Sinai – providing for them for a whole generation.

3. (:30-33) Fruit of Paganism is Poisonous

*“How could one chase a thousand,
And two put ten thousand to flight,
Unless their Rock had sold them,
And the LORD had given them up?
Indeed their rock is not like our Rock,*

*Even our enemies themselves judge this.
For their vine is from the vine of Sodom,
And from the fields of Gomorrah;
Their grapes are grapes of poison,
Their clusters, bitter.
Their wine is the venom of serpents,
And the deadly poison of cobras.”*

Eugene Merrill: This vine of paganism with its roots in Sodom produced noxious (cf. **Deut 29:18; Lam 3:5; Hos 10:4**) and bitter grapes. This is a way of saying that the fruit of the worship of these detestable gods was far short of satisfying. In fact, it left a bad taste in the mouth, so to speak. But more serious than that was the final result of worshipping them—certain and agonizing death. The wine of the bitter fruit of paganism was as deadly as the venom of the most virulent snake (v. 33). Far from being merely harmless options to the worship of the Lord, devotion to the gods of paganism had **fatal consequences**. Israel had to understand this lest they credit these gods with what the Lord had done and thus bring most painful judgment upon themselves.

4. (:34-35) Future of Israel Destined for Certain Retribution

*“Is it not laid up in store with Me,
Sealed up in My treasuries?
Vengeance is Mine, and retribution,
In due time their foot will slip;
For the day of their calamity is near,
And the impending things are hastening upon them.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: God alone is in control of the future of both Israel and the nations and will **recompense** as God determines. God retains his freedom, with the nations expected to recognize God’s role in reality. God’s integrity and honor require that God not allow people to consider themselves as independent and able to determine their own fate apart from God. It is striking that here again in the process of focusing on Israel, the people of God, Deuteronomy does so against a backdrop of the nations (cf. **4:5-8; 29:22-28**). Even though God the *Most High* has chosen Israel as a treasured possession, God remains God over all nations and will protect that reputation among those nations (cf. **32:8**).

Michael Grisanti: Yahweh resumes speaking (as vv.31–33 reflect the words of the Moses) and presents the demise of the wicked as a **certainty**. The “*this*” Yahweh has stored in his vaults refers to his intent to bring judgment on the pagan nations, who are devoted to their false gods. This judgment will take place at the time and in the manner that Yahweh determines. Because these nations have overstepped their bounds as agents of divine wrath, Yahweh alone will punish them (cf. **Isa 10:5–19, 24–27; Jer 25:12–14**).

Earl Kalland: The time when God acts against the wicked is indicated as near and soon. Even though he is a God of patience with quite a different view of time than that of men

(Ps 90:4; Isa 55:8), he nevertheless is said to move quickly to punish the wicked.

IV. (:36-42) DIVINE MERCY OPERATES IN CONJUNCTION WITH DIVINE VENGEANCE

A. (:36) Divine Compassion Will Rescue Once God's People Hit Rock Bottom

*“For the LORD will vindicate His people,
And will have compassion on His servants;
When He sees that their strength is gone,
And there is none remaining, bond or free.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: The implication of God's second thought for Israel now becomes explicit: God will *vindicate his people* (v. 36) and will *cleanse the land for his people* (v. 43). These two affirmations frame this final portion of the Song and dominate the overall picture.

Peter Craigie: Eventually, God would *vindicate* his people and *have compassion* on them (vv. 36–38). There was a prerequisite to the vindication of God, however. Before the people could experience once again the compassion of God, they had to be totally drained of self-assurance and totally freed from their alliance with foreign gods. *Their strength is exhausted and become nothing* (v. 36)—since Israel's defection was largely a result of the arrogance of believing in their own strength, that arrogance and belief in human strength had to be totally demolished before the people were in a position to realize their need of God's strength. The rhetorical question posed in vv. 37–38 is designed to create awareness that other possible sources of strength were also useless. *Where are their gods ...?*—the events God had permitted to happen to his people would make it very clear that foreign gods, in whom Israel so lightly could place its trust, were unable to offer help in crisis, and that they were in fact responsible for the crisis in the first place. Only when the Israelites reached rock-bottom would they be able to turn away from the lifeless *rock in whom they sought refuge* (v. 37), and turn again to their God, the living *Rock* (cf. v. 4).

Earl Kalland: The reality of the Lord's deity is seen in what he does: he puts to death at his will and he gives life – a reference to his creative power and his power to rescue from death illustrated by his rescue of the nation of Israel when no one remains (v. 36).

B. (:37-38) Divine Sarcasm Will Expose False Gods as Futile Saviors

*“And He will say, 'Where are their gods,
The rock in which they sought refuge?
Who ate the fat of their sacrifices,
And drank the wine of their libation?
Let them rise up and help you,
Let them be your hiding place!’”*

Eugene Merrill: Compassion does not negate accountability, however, and in Israel's day of judgment the question must have been raised about who really is God. The Lord

himself would challenge his people to produce the gods to whom they had turned for protection and whom they worshiped in their days of apostate unbelief. The answer to the query, “*Where are their gods?*” is self-evident. They were not to be found because they, in fact, did not exist. In scorn the Lord would exhort Israel in the day of their calamity to invoke the gods whom they had chosen in lieu of him (v. 38c, d). Vainly they would implore these figments of imagination to help them and to provide them security.

C. (:39) Divine Testimony Affirms God’s Unique Ability

*“See now that I, I am He,
And there is no god besides Me;
It is I who put to death and give life.
I have wounded, and it is I who heal;
And there is no one who can deliver from My hand.”*

Peter Craigie: Life, health, and victory were a result of God’s blessing. But death, disease, and defeat were equally a part of God’s dealings with his people; they did not indicate any diminution of God’s power, but showed only that the actions of the Israelites deserved divine judgment. An important principle emerges from this passage: when the blessing of God appears to be withdrawn, man should not question the ability of God, but should examine the state of his relationship to God.

D. (:40-42) Divine Vengeance Will Devour All Adversaries

*“Indeed, I lift up My hand to heaven,
And say, as I live forever,
‘If I sharpen My flashing sword,
And My hand takes hold on justice,
I will render vengeance on My adversaries,
And I will repay those who hate Me.
I will make My arrows drunk with blood,
And My sword shall devour flesh,
With the blood of the slain and the captives,
From the long-haired leaders of the enemy.’”*

Daniel Block: Yahweh will rise on behalf of his people and punish their enemies for their arrogance and brutality to Israel.

Michael Grisanti: vv. 39-43 -- The goal of Yahweh’s dealings with Israel, especially his judgment of them for their rebellion, is to elicit the nation’s realizing that he is the only true God, who possesses all power and will judge every one of his enemies in an act that will affect the entire world. In stark contrast to the pagan gods that the Israelites found so alluring, Yahweh is unique—“*I am he,*” declares the Lord. He makes the same affirmation in the book of Isaiah, where he announces that he has no rival among the pagan gods (Isa 41:4; 43:10, 13; 48:12). In the context (here and in Isaiah), Yahweh is stating that he alone, unlike the non-gods, controls the events of history. The affirmation of Yahweh’s **uniqueness** and **exclusivity** (“*there is no other*”) is echoed in

several other OT passages (**Dt 4:35, 39; 1Ki 8:60; Isa 45:5–6, 14, 18, 21–22; 46:9; Joel 2:27**). He alone wields **absolute sovereignty** over life and death and has the ability to cause and heal wounds, which only God can do perfectly.

(:43) EPILOGUE – CELEBRATE DIVINE VENGEANCE AND ATONEMENT

*“Rejoice, O nations, with His people;
For He will avenge the blood of His servants,
And will render vengeance on His adversaries,
And will atone for His land and His people.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: In the end it is a hymn of praise that witnesses to God’s unparalleled supremacy, power that God uses on behalf of his people. The Deuteronomic movement from jealousy to mercy, or from punishment to redemption (even if at points in the Song punishment appears to be more intended than actual), once more is evident (cf. **4:24-31; 29:16 – 30:10**).

Daniel Block: Viewed as a whole, **verse 43** presents the hosts of heaven and the nations with three reasons to celebrate and pay homage to Yahweh:

- (1) Yahweh has restored his relationship with Israel;
- (2) Yahweh has taken vengeance on Israel’s (and his own) enemies;
- (3) Yahweh has made atonement for the land.

In so doing he has reversed the earlier dissolution of the tripartite relationship involving deity–nation–people precipitated by Israel’s idolatry. This is cause for celebration not only by the Israelite beneficiaries of the divine action—as in this song—but also by the hosts of heaven and the nations, indeed the entire universe.

Eugene Merrill: Though evil appeared to prevail and by its very strength to justify itself, in the day of the Lord's triumph and Israel's vindication it would be clear that the Lord and his eternal purposes for creation were brought to fruition in accordance with the standards of his own perfect holiness. . . . God's wayward people (**vv. 15-18**), set for judgment (**vv. 19-25**) and unable to find deliverance through powerless pagan gods (**vv. 26-38**), would at last be purged of their sin, vindicated in the face of their enemies, and restored to perfect covenant relationship with the Lord (**vv. 39-43**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why the initial emphasis on God’s justice and holiness in the song?
- 2) Since this passage shows that God actually decreed evil, how is He not responsible for evil?
- 3) What caused God to hold back from utterly wiping out unfaithful Israel?
- 4) What attributes of God are highlighted in this special song?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Eugene Merrill: THE SONG OF MOSES (31:30–32:44)

1. Introduction to the Song (31:30)
2. Invocation of Witnesses (32:1-4)
3. Indictment of the People (32:5-6)
4. Review of Past Blessings (32:7-14)
5. Israel's Rebellion (32:15-18)
6. God's Promise of Judgment (32:19-25)
7. The Powerlessness of Other Gods (32:26-38)
8. The Vindication of the Lord (32:39-43)
9. Conclusion to the Song (32:44)

Charlie Garrett: Basic Outline

Verses 1 & 2 are an introduction concerning the words to be conveyed.

Verses 3 & 4 proclaim the perfections of Yehovah.

Verses 5 & 6 provide a contrast by noting the imperfections of Israel.

Verses 7-14 speak of the calling, establishment, and exalting of the nation.

Verses 15-18 tell of Israel's abandonment of Yehovah because of prosperity and ease, leading to apostasy from Him and to false gods.

Verses 19-25 bring out Yehovah's rejection of Israel, His turning from them, and His judgment upon them. But, in this time of rejecting them, verse 21 alludes to His plan to lure Israel back to Himself through His active turning to another group of people.

Verses 26 & 27 detail the reason for Yehovah's sparing, and not utterly destroying, the disobedient nation – the safeguarding of His own honor and glory.

Verses 28-33 detail the evident nature of Israel's unworthiness to be spared. As such, it highlights the very fact that they are spared.

Verses 34-38 reveal the wisdom of allowing Israel to be brought to a state of utter calamity, when all of the other gods fail to deliver, it is to...

Verse 39 reveals that Yehovah has, through His interaction with Israel, demonstrated that He alone is God.

Verses 40-42 call out the judgment of the nations for failing to recognize what God has done, which is manifestly evident through His treatment (establishment, care for,

spurning of, punishment upon, sparing, and defense) of Israel.

Verse 43 is a final climactic call to the world who knows Yehovah that He has kept His covenant promises to this nation of disobedience by providing them the atonement they do not, in fact, deserve.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/3622163527814.pdf>

Stan Anderson: We know that God is our creator, sustainer, provider, and defender. We appreciate all those things He is to us. We know He is our shepherd, king, teacher and guide. We love and appreciate Him for all these reasons. God has another role that we must not forget. He is our **judge**. **J. I. Packer**, in his book *Knowing God*, suggests four things that are true of a judge:

- A judge is a person with authority
- A judge is always identified with what is good and right
- A judge is a person of wisdom and discernment (a finder of fact)
- A judge is a person of power to execute a sentence or render a decision

All of these are true of God as judge. God is always just and right.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/33151253465.pdf>

Duane Christensen:

- A God's justice and Israel's disloyalty **32:1–6**
- B God's blessing on Israel in times past **32:7–14**
- X Israel's sin provokes God's punishment 32:15–29**
- B' God's decision to punish his enemies **32:30–35**
- A' God's "vengeance"—Israel delivered **32:36–43**

Gerald Gerbrandt: The content of the Song may surprise us. After all, the instruction occurs in a paragraph where God announces that because of Israel's apostasy, *I will forsake them and hide my face from them (31:17)*. The Song does witness for God as instructed, indict Israel for abandoning God and going after other gods (**32:15-18**), speak of God hiding his face from Israel (**v. 20**) and of disasters coming upon Israel (**v. 23**), and say God thought to *blot out the memory of them from humankind (v. 26)*. But this is not the last word, nor in the context of the Song, even the first word. The Song opens with a fervent call to *ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, his work is perfect (vv. 3-4)*. It concludes with a moving declaration that God will *vindicate his people, have compassion on his servants (v. 36)*, and *cleans the land for his people (v. 43)*. This is not an announcement of doom and gloom for the people of God as we might have anticipated based on the Song's introduction in **Chapter 31**. Rather, it is a hymn of praise to a God who, despite the corruption of his people, remains the fully sovereign God who cares for his people.

Daniel Block: Structure of Antiphonal Liturgy

Verses	Content	Speaker
1-3	Introduction	Leader of the service
4	Creedal affirmation	Congregation
Pause		
5-6	Summary declaration of the indictment	Leader of the service
7	Call to remember Yahweh's grace	Leader of the Service
8-14f	Recitation of Yahweh's grace	Man or men in the assembly
14g-18	Declaration of the indictment of the people	Leader of the service
Pause		
19-20a	Declaration of Yahweh's sentence	Leader of the service
20b-27c	Recitation of Yahweh's judgment speech	Priest or cultic prophet
27d-e	Declaration by the nations	Appointed man in the assembly
28-29	Description of the nations	Priest or cultic prophet
30	Question asked of the nations	Leader of the service
31	Declaration of the Israelites	Congregation
32-35	Recitation of Yahweh's description of Israel's enemies	Priest or cultic prophet
Pause		
36-37a	Declaration of Yahweh's commitment to his people	Priest or cultic prophet
37b-38	Recitation of Israel's challenge to the nations	Congregation
39-42	Recitation of Yahweh's judgment speech against the nations	Priest or cultic prophet
43	Concluding summons to praise	Congregation

MacArthur: This prophetic, poetic song has as its central theme Israel's apostasy, which brings God's certain judgment. The song begins with a short introduction emphasizing the steadfast God and the fickle nation (vv. 1-6). The song describes God's election of Israel (vv. 8, 9) and His care for them from the time of the wilderness wanderings (vv. 10-12) to their possession and initial enjoyment of the blessings in the Land (vv. 13, 14). However, Israel's neglect of God's goodness and her apostasy (vv. 15-18) would bring God's future outpouring of wrath on His people (vv. 19-27) and Israel's continuing blindness in the face of God's wrath (vv. 28-33). Ultimately, God's vengeance would strip Israel of all power and turn the nation from idolatry (vv. 34-38). Then, God would bring His judgment upon the nations, both His enemies and Israel's (vv. 39-42). The song ends with a call to the nations to rejoice with Israel because God would punish His enemies and spiritually heal both Israel and her Land (v. 43).

Steven Cole: Remember This Song

As Moses came near the end of his life, the Lord told him that in the future, Israel would break their covenant with the Lord and play the harlot with the false gods of the Canaanites (**Deut. 31:16**). As a result, in judgment the Lord would bring many evils upon them. So the Lord directed Moses to write a song as a witness against unfaithful Israel (**Deut. 31:19-21**). They were to teach this song to their children as a warning about what happens when you forsake the Lord and follow false gods. So Moses wrote this second song (**Exodus 15** is his first song) and taught it to Israel.

God wanted Israel to remember and sing **Deuteronomy 32** down through their generations, but it may have been a song that Israel wished they could forget. You've had songs that get into your head and you can't get them out until they just about drive you crazy! We don't know the tune of Moses' song, but God wanted it to stay in the Israelites' heads forever. Someday we'll hear this song, because in **Revelation 15**, John saw the saints in heaven singing the song of Moses, praising God for His greatness, righteousness, truth, and holiness. It teaches us:

To avoid turning away from the Lord, we should remember and sing songs that tell us who God is and who we are so that we appreciate what He has done for us in Christ. It would take many sermons to work through this song in detail, but there are three general lessons:

1. God wants us to remember and sing spiritual songs to warn us of the dangers of turning away from Him.

When God told Moses that in the future, Israel would break God's covenant and play the harlot with foreign gods, Moses must have felt as if his life's work was going down in flames! He had put up with hardship, grumbling, criticism, and rebellion from these people for the past 40 years, but his hope no doubt was that once they got into the Promised Land, they would finally become the kingdom of priests and holy nation that God had proclaimed them to be (**Exod. 19:5-6**). But now he hears this grievous word that after his death, Israel would forsake the Lord and turn to other gods. So God gave

Moses this song to teach Israel who He is and to warn them of the consequences if they turned away from Him.

When God tells us in His Word what the future holds, it is not so that we can draw up nifty prophecy charts. It's so that we will heed His warning and not fall into the sins that will happen in the future. And, it's so that we will not be surprised or discouraged when we see these things taking place. For example, the Bible tells us that in the future, there will be a time of great apostasy, when many professing believers will fall away (**Matt. 24:10-12**). Many will be deceived by the man of lawlessness (**2 Thess. 2:3-12**). But knowing that this will happen does not mean that it's inevitable that we will be part of that future apostasy. Rather, we can be on guard not to fall into spiritual deception. And, we'll be ready to endure persecution and hardship for the sake of the gospel. In the introduction (**Deut. 32:1-2**), Moses calls upon heaven and earth to let his teaching be as refreshing rain on the earth. But the bulk of the song describes terrible judgment, not refreshing showers! How can this be? Warnings and descriptions of future judgment are a means of blessing if we heed the warning. It's as if I warned, "Don't go near the edge of the Grand Canyon. Many have fallen in the past and there will be many who fall and die in the future." That predictive warning does not make it inevitable that you will fall over in the future. If you take the warning to heart, you will be blessed to avoid becoming a victim of my prediction.

That's the intent of this song. One way to heed the warning of future apostasy is to sing spiritually edifying songs as we gather each week.

2. The songs we remember and sing should tell us who God is and who we are.

- 1) GOD IS YAHWEH, OUR GREAT COVENANT GOD, THE ROCK.
- 2) GOD IS PERFECT, JUST IN ALL HIS WAYS, FAITHFUL, AND RIGHTEOUS.
- 3) GOD IS OUR FATHER WHO BOUGHT US, MADE US, AND ESTABLISHED US.
- 4) GOD IS THE MOST HIGH, SOVEREIGN OVER THE NATIONS, WHO CHOSE HIS PEOPLE AS HIS PORTION AND INHERITANCE.
- 5) GOD IS THE LOVING, FAITHFUL GOD WHO CARES FOR, GUIDES, AND SUSTAINS HIS PEOPLE.
- 6) GOD IS THE FEARFUL, RIGHTEOUS JUDGE OF THOSE WHO REJECT HIM.
- 7) GOD IS THE ONLY GOD, WHO KILLS AND GIVES LIFE, WHO WOUNDS AND HEALS, FROM WHOM NONE CAN ESCAPE.

3. When we see who God is and who we are, it leads to heartfelt worship because of what He has done for us in Christ.

The catalyst for heartfelt worship is when you see God as He has revealed Himself in the Bible and you see yourself as justly deserving His wrath. But then you see the surpassing riches of His grace in sending His own Son to die for your sins (**Eph. 2:4-7**).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 32:44-52

TITLE: TESTIMONY OF MOSES' SONG AND DEATH

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S JUDGMENT (AS REFLECTED IN MOSES' SONG AND HIS OWN DEATH) IS DESIGNED TO PROMOTE THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

INTRODUCTION:

Gerald Gerbrandt: One may speak of the Song as having a double role. First, it has an **educational function** as it encourages Israel to obey, reminding it of the nature of God on the one side, and of the tendency of human nature on the other. Second, when Israel sins, the Song serves as a **witness**, as a formal indictment of the people. Although a hymn of praise witnessing to God's greatness and compassion, it simultaneously becomes an indictment in a time of sin. Both roles of the Song (**v. 46a**) have as their goal obedience to the sermon of the larger book, *the words of this law* (**v. 46b**), and long life in the land. . .

Despite Moses' greatness, his special role in teaching God's instructions, and the uniqueness of his leadership (cf. 34:10), even he did not trust God fully. Perhaps it is intimating that if blessing and reward require full obedience, no one would ever receive them. God remains with his people, but this is due solely to his compassion and honor, not the people's obedience. And so Moses must die away from the land, along with all the other Israelites of his generation – the only exceptions are Caleb and Joshua, the one who now will lead the people into the land.

Jack Deere: If they would meditate on the certainty and severity of the judgment that the Lord would send on them for their apostasy, the Song of Moses could serve as a powerful deterrent to future rebellion. The threat of the Lord's retributive justice was given for their spiritual health.

I. (:44-47) TESTIMONY OF MOSES'S SONG – APPLICATION OF THE LAW IS CRITICAL AND MUST EXTEND TO SUCCEEDING GENERATIONS

Michael Grisanti: Looking back on the message of this song in particular and the law in general, Moses charges the nation of Israel to live in accordance with the Lord's expectations. Not only must they wholeheartedly obey Yahweh's demands, but they must also pass on to each successive generation that passion for genuine conformity of heart to his law. Only then will they and their descendants enjoy long tenure in the Promised Land.

A. (:44) Recitation of the Song

“Then Moses came and spoke all the words of this song in the hearing of the people, he, with Joshua the son of Nun.”

Duane Christensen: As a final charge to the people of Israel, Moses and Joshua together remind them to take to heart all the words of this Torah and the Song of Moses and to see that this teaching is handed on to their children in generations to come. Nothing is more important.

Eugene Merrill: this verse forms the closing frame of the song of Moses. The opening frame (**31:30**) states that Moses recited the words of the song, and that is the message here. Unless one understands that the song is spoken all over again, a view that has little to commend it, it seems best to see the present verse as a rounding off of the pericope in which the song is embedded.

Warren Wiersbe: Much of this song is a warning to the people that they were prone to forget what God did for them and to turn from God to idols. We do not know how often they sang this song, but we do know that they did not take it to heart. Do God’s people today pay attention to what they are singing?

B. (:45-46) Exhortation to Obey and Indoctrinate Future Generations

“When Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, he said to them, ‘Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this law.’”

Peter Pett: This is probably to be seen as referring to all his words in the song, but some see it as referring to all his words in Deuteronomy. Now his final great task of preparing the people for his death and for the entry into the land was accomplished. It was all over. There remained but the **final exhortation**.

Daniel Block: Echoing the sequel to the Shema in **6:6–9**, Moses emphasizes how seriously they must take his instruction. From the inside out they are to commit themselves to all the words with which he has admonished them, and they are to pass on all his teachings to their children, charging them to keep all the words of this Torah by doing them.

Eugene Merrill: Over and over again the people of Israel were reminded that the faith and commitment of any one generation were not sufficient for all the generations to come. Each must have its own time of covenant renewal (cf. **Deut 4:9-10; 5:29; 6:2,7; 11:19,21; 12:25,28; 30:19**).

John Gill: it was not enough to hear them, but they were to lay them up in their hearts, and retain them in their memories; and not only so, but reflect on them in their minds, and closely apply to the consideration of them, and get the true knowledge and sense of

them, and put it in practice... (They were) to transmit to their children, and enjoin them the observance of, that so religion might be perpetuated in their posterity.

C. (:47) **Obligation to Obey**

1. Essential Value

“For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life.”

Eugene Merrill: Finally, Moses pointed out that the words of covenant requirement were not “idle” words, flippant or offhanded matters of opinion (v. 47). Rather than being empty and worthless words they were, in fact, **words that led to life**. The same sentiment appears earlier in Deuteronomy, where the point is made that “*man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD*” (**Deut 8:3**; cf. **30:20**). By feeding on them, that is, by obeying them explicitly, Israel could face the prospect of long life in the land of promise (cf. **Deut 4:40**).

Peter Craigie: The law did not bind men in a straitjacket of legalism, but pointed toward that **life** which God purposed for them. In the law lay the secret of Israel’s longevity and prosperity in the Promised Land which they were soon to possess.

John Gill: It was no light and trifling matter, but of great importance and consequence, obedience to it being attended with rewards, and disobedience with punishment... if obeyed, the means of a comfortable and happy life, in the enjoyment of all good things, of the preservation and continuance of it to a length of time; and long life was always reckoned a great temporal mercy:

2. Enduring Legacy

*“And by this word you shall prolong your days
in the land, which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.”*

Daniel Block: In **verse 47** Moses reiterates the importance for Israel’s future of heeding his instruction. Stated negatively, they are not to treat his teaching as frivolous or trivial; stated positively, Moses’ words are the keys to Israel’s life; their existence in the land they are about to enter depends on their commitment to these words (cf. **6:24–25**; **30:20**; **31:12–13**). In identifying his words with the revelation of God, Moses provides his people with the key to their future.

Earl Kalland: Previously Moses had said that the Lord was the people’s life (**30:20**); here he said that “*all the words I have solemnly declared to you,*” “*all the words of this law*” (v. 46), are their “*life*” (v. 47). This was so because by adherence to the revelation the Lord had given them, they were to live under his covenant in the land across the Jordan.

These words were not to be taken lightly, as though the people could follow them or disregard them with no great change in their welfare in either case. Not so! The revelation in covenant-treaty form was to be obeyed in all its detail, with a willing adherence and devotion both to the words and spirit of the law and to its giver – the

Lord their God. He was their life, and his words were their life. Without the words there would be insufficient knowledge of him or of his way of life for them. Commitment to the Lord and to his word would insure a long national life for Israel in the Promised Land.

II. (:48-52) TESTIMONY OF MOSES' DEATH – APPROPRIATION OF GOD'S PROMISES DEPENDS ON OBEDIENCE

“And the LORD spoke to Moses that very same day, saying,”

A. (:49) Vision of the Promised Land from Mount Nebo

1. Vantage Point -- Go Up

“Go up to this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab opposite Jericho,”

2. View -- Look

“and look at the land of Canaan,”

3. Victory by God's Grace

“which I am giving to the sons of Israel for a possession.”

B. (:50-51) Vindication of God's Judgment on Moses

1. (:50) Denial of Entrance into the Promised Land

a. Sentence of Death Applied to Moses

“Then die on the mountain where you ascend, and be gathered to your people,”

Peter Pett: Dying in a mountain to which he was called by God appears to indicate a glorious death, a death near to heaven. He had to be punished but God still cherished His faithful servant, as He had Aaron.

b. Sentence of Death Applied to Aaron

“as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people,”

2. (:51) Disqualifying Sins

a. Disloyalty

“because you broke faith with Me in the midst of the sons of Israel at the waters of Meribah-kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin,”

Eugene Merrill: He had done two things to disqualify himself:

- (1) he had “*broken faith*” with the Lord at Meribah Kadesh, and
- (2) he had failed to “*uphold the Lord's holiness*” (v. 51).

The former term (Heb. *m al*) has the basic idea of **treachery** or **unfaithfulness**, suggesting here that Moses, as covenant mediator, had proved to be disloyal to that

covenant commitment in a time of unusual trial. The verb occurs in numerous other places where the issue of covenant is central (cf. **Lev 26:40; Num 31:16; 1 Chr 5:25; Ezek 17:15-19; 20:25-27**). Whatever else may have happened at Meribah Kadesh, the place where Moses struck the rock in anger (**Num 20:11**), the whole episode is summarized as an act of rebellion (*m rā*) against God (**Num 20:24; cf. 27:14; 1 Sam 12:15**). Such an act by the very leader of the covenant community was unthinkable, so, tragically enough, Moses was barred access to the land to which he had led the people.

Failure to “*uphold holiness*” (*l qidda tem ôti*) with respect to the Lord (also associated with the Meribah Kadesh incident; cf. **Num 20:12; 27:14**) was failure to give proper consideration to who he is. That is, it was a denial of his transcendent uniqueness and lordship and an attempt, conscious or not, to reduce him to a human level. Again the covenant implications are clear, especially in Moses' act of rebellion. The Lord had told him to speak to the rock (**Num 20:8**), the mere act of speaking being designed to demonstrate the power of God who creates by the spoken word. To strike the rock was to introduce an interruptive element and thus to diminish the significance of the powerful word. By doing this, Moses betrayed not only anger and disobedience but he correspondingly reflected on the God whom he served by implying that God could not bring forth water by the divine word alone.

b. Disrespect

*“because you did not treat Me as holy
in the midst of the sons of Israel.”*

C. (:52) Verdict of God’s Judgment Reiterated

1. Remote View

“For you shall see the land at a distance,”

2. Rejected Entrance

*“but you shall not go there,
into the land which I am giving the sons of Israel.”*

Michael Grisanti: The text specifies two reasons for this painful reality. In the first place, Moses “*broke faith*” with Yahweh. This verb signifies a breach of a relationship of trust between persons or with God (**Wakely, NIDOTTE, 2:1020**). The covenantal mediator’s conduct at Meribah represented **disloyalty**. That whole episode was regarded as an act of rebellion throughout Israelite history (**Nu 20:24; cf. 27:14; 1Sa 12:15**). Second, Moses failed to “*uphold holiness*.” His actions at Meribah did not demonstrate a proper recognition of **Yahweh’s absolute sovereignty and uniqueness**. In spite of this offense, Yahweh will allow Moses the privilege of viewing the long-anticipated land before he dies.

John Schultz: We suppose that, at this point, Moses was more overwhelmed with the sadness of earthly failure than with the joyful anticipation of entering the heavenly glory. . .

On this day Moses left the pictures behind in order to enter into the reality of God's presence. From now on he would be fully satisfied with the glory of which he had only had a foretaste before. God's punishment for Moses was that, instead of being allowed to enter Canaan on earth, he was ushered into the real Promised Land. Moses' failure to enter Canaan was on account of his sin. God reminded him: *"This is because both of you broke faith with me in the presence of the Israelites at the waters of Meribah Kadesh in the Desert of Zin and because you did not uphold my holiness among the Israelites."* But how can we say that Moses failed, if he entered into the presence of God? By a miracle of God's grace, his failure on earth precipitated the consummation of his life. Grace is, indeed, amazing!

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How did Moses prepare the people for the transfer of leadership to Joshua?
- 2) What is our process for taking to heart the messages we hear from God's Word?
- 3) What temptations face our current church leaders in the same general areas that Moses transgressed?
- 4) How did Moses not become bitter over the denial of his desire to enter the Promised Land?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: There is a practical lesson here about the price of sins we commit, however provoked we may be at the moment. But there is also a deeper lesson in that a visionary leader who is called to take a people to a "new land" often takes them only to the edge of his or her dream. **Martin Luther King** (1929–68) knew this, as did Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) and so many others in times past.

Happy are they who die with the promised inheritance in **full view**, and with clear assurance of eternal life. At the same time, let us remember to walk circumspectly, lest some false step we have taken be remembered against us on a deathbed and render that final scene less comfortable.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Preachers may teach theology from the Bible, but people often learn theology from the hymns they sing. The most prominent tone of song tends to be praise. The Song of **Deuteronomy 32** thus provides a powerful and dramatic climax to the book. The pessimism and warnings of the narrative are not forgotten but they now are

encased in words of praise to the Rock who bore Israel, who provided for them, and who in the end will vindicate himself and his people.

Eugene Merrill: Even God's discipline is mitigated by his **grace**, however, so Moses was allowed to see the land of Canaan from a distance (v. **52**; thus *minneged*; cf. **Num 2:2; 2 Kgs 2:15; 3:22; 4:25**). More specifically, he could ascend Mount Nebo, opposite Jericho, and there take in the panorama of the land before he died on the mountain (vv. **49-50**). The “*Abarim Range*” refers to the high plateau area east of the Jordan River and Dead Sea, the highest peak of which was Pisgah, a part of Mount Nebo (cf. **Deut 34:1**). This peak, with an elevation of over 2,600 feet, is about twenty miles from Jericho as the crow flies and affords an unobstructed view of nearly all the promised land (cf. **Deut 34:1-3**).

Aaron too had died on a mountain, Mount Hor, some ten miles northeast of Kadesh Barnea (cf. **Num 20:22-29**). The significance of death and burial on a mountain may lie in the notion, even in the Bible, that the mountain peak symbolizes nearness to heaven, that is, to God himself. The “*high places*” associated with pagan worship certainly conveyed this concept, but the Lord himself sanctions the idea that he meets in a special way with those who worship him on designated mountains (cf. **Gen 22:14; Exod 3:1,12; 19:11; 24:16; Josh 8:30; Pss 43:3; 48:1; 68:16; Isa 2:2**). It is fitting that Aaron and Moses, despite their rebellion, be buried “near God” on a prominent mountain top.

Dennis J. De Haan: Great emphasis is being placed on living longer and better. Advances in medical science are making it possible for more and more people. Yet in spite of this, none of us can avoid growing old. One day aging will overtake all of us, and our bodies will shut down.

What is preventable, however, is an **attitude of bitterness and regret** as we grow older. Look at the life of Moses. When he was 120 years old, he stood with the Israelites before they crossed the Jordan River and entered the Promised Land. He could not go with them because he had disobeyed the Lord when in anger he struck the rock in the wilderness (**Numbers 20:12, 24**).

How easily Moses could have slipped into a self-pitying and resentful frame of mind! Had he not borne the burden of a stubborn and stiff-necked people for 40 years? Had he not interceded for them time after time? Yet at the end of his life he praised the Lord and urged a new generation of Israelites to obey Him (**Deuteronomy 32:1-4, 45-47**). As we grow older, we can dwell on the failures and hardships of our past, or we can remember God's faithfulness, accept His discipline, and keep looking to the future in faith. It's the only way to avoid a bitter attitude.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 33:1-29

TITLE: TRIBAL BLESSINGS COMMUNICATED BY MOSES

BIG IDEA:

TRIBAL BLESSINGS AS THE LAST WORDS OF MOSES PROVIDE ENCOURAGEMENT IN COVENANT RENEWAL AND CONQUEST PREPARATION

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: Moses' death looms over the congregation of Israel and the book of Deuteronomy. Having delivered his final pastoral addresses, installed Joshua as successor, taught the people the Song, and received Yahweh's command to climb Mount Nebo, all that remains in the extended liturgical event reflected by Deuteronomy is the blessing of the congregation. . . **Deuteronomy 33** consists of a series of benedictory fragments strung together like a string of pearls. . .

Deuteronomy 33 exhibits several marks of intentional and artful design.

- (1) The tribal benedictions are framed by hymnic pieces virtually identical in size (**33:1–5, 26–29**).
- (2) Within the collection of blessings, Levi and Joseph represent the tribal center of gravity, receiving as much attention as all the rest combined. This interest not only anticipates the future religious and political significance of these tribes, but also reflects their significance within Israel in the recent past (cf. **Gen. 45–50; Ex. 32:25–29; Num. 25:7–13**). At the same time, given the tribe of Judah's later significance of the Davidic monarchy and its separate existence as a nation, the relatively little attention that Judah receives is striking.

Duane Christensen: Though this chapter is titled "*The Blessing*," many interpreters give it the title "*The Testament of Moses*." I call the poem a "*Testamentary Blessing*" to bring out its character as a final pronouncement on the part of Moses within the literary genre of "blessings" (cf. **Gen 48:21** in relation to **49:1–28**). . .

The poem in vv **1–5** and **26–29**, which makes up the framework around the blessing itself (vv **6–25**), "reflects a rare tranquility and sustained optimism" that stands in sharp contrast with what precedes it in **Deut 31–32**. "As in the great prophetic books, where the record of unrelieved defection was mitigated by a happier editorial addition at the close, so Deuteronomy now comes out from the storms of sin, ingratitude, and apostasy into the still waters of hope. . . . While the human spirit needs the discipline of facing up to its shortcomings, it also needs encouragement to call forth its best efforts" (**H. H. Shires** and **P. Parker**, IB 2:528).

Gerald Gerbrandt: As Moses prepares to die, he gives a final blessing to all of the tribes, both as their "*father*" and as a prophet with a view into the future. An opening and

closing frame enclose blessings for eleven tribes (Simeon is missing; vv. 1-5, 26-29) that emphasize “the ideal unity of the tribes as a single people and places their security and prosperity in the broader context of God’s benefactions to Israel” (Tigay: 318). **Prosperity** and **security** also are the central themes of the blessings for the individual tribes. A unique God (v. 26) will protect and provide generously for a united, unique people (v. 29). That is a formula for a *happy* or *blessed* (NIV) people.

Michael Grisanti: It is also important to notice that the chapter does not delineate Israel’s responsibility to the exclusion of Yahweh’s role. As a matter of fact, the idea of blessing in **ch. 33**, according to **Barker** (“*The Theology of Deuteronomy 27*,” 293), “is not bound to the law but ultimately derives from **Yahweh’s grace**. Thus **Deuteronomy 33**. . . is an expression of optimism, with confidence placed not in Israel’s possibility of covenantal obedience, but in Yahweh’s grace.”

I. (:1-5) DIVINE AUTHORITY INFUSES THE TRIBAL BLESSINGS

(:1) Divine Source of Authority for the Blessings Issued by Moses

“Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the sons of Israel before his death.”

Duane Christensen: The scene of Moses blessing the twelve tribes of Israel evokes the image of another scene of the “*prophet like Moses*” who spoke with his twelve disciples the night before his crucifixion to encourage them, concluding with an affectionate prayer for them (**John 14–17**), and blessed them when he parted from them on the Mount of Olives to ascend into heaven (see **Luke 24:50–53**).

Gerald Gerbrandt: The phrase “*man of God*” is frequently applied to prophets in the Old Testament, such as Samuel, in **1 Samuel 9:6-10**; **Shemaiah, 1 Kings 12:22**; **Elijah, 1 Kings 17:18**; **Elisha, 2 Kings 1:9**. Sometimes it serves as a formal title for someone whose name is not given but who is recognized as a spokesperson of God with regard to the future (**Judg 13:6, 8**; **1 Sam 2:27**; **1 Kings 13:1-31**; **20:28**; cf. **1 Sam 9:6-10**). The identification fits with the closing passage of the book (**Deut 34:10**) and serves to give special authority to the blessing.

Peter Craigie: It should be noted that in blessing the tribes of Israel, Moses was assuming the role of a father. In **Gen. 49**, the parallel passage to **Deut. 33**, Jacob/Israel blesses his sons. Moses acts in a similar fashion, for though the tribes were not literally his sons, he had acted as a father to them.

A. (:2) Divine Theophany in Historical Reflection

*“And he said, ‘The LORD came from Sinai,
And dawned on them from Seir;
He shone forth from Mount Paran,
And He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones;
At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.’”*

Daniel Block: The exordium proper takes up **verses 2–5**, portraying Yahweh in glorious theophanic form, coming from the mountains in the desert, presumably to deliver his people and to be acknowledged as king over all the tribes of Israel. Verse 2 describes in cryptic form the divine warrior’s appearance to Israel. In this and other poems celebrating Yahweh’s military actions,¹⁰ he fights on Israel’s behalf, rescuing them from enemies who hold them in bondage (Egypt) and who interfere in their march toward destiny (Amalekites, Moabites, Amorites, etc.). Accompanied by his heavenly host, nothing can stop him. . .

Taken together **verses 2–3** paint a picture of Yahweh’s **universal authority**, balancing his superiority over the heavenly hosts with his sovereignty over Israel. Moses emphasizes Israel’s role in Yahweh’s earthly agenda. What the angels are to his cosmic administration, the Israelites are to the earthly. This idealized picture of Yahweh’s holy ones investing their energies in the divine agenda provides significant background for interpreting the blessings.

Gerald Gerbrandt: God is depicted as coming from the region south of the Promised Land to deliver and lead *the united tribes of Israel* (**vv. 2-3, 5**). *Sinai* (the only reference to Sinai in the book of Deuteronomy), *Seir*, and *Mount Paran* are in desert regions of the Sinai Peninsula and Edom, southwest of the Dead Sea. . . the terminology (*came, dawned, and shone forth*; cf. **Ps 50:2**) does suggest a theophany, a divine encounter between God and human. Accompanying God are *myriads of holy ones, a host, and all his holy ones* (accepting NRSV here), probably a reference to the heavenly forces at God’s disposal (cf. **1 Kings 22:19; 2 Kings 6:17; 19:35**). The nature of the theophany is one in which God with his heavenly army wondrously delivers and protects his people.

Eugene Merrill: The imagery here is that of the **Divine Warrior** marching at the head of his armies on behalf of those whom he had chosen for protection and blessing. The same motifs appear elsewhere, especially in the Song of the Sea following the exodus (**Exod 15:1b-18**); the Song of Deborah (**Judg 5:2-5**); **Ps 68** (esp. **vv. 7-10**); and the prayer of Habakkuk (**Hab 3:2-15**). Particularly noteworthy are the allusions to Sinai (**Deut 33:2; Judg 5:5; Ps 68:8**); Seir (**Deut 33:2; Judg 5:4**) or Edom (**Exod 15:15; Judg 5:4**); Paran (**Deut 33:2; Hab 3:3**); and mountains (**Exod 15:17; Deut 33:2; Judg 5:5; Ps 68:15-16; Hab 3:6,10**).

What all these descriptions share in common in addition to the literary motifs just listed is an explicit or implicit (as here in **Deut 33**) polemic against all hostile forces that seek to frustrate the Lord’s purposes for creation and especially for his elect people Israel. In historical terms that purpose was to bring them out of Egyptian bondage, deliver them from the Red Sea, engage them in covenant at Sinai, transport them safely through the desert, and at last lead them to a successful conquest and occupation of the Promised Land. To achieve this Yahweh must act as a warrior in command of a heavenly host. As such, nothing could withstand his forward march, nor could any foe prevent his people from achieving the success and prosperity he had promised them (cf. **Deut 4:32-40; 7:17-24; 20:1-20**).

B. (:3) Divine Relationship in Covenant Commitment

1. God's Love for His People

"Indeed, He loves the people;"

2. God's Guidance and Israel's Submission

*"All Thy holy ones are in Thy hand,
And they followed in Thy steps;"*

3. God's Revelation to His People

"Everyone receives of Thy words."

Michael Grisanti: Yahweh loves his chosen people (evidenced in his election of and care for them), and they should respond in submission by gladly accepting his instruction (v.3), mediated to them through Moses (v.4). Their reception of this special provision from Yahweh is part of what has made them his special possession in the world (Ex 19:5–6; Dt 7:6). A fundamental element of Israel's relationship with Yahweh is to recognize and submit to his kingship. He is sovereign over them, i.e., over Jeshurun. As their king he can lay before them his requirements, demand their submission, and provide the blessings (or curses) he promised them.

Wright (Deuteronomy, 309–10) helpfully summarizes three key themes in these verses:

- Yahweh's transcendent power (clearly demonstrated at Sinai),
- the reciprocal nature of this covenantal relationship (Yahweh's love and Israel's obedience or loyalty), and
- Yahweh's kingship, which rested on three basic premises:
 - o his deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Ex 15:18),
 - o his provision of the law at Sinai, and
 - o the victory over Canaan he is about to give to Israel (see also **Craigie**, 394).

C. (:4) Divine Law as Unique Authority for Governance

*"Moses charged us with a law,
A possession for the assembly of Jacob."*

D. (:5) Divine Kingship in Celebration of Sovereign Dominion

*"And He was king in Jeshurun,
When the heads of the people were gathered,
The tribes of Israel together."*

Eugene Merrill: The basis and culmination of this privileged relationship was the Lord's sovereignty (v. 5). He was king over Jeshurun, a pet name for Israel (cf. **Deut 32:15; 33:26; Isa 44:2**), suggesting its uprightness (Heb. *y ar*, "be right"), at least as an ideal. It was because he was king that he had the power and authority to convene the leaders and people of the tribes together at the time of covenant making (cf. **Exod 19:7-8**;

34:31-32; Deut 29:10), and likewise it was his sovereignty that gave efficacy to the promised benefits about to be articulated to the tribes.

II. (:6-25) LISTING OF TRIBAL BLESSINGS

Gerald Gerbrandt: The statements are of three types:

- general undirected statements of blessing or wishes for a tribe (Reuben, Gad, and Joseph),
- prayers directed to God (Judah, Levi), and
- descriptions of a tribe's situation or way of life (remainder).

Unlike the blessing of Jacob upon his twelve sons (**Gen 49**), all statements are positive, with no accusations of wrongdoing included.

Michael Grisanti: The order in which the blessings are pronounced departs from that found in **Genesis 49**. It appears roughly to follow their divinely intended geographic distribution of the land, from south to north.

A. (:6) Blessing of Reuben

*“May Reuben live and not die,
Nor his men be few.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: Although Reuben was the oldest and thus the one who normally should have received a double share (**21:15-17**), his blessing promises nothing but is merely a wish that he survive. This may be intended as a retribution for his earlier misdeeds (cf. **Gen 35:22; 49:3-4**), but more likely simply reflects the struggle the tribe of Reuben had to survive.

B. (:7) Blessing of Judah

*“And this regarding Judah; so he said,
‘Hear, O LORD, the voice of Judah, And bring him to his people.
With his hands he contended for them;
And mayest Thou be a help against his adversaries.’”*

Daniel Block: The tribe's fate and fortune are in the hands of Yahweh, the nation's divine Warrior.

C. (:8-11) Blessing of Levi

1. (:8-9) Reflection on Key Historical Events

“And of Levi he said, ‘Let Thy Thummim and Thy Urim belong to Thy godly man, Whom Thou didst prove at Massah, With whom Thou didst contend at the waters of Meribah; 9 Who said of his father and his mother, ‘I did not consider them’; And he did not acknowledge his brothers, Nor did he regard his own sons, For they observed Thy word, And kept Thy covenant.’”

Peter Craigie: In vv. 8–9, the tribe is characterized representatively, in the person of Moses and (perhaps) Aaron (v. 8), and collectively (v. 9). The characterization refers to a number of **different events** which are blended together in the structure of the poetry; the testings of the representatives of the tribe at both Rephidim (**Exod. 17:1–7**) and Kadesh (**Num. 20:1–13**) are noted first (v. 8). Then the collective action of the tribe, which resulted in its being set aside for divine service (see **Exod. 32:26–29**), is recalled (v. 9). After Israel’s apostasy in the incident of the “Golden Calf,” the Levites had executed God’s judgment even on their own brethren, their neighbors and their companions (**Exod. 32:27**), and it is this incident that is expressed in different language in v. 9.

Daniel Block: The length of the Levites’ blessing reflects Moses’ relationship to this tribe (**Ex. 6:16–27**) and their spiritual role among the people. While **verse 11** hints at a military role for this tribe, the emphasis is on their **spiritual ministry** among the people. This blessing envisions four responsibilities for the Levites, all of them custodial:

- of the Thummim and Urim (v. 8),
- the covenant (v. 9),
- divine revelation (v. 10a–b), and
- the sacrificial liturgy (v. 10c–d).

Thummim and Urim identify the two small stones carried by the high priest in a pouch in his pectoral (**Ex. 28:30; Lev. 8:8**). The Old Testament does not give a clear picture of their nature or the manner in which they were to be manipulated. They seem to have been small stones or sticks cast like lots for binary decisions (cf. **Num. 27:21; Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65**).

2. (:10) Role of the Levites

a. Role in Indoctrination

*“They shall teach Thine ordinances to Jacob,
And Thy law to Israel.”*

b. Role in Liturgy

*“They shall put incense before Thee,
And whole burnt offerings on Thine altar.”*

3. (:11) Reward of the Levites

a. Prosperity -- Material Blessing

*“O LORD, bless his substance,
And accept the work of his hands;”*

b. Protection against Enemies

*“Shatter the loins of those who rise up against him,
And those who hate him, so that they may not rise again.”*

Eugene Merrill: To “*smite the loins*” most likely refers to rendering one impotent, unable to produce progeny, and certainly to undermine his strength (cf. **1 Kgs 12:10; Prov 31:17; Nah 2:2**).

D. (:12) Blessing of Benjamin

*“Of Benjamin he said,
‘May the beloved of the LORD dwell in security by Him,
Who shields him all the day,
And he dwells between His shoulders.’”*

Daniel Block: The blessing proper focuses on Benjamin’s security under Yahweh’s protective care.

Michael Grisanti: Moses pronounces a tender blessing on Benjamin—one reminiscent of Benjamin’s close relationship with his father, Jacob (**Ge 42:4, 38; 44:18–34**). The term “*beloved*” refers to someone who enjoys a special relationship with Yahweh or with another person (**2Sa 12:25; Ps 127:2; Isa 5:1; Jer 11:15**). Benjamin can rest securely in Yahweh, who shields him from all threats.

E. (:13-17) Blessing of Joseph

1. (:13-16) Material Blessings of Joseph

*“And of Joseph he said,
‘Blessed of the LORD be his land,
With the choice things of heaven, with the dew,
And from the deep lying beneath,
14 And with the choice yield of the sun,
And with the choice produce of the months.
15 And with the best things of the ancient mountains,
And with the choice things of the everlasting hills,
16 And with the choice things of the earth and its fulness,
And the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush.
Let it come to the head of Joseph,
And to the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his
brothers.’”*

Daniel Block: In the blessing of Joseph we reach a second center of gravity. Past and present history offer sufficient warrant for the amount of attention given to Joseph and the tribe’s status reflected here:

- (1) the benediction exhibits conceptual and lexical links with **Genesis 49:22–26**;
- (2) Joseph was the tribe of Joshua;
- (3) the narratives of Joseph dominate the last fifteen chapters of Genesis. The fact this blessing is identical in length to that of Levi (52 words) may reflect the nature of Israel’s leadership under Josephite and Levite tribes after Moses’ death (Joshua was an Ephraimite).

Although the opening line of this litany recognizes Yahweh as the source of all good things, the picture involves the covenantal triangle, with deity, people, and land all fulfilling their functions within this relationship.

Eugene Merrill: In most arresting imagery Moses implored God to make all of these blessings a crown on Joseph's head, a diadem attesting to his preeminence among the tribes (v. 16c, d). This role already was apparent to Jacob (**Gen 49:26**), who no doubt remembered well the dream in which Joseph saw his entire family bow low before him (**Gen 37:5-11**). Subsequent events revealed the fulfillment of the dream, both in terms of Joseph's personal rise to power (**Gen 42:6-9**) and the importance of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh in the era of Israel's monarchy.

Michael Grisanti: The parallelism of the places or topographical features emphasizes the comprehensive nature of these blessings. All parts of creation, under the control of Yahweh, will produce abundantly for Joseph's descendants. In light of the relatively arid climate, rain, dew, and springs are of the utmost importance. The sun (with the moon as a parallel) is essential to a productive harvest. The hills and mountains are valuable not only as sources for needed minerals but also for their slopes, on which are planted vineyards and olive trees.

2. (:17) Majesty of Joseph

*“As the first-born of his ox, majesty is his,
And his horns are the horns of the wild ox;
With them he shall push the peoples,
All at once, to the ends of the earth.
And those are the ten thousands of Ephraim,
And those are the thousands of Manasseh.”*

F. (:18-19) Blessing of Zebulun and Issachar

*“And of Zebulun he said,
‘Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going forth,
And, Issachar, in your tents.
19 They shall call peoples to the mountain;
There they shall offer righteous sacrifices;
For they shall draw out the abundance of the seas,
And the hidden treasures of the sand.’”*

Daniel Block: The harvest would include primary marine resources like fish and shells (used for making jewelry, lamps, and dyes), as well as products of maritime trade: timber, precious metals, pottery, and agricultural products from abroad. He describes the mercantile enterprise strangely as “sucking” (NIV “feast on”) abundance from the seas and the hidden treasures of the sand. Like **Genesis 49:13**, this blessing envisions Zebulun and Issachar along the coast in Phoenician territory rather than inland as described in **Joshua 19:10–23**.

Gerald Gerbrandt: Zebulun and Issachar were consecutive sons of Jacob by his wife Leah. Their tribes settled in bordering territories in southern Galilee, resulting in their being treated next to each other more than once in the story (blessing of Jacob, **Gen 49:13-14**; Song of Deborah, **Judg 5:14-15**). Their territories extended to the Mediterranean Sea, allowing these tribes to participate in fishing and other marine activities. The reference to inviting *peoples to the mountain to offer the right sacrifices* presumably is to either Mount Tabor or Mount Carmel, perhaps reflecting a time before Jerusalem gained its preeminent status.

G. (:20-21) Blessing of Gad

1. (:20) Characterization of Gad – Aggressive and Expansive

*“And of Gad he said,
‘Blessed is the one who enlarges Gad;
He lies down as a lion,
And tears the arm, also the crown of the head.’”*

Daniel Block: The two verbs reflect the two activities for which these large felines are known: sleeping and devouring prey.

Gerald Gerbrandt: The tribe of Gad is characterized as aggressive and expansive, with a political and possibly even judicial role in relationship to other tribes.

2. (:21) Conduct of Gad – Governing in Justice

*“Then he provided the first part for himself,
For there the ruler's portion was reserved;
And he came with the leaders of the people;
He executed the justice of the LORD,
And His ordinances with Israel.”*

Daniel Block: “*justice of the Lord*” -- this term does include the notion of social justice, but it should be interpreted more broadly as “*righteousness*” as laid down in the Sinai revelation and the Mosaic Torah (cf. **16:20**). To be sure, righteousness involves justice, but it refers to conduct according to all his righteous “*decrees*” and “*laws*” (**Deut. 4:8**) and “*walking in all the ways of the LORD*,” which include religious, ceremonial, civil, social, and personal prescriptions as well.

H. (:22) Blessing of Dan

*“And of Dan he said,
‘Dan is a lion's whelp,
That leaps forth from Bashan.’”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: Dan may have been small, forced to relocate in the north when its original location on the coast proved unsuccessful (**Josh 19:40-48**), but as a *lion's whelp* (i.e., cub), it is characterized as surprisingly strong. Bashan was not part of Dan, but its reputation for fertile land and strong herds may support the image of a vigorous and aggressive lion.

I. (:23) Blessing of Naphtali

*“And of Naphtali he said,
‘O Naphtali, satisfied with favor,
And full of the blessing of the LORD,
Take possession of the sea and the south.’”*

Eugene Merrill: Naphtali appears as a **highly favored people**, “*a doe set free that bears beautiful fawns*” in the colorful language of Jacob's prediction (**Gen 49:21**). Here the tribe is seen as one satiated (so Heb. *ba*) with the Lord's good pleasure (*r ôn*), filled up (*so m l*) with his blessing. A token of this special grace was Naphtali's **favorable location**, one that extended “*southward to the lake*.” This difficult phrase (lit., “*take possession of sea and south*”) probably is to be construed as in the NIV, “*southward to the lake*” (the Heb. construction being epexegetical). This in any case eliminates the Mediterranean and suits Chinnereth very well. The Galilee region embraced by Naphtali did indeed enjoy many temporal and material riches (cf. **Josh 20:7; 2 Chr 16:4; Isa 9:1**), but by far the most abundant blessing was the fact that the Messiah spent most of his life and exercised much of his ministry there or in nearby Zebulun (cf. **Matt 4:12-17**). One can scarcely imagine greater evidence of divine favor.

J. (:24-25) Blessing of Asher

*“And of Asher he said,
‘More blessed than sons is Asher;
May he be favored by his brothers,
And may he dip his foot in oil.
25 Your locks shall be iron and bronze,
And according to your days, so shall your leisurely walk be.’”*

Daniel Block: In the blessing of Asher Moses prays for both **fertility** and **security**. The first two lines request for Asher's supremacy among the tribes in the blessing and favor with God. The material dimension of that favor is expressed by a curious idiom, “*let him bathe his feet in oil*.” The expression imagines the olive trees of Galilee so productive that streams of oil run down the hills.

Michael Grisanti: This pronouncement of “*blessing*” (*brk*) on Asher is likely related to the meaning of “*Asher*” as “*happy, blessed*.” Not only is this tribe blessed above all others, but it is also regarded highly by its brother tribes. The hyperbolic metaphor of bathing one's foot in oil suggests abundant prosperity. Even though olive groves were abundant in the territory of Asher, it seems that here the oil, which often symbolizes blessing in the OT (**Dt 32:13; Job 29:5-6, 11**), provides a metaphor of prosperity in general.

The iron and bronze bolts refer to bolts that held a city gate in place as an essential component to the city's defense. The basic idea of this line may be: “*May your land be as secure as if it were locked with bolts of iron or bronze*” (**Tigay**, Deuteronomy, 333). As long as the tribe lives, they will enjoy Yahweh's protection.

III. (:26-29) INCOMPARABLE STANDING OF BOTH GOD AND ISRAEL AS SEEN IN DELIVERANCE FROM ENEMIES

Daniel Block: The CODA picks up where the exordium had left off, praising Yahweh for his lavish support for Israel (vv. 26–27) and congratulating Israel for having a God like Yahweh (vv. 28–29). This stanza divides into three artfully composed parts, with the first (vv. 26–27) and last (v. 29) being identical in length by word count (19 words) framing the shorter center (v. 28). The outer parts both begin with a vocative address and highlight Yahweh’s rescue of Israel from her enemies, while the center focuses on Israel enjoying the security he has provided.

Duane Christensen:

A	Who is like God, O Jeshurun?	33:26	
	B God is a refuge and undergirding presence		33:27a
	X He drove out the enemy before you		33:27b
	B’ Israel settled securely in a land of plenty		33:28
A’	“Who is like you? A people delivered by YHWH”	33:29	

A. (:26-27) Deliverance from Enemies Secured by the Incomparable God

1. (:26) Incomparable God

*“There is none like the God of Jeshurun,
Who rides the heavens to your help,
And through the skies in His majesty.”*

Eugene Merrill: The image of Yahweh riding on the heavens and clouds (*mayîm* and *qîm*) is mythopoeic anthropomorphism adapted, no doubt, from pagan epic sources but with intensely polemic overtones against the depravity of pagan religious conception. The point was that it was not really Baal (or any other god) who rode in triumph in the heavens above, but it was the Lord alone who did so, he who is unique and solitary (cf. **Pss 18:10; 68:33; 104:3**).

2. (:27) Deliverance from Enemies

*“The eternal God is a dwelling place,
And underneath are the everlasting arms;
And He drove out the enemy from before you,
And said, ‘Destroy!’”*

B. (:28) Results of Deliverance from Enemies: Security and Prosperity of Israel

1. Security

*“So Israel dwells in security,
The fountain of Jacob secluded,”*

2. Prosperity

“In a land of grain and new wine;

His heavens also drop down dew.”

C. (:29) Deliverance from Enemies Enjoyed by Incomparable Israel

1. Incomparable Israel

*“Blessed are you, O Israel;
Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD,
Who is the shield of your help, And the sword of your majesty!”*

2. Deliverance from Enemies

*“So your enemies shall cringe before you,
And you shall tread upon their high places.”*

Duane Christensen: It is not only the **God of Israel** who is incomparable; the same is true of the **Israel of God**. No words can adequately express the excellence of the God of Jeshurun, or the privileges and blessing of his people (v 26). The righteousness with which they are clothed is everlasting. The eternal God is their dwelling place and his undergirding arms form their unfailing support (v 27). He is the one who defeats the enemy so that Israel may settle securely in a fertile land, whose “*skies drip moisture*” (v 28). Israel is “*a people delivered by YHWH,*” whose “*enemies come cringing to you*” as you tread upon their backs (v 29). God help us to know the happiness of Israel as portrayed here, so that we too may find our dwelling place in the everlasting arms of the God of Jeshurun.

Eugene Merrill: The blessing of all Israel ends with a note of **triumphant hope** for the nation, a people unique in all the earth for having been delivered from bondage by the Lord (v. 29a; cf. **Deut 4:32-40**). Salvation in the past provides confidence for the present, for the God who redeemed is the Shield, Helper (cf. v. 26), and Sword of Israel. He not only provides these things but in himself he embodies them (cf. **Ps 115:9-11**). The future was, therefore, bright as well. On the eve of conquest it was assuring to know that Yahweh, the Divine Warrior (cf. v. 27), would lead his elect nation to victory. Their enemies would submit to them, and they would tread upon the high places of their foes (v. 29b, c).

This last figure is that of a conqueror who places his foot upon his vanquished and fallen adversary as a sign of **absolute dominion** (cf. **Gen 49:8; Josh 10:24**). The verb “*trample*” (Heb. *d rak*) occurs frequently to speak of the exercise of sovereignty over peoples and lands or even over nature itself (**Deut 1:36; 11:24-25; Josh 1:3; 14:9; Amos 4:13; Mic 1:3; 5:4; Hab 3:15**; cf. **Job 1:7; 2:2**). In light of the combination of conquest and dominion, it is better to understand *b môt* not as “*high places*” but as “*backs*,” a rendering supported by comparative Semitic lexicography (cf. Ug. bmt, Akk. b mtu; KB, 132). The mythopoeic language of the passage as a whole (cf. v. 26) favors this view as does the parallelism of cringing (“*cower*”; Heb. *k a*) and trampling on the back. The couplet may perhaps be rendered:

*Your enemies will be forced to prostrate before you;
You will then trample upon their backs.*

In any case, Israel's prospects, despite their historical shortcomings, were optimistic indeed, for the Lord would assure ultimate triumph.

Michael Grisanti: Moses brings his conclusion to a climax by exulting over Israel's blessed position. Because of their special relationship with Yahweh, demonstrated by his deliverance of them from Egypt (and other calamities), they are unique among all the nations of the world. The question "*Who is like you?*" is normally addressed to God (**Ex 15:11; Pss 35:10; 71:19; 89:8 [9]**) to emphasize his incomparability.

Another demonstration of the unparalleled relationship between Israel and Yahweh is God's consistent care for them. He is their shield, helper, and sword. Those metaphors describe not only what Yahweh does for his chosen people but also his very character (Ps 115:9–11). Israel's enemies will be enemies of Yahweh, who will cower before this God-enabled nation.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do these blessings compare to the parallel passage in **Gen. 49**?
- 2) How does God encourage His people to trust Him for victory over their powerful enemies as they just begin to launch their invasion campaign of Canaan?
- 3) What type of grace was at work in the heart of Moses to communicate these blessings at the very time that he was being denied personal entrance into the Promised Land?
- 4) How impactful were these **last words** from the great leader of God's people?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: For those with eyes to see, this benediction, particularly the framework, offers a profound ecclesiology, highlighting the privileges that come with membership in the assembly of God's people. Like the faithful in ancient Israel,

- we are the recipients of the divine revelation (**v. 2**),
- the objects of his love, identified by a special name (**vv. 3, 5**),
- his holy ones held by his hand (**v. 3**),
- the people to whom God has revealed his will (**vv. 3–4**; cf. **4:7–8**),
- citizens of his kingdom (**v. 5**),
- the secure beneficiaries of his defense (**vv. 26–27**), and his lavish provision (**v. 28**), but, most fundamentally,
- the undeserving recipients of his salvation.

Duane Christensen: Structure of the Blessings

A Reuben, Judah, Levi, and Simeon (?)	Leah	33:6–11
B Benjamin	Rachel	33:12
X Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh)	Rachel	33:13–17
B' Zebulun and Issachar	Leah	33:18–19
A' Gad, Dan, Naphtali, and Asher	Zilpah and Bilhah	33:20–25

Peter Craigie: There is a strong **militaristic thread** running throughout this chapter, which serves to remind the reader that this blessing is not only the last act of a dying man, but also a word of encouragement and an anticipation of the victories that would soon be won as the Israelites began their conquest of the promised land. The death of Moses marked the end of an era, but it also introduced a new era in which the people of God would receive the gift of God's land, which had been anticipated since the promise made to Abraham. . .

The law received at Sinai was to be the constitution of the new state of Israel, which was to come into existence in the near future; the lawgiver would be the head of the new state. Hence the people acclaim their leader, namely, God (the lawgiver): Let there be a King in Jeshurun. The kingship of God in early Israel rests on three basic premises:

- (i) the liberation of his people in the Exodus (see Exod. 15:18);
- (ii) the giving of the law at Sinai;
- (iii) the victory (still lying in the future) by which God would grant to his people the Promised Land.

The affirmation of God's kingship at the beginning of the blessings, in the context of a gathering of the tribes with their chiefs, points up that although Moses would utter the blessings, their fulfilment would lie in the hands of God, provided that the people continued to acknowledge and serve him as their King. And Moses, about to die, could

leave his people with the knowledge that they recognized God as their King, so that his death did not mean that the Israelites were bereft of a leader; his departure might even make them depend more heavily on God.

TEXT: Deuteronomy 34:1-12

TITLE: THE END OF THE ROAD FOR MOSES

BIG IDEA:

DESPITE THE UNIQUE SIGNIFICANCE OF MOSES' MINISTRY, HE MUST DESIGNATE JOSHUA AS HIS SUCCESSOR AND DIE WITHOUT ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Block: We have heard the voice of the narrator before (1:1–5; 4:41–5:1a; 29:1[28:69]), but now for the first time he holds our attention. The events described conclude the death narrative formally begun in **chapter 31**. By this point in the drama, Moses has done all he could do to set his house in order. He has commissioned a successor (31:1–8, 23), provided a written transcript of his farewell pastoral sermons and arranged for the regular reading of this Torah in the future (31:9–13, 24–29), taught the people a national anthem (31:14–22, 30; 32:47), and pronounced his benediction on the tribes (33:1–29). All that remains is the report of his death and the people's response to his passing. This is the function of **chapter 34**.

Believer's Study Bible: Philo, Josephus, and some modern commentators have accepted this account of Moses' death and funeral as written by the lawgiver himself. Although this is certainly possible, there is no reason to reject the likelihood that Joshua or another prophet, acting editorially, appended these words concerning the author's death.

G. Campbell Morgan: In this last chapter of Deuteronomy we have the writing of another hand. It contains the story of the death of Moses, the equipment of Joshua for his work, and a last tender reference to the great leader and law-giver, beginning with these particular words. For the man who wrote them, they were true words; and they remained true through all the history of that wonderful people until One was born of the seed of David, Who was greater far than Moses. In his second discourse Moses had foretold his coming in the words: "*I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren like unto thee.*" Long centuries elapsed, but at last He came, and in His coming fulfilled all Moses had initiated under the Divine government; absorbed and abolished the law which came through him, in the grace and truth which He brought to men. All this does not detract from, but rather enhances our sense of **the greatness of this servant of God**. His passing was full of beauty. In the fact of his exclusion from the land toward which he had led the people, it was a punishment; but, like all the chastisements of God, it was wonderfully tempered with mercy. There had been no weakening of his force. Everything ended in full strength. He went up to die. Jehovah gave him a vision of the land, and then buried him in that unknown grave. It was an august and glorious ending to a great and dignified life. Thus ends the last book of the Pentateuch, the final section of the Law.

I. (:1-8) TERMINATION OF THE LIFE OF MOSES

A. (:1-4) Moses' Vision of the Promised Land and Denial of Entry

1. (:1-3) Vision of the Promised Land

“Now Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, 2 and all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, 3 and the Negev and the plain in the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar.”

Michael Grisanti: Yahweh introduced himself to Moses on a mountain (**Ex 3**), gave his law to Moses on the same mountain (**Ex 19–20**), and now brings an end to his physical life on another mountain.

Daniel Block: The narrator specifies the **regions** surveyed. Moving in a counterclockwise direction, Moses looks straight north to Gilead (representing the eastern Transjordanian territories), to Naphtali (representing the northern region between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean), Ephraim and Manasseh (representing the Israelite heartland across the Jordan), Judah (the region between the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean), the Negev (the southern region as far as the Sinai peninsula), and coming full circle to the southern part of the Ghor, the rift valley dominated by the city of Jericho, “*the City of Palms.*”

The narrator mentions the **extremities** of Moses' gaze: from Gilead a hundred miles north as far as Dan, at the foot of Mount Hermon, sixty miles west as far as the western sea, and fifty miles south as far south as Zoar (cf. **Gen. 19:22**).

Duane Christensen: Moses was given a vision of the Promised Land in its entirety that no tourist today can see without ascending into the skies. Perhaps this fact helps to explain the subsequent tradition known as **The Assumption of Moses**, with its account of Moses being taken directly to heaven rather than dying a natural death. **Jude 9** appears to refer to such a tradition, which was apparently well known in early Jewish circles. At any rate, it would require such an airborne experience for Moses to actually see all that the biblical text says he saw in his vision from the summit of Mount Nebo.

Gerald Gerbrandt: On a literal level, Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch end with Israel on the border of the Promised Land, yet outside of it. Although Israel has already conquered the Transjordan, it remains only a foretaste of what really counts. Later Joshua describes the actual entrance into the land, with the process only completed under David (**2 Sam 7:1**). But the systematic viewing of the land is more than Moses having the privilege of seeing what he cannot experience. It also is a symbolic taking possession of the land, possibly even an act of laying a legal claim to the land (**Daube: 34–9**). The reference to God's oath to the ancestors binds together the whole Pentateuch (note **Gen 12:7**) as well as the book of Deuteronomy (**1:8**).

2. (:4) Denial of Entry

*“Then the LORD said to him,
‘This is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying,
I will give it to your descendants’;
I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there.”*

Daniel Block: For Israel this declaration brings the book to an end on a hopeful note, but for Moses it was extremely painful. Without rehearsing the cause as he had in **32:50–52**, Yahweh reminds him once more that he will not cross over there. Moses may only gaze at the prize with his eyes. With this statement, the forty-year conversation that Yahweh had initiated with his trusted servant in Midian (**Ex. 3:6–10**) ends. Moses will not experience the realization of the promise, but he will leave the stage knowing that Yahweh has been faithful both to the ancestors and to him.

B. (:5-8) Moses’ Death and Burial

1. (:5) Death of Moses

*“So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab,
according to the word of the LORD.”*

Peter Craigie: *The servant of the Lord*—again, it is emphasized that in his death, Moses was faithful, and that the prohibition against entering the land had not separated him from God’s presence (see also the expression *man of God*, **33:1**).

2. (:6) Burial of Moses

*“And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab,
opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows his burial place to this day.”*

Gerald Gerbrandt: Since the location of his grave is not known, establishing a shrine to Moses, or developing a cult around Moses attached to the grave, becomes highly speculative. The memorial he leaves behind is not some grave marker but *the words of this law* (**31:24**), the instructions on how to live a life that leads to blessing in the land. At his death Israel mourns the appropriate length of time (cf. **21:13**).

Eugene Merrill: Later Jewish tradition speaks of the peculiar circumstances surrounding Moses' burial as does the New Testament. Jude relates a confrontation between the archangel Michael and the devil over Moses' body (**Jude 9**), a dispute apparently having to do with Yahweh's purpose for burying Moses in a secret place to begin with. Most likely the sepulchre remained hidden precisely to prevent the Israelites from taking Moses' body with them to Canaan, thus violating the divine command to disallow Moses entry there. His subsequent appearances to witnesses do little to alleviate the enigmatic character of his death and interment, but they do reveal in a most magnificent manner the reality of the ongoing existence of God's saints and of his everlasting grace toward them (cf. **Matt 17:3; Mark 9:4; Luke 9:30; Rev 11:1-13[?]**).

3. (:7) Vitality of Moses

“Although Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated.”

Daniel Block: Moses died neither of old age nor disease, but simply because within the divine plan his time was up.

Duane Christensen: Moses died at the height of his physical strength shortly after he had commanded the tribes of Israel in battle against the Canaanite kings, Sihon and Og, and immediately after he had climbed to the summit of Mount Nebo alone.

4. (:8) Mourning over Death of Moses

“So the sons of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses came to an end.”

II. (:9) TRANSITION TO THE LEADERSHIP OF JOSHUA

A. Empowering of Joshua by Laying on of Hands by Moses

“Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him;”

Daniel Block: The expression “*spirit of wisdom*” occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament in **Exodus 28:3** and **Isaiah 11:1–2**. In both, it represents a special divine endowment for the fulfillment of a divinely ordained role. Through Moses’ ritual gesture Joshua was authorized and empowered to administer the nation justly and to embody the righteousness of the Torah (cf. **17:14–20**).

Duane Christensen: The act of Moses laying “*his hands*” on Joshua is connected with the idea of a transference of authority in a rite of investiture.

B. Effective Leadership of Joshua

“and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses.”

Gerald Gerbrandt: Surprisingly, we also read that *the Israelites obeyed him* [Joshua], *doing as the Lord had commanded Moses*, a statement in apparent tension with passages announcing that as soon as Moses leaves the scene, the people will *begin to prostrate themselves to the foreign gods in their midst* (**Deut 31:16**; cf. **31:27**). But here Deuteronomy is reassuring Israel that the death of Moses is not the end of the story. Deuteronomy moves within a tension between, on the one hand, regularly warning the people against their inclination to rebel against God and, on the other hand, the assurance that the law can be obeyed and that if Israel has faithful leaders, they can choose life (cf. **Josh 24**; the stories of the judges). The death of Moses marks the end of one part of the story, but the accession of Joshua to leadership is the start of another, one filled not only with danger and threat but also of promise.

Eugene Merrill: For many years it had been apparent that Joshua son of Nun would someday succeed Moses as covenant mediator and leader of his people. He first appeared as a commander of Israel's fighting men, leading them to victory over the Amalekites under Moses' direction (**Exod 17:8-16**). After the giving of the covenant at Sinai, Joshua, designated as the “*aide*” (*na ar*) of Moses, began to assert a greater spiritual role by partially ascending the holy mountain with Moses to receive the stone tablets of the Decalogue (**Exod 24:12-13**). Thereafter he continued this close covenant association (**Exod 32:17; 33:11**), always concerned to maintain Moses' leadership and to carry out his bidding (**Num 11:28; 13:16; 14:6-10**). When it was disclosed that Moses could not enter the land of Canaan, the mantle of leadership fell on Joshua, who, from that day forward, prepared himself with that responsibility in view (**Num 20:12; 26:65; 27:15-23; 34:17; Deut 1:38; 3:28; 31:3-8, 14-23**).

William MacDonald: One important insight we gather from this verse is that Moses appointed Joshua as his successor, knowing that his own ministry would be coming to an end. In doing so, he set a good example for others who are in places of spiritual leadership. Some may think that this is too elementary to emphasize but the fact is that there is often **gross failure to train successors and to turn work over to them**. There seems to be an innate resistance to the idea that we are replaceable.

Sometimes this is a problem that faces an elder in a local fellowship. Perhaps he has served faithfully for many years, but the day is approaching when he will no longer be able to shepherd the flock. Yet it is hard for him to train a younger man to take his place. He may see young men as threats to his position. Or he may contrast their inexperience with his own maturity and conclude that they are quite unsuitable. It is easy for him to forget how inexperienced he was at one time, and how he came to his present maturity by being trained to do the work of an overseer.

This can also be a problem on the mission field. The missionary knows that he should train nationals to assume places of leadership. But he rationalizes that they cannot do it as well as he. And they make so many mistakes...and attendance at the meetings will drop if he does not do all the preaching. And anyway, they don't know how to lead. The answer to all these arguments is that he should look upon himself as being expendable. He should train the nationals and delegate authority to them until he works himself out of a job in that particular area. There are always unfilled fields elsewhere. He never needs to be unemployed.

When Moses was replaced by Joshua there was a **smooth transition**. There was no vacuum of leadership. The cause of God did not suffer trauma. That's the way it should be.

All God's servants should rejoice to see younger men raised up to places of leadership. They should count it a great privilege to share their knowledge and experience with these disciples, then turn the work over to them before they are forced to do so by the hand of death. They should have the selfless attitude that Moses displayed on another occasion when he said, “*Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets.*”

III. (:10-12) TESTIMONY TO THE UNIQUE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MINISTRY OF MOSES BY VIRTUE OF

Gerald Gerbrandt: Moses, Deuteronomy concludes, was an incomparable prophet, in his communication with God (*whom the Lord knew face to face*) and in what he did (*for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform*), combining the two central themes of law and exodus.

Peter Craigie: The last three verses of the book constitute, as it were, the **literary epitaph** of Moses; they form a fitting conclusion to the Pentateuch, of which the last four books contain an account of the life and work of Moses in Israel. Moses was a prophet, but in his epitaph it is not his knowledge of God that is stressed, but rather the **Lord's knowledge of him**. God had sought him out and appointed him to a particular task; over the years, the relationship had become intimate, so that to those Israelites who knew Moses, it was evident that his highest communion was with God. And so in his epitaph, written in a book because the grave was not known, God's intimate knowledge of Moses was the most striking memory of the man now departed.

A. (:10) His Intimate Relationship with the Lord

“Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face,”

Daniel Block: The idiom speaks of an intimate and direct relationship—without need for an intermediary (cf. **Ex. 33:11; Num. 12:6–8**).

Duane Christensen: As **Tigay** puts it ([1996] 340), “The point of the text is that Moses had the most direct contact with God of any prophet, and hence had the clearest knowledge of Him and His will.” As the “*Word of God*” incarnate, and the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of a “*prophet like (Moses)*” at some future point in time (**Deut 18:15, 18**), Jesus had even deeper personal contact with God and God's will for his people.

Eugene Merrill: This intimacy is reminiscent of the challenge to Moses' preeminence as a prophet by his sister and brother, who accused Moses of arrogating prophetic privilege only to himself (**Num 12:2**). Part of Yahweh's response to this challenge was that there were, indeed, other prophets (Miriam and Aaron included); but only to Moses did Yahweh speak “*face to face*” (**Num 12:8**).

B. (:11-12) His Performance of God's Special Works before both the Egyptians and the Israelites

1. (:11) Special by Virtue of Signs and Wonders before the Egyptians

“for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land,”

2. (:12) Special by Virtue of Power and Terror before the Israelites
*“and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror
which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.”*

Eugene Merrill: Moreover, no other prophet had till then performed such signs and wonders (*tôt* and *môp tîm*; cf. **Exod 7:3; Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8; 29:3; Neh 9:10; Ps 78:43; 105:27**), awesome displays to Pharaoh and all Egypt that Yahweh alone is God (v. 11). Nor was their effect intended only for the pagan world. Israel also needed to be reminded over and over again of the power and protection of Yahweh manifested through his humble and faithful servant Moses (v. 12). It is no less true today that the unbelieving world as well as the church depends to a great extent upon faithful servants of the Lord to make him known in his saving and sovereign purposes.

Duane Christensen: In the phrase “*all Israel*” we find an envelope around the book as a whole (see **1:1**) that tells the reader we have reached the end of a long journey, which is also the beginning of another even longer journey for God’s people, one that extends from Joshua to another “*Joshua*” in times to come, for “*Jesus*” is simply the Greek form of “*Joshua*.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What argument can you make for the full possession of the Promised Land by the nation of Israel as still awaiting eschatological fulfilment?
- 2) What was the reason for such secrecy surrounding the burial of Moses?
- 3) How can leaders more effectively train their successors and prepare their people for times of transition?
- 4) How does the Lord manifest His power through weak earthen vessels today?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Christensen: When examined in light of the structure of **Deut 31–34** as a whole, the primary structure of **chap. 34** focuses attention on observing the Torah under the leadership of Joshua, as the following menorah pattern suggests:

- A In view of his impending death, Moses commissions Joshua **31:1–15**
 - B Moses’ final works: Torah and song as witnesses **31:16–30**
 - C The Song of Moses as a witness for future generations **32:1–43**
 - X **Moses’ final charge: observe all the words of the Torah**

32:44–47

- C' The testamentary blessing of Moses **33:1–25**
- B' Moses' final words: on Israel's security and blessing **33:26–29**
- A' Death of Moses and transition of leadership to Joshua **34:1–12**

It is useful to divide **34:1–12** in two equal parts and to observe that each half may be outlined in similar fashion:

- A Moses ascends Mount Nebo in the land of Moab **34:1a**
 - B YHWH shows him the whole of the Promised Land **34:1b–3**
 - X YHWH says: *“This is the land I promised your fathers”* **34:4a**
 - B' YHWH lets Moses see it but does not let him enter it **34:4b**
 - A' Moses dies on Mount Nebo and is buried in the land of Moab **34:5–6**
- A Moses is 120 years old when he dies **34:7**
 - B Israel mourns his death for 30 days **34:8**
 - X Joshua takes Moses' place as leader in Israel **34:9**
 - B' There has not risen a prophet since in Israel like Moses **34:10**
 - A' Moses did awesome things in the eyes of all Israel **34:11–12**

This particular reading highlights that what YHWH shows Moses from the top of Mount Nebo is the very land that was *“promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying: ‘To your descendants I will give it’”* (v 4); and that Joshua is designated as the leader to take the people there (v 9).

Gerald Gerbrandt: Although Moses is the model for future prophets (*God will raise up for you a prophet like me, 18:15*), none will really compare to Moses. Perhaps most significantly, the word of future prophets will now be judged by whether it coheres with the words of God through Moses in Deuteronomy. Whereas the Blessing of Moses connected the incomparability of Yahweh, the God of Israel, with that of the people Israel (**33:26–29**), now the incomparability of Moses is presented with an unstated but implicit message: this incomparable prophet with whom God spoke face-to-face has given his incomparable word to the people, and this is the book of Deuteronomy.

F. B. Meyer: This was true of Moses as a man. He had seen plenty of sorrow and toil; but such was the simple power of his faith, in casting his burden on the Lord, that they had not worn him out in premature decay. There had been no undue strain on his energy. All that he wrought on earth was the outcome of the secret abiding of his soul in God. God was his home, his help, his stay. He was nothing: God was all. Therefore his youth was renewed.

But there is a deeper thought than this. **Moses stood for the law.** It came by him, and was incarnated in his stern, grave aspect. He brought the people to the frontier of the land, but would not bring them over it: and so the Law of God, even when honored and obeyed, cannot bring us into the Land of Promise. We stand on the Pisgah-height of effort, and view it afar in all its fair expanse; but if we have never got further than

“Thou shalt do this and live,” we can never pass into the blessed life of rest and victory symbolized by Canaan.

But though the law fails, it in through no intrinsic feebleness. It is always holy, just, and good. Though the ages vanish, and heaven and earth pass away, its jots and tittles remain in unimpaired majesty. It must be fulfilled, first by the Son, then by his Spirit in our hearts. Let us ever remember the searching eye of that holy Law detecting evil, and its mighty force avenging wrong. Its eye will never wax dim, nor its natural force abate. Let us, therefore, shelter in Him, who, as our Representative, magnified the law and met its claims, and made it honorable.

Thomas Constable: Many students of Moses' life have noticed similarities to Jesus' life, and they regard him as a type of Christ:

1. Both men were divinely chosen deliverers (**Exod. 3:7-10; John 3:16; Acts 7:25**).
2. Both were born into a godly home at a difficult time in Jewish history (**Exod. 1:15—2:10; Matt. 2:1-12**).
3. Both of their lives were threatened when they were infants (**Exod. 1:22; Matt. 2:16**).
4. Both were protected in Egypt (**Exod. 2:1-10; Matt. 2:13-15**).
5. Both gave up wealth to benefit others (**Heb. 11:24-26; Phil. 2:6-8**).
6. Both experienced a time of preparation in a wilderness (**Ex. 2:15-22; Matt. 4:1-11**).
7. Both experienced rejection by Israel initially, and so turned to the Gentiles (**Exod. 2:11-15; Acts 7:23-29; 18:5-6; cf. Acts 28:17-28**).
8. Both gained a bride during their rejection by Israel (**Exod. 2:16-21; Matt. 12:14-21; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:30-32**).
9. Following his period of rejection, Moses again appeared as Israel's deliverer and was accepted, as Jesus will be (**Exod. 4:29-31; Zech. 12:10—13:1; Rom. 11:24-26; cf. Acts 7:23-36; 15:14-17**).
10. Both did mighty signs and wonders (miracles; **Deut. 34:11-12; Matt. 4:23**).
11. Both were servants of the LORD (**Deut. 34:5; Isa. 53**).
12. Both were prophets (**Acts 3:22-23**), advocates (**Exod. 32:31-35; 1 John 2:1-2**), intercessors (**Exod. 17:1-6; Heb. 7:25**), and leaders or kings (**Deut. 33:4-5; Isa. 55:4; Heb. 2:10; Rev. 19**).
13. Both were meek men (**Num. 12:3; Matt. 11:28-30**).
14. Both were mighty in word and deed (**Acts 7:22; Luke 24:19**).
15. Both experienced glorious transformation—Moses' face, and Jesus' entire person (**Exod. 34:29-30; Matt. 17:2**).
16. Both enjoyed an intimate relationship with God (**Deut. 34:10; John 17**).
17. Moses was faithful as a servant over another's house, whereas Christ is faithful as a Son over His own house (**Heb. 3:5-6**).
18. Both finished the work that God gave them to do (**Exod. 39:42-43; 40:33; John 17:4**).
19. Both went to heaven after dying (**Deut. 34:5-6; Acts 1:9**).
20. Both left trained successors behind who continued their work (Joshua, and the apostles).
21. However, in dissimilarity, Moses sinned (**Num. 20:11**), but Jesus did not (**1 Pet. 2:21-24**).

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