

Notes on Deuteronomy

2025 Edition
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Introduction

TITLE

The title of this book in the Hebrew Bible was its first two words, *'elleh haddebarim*, which translate into English as "these are the words" (1:1). Ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties began the same way.¹ So the Jewish title gives a strong clue to the literary character of Deuteronomy.

The English title comes from a Latinized form of the Septuagint (Greek) translation title.² "Deuteronomy" means "second law" in Greek. We might suppose that this title arose from the idea that Deuteronomy records the law as Moses repeated it to the new generation of Israelites who were preparing to enter the land, but this is not the case. It came from a mistranslation of a phrase in 17:18. In that passage God commanded Israel's kings to prepare "a copy of this Law" for themselves.³ The Septuagint translators mistakenly rendered this phrase "this second [repeated] law." The Vulgate (Latin) translation, influenced by the Septuagint, translated the phrase "second law" as *deuteronomium*, from which "Deuteronomy" is a transliteration.⁴ The Book of Deuteronomy is, to some extent however, a repetition to the new generation of the Law that God gave at Mt. Sinai. For example, about 50 percent of the so-called Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:23—23:33) is paralleled in Deuteronomy.⁵ Thus God overruled the translators' error and gave us a title for the book in English that is appropriate in view of the contents of the book.

¹Meredith G. Kline, "Deuteronomy," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 155.

²The Septuagint (LXX) translation was made by a group of scholars in the third and second centuries B.C.

³Quotations from the English Bible in these notes are from *The New American Standard Bible* (NASB), 2020 edition, unless otherwise stated.

⁴The Vulgate translation was made by Jerome in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D.

⁵A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 27.

DATE AND WRITER

Moses evidently wrote this book on the plains of Moab shortly before his death, which occurred about 1406 B.C.

The Mosaic authorship of this book is quite easy to establish, though it has been disputed by critical scholars. The book claims to be the words of Moses (1:5, 9; 5:1; 27:1, 8; 29:2; 31:1, 30; 33:1, 30) and his writing (31:9, 22, 24). Other Old Testament books also assert the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy (1 Kings 2:3; 8:53; 2 Kings 14:6; 18:6, 12). Jesus Christ believed that Moses wrote Deuteronomy (Matt. 19:7-8; Mark 10:3-5; 12:19; John 5:46-47), as did the Apostle Peter (Acts 3:22), Stephen (Acts 7:37-38), Paul (Rom. 10:19; 1 Cor. 9:9), and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 10:28).

"The authorship of no other book in the Old Testament is so explicitly emphasized."¹

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.

Some scholars have identified Deuteronomy with the "book of the law" that King Josiah discovered as he was cleaning out the temple (2 Kings 22—23). This theory goes back as far as the early church father Jerome (A.D. 342-420). The theory is impossible to prove, but there are reasons why some scholars have made this connection.²

The form in which Moses wrote Deuteronomy is very similar to that of ancient Near Eastern suzerainty-vassal treaties, which date before and

¹*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Deuteronomy," by George L. Robinson, 2:836. See also Daniel I. Block, "Recovering the Voice of Moses: The Genesis of Deuteronomy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:3 (September 2001):385-408.

²See Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 105-6.

during the Mosaic era. This structural evidence confirms an early date of composition.¹

In spite of such conclusive evidence, some scholars prefer a later date for Deuteronomy. The critics favor a post-Mosaic but pre-seventh-century date, a seventh-century date in King Josiah's era, or a postexilic date.²

SCOPE

Deuteronomy is similar to Leviticus in that both books consist, almost entirely, of instructions and speeches. Deuteronomy is not so much a book of history, as Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers are, as it is a book of law. In contrast to Leviticus, however, Deuteronomy is law preached rather than law revealed.

The scope of history covered in Deuteronomy is very brief. All the events recorded took place on the plains of Moab probably within a few weeks, just before Israel's entrance into Canaan.

"According to the *Index locorum* of Nestle's *Novum Testamentum Graece* Deuteronomy is quoted or otherwise cited at least 95 times in the New Testament (compared to 103 for Genesis, 113 for Exodus, 35 for Leviticus, and 20 for Numbers), making it one of the favorite Old Testament books of Jesus and the apostles."³

¹See Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, for discussion of Deuteronomy as a suzerainty-vassal treaty; and Longman and Dillard, pp. 110-12, for discussion of the debate.

²For a survey of major studies in Deuteronomy since 1938, see Gary Collier, "The Problem of Deuteronomy: In Search of a Perspective," *Restoration Quarterly* 26:4 (1983):215-33. For an excellent defense of the conservative dating of Deuteronomy as opposed to the critical dating, especially the seventh-century B.C. option, see Gordon Wenham, "The date of Deuteronomy: lynch-pin of Old Testament criticism," *Themelios* 10:3 (April 1985):15-20, and 11:1 (September 1985):15-18. For a more general review of the criticism of Deuteronomy, see Longman and Dillard, pp. 104-9; or Edward J. Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, pp. 13-20.

³Eugene H. Merrill, "Deuteronomy, New Testament Faith, and the Christian Life," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 23. See D. Eberhard Nestle, ed., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 21st ed., pp. 658-61.

CHARACTER AND THEME

"While in Exodus the letter and holiness of the Law is prominent, the spirit of the law is emphasized in Deuteronomy."¹

"The book of Deuteronomy is the document prepared by Moses as a witness to the dynastic covenant which the Lord gave to Israel in the plains of Moab (cf. 31:26)."²

"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."³

"As we shall see, God is placing before His people, in this Book of Deuteronomy, the conditions of their occupancy of this land of Canaan. We shall see all these conditions sum themselves up into one great word: OBEDIENCE."⁴

It is the conditions of the Israelites' *occupancy* of the land, not the conditions of their *possession* of the land, that this book sets forth. God had given the land of Canaan as a gift to Abraham's descendants (cf. Gen. 15:18-20). But their occupation of it depended on their obedience to the terms of the Mosaic Covenant.

THEOLOGY

"In line with the general correspondence of the form of a thing to its function, it is safe to say that one cannot understand the theology of Deuteronomy without reference to its covenant form and structure ... It is no exaggeration to maintain that the concept of covenant lies at the very heart

¹Kenneth G. Hanna, *From Moses to Malachi*, p. 96.

²Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 155.

³Mayes, pp. 57-58.

⁴William R. Newell, *Studies in the Pentateuch*, p. 236. Cf. Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible*, 1:1:371-72.

of the book and may be said to be the center of its theology.

...

"Covenant by its very definition demands at least three elements—the two contracting parties and the document that describes and outlines the purpose, nature, and requirements of the relationship. Thus the three major rubrics of the theology of Deuteronomy are (1) Yahweh, the Great King and covenant initiator; (2) Israel, the vassal and covenant recipient; and (3) the book itself, the covenant organ, complete with the essentials of standard treaty documents. This means, moreover, that all the revelation of the book must be seen through the prism of covenant and not abstractly removed from the peculiar historical and ideological context in which it originated."¹

"The theological values of Deuteronomy can hardly be exaggerated. It stands as the wellspring of biblical historical revelation. It is a prime source for both OT and NT theology. Whether the covenant, the holiness of God, or the concept of the people of God is the unifying factor of OT theology, each finds emphasis and remarkable definition in Deuteronomy."²

IMPORTANCE

"Deuteronomy is one of the greatest books of the Old Testament. Its significance on the domestic and personal religion of all ages has not been surpassed by any other book in the Bible. It is quoted over eighty times in the New Testament [closer to 95] (references occur in all but six books of the New Testament, namely John, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy and 1 and 2 Peter) and thus it belongs to a small group of four Old Testaments books

¹Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 47-48.

²Earl S. Kalland, "Deuteronomy," in *Deuteronomy-2 Samuel*, vol. 3 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 10.

(Genesis, Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Isaiah) to which the early Christians made frequent reference."¹

"The book of Deuteronomy is the most important book in the Old Testament from the standpoint of God's revelation to man."²

GENRE³

Like the other books of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy is essentially a narrative document that was written to teach theology. There is a general alternation between narrative sections (I, III, V, and VII) and didactic sections (II, IV, and VI) of material in Deuteronomy.⁴ However, there is some mixture of narrative and didactic material in sections V and VII. Deuteronomy is essentially a story in which Moses included several of his speeches to the new generation of Israelites—the older generation having died out in the wilderness.⁵ As is clear in the chart below, Deuteronomy is more didactic (teaching) than historic (action).

Narrative material	Moses' speeches	References
Explanation of the setting		1:1-5
	A review of God's faithfulness	1:6—4:40
Historical interlude		4:41-49
	An exposition of the Law	5:1—26:19
	Charges to keep the commandments	27:1-8 and 9-10

¹J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, p. 11.

²Samuel J. Schultz, *Deuteronomy*, p. 7.

³"Genre" refers to a category of literature characterized by similarities in form, style, or subject matter.

⁴See the outline of the book below.

⁵See Appendix 1, at the end of these notes: Key verses and important commands in Moses' speeches.

	Instructions for renewing the covenant in the land	27:11— 28:68
Explanation of the setting		29:1
	An exhortation to obedience	29:2—30:20
Introduction of what follows		31:1
	A call to be courageous	31:2-8
Historical interlude		31:9
	A charge to the priests to re-read the Law publicly every seven years	31:10-13
God's instructions to Moses in view of his imminent death		31:14-22
	A charge to Joshua to be courageous	31:23
Historical interlude		31:24-25
	A charge to the Levites to preserve the Law in the ark	31:26-29
Introduction of what follows		31:30
	The song of Moses	32:1-43
Historical interlude		32:44-45
	A charge to the Israelites to heed the Law	32:46-47

God's instruction to Moses to view the Promised Land		32:48-52
Introduction of what follows		33:1
	The blessing of the tribes	33:2-29
Moses views the land and dies		34:1-8
Joshua assumes leadership and Moses' epitaph		34:9-12

One can also divide the revelation in this book according to the general arrangement of the typical form of a suzerain-vassal treaty, which was common in the ancient Near East.¹

- I. Preamble: Covenant mediator 1:1-5
- II. Historical prologue: Covenant history 1:6—4:49
- III. Stipulations: Covenant life chs. 5—26
 - A. The Great Commandment chs. 5—11
 - B. Supporting commandments chs. 12—26
- IV. Sanctions: Covenant ratification chs. 27—30
- V. Dynastic disposition: Covenant continuity chs. 31—34

OUTLINE

- I. Introduction: the covenant setting 1:1-5
- II. Moses' first major address: a review of God's faithfulness 1:6—4:40

¹Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 156.

- A. God's past dealings with Israel 1:6—3:29
 - 1. God's guidance from Sinai to Kadesh 1:6-46
 - 2. The march from Kadesh to the Amorite frontier 2:1-23
 - 3. The conquest of the kingdom of Sihon 2:24-37
 - 4. The conquest of the kingdom of Og 3:1-11
 - 5. A review of the distribution of the conquered land 3:12-20
 - 6. Moses' anticipation of future blessing 3:21-29
- B. An exhortation to observe the law faithfully 4:1-40
 - 1. The appeal to listen and obey 4:1-8
 - 2. God's appearance at Mt. Horeb 4:9-14
 - 3. The prohibition of idolatry 4:15-24
 - 4. The consequences of idolatry 4:25-31
 - 5. The uniqueness of Yahweh and Israel 4:32-40
- III. Historical interlude: preparation for the covenant text 4:41-49
 - A. The appointment of cities of refuge in Transjordan 4:41-43
 - B. Introduction to the second address 4:44-49
- IV. Moses' second major address: an exposition of the law chs. 5—26
 - A. The essence of the law and its fulfillment chs. 5—11
 - 1. Exposition of the Decalogue and its promulgation ch. 5
 - 2. Exhortation to love Yahweh ch. 6
 - 3. Examples of the application of the principles chs. 7—11
 - B. An exposition of selected covenant laws chs. 12—25
 - 1. Laws arising from the first commandment 12:1-31
 - 2. Laws arising from the second commandment 12:32—13:18
 - 3. Laws arising from the third commandment 14:1-21
 - 4. Laws arising from the fourth commandment 14:22—16:17
 - 5. Laws arising from the fifth commandment 16:18—18:22
 - 6. Laws arising from the sixth commandment 19:1—22:8

7. Laws arising from the seventh commandment 22:9—23:18
 8. Laws arising from the eighth commandment 23:19—24:7
 9. Laws arising from the ninth commandment 24:8—25:4
 10. Laws arising from the tenth commandment 25:5-19
- C. Covenant celebration, confirmation, and conclusion ch. 26
1. Laws of covenant celebration and confirmation 26:1-15
 2. Summary exhortation 26:16-19
- V. Preparations for renewing the covenant 27:1-29:1
- A. The ceremony at Shechem 27:1-13
 - B. The curses that follow disobedience to specific stipulations 27:14-26
 - C. The blessings that follow obedience 28:1-14
 - D. The curses that follow disobedience to general stipulations 28:15-68
 - E. Narrative interlude 29:1
- VI. Moses' third major address: an exhortation to obedience 29:2—30:20
- A. An appeal for faithfulness 29:2-29
 1. A historical review 29:2-9
 2. The purpose of the assembly 29:10-15
 3. The consequences of disobedience 29:16-29
 - B. A call to decision ch. 30
 1. The possibility of restoration 30:1-10
 2. The importance of obedience 30:11-20
- VII. Moses' last acts chs. 31—34
- A. The duties of Israel's future leaders 31:1-29
 1. The presentation of Joshua 31:1-8
 2. The seventh year covenant renewal ceremony 31:9-13

3. The commissioning of Joshua 31:14-23
4. The preservation of God's words 31:24-29
- B. The Song of Moses 31:30—32:44
 1. The introduction to the song 31:30
 2. The song itself 32:1-43
 3. The conclusion to the song 32:44
- C. Narrative interlude 32:45-52
 1. Moses' exhortation to obedience 32:45-47
 2. The announcement of Moses' death 32:48-52
- D. Moses' blessing of the tribes ch. 33
- E. The end of an era: narrative epilogue ch. 34

A simpler outline follows:¹

- I. Looking backward chs. 1—11
 - A. Review of the way since Sinai chs. 1—3
 - B. Review of the law from Sinai chs. 4—11
- II. Looking forward chs. 12—34
 - A. Final rules and warnings to Israel before entering the earthly inheritance chs. 12—30
 - B. Final words and actions of Moses before entering the heavenly inheritance chs. 31—34

G. Campbell Morgan believed that Deuteronomy contains six discourses:²

Retrospective: 1:6—4:40, and 5:1—27:10

Introspective: 27:11—28:68, and 29:1—30:20

Prospective: 31:1—32:52, and 33:2-29

¹J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 1:212.

²G. Campbell Morgan, *The Unfolding Message of the Bible*, pp. 72-73.

MESSAGE

Deuteronomy is not simply a recapitulation of things previously revealed in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. It is a selective digest of matters most important to the average Israelite in his or her relationship with God. Moses spoke as an aged father to his children. These are the parting words of the man who communed with God "face to face" (Exod. 33:11; i.e., without a mediator). His words in Deuteronomy spring from a personal and intimate knowledge of God that had matured over 120 years.

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 done. 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 (His rule over them) 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 (lay behind) His laws for them (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), Moses 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 Him. Love is the most proper and adequate motivation for obedience to God and service for God.

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 His people's love for God should motivate them to obey Him.

This emphasis on love appears even more striking in comparison with other ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties. Deuteronomy is not only a collection of Moses' sermons. It is also a covenant renewal document.

"When a Hittite king [for example] renewed a treaty with a vassal state—usually after a change of monarch—he would bring the stipulations up to date, and this may explain some of the changes in the specific laws found in chapters 12—26."¹

The ancient Near Eastern kings clearly delineated the rights of the ruler and the responsibilities of the subjects in these documents. However, the motivation was self-interest, not love. Concern for others was present in some cases, but self-interest predominated.

Since Moses set Deuteronomy in the form of a suzerain-vassal treaty, we can learn much about how he viewed Israel's relationship to God.

"Both the literary shape of Deuteronomy and its underlying central concept provide an important clue to the basic theology of the book. Yahweh, the God of Israel, appears in a strong covenantal setting. He is the great King, the Lord of the covenant. From this central concept Israel's finest theological ideas derived."²

These "ideas" include the fact that Yahweh is both the Lord of the covenant and the Lord of history.

¹Herbert M. Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch*, p. 213.

²Thompson, p. 68.

Obedience to God and His covenant brings blessing, whereas disobedience incurs curses. Israel was "the people of the covenant" (cf. Exod. 24:7). The people were to worship the LORD (Yahweh) by loving Him with their hearts, and remembering Him and His acts with their minds.

There are perhaps four basic implications of this revelation, and these correspond to four major sections of the book:

First, it is important to remember God's past faithfulness in order to help one to appreciate His love (1:6—4:40). God *commanded* the Israelites to remember. Forgetfulness was a sin that would lead them to ingratitude and ultimately to apostasy (abandonment and renunciation of their beliefs). To forget was to rebel against God. Remembering in Scripture means not only recalling to mind but also responding appropriately to what is recalled. Remembering the past would remind the people of God's love for them, and it would rekindle their love for Him. Love, as well as trust, rests on confidence. We can love God only when we have confidence in Him. Reading Scripture, attending church, and participating in the Lord's Supper all help us to remember God's faithfulness and His love for us.

Second, God's laws are an expression of His love (chs. 5—26). Because man is a sinner, he needs divine laws. God's provision of these laws is an expression of His love for humankind. The specific laws in the Mosaic Code expressed God's love because God intended them to result in Israel's blessing and welfare. Often we think laws are undesirable because they curb our freedom. But God curbs our freedom in order to keep us from evil, not to keep us from good (cf. Gen. 2:17). Some children do not realize that their parents' prohibitions are mostly for their welfare. Not to see this is an immature view of reality. The lines down the middle of our highways curb our freedom so we will not drive all over the road, but they are there to keep us safe. Unfortunately many people, including Christians, think that God's laws are there to make us miserable, but really they are there to keep us safe.

Third, only love for God will adequately motivate a person to be obedient to God's laws (chs. 27—28). The laws in Israel were so comprehensive that the only motive strong enough to produce consistent obedience was love. Moses urged the Israelites to cultivate their love for God as they prepared to renew the covenant. Self-confidence had failed their fathers, and it would fail them too. Obedience to God can be a joyful or a bitter experience—depending on one's motivation. When we truly know God we

love Him, and when we love God we will want to obey Him. Bible study should always be a means to an end, never an end in itself (2 Tim. 3:16). We should focus on getting to know God better, and when we do, we will find it easier to love God and to obey Him.

Fourth, obedience to God demonstrates love for Him (chs. 29—30). While it is possible to obey God with lesser motives, it is impossible to be consistently obedient without love for God. Consistent obedience is not the same as sinless perfection. The measure of one's love for God is the measure of a person's obedience to the revealed will of God (1 John 5:3). The degree of our commitment to do the will of God is the true measure of our love for God. The real test of our love for God is what we do more than how we feel or what we say.¹

¹Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:1:83-97.

Exposition

I. INTRODUCTION: THE COVENANT SETTING 1:1-5

This brief section of text (pericope) places the events that follow in their geographical and chronological setting. It introduces the occasion for the covenant, the parties involved, and other information necessary to identify the document and the distinctive features of its composition.

"The time was the last month of the fortieth year after the Exodus (v. 3a), when the men of war of that generation had all perished (2:16), the conquest of Trans-Jordan was accomplished (v. 4; 2:24ff.), and the time of Moses' death was at hand. It was especially this last circumstance that occasioned the renewal of the covenant. God secured the continuity of the mediatorial dynasty by requiring of Israel a pledge of obedience to his new appointee, Joshua (cf. 31:3; 34:9), and a new vow of consecration to himself."¹

"The preamble thus forms a bridge between the original covenant [Exod. 20:23—23:33] and its renewal to the new generation."²

- 1:1 Deuteronomy opens and closes with references to Moses and to all Israel (cf. 34:12). These references bracket the entire book, and they show that all of its contents describe Moses' interaction with the entire nation at the end of their journey from Egypt. The "Arabah" is the depression that runs from north of the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee) all the way to the Red Sea (specifically the Gulf of Aqabah). Israel's location in this plain was just northeast of the point at which the Jordan River empties into the Dead Sea, directly east of Jericho.
- 1:2 The reference to the duration of a normal journey from Horeb (the range of mountains in which Mt. Sinai stood) to Kadesh-barnea (also referred to as Kadesh) as being 11 days, or about 150 miles, is not just for geographical purposes. This was the

¹Kline, "Deuteronomy," pp. 156-57.

²Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 74.

part of Israel's journey that took her from the place where God gave His covenant to the border of the Promised Land. From there the Israelites could have, and should have, entered Canaan. This reference points out a contrast between the short distance and the long time it took Israel to make the trip—due to her unbelief.

- 1:3 It took Israel 40 years to travel from Egypt to the plains of Moab ("in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month"). This is the only exact date that Moses specified in Deuteronomy. The spiritual failure at the root of this lengthened sojourn provided the reason for much of what Moses said and did that follows in Deuteronomy.

The name "Yahweh" (translated "the LORD") appears for the first time in this verse 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-maker and covenant-keeper. In contrast, the name "Elohim" (translated "God") occurs only 38 times in this book.

- 1:4 Moses probably referred to God's defeat of Sihon and Og here in order to give the Israelites hope, as well as to date his words more specifically.

- 1:5 The nature of Deuteronomy, as a whole, is that it is an exposition (explanation) of all that God had commanded the Israelites (cf. v. 3). The Hebrew word translated "explain" (*be'er*) means to make something absolutely clear or plain (cf. 27:8). We might say that Deuteronomy is a commentary on earlier passages in the Pentateuch. Moses' second address (chs. 5—26) particularly concentrated on this exposition.

The English word "law" has negative connotations, but the Hebrew *torah* (lit. "instruction") is positive. The Torah is more instruction than prohibition. Here the whole Mosaic Covenant is in view with this use of "Law."

"What the man and woman lost in the Garden is now restored to them in the Torah, namely, God's plan for their good."¹

Four superscriptions signal the beginnings of Moses' speeches in Deuteronomy (1:1-5; 4:44-49; 29:1; 33:1).

II. MOSES' FIRST MAJOR ADDRESS: A REVIEW OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS 1:6—4:40

Moses delivered three major addresses in Deuteronomy: the first being a review of God's past faithfulness (1:6—4:40), the second being an exposition of Israel's present responsibilities (chs. 5—26), and the third being an exhortation to future obedience (chs. 29—30). Moses gave these addresses so the new generation of Israelites would not repeat the sins of their fathers. There are other, shorter speeches, plus some narrative material in the book, but these are the major addresses. Similarly, Matthew structured his Gospel around five discourses of Jesus.

"... an explicit *literary* structure to the book is expressed in the sermons or speeches of Moses; a *substructure* is discernible in the covenantal character of the book; and a *theological* structure is revealed in its theme of the exclusive worship of the Lord as found in the Ten Commandments, particularly in the First Commandment and its positive expression in the Shema (Deut. 6:4-5)."²

The writer set forth God's acts for Israel as the basis on which he appealed to the new generation of Israelites to renew the Mosaic Covenant with Him.

"... it is not an overstatement to propose that covenant is the theological center of Deuteronomy. ... Moreover, 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

¹John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 424.

²Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, p. 10.

to represent Himself in a particularized role—Sovereign, Redeemer, covenant-maker, and benefactor."¹

"The preamble in the international suzerainty treaties was followed by a historical survey of the relationship of lord and vassal. It was written in an I-thou style, and it sought to establish the historical justification for the lord's continuing reign. Benefits allegedly conferred upon the vassal by the lord were cited, with a view to grounding the vassal's allegiance in a sense of gratitude complementary to the sense of fear which the preamble's awe-inspiring identification of the suzerain was calculated to produce. When treaties were renewed, the historical prologue was brought up to date. All these formal features characterize Deut 1:6—4:49."²

Moses pointed out Israel's unfaithfulness in order to emphasize God's faithfulness.

A. GOD'S PAST DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL 1:6—3:29

Moses began this first "sermon" to the Israelites by reviewing God's faithfulness to them. God had been faithful in bringing the nation from Sinai to her present location, and by giving her victory over her Transjordanian (east of the Jordan River) enemies. He also reminded the people of the future blessings that she could anticipate.

Some expositors believe that God's faithfulness is the central message of Deuteronomy (cf. 1 Cor. 1:8-9).³ It certainly is a major emphasis.

1. God's guidance from Sinai to Kadesh 1:6-46

Moses began his recital of Israel's history at Horeb (Sinai), because this was where Yahweh adopted the nation as His special people and made the Mosaic Covenant with her (cf. Exod. 19:5-6). The trip from Egypt to Sinai was only a preparation for the giving of the covenant. God did not consider Israel's responsibility to Him, before the giving of the Covenant, as great

¹Merrill, "A Theology ...," p. 62. Paragraph division omitted. See also idem, "Deuteronomy," in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 131-32.

²Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 157.

³E.g., Baxter, 1:212.

as it was after He gave it. Knowledge of God's will increases responsibility to do God's will.

"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."¹

Moses reflected on the past, mainly as Israel's history stands as revealed in the earlier books of the Pentateuch. He did not assume the reader's knowledge of Israel's history that is independent of the biblical account, nor did he recount events previously unrecorded. Occasionally though, in Deuteronomy, he supplemented what he had written earlier with other explanatory material. This indicates that Moses assumed that those who read Deuteronomy would have prior knowledge of his preceding four books. He did not just write Deuteronomy for the generation of Israelites about to enter the Promised Land but also for later generations as well, including our generation.

Events at Horeb 1:6-18

1:6-8 Moses called Mt. Sinai "Horeb" almost exclusively in this book, "... in keeping with the rhetorical style of the book."² "Horeb" (Heb. *ho'reb*) means "dryness" and "desert." Whereas the use of "Mt. Sinai" specifies the location, "Horeb" connotes the desolate condition of the location.

The events in this section of verses took place before Israel left Horeb. God had directed Moses, after the nation had remained at Horeb for one year and almost 50 days, to begin the march to Canaan (cf. Num. 10:11-12). The reference to

¹Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 94.

²C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, 3:284.

the river Euphrates (v. 7) harks back to God's promises to Abraham (Gen. 15:18).

"Virtually all of Palestine and Syria are included in these terms [in v. 7], an area larger than Israel ever possessed in fact, even during the reigns of David and Solomon."¹

"The Lord's gift of Canaan to Israel (v. 8) and his command to them to enter and to possess the land began here and was reiterated and emphasized repeatedly in the speeches of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy. They are cardinal elements of the teaching of the book and show that, as Baly has said, 'Palestine was, in fact, the Chosen Land for the Chosen People; not, it should be noticed, chosen *by* them, but chosen *for* them' (p. 303)."²

"Abraham was told (Gen. 15:5, 6) to look to the stars, and though they *appear* innumerable, yet those seen by the naked eye amount, in reality, to no more than 3010 in both hemispheres. The Israelites already far exceeded that number, being at the last census above 600,000."³

Note the statements of Yahweh's sovereign prerogative in these verses. It was He, not primarily Moses, who would bring the Israelites into the land.

1:9-15 God had already multiplied the Israelites greatly when they were at Horeb (v. 10), as He had promised (cf. Gen. 15:5), and He was ready to give them the land. But the burden and weight of the people and their strife (v. 12) threatened to be Moses' undoing. Moses did not object to the large size of the congregation. In fact, he had wished that the LORD would increase its size a thousand-fold, and that He would bless them

¹Craigie, p. 95.

²Kalland, p. 22. The quotation is from Dennis Baly, *The Geography of the Bible*.

³Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 141.

accordingly (v. 11). Nevertheless, Moses felt overwhelmed with his responsibility.

The delegation of Moses' authority that resulted was the suggestion of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law (cf. Exod. 18:13-27). Here in Deuteronomy Moses reported what he had said to the people after Jethro had made his suggestion and after he (Moses) had accepted it. The people had agreed to the arrangement, and Moses had set up judges under himself who would lighten his workload.

- 1:16-18 Moses had ordered the judges to be fair and impartial as they carried the burden of legal decisions that resulted from the giving of the Law.

"The ear of the learner is necessary to the tongue of the learned."¹

The hard decisions were to be brought to Moses. He was the final court of appeal because he had an intimate relationship with Yahweh that the other judges did not have. So he could obtain the will of the LORD. And he could command all the Israelites to do what God ordered them to do.

Events at Kadesh-barnea 1:19-46

These verses deal with Israel's failure at Kadesh-barnea (also called Kadesh), its causes, and its consequences.

"The remembrance of our dangers should make us thankful for our deliverances."²

- 1:19 This verse summarizes Israel's trek from Mt. Sinai to Kadesh.
- 1:20-21 When the Israelites arrived at Kadesh Moses commanded them to go up and take possession of the Promised Land. They were not to fear or be dismayed. The Hebrew word translated "take possession," referring to the Promised Land, occurs over 50 times in Deuteronomy. God's great desire for His people had

¹Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 178.

²Ibid.

been that they possess what He had promised them. Unfortunately, the older generation would not take possession on the land because of fearful unbelief.

"It has well been said that faith is not believing in spite of evidence—that's superstition—but obeying in spite of circumstances and consequences."¹

1:22-25 The sending of the spies was the people's idea (v. 22; cf. Num. 13:1-3). Moses agreed to it, as did the LORD, because it was not wrong in itself. It had the potential of being helpful to the Israelites. God had not commanded this strategy. He knew that the sight of the threatening people and fortified cities would discourage them. When the spies returned they brought evidence of the land's fruitfulness and reported that the land was good.

1:26-28 The people's sin in failing to enter the land was not simply their underestimating of God's power. They could have blamed themselves for their weak faith. Instead, they blamed God and imputed to Him the worst of motives in His actions toward them ("the LORD hates us"). God really loved them, but they claimed that He hated them. In covenant terminology, to love means to choose, and to hate means to reject (cf. Gen. 25:23; Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:10-13).² The Israelites doubted God's goodness, they denied His word, and they disobeyed His will (cf. Gen. 3).

"The most subtle danger for Israel was the possibility that they might doubt the gracious guidance of God and His willingness to fulfill His promises. It was to become the besetting sin of Israel that they doubted the active and providential sovereignty of Yahweh in every crisis."³

¹Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary/Pentateuch*, p. 375.

²Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 77; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 388-89.

³Thompson, p. 88.

God's people still face the temptation to judge God's motives on the basis of circumstances. We may sometimes wonder if He hates us when we experience sickness, shortages, and other sufferings.

- 1:29-31 Moses had appealed to the people to be courageous on the basis of God's past deliverances of them from Egypt and during their wilderness trek.

"Such familial language ["as a man carries his son," v. 31] was common in ancient Near Eastern treaty texts where the maker of the covenant would be 'father' and the receiver 'son.'"¹

- 1:32-33 In spite of Moses' reminders of God's past deliverances the people refused to trust in Yahweh their God. Moses also reminded the people of God's presence with them and His direction of them in the cloudy pillar. But this appeal also proved unsuccessful in moving them to enter the land.

- 1:34-36 The people's lack of faith in Him made Yahweh angry with them. The Book of Deuteronomy reveals the wrath of God as well as His love. Swearing an oath means saying something that one will not recant. In this case God swore that none of the older generation of Israelites would enter the land—except for Caleb, who had encourage the people to trust and obey the LORD (Num. 13:30).

- 1:37-38 The account of Moses' sin, which happened after the people's rebellion at Kadesh (Num. 20:9-13), is out of chronological order. Likewise the appointment of Joshua as Moses' successor occurred at another time (cf. Num. 27:15-21). Moses' purpose in this narrative was not to relate Israel's experiences in sequence but to emphasize spiritual lessons. He was exhorting the Israelites to action more than teaching them history. So he drew events from the past to suit his purpose.

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 79. Cf. D. J. McCarthy, "Notes on the Love of God in Deuteronomy and the Father-Son Relationship between Yahweh and Israel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (1965):144-47.

"Moses ... looked behind his own failure and referred to the cause of his action, which was the people's criticism of the Lord's provision of food."¹

Moses did not try to hide his own guilt. God provided for the Israelites even when they failed.

1:39-40 The older generation of Israelites was punished with death in the wilderness, but the younger generation, that the older generation had feared would die in Canaan, would live and enter the Promised Land. The new generation of Israelites was in a position similar to the one in which their original parents, Adam and Eve, found themselves. They were innocent, having no knowledge of good or evil—they were younger than the age at which God considered them responsible for their actions—and so had to depend on God to give the land to them as a gracious Father (v. 39; cf. 32:6). The instruction (Torah) that Moses gave the people was the means that God would use to provide for their welfare (cf. 30:15-16).

1:41-46 Moses next reminded the people of the aborted attempt that they had made to enter the land from Kadesh (cf. Num. 14:40-45). The former generation tried to salvage an opportunity lost at Kadesh through unbelief. This is not always possible, and it was not in this instance.²

"... 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 ..."³

¹Kalland, pp. 27-28.

²See Sailhamer, pp. 428-30, for four different ways of explaining the sequence of events during the 38 years of wandering in the wilderness.

³Miller, p. 36.

God's faithfulness stands out in this chapter (cf. vv. 25, 29-31, 33, and 36). Moses stressed this to assure the people that their future success was certain because of God's faithfulness, not theirs (cf. 2 Cor. 3:1—6:10).

Moses addressed the people as though they had personally committed these errors. But it was really the parents of the generation that he addressed that had done so. By charging the present generation of Israelites with these actions Moses was helping them to see that they were part of a nation that had historically rebelled against the LORD. And that they should therefore beware of making the same mistakes as their forefathers had made.

2. The march from Kadesh to the Amorite frontier 2:1-23

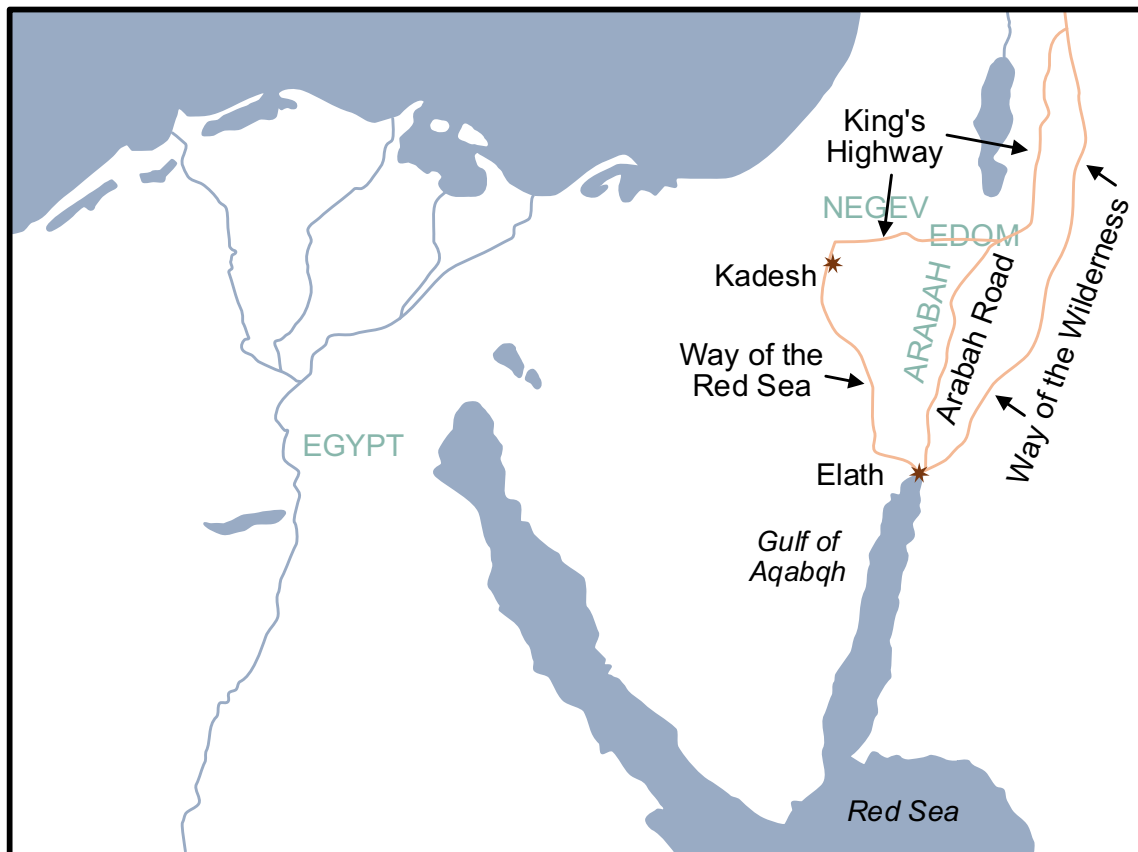
2:1 Following Israel's departure from Kadesh (Num. 20:22), the nation set out for "the wilderness." This was probably the wilderness of Moab that lay to the east of the Dead Sea. They traveled by the way of the Red Sea. This probably refers to the caravan route that ran from several miles south of the Dead Sea to Elath. Elath stood at the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqabah. Then they travelled around the mountains of the Seir range that stood to the east of the Arabah. The NIV translation "we made our way around the hill country of Seir" is better than the NASB translation "we circled Mount Seir."¹ Numbers 21:4 says that they "set out ... to go around the land of Edom." This route probably took them up onto the high plateau of the great eastern desert.

2:2-6 Apparently it took some time for the Israelites to make their way around Edom, because the LORD then told Moses to head north. When Israel lay camped at Kadesh, Moses had asked permission from the Edomites to pass through their land on the Arabah road (Num. 20:14-17). This route ran east from Kadesh to the King's Highway, the main north-south road east of the Seir mountains. The Edomites denied Moses' request (Num. 20:18-21).

¹NIV refers to *The Holy Bible: New international Version*, 1984 edition.

Apparently later, when Israel was moving north toward Edom from Elath, God told Moses that they would pass through Edom (vv. 4-6). They did this on the way of the wilderness of Moab (v. 8), which was a secondary route east of and roughly parallel to the King's Highway. We may assume that the Israelites did buy food and water from the Edomites at this later time (v. 6).

2:7 This verse is a testimony to God's care for His people during their wilderness wanderings.



2:8 The Israelites obediently avoided the Kings' Highway, which led from Elath and Ezion-geber through the Arabah, and they took the way of the wilderness that skirted Edom. The sites of Elath and Ezion-geber seem to have been very close together.

"... the main settlement was the oasis of Aqabah, at the northeast corner of the gulf, and ... both

names, Elath and Ezion-geber, referred to this place, perhaps to two parts of the oasis."¹

2:9-13 God's care of Moab (v. 9), as well as Ammon (v. 19) and Edom (v. 5), is traceable to the source of these nations in Abraham's family. They were partakers in the benefits of the Abrahamic Covenant. Note that God gave these nations their lands. The thrice repeated phrase "I have given" (vv. 5, 9, 19) indicates Yahweh's sovereign prerogative to assign His land to whomever He chose.

A later editor, under divine inspiration, may have added the parenthetical sections (vv. 10-12, 20-23) to Moses' narrative after Israel had settled in the land. They contain some events that happened after Israel crossed the Jordan (vv. 12, 23).

"*Rephaim* [v. 11]: not an ethnic term, but a general designation for legendary pre-Israelite inhabitants of Palestine. These legendary heroes were apparently known by different names in different areas: *Emim* in Moab (see also Gen. 14:5), *Anakim* in Judah (Num. 13:33; Jg. 1:20), and *Zamzummim* in Ammon (see v. 20)."²

Eugene Peterson paraphrased these names as follows: Emim are Emites (Monsters) [v. 10]; Rephaim are Rephaites (Ghosts) [v. 11]; and Zamzummin are Zamzummites (Barbarians) [v. 20].³

"The Hurrians are referred to frequently in the Old Testament as the Horites [vv. 12, 22] ..."⁴

2:14 This verse is a flashback. The crossing of the Zered wadi was a benchmark event for the Israelites. (A wadi is a dry stream bed, except in the rainy season.) It signaled the end of the wilderness wanderings, like the crossing of the Red Sea had

¹Dennis Baly, "Elath, Ezion-geber, and the Red Sea," *Biblical Illustrator* 9:3 (Spring 1983):69.

²Mayes, p. 137.

³Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, p. 226.

⁴Peter Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament*, p. 80.

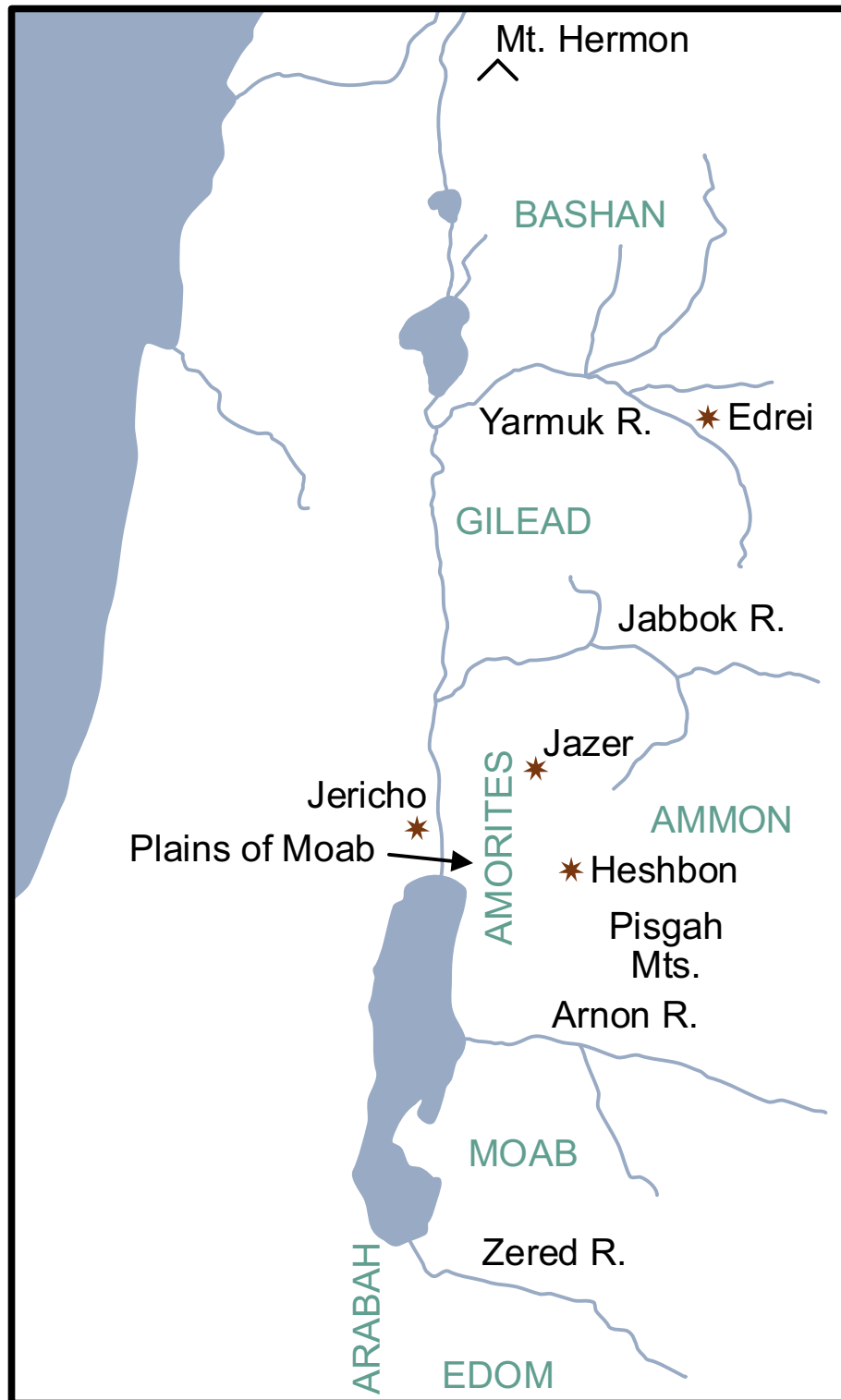
marked the end of Egyptian bondage. The crossing of the Jordan River would mark the beginning of a new era in the Promised Land.

2:15 "The reference to the demise of all the fighting men accomplishes at least two purposes: (1) it brings that whole era of desert sojourning to an end, and (2) it emphasizes more than ever that the impending victories of Israel in both the Transjordan and Canaan must be attributed not to Israel but to the Lord alone. With the heart of military capacity gone, there can be no doubt that victory is achievable only as he, the Warrior of Israel, leads them to triumph in holy war."¹

"We can be sure that the will of God will never lead us where the grace of God cannot keep us or the power of God enable us to glorify the Lord."²

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 95.

²Wiersbe, p. 458.



2:16-23 When all the Israelite soldiers of the older generation had died, the LORD commanded Moses to cross the Arnon River near Ar, the chief city of Moab (cf. Num. 21:15), which was the border

between Moab and Ammon. But they were not to attack the Ammonites, who were the descendants of Lot.

The Caphtorim (v. 23) were part of the "sea people," who had invaded Canaan from the northwest and settled in the southwest portion of that land. The Caphtorim migrated from Caphtor (Crete) as a result of the invasion of their northern Mediterranean homelands by the Dorians (Greeks). The Caphtorim also became known as the Philistines. The whole land of Canaan became known as Palestine, meaning land of the Philistines. The Roman Emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117-138) gave it this name.

3. The conquest of the kingdom of Sihon 2:24-37

This narrative closely parallels the one in Numbers 21:21 through 32. In the Deuteronomy account Moses again emphasized for the people God's faithfulness to them. Note especially in this regard verses 25, 29, 30, 31, 33, and 36.

2:24-25 The Israelites were to attack the Amorites who lived west of the Ammonites and east of the Jordan River. God promised to give Sihon, a king of the Amorites who lived in Heshbon, into the hands of the Israelites. The defeat of Sihon would put fear of the Israelites into the hearts of all people when they heard of it.

"'All the nations under heaven' ['people everywhere'] (v. 25) is an idiomatic hyperbole signifying all the nations in the vicinity; that is, at least from horizon to horizon (under heaven)."¹

2:26-31 "The process of Sihon's fall was much the same as that of the fall of ... the Pharaoh of the Exodus. Each was approached with a request to favor the Israelites (vv. 26-29), which he refused, because 'the Lord ... hardened his spirit' (v. 30). Each made a hostile advance against Israel (v. 32) and

¹Kalland, p. 32.

suffered defeat, as the Lord fought for His people (vv. 31, 33ff.)."¹

"... because God willed that Sihon be destroyed, He prepared his ruin through obstinacy of heart."²

"... the divine hardening described here [v. 30] was part of Yahweh's sovereign judgment on a morally corrupt culture."³

2:32-37 The Israelites captured all the cities that Sihon controlled, and they left no survivors. But they did take the Amorites' animals and the plunder from their cities. As God had promised His people, no city was too high (or strong) for them (cf. Num. 13:28). Moses gave Yahweh all the credit for this victory. The Israelites were also obedient in not attacking the Ammonites.

"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."⁴

"This great truth that God never forsakes His people, even when they are bearing the chastisements He imposes as the result of their unbelief, is full of comfort for the hearts of His people for all time."⁵

¹Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 159.

²John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:4:3.

³Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Divine Hardening in the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:612 (October-December 1996):430.

⁴Miller, p. 40.

⁵G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 78.

4. The conquest of the kingdom of Og 3:1-11

This record is also very similar to the previous account of this conquest in Numbers 21:33 through 35, though Moses provided more information here. Again, Moses interpreted Israel's history to emphasize God's faithfulness.

3:1-7 The land of Bashan was a fertile, heavily forested plateau famous for its oaks (Isa. 2:13) and livestock (32:14; Amos 4:1). The region of Argob (v. 4) may be another name for Bashan, or a part of Bashan.¹ The spies had feared the giants and walled cities of Canaan. Nevertheless, in this campaign, God delivered to His people 60 heavily fortified cities, besides many other rural (unwalled) towns.—plus at least one real giant,

3:8-11 Og was the last of the Rephaite giants who lived in Bashan. Moses probably recorded the size of Og's king-sized bed (nine cubits, or 13 and a half feet) in order to document the fact that God gave the Israelites victory even over the giants, whom they had so greatly feared (cf. Num. 13:32-33).

Some scholars have believed that the Hebrew word *'eres* should be translated "sarcophagus" rather than "bed."² Others believe that "bed" is the better translation.³ His "bed," or "bedstead," probably contained "iron" decorations, since at this time iron was a precious metal.⁴ Alternatively, "iron" may refer to black basalt.⁵

¹Mayes, p. 143.

²Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 120; Mayes, p. 144; Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, p. 430; Jack S. Deere, "Deuteronomy," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 267; *The NET2 (New English Translation) Bible*, 2019 edition, note on 3:11; NEB (*The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*); CEV (*The Holy Bible: Contemporary English Version*).

³E.g., Alan R. Millard, "King Og's Iron Bed: Fact or Fancy?" *Bible Review* 6:2 (April 1990):20; NASB; AV (*The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version*); NKJV (*The Holy Bible: New King James Version*); TNIV (*The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*); NRSV (*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*); ESV (*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*); HCSB (*The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible*).

⁴See Millard, p. 20.

⁵Mayes, p. 144.

**5. A review of the distribution of the conquered land
3:12-20**

3:12-17 The division of the land of these two Amorite kings, between two and one-half Israelite tribes (the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh; cf. Num. 32), further fulfilled God's promise to give the land to His people. This extensive portion of real estate was part of the land that God had promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:18-19).¹

The Geshurites and the Maacathites (v. 14) occupied two Aramean states, located immediately north of Bashan.² The name "Dead Sea," the newer name of the "Salt Sea" (v. 17), does not occur in the Old Testament. It derives, at the earliest, from the first or second century A.D.³

3:18-20 Moses' earlier description of this conquest stressed Israel's role in taking this land (Num. 32), but in this one he stressed that it was God who gave it to them (v. 20).

6. Moses' anticipation of future blessing 3:21-29

3:21-22 Moses encouraged Joshua, his successor, to take courage in view of all that God had done for Israel thus far, especially in defeating Sihon and Og. Israel's future success was certain only because of Israel's God, not because of Israel's strength or wisdom.

3:23-27 Moses was so eager to see the Promised Land that he requested special permission to enter it—even if for just a brief visit. Because of his sin of striking the rock, which the people provoked by their incessant complaining, but which Moses did not shirk responsibility for, God did not permit this. God did, however, allow Moses to view the land from a good vantage point: the top of Pisgah (Mt. Nebo; cf. 34:1-3).

¹See Carl G. Rasmussen, *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, Revised Edition, pp. 108 and 109 for good maps that show many of the places named.

²Mayes, p. 146.

³Ibid.

"Though we repent of our sin, we will have to take the consequences of it in this life whether we like it or not."¹

"It's when we forget our high calling that we descend into low living."²

"In this section we also have one of Moses' prayers (vv. 23-29). These prayers contribute to a profile of Moses as a type or model figure that is anticipatory of later figures in the biblical tradition. The primary components of this profile show Moses as a suffering servant [here], teacher (see discussion of 5:22-33), intercessor (see ch. 9), and prophet (see 18:9-22)."³

3:28-29 God charged Moses with encouraging Joshua further. Abundant encouragement is necessary, because it is much easier to live by sight than by faith in God's promises.

B. AN EXHORTATION TO OBSERVE THE LAW FAITHFULLY 4:1-40

Moses turned in his address, in this chapter, from contemplating the past to an exhortation for the future. This section is the climax of his first speech to the younger generation of Israelites.

"The parallel between the literary structure of this chapter and that of the Near Eastern treaty is noteworthy. The author of the treaty is named (1, 2, 5, 10), reference is made to the preceding historical acts, the treaty stipulations are mentioned, the appeal is made for Israel to obey, the treaty sanctions, blessing and cursing, are referred to, witnesses are mentioned (26), and the obligation to transmit the knowledge of the treaty to the next generation is stated (10). While these elements in the Near Eastern treaty are not set out in a rigid

¹J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 1:542.

²Wiersbe, p. 379.

³Miller, pp. 42-43.

legal form, but are woven into a speech without regard for strict formality, they can be clearly discerned."¹

"Moses stresses the uniqueness of God's revelation to them [the Israelites] and their responsibility."²

"He [Moses] would not enter the land and guide the people in God's Law, so he now gives them his explanation of the Law to use in his absence. His central purpose in this section is to draw out the chief ideas of the Sinai narratives, Exodus 19—33."³

These chief ideas are: the Torah as wisdom (vv. 1-14), warning against idolatry (vv. 15-24), the possibility of exile (vv. 25-31), and God's presence with Israel (vv. 32-40).

1. The appeal to listen and obey 4:1-8

- 4:1-2 Moses urged the Israelites to "listen to" (v. 1) and to obey ("keep," v. 2; "do," v. 5; and "keep and do," v. 6) the Mosaic Law. The Hebrew verb translated "listen" occurs frequently in Deuteronomy.⁴ "Statutes" (v. 1) were the permanent, basic rules of conduct, whereas "judgments" (v. 1) were decisions that God revealed in answer to specific needs. The judgments set precedent for future action (e.g., the case of Zelophehad's daughters, Num. 36). The Israelites were not to add to what God had revealed to them nor were they to take away anything of it (cf. Rev. 22:18-19).
- 4:3-4 Moses used the illustration of the recent seduction of the Israelites by the Midianites ("the case of Baal-peor"), and God's consequent plague (Num. 25:1-9) to warn the people of the danger of disregarding God's Law.
- 4:5-8 Moses' appeal rested on the promises of life and possession of the land (v. 1). He also referred to the praise that would come

¹Thompson, p. 102. Cf. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 113.

²Schultz, p. 30.

³Sailhamer, p. 433.

⁴Wiersbe, pp. 380, 397.

on the Israelites from other peoples for the Israelites' obedience (v. 6), their relationship of intimacy with God (v. 7), and the intrinsic superiority of their laws (v. 8).

"The theology of the nations at large taught that the supreme gods were remote and inaccessible. Though they were perceived in highly anthropomorphic [human-like] terms, they also were thought to be so busy and preoccupied with their own affairs that they could scarcely take notice of their devotees except when they needed them.¹ It was in contrast to these notions, then, that Moses drew attention to the Lord, God of Israel, who, though utterly transcendent and wholly different from humankind, paradoxically lives and moves among them."²

"In this exposition of the way of the covenant as the way of wisdom, the foundation was laid in the Torah for the Wisdom literature which was afterwards to find its place in the sacred canon."³

2. God's appearance at Mt. Horeb 4:9-14

4:9-10

"The abstract nature of God in the Israelite religion, and the absence of any physical representation of him, imposed great difficulties for a people living in a world where all other men represented their gods in visual, physical form. To counter this difficulty would require great care and so Moses urged such care, *lest you forget the things your eyes have seen* [v. 9]. They had never literally seen their God, but they had seen what God had done."⁴

¹M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, pp. 27-31.

²Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 117.

³Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 161.

⁴Craigie, *The Book ...*, pp. 132-33. Cf. John 3:8.

The emphasis in this pericope is on the supernatural character of the revelation of God's Law. Human beings did not invent Israel's Law. A holy God had revealed it. It was special revelation. Consequently, the Israelites were to "fear" (i.e., have an awesome reverence for) God (v. 10).

"The basic lesson for Israel to learn at Horeb was to fear and reverence God."¹

"In the Old Testament the fear of God is more than awe or reverence though it includes both. Fearing God is becoming so acutely aware of His moral purity and omnipotence that one is genuinely afraid to disobey Him. Fearing God also includes responding to Him in worship, service, trust, obedience, and commitment."²

In Deuteronomy Moses often reminded the parents that they, not the priests or other religious leaders, bore the primary responsibility for spiritually educating their children (cf. 6:7, 20; 11:19; 31:13; 32:46).

"Our problem today is not foreign affairs or national economy; our problem is the home. God will hold divorced and preoccupied parents responsible for the vagrants of the world today who never knew the instruction and the love and the concern and the communication from parents. What a responsibility parenthood is!"³

4:11-14

"...extra-biblical treaty custom indicates that it is unlikely that the necessity for two tables [v. 13] arose from the amount of material to be inscribed. Rather, the one table was a duplicate of the other. In establishing treaties the sovereign had one copy of the treaty and the vassal the other, and each deposited his copy at his own sanctuary. In the case of Israel the sanctuary was at the same

¹Schultz, p. 31.

²Deere, p. 269

³McGee, 1:544.

time the sanctuary of Yahweh and that of Israel, and so held the two copies of the treaty/covenant ..."¹

3. The prohibition of idolatry 4:15-24

4:15-19 Because God did not reveal Himself in any physical form, He forbade the Israelites from making any likeness of Him as an aid to worship. They were not to worship any heavenly bodies for this purpose, either, as did other ancient Near Easterners.

Christians may not face the temptation to represent God in wood or stone, but we must be careful about thinking that we can contain or limit Him, or fully comprehend Him. Even though we in the Church Age have received much revelation about God, we cannot fully grasp all there is to appreciate about Him.

4:20-22 Evidently the thought of God, bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, the "iron furnace," in order to bring them into the land, triggered Moses' reference to his own sin and its consequences.

"The use of metal by heating certain ores and then hammering the metallic residue or welding it to other parts while still hot may have appeared in the Near East in the first half of the third millennium B.C., but the manufacture of iron objects (usually weapons) was very limited till 1500 B.C. and later. Though the 'furnaces' of the OT world could not be heated sufficiently to make molten iron, artisans had learned to use bellows to make the hottest fire then known; and they knew that the hottest fire they could produce was necessary for their iron productions. 'Out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt' does not mean to imply that iron-smelting furnaces were in Egypt at that time. Rather, bringing Israel out of Egypt was like bringing her out of an iron-smelting furnace—the heavy bondage of Egypt with its

¹Mayes, p. 153.

accompanying difficulties and tensions being likened to the hottest fire then known."¹

- 4:23 Israel was to learn from Moses' personal failure ("So be careful yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant"), and so be completely loyal to Yahweh.

"Not only can the inheritance be merited by obedience, but it can be lost by disobedience. Even Moses was excluded from the land of Canaan (i.e., the inheritance) because of his disobedience (Dt. 4:21-22). Clearly, Moses will be in heaven, but he forfeited his earthly inheritance. Not entering Canaan does not necessarily mean one is not born again. ...

"Even though Israel had become God's firstborn son (Ex. 4:22-23), the entire wilderness generation with the exception of Caleb and Joshua forfeited the inheritance due the firstborn. God disinherited them, and they wandered in the wilderness for forty years."²

- 4:24 The consuming fire metaphor refers to the manifestation of God's glory that burns in judgment all that is impure (cf. Exod. 24:17; Lev. 10:2; Num. 16:35; Heb. 12:29). God's jealousy is His zeal for righteousness that springs from His holiness. He would not tolerate Israel's allegiance to any other god. The connotation of pettiness that is present in the English word "jealous" is absent from the Hebrew idea.

4. The consequences of idolatry 4:25-31

- 4:25-28 This warning proved prophetic, in that Israel did indeed apostatize ("act corruptly," turn from God to idolatry), and experience all the consequences Moses warned against here. The nation's present scattered condition, as a result of her

¹Kalland, pp. 45-46.

²Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 50.

dispersion by the Romans, is only one of several scatterings that Israel has experienced (v. 27).

"Heaven and earth are witnesses to the activity of Yahweh [v. 26] in different contexts. Outside Deuteronomy (e.g. Isa. 44:23; Pss. 69:35; 96:11f.) they witness the saving activity of Yahweh, especially in creation. Within Deuteronomy the reference is always to Yahweh's judging activity. The background here is again that of the extra-biblical treaties. Heaven and earth and other natural phenomena were part of the Hittite pantheon and functioned actively as treaty witnesses ..."¹

4:29-31 Israel's repentance, following apostasy, was to be wholehearted ("with all your heart and all your soul," v. 29). The "heart" refers to the seat of one's intellect and will (cf. 15:9), and the "soul" to the source of emotion, especially desire (cf. Isa. 26:8-9).

Moses predicted a turning back to the LORD ("in the latter days you will return to the LORD," v. 30). This has yet to take place during Israel's present dispersion, but it will happen (Zech. 12:10). Verse 30 is one of the first Scriptural references to the Great Tribulation.²

Yahweh is a holy judge who zealously yearns for the welfare of His chosen people, but if they turn from Him, and He disciplines them, He will afterward have compassion on them (cf. 6:5; 10:12; 11:13; 26:16; 30:2, 6, 10). The promise that God would not abandon or destroy His people, or forget His covenant with them, indicates the extent of His love for Israel (cf. Rom. 11:1).

¹Mayes, p. 155.

²See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p. 233.

5. The uniqueness of Yahweh and Israel 4:32-40

"The passage at hand is without comparison as a discourse on the doctrine of God."¹

4:32-34 Moses' three rhetorical questions in these verses clearly point out the uniqueness of Yahweh. The answer to each one is: No.

"In addition to His self-disclosure in event, in history, Yahweh revealed Himself as sovereign in theophany. In this manner the glorious splendor of the King contributes to His aura of majesty and power and is thereby persuasive of His dignity and authority. Almost without exception the theophanic revelation [the manifestation of God to humankind] was in the form of fire and its opposite, darkness (Deut. 1:33; 4:11-12, 33, 36; 5:4, 22-26; 9:10, 15; 10:4; 33:2; cf. Pss. 50:2; 80:2 [*sic* 1]; 94:1). ... The darkness speaks of His transcendence, His *mysterium*, His inaccessibility. On the other hand, the fire represented His immanence, the possibility of His being known even if in only a limited way (cf. Ezek. 1:4, 27-28; Dan. 7:9; Rev. 1:14)."²

4:35-36 Israel was not to miss the point ("He is God; there is no other besides Him," v. 35).

"From a literary point of view, these verses [32-36] are among the most beautiful in Deuteronomy. They are prosaic in form, but poetic in their evocation of the marvelous acts of God."³

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 130.

²Idem, "A Theology ...," p. 64. Cf. Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, pp. 109-12.

³Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 142.

4:37-38 The articulation of God's motivation in His great redemptive and saving acts for Israel—as being His love for them (v. 37)—brings this mounting crescendo of argument to its climax.¹

"This is the first time in the Bible that God tells anybody that He loves them. God has *demonstrated* that He loves man from the very first of Genesis, but, up to this point, He hasn't said anything about it. This is the first time He mentions it."²

The earliest reference to Israel's election in Deuteronomy is in verse 37 (cf. 7:6-8; 10:15-16; 14:2; 26:18-19; Exod. 19:5-6). God chose the Israelites for special blessing because of His love for them, not because He foresaw that they would be a great example to all other people, or because He knew that they would love Him in return. In fact, they failed to do both of these things.

"National election does not guarantee the salvation of every individual within the nation since only individual election can do that. Nor does national election guarantee the physical salvation of every member of the nation. What national election does guarantee is that God's purpose(s) for choosing the nation will be accomplished and that the elect nation will always survive as a distinct entity. It guarantees the physical salvation of the nation and, in the case of Israel, even a national salvation. It is the national election of Israel that is the basis of Israel's status as the Chosen People."³

¹See William L. Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 35 (1963):77-87; Greg Chirichigno, "A Theological Investigation of Motivation in OT Law," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (1981):303-13; and Pinchas Doron, "Motive Clauses in the Laws of Deuteronomy: Their Forms, Functions and Contents," *Hebrew Annual Review* (1978):61-77.

²McGee, 1:543.

³Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, p. 114.

"What is important to note here is that the exodus deliverance was predicated on Israel's prior election by the Lord. It was precisely because of his love and choice that he acted to redeem. ... The exodus and even the ensuing covenant did not make Israel the people of the Lord. Rather, it was because they were his people by virtue of having been descended from the patriarchs, the objects of his love and choice, that he was moved to save them and enter into covenant with them."¹

4:39 Moses revealed that God is "in heaven above [transcendent] and on the earth below [immanent]."

"When we speak of God as transcendent we mean of course that He is exalted far above the created universe, so far above that human thought cannot imagine it. To think accurately about this, however, we must keep in mind that 'far above' does not here refer to physical distance from the earth but to quality of being. We are concerned not with location in space nor with mere altitude, but with life."²

Likewise "immanent" means that God permanently pervades and sustains the universe.

4:40 In view of all that Moses had said, the Israelites were to obey the Mosaic Law. If they did, things would go well for them and their children, and they would be able to live long in the land that the LORD was giving them.

"... 'that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the land.' That is the purpose of the wilderness, the preparation for the settlement in the land."³

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 133. See also idem, "A Theology ...," pp. 30-32.

²A W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 75. Paragraph division omitted.

³Morgan, *The Unfolding ...*, p. 75.

This whole address by Moses (1:6—4:40), and especially the exhortation to observe the Law faithfully (ch. 4), is one of the greatest revelations of God's character in the Old Testament. The address builds to a climax, as every great sermon does. The total impression which God and Moses intended must have been awe and humble gratitude in the hearts of the Israelites.

"One of the principal means by which God has revealed Himself is in historical event, that is, by acts the community of faith could recognize as divine.¹ To Israel on the plains of Moab, these acts made up the constellation of mighty deeds Yahweh had displayed before them and on their behalf from the days of the patriarchs to their present hour. It was on the basis of such historical interventions, in fact, that Yahweh's claim as Sovereign could be made. ...

"Elsewhere in the Old Testament the foundational act of God is creation itself, but here the matter is less cosmic; the focus of Deuteronomy is not on God's universal concerns but on His special purposes for His people."²

The best way to motivate people to obey God is to expound His character and conduct positively, as Moses did here. Note too that Moses appealed to the self-interest of the Israelites: "... that it may go well for you and for your children after you, and that you may live long on the land ..." (v. 40; cf. 5:16; 6:3, 18; 12:25, 28; 19:13; 22:7; Prov. 3:1-2, 16; 10:27).

"Moses pleads for obedience; he must, for he is the Law-giver; Paul pleads for loving consecration [cf. Rom. 12:1-2]; he must, for he is the Grace-preacher; but the foundation of their pleas is the same—'the mercies of God.'"³

¹G. Ernest Wright and Reginald H. Fuller, *The Book of the Acts of God*, pp. 9-10.

²Merrill, "A Theology ...," p. 63.

³Newell, p. 246.

III. HISTORICAL INTERLUDE: PREPARATION FOR THE COVENANT TEXT 4:41-49

Having completed his address, which reminded the Israelites to look backward and remember God's faithfulness so they would remain faithful in the future, Moses next turned to a reminder of what God's will for His chosen people involved. He prefaced this second speech with instruction concerning cities of refuge in the land.

A. THE APPOINTMENT OF CITIES OF REFUGE IN TRANSJORDAN 4:41-43

It may seem strange that Moses included the record of his appointment of Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan as the three cities of refuge ("safe towns," CEV) east of the Jordan at this point in Deuteronomy (cf. Josh. 20:8). He probably did so because this important event took place after his first address, and before he delivered his second speech. The two and one-half tribes were beginning to settle in Transjordan, and they, in particular, needed this information.

The inclusion of this historical incident also serves a literary function. It provides a kind of intermission for the reader following the emotional climax at the end of the first address. It allows him or her to recover from its strong impact before the next long address begins.

Deuteronomy, like Leviticus and the other books of Moses, is essentially a narrative document. Moses inserted much legal material in the narrative of Leviticus, and he inserted much sermon material in the narrative of Deuteronomy. In both books there is less narrative material than either legal or sermon material.

B. INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND ADDRESS 4:44-49

These verses are similar to 1:4 and 5. They summarize and introduce, with historical references, what follows. In a larger sense these verses summarize all of chapters 1 through 3. These verses contain narration about Moses, not a discourse by Moses.

"This address, which is described in the heading as the law which Moses set before the Israelites [v. 44], commences with a repetition of the decalogue, and a notice of the powerful

impression which was made, through the proclamation of it by God Himself, upon the people who were assembled round Him at Horeb (chap. v). In the first and more general part, it shows that the true essence of the law, and of that righteousness which the Israelites were to strive after, consisted in loving Jehovah their God with all their heart (chap. vi); that the people were bound, by virtue of their election as the Lord's people of possession, to exterminate the Canaanites with their idolatrous worship, in order to rejoice in the blessing of God (chap. vii.); but more especially that, having regard on the one hand to the divine chastisement and humiliation which they had experienced in the desert (chap. viii.), and on the other hand to the frequency with which they had rebelled against their God (chap. ix. 1—x. 11), they were to beware of self-exaltation and self-righteousness, that in the land of Canaan, of which they were about to take possession, they might not forget their God when enjoying the rich productions of the land, but might retain the blessings of their God for ever by a faithful observance of the covenant (chap. x. 12—xi. 32). Then after this there follows an exposition of the different commandments of the law (chap. xii.—xxvi.)."¹

The "Law" (v. 44, Heb. *torah*) here refers to the covenant text itself, rather than to the Pentateuch, its more frequent referent.

"The law given at Sinai is properly a suzerainty treaty rather than a legal code, and Deuteronomy is a covenant-renewal document. Consequently it has some modification or modernizations of the code given originally."²

"... there is no distinctive anthropology in Deuteronomy because in this covenant text the individual is of relatively little significance. It is Israel, the vassal, that is highlighted in the book whose purpose is to show the Sovereign's redemptive, covenantal claims on and relationship to a people through whom He would manifest His saving will."³

¹Keil and Delitzsch, 3:318.

²Schultz, p. 32.

³Merrill, "A Theology ...," p. 72.

Note that God gave this law, "... to the sons of Israel" (v. 44). As I have pointed out previously, the Mosaic Law had a double purpose: (1) God gave it primarily as a revelation of Himself, of humankind, and of the essential requirements for their relationship. He has preserved it in Scripture for all believers because it still has this revelatory value. However, God also gave the law (2) to regulate the life of the Israelites religiously, governmentally, and domestically. This regulatory purpose is what ended with the death of Jesus Christ. The "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2) has replaced the Old (Mosaic) Covenant by specifying new regulations for believers since Jesus Christ died.

"*Testimonies* denoted covenant stipulations. *Statutes* were laws that were written down or inscribed on some suitable medium. *Ordinances* were the decisions of a judge [v. 45]."¹

IV. MOSES' SECOND MAJOR ADDRESS: AN EXPOSITION OF THE LAW CHS. 5—26

"... Deuteronomy contains the most comprehensive body of laws in the Pentateuch. It is clearly intended to be consulted for guidance on many aspects of daily life, in sharp contrast with the laws of Leviticus, which are very restricted in scope and mainly concern the functions of the priesthood."²

"Two of the major elements [in ancient Near Eastern covenant texts] ... are lists of stipulations, the first of a general, principal nature and the second of a more specific and applicational kind. That is, the first spelled out in broad strokes the kinds of actions and reactions the Great King expected of his vassal, and the other offered examples of how these general expectations could and should be worked out in everyday life within the relationship. ...

"While a general correspondence exists between Deuteronomy and the secular treaty texts, especially in form, there are significant differences as well. Among these are the narrative sections and the extensive parenesis [exhortation], both of

¹Schultz, p. 111.

²R. Norman Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, pp. 103-4.

which are lacking in the extrabiblical models. It is important to note here, moreover, that Deuteronomy, in addition to being a covenant text, is also a law code, or, more precisely, contains a law code. The general stipulation section (5:1—11:32) and the specific stipulation section (12:1—26:15) function as such a law code and thus serve both in this capacity and in that of covenant stipulation. To put it more succinctly, the stipulations of the Deuteronomic covenant constitute the law code for the nation Israel that was about to enter the new conditions and expectations of life in the land of promise. This is why the following principles resemble both legal statutes and covenant stipulations at one and the same time."¹

A. THE ESSENCE OF THE LAW AND ITS FULFILLMENT CHS. 5—11

"In seven chapters the nature of Yahweh's demand is now set out in the form of great principles. The deliverance of past days is the ground on which Moses appeals to Israel to hear what Yahweh requires of them."²

1. Exposition of the Decalogue and its promulgation ch. 5

"The exposition of the law commences with a repetition of the ten words of the covenant, which were spoken to all Israel directly by the Lord Himself. ... The great significance of the laws and rights about to be set before them, consisted in the fact that they contained the covenant of Jehovah with Israel."³

Introduction 5:1-6

5:1-5 The "covenant" to which Moses referred (v. 2) was not the Abrahamic, but the Mosaic Covenant. What follows is an "upgrade" of the Mosaic Covenant for the new generation about to enter the Promised Land. The "fathers" (v. 3) were the patriarchs, their ancestors. "Face to face" (v. 4) is a figure

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 139-40. Cf. Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 162.

²Schultz, p. 112.

³Keil and Delitzsch, 3:319.

of speech indicating direct communication: without a mediator. God uttered the Ten Commandments in the hearing of all the Israelites (v. 22). The expression "spoke with you face to face" (v. 4) also reflects the personal relationship that existed between Yahweh and the Israelites. God made the covenant with His friends; it was not simply an impersonal revelation of laws.¹

5:6 The basis for the LORD's Ten Commandments was that He is who He is (cf. Exod. 3:14), and that He had provided redemption for His people (cf. 13:4-5; Exod. 20:3; Lev. 26:13; Num. 15:41). God always gives first (grace), then asks for a response (obedience).²

"Love and mercy are the dominant characteristics of the covenant relationship."³

Because God had initiated love toward Israel by redeeming the nation, the people were to respond appropriately by loving Him in return. God initiates love, and the only reasonable response is to love Him back because of what He has done (cf. Rom. 12:1-2). God does not just love us after we love Him. More fundamentally, He loves us first (cf. Rom. 5:10; Eph. 1:4-5; 1 John 4:19). In the game of love, God always makes the first move.⁴ The human expression of love for God is obedience to His commandments (John 14:15, 21; 1 John 5:3; 2 John 6).

The first commandment 5:7 (cf. Exod. 20:3)

This command was a call to respond to God's love by remaining faithful to Him, instead of turning from Him to love something else more than Him. Israel was to have no other gods besides (instead of, other than, in addition to) Yahweh. The people were to worship Him exclusively.⁵

¹For an excursus on Moses the teacher, see Miller, pp. 70-71.

²See H. H. Rowley, "Moses and the Decalogue," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester* 34:1 (September 1951):81-118, for arguments for the Mosaic origin of the Ten Commandments as opposed to a later origin.

³Miller, p. 77.

⁴G. S. Sloyen, *Walking in the Truth*, p. 49.

⁵See Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 146.

This commandment applies to all people, not just Israel, because Yahweh is the only true God, and He is worthy of love and worship for both who He is and what He has done. He has reached out lovingly to all humankind with the provision of salvation (cf. Acts 14:15; 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Tim. 2:5; Titus 2:11; James 2:19; 1 John 5:20-21).

The second commandment 5:8-10 (Exod. 20:4-6)

This commandment is a prohibition against making images or likenesses (idols) of Yahweh mainly, but also images of any other heavenly beings, angels, or celestial bodies in order to worship or serve them (v. 9). God forbade idolatry itself, the worship or service of any other god or idol, in the first commandment. This second commandment was necessary for at least three reasons:

1. Any material (physical) representation of the LORD slanders Him, since He is greater and more perfect than anything we humans can conceive in our minds, let alone make with our hands.
2. By making images of Yahweh, the worshipper would gain a false and illegitimate sense of control and authority over Him. God is the Creator, and human beings are His creatures. He is also sovereign over all. Rather than accepting his place as a subject (subservient) creature, under the sovereign Creator, the person who makes an image of God puts himself above Him, in the position of the creator. In effect he also puts God in the place of a created thing; he usurps God's sovereignty. Since God made man in His image, it is inappropriate for us to try to make God in our image, much less in the image of any other created thing (cf. Rom. 1:23-25).
3. It is easy for anyone to confuse an object that represents a deity with that deity. Instead of worshipping the god that the object represents, people have always inclined toward transferring their worship to the object itself. For example, the Israelites worshipped the golden calf as something that represented Yahweh ("This is your god, Israel," Exod. 32:8), and even referred to their manmade, handcrafted idol as the god "who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (Exod. 32:8). This is our natural tendency as material (physical) beings who give preference to what we can see over what we cannot see (i.e., God, who is spirit).

The writer's view of the earth—as having living beings above the earth, on the earth, and under the water of the earth—is consistent with all ancient Near Eastern cosmology (v. 8; cf. Gen. 1).¹

We can identify several benefits of observing this commandment:

1. Obedience tends to preserve the relationship between God and man, as one characterized by love (v. 9). Images that represent God will divert love from God Himself to the image that represents Him (as with the golden calf).
2. God also intended this commandment to constantly cast the Israelites back on their knowledge of Himself. What God has revealed about Himself is much greater than anything that His people could represent in material form. And what He has revealed about Himself is not all there is to know about God.
3. Obedience would also preserve Israel's distinctiveness in the world. Israel alone in the ancient Near East did not make images of her God.² If the Israelites had made images of Yahweh, the other nations would have perceived Him as just another god like their gods.
4. God also intended to preserve love for Himself in the succeeding generations of His people (vv. 9-10). God is jealous when we commit to (i.e., love) something other than Himself. He disciplines people who do not love Him, but He blesses those who do. Apostasy has effects on succeeding generations. Rebellious, God-hating parents often produce several generations of descendants who also hate God (cf. Exod. 20:5; 34:6-7). Children normally follow the example of their parents. But God's blessing exceeds His discipline a thousand-fold ("showing favor to thousands," v. 10).

Is this commandment one that God wants us to live by even today? It deals with the problems we human beings have with understanding the nature of God and our own nature, which both affect our having a proper relationship to Him. The nature of man and the nature of God have not changed. Consequently almost everyone acknowledges that this commandment is

¹Ibid., p. 147.

²Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 154.

one that God intended to affect His people in every age, not just those living in Israel in Old Testament times (cf. Acts 17:24-28).¹

The third commandment 5:11 (cf. Exod. 20:7)

Whereas the second commandment deals with a potential visual temptation to depart from Yahweh, the third one deals with a potential verbal temptation. Two of the Ten Commandments affect the use of the tongue and speech: the third (speech about God) and the ninth (speech about people).

God designed this commandment to encourage people to express their respect for Him with appropriate speech. It forbids abusing God's name or reputation. A person's "name" represents that person (cf. Exod. 3:13-14). The positive form of this command is: "Hallowed be Your name" (Matt. 6:9). Misuse of God's name expresses disrespect for Him.

"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 [casting a spell] or of prophylaxis [action taken to prevent disease]."²

There are several ways in which people can abuse ("take ... in vain") God's name. One is by swearing falsely (Lev. 19:12). This involves lying but at the same time appealing to God's name for support that one is telling the truth (i.e., perjury; cf. 2 Sam. 15:7-10). God allowed swearing in His name under the Mosaic Law (6:13; et al.), but Jesus Christ ended it (Matt. 5:33-37; cf. James 5:12). The principle in view is that all of our talk should be honest and not hypocritical. Our lives talk as well as our lips. Therefore, in a wider sense, this commandment should affect how God's people behave as well as how they speak (cf. 1 Tim. 6:1).

The consequence of breaking this commandment was God's punishment. In Israel the leaders of the nation carried this out by stoning the blasphemer.

¹J. Daniel Hays gave some helpful guidelines for applying Old Testament laws today in "Applying the Old Testament Law Today," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (January-March 2001):21-35.

²Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 149.

A blasphemer is a person who practices profane or mocking speech, writing, or action concerning God or anything regarded as sacred. The blasphemer in these various ways expresses contempt for God. In the church the leaders do not have the responsibility of punishing blasphemy. God Himself will do it.

The Jews took this command seriously. They did not even speak God's name—Yahweh—in order to avoid abusing it. Instead they substituted the phrase "the Name" in the place of "Yahweh" in conversation. They also spoke of "heaven," the place where God resides, rather than speaking directly of "God." This, by the way, explains why Matthew, in writing his Gospel to Jews, usually spoke of the "kingdom of heaven," whereas the other Gospel writers, who wrote primarily for Gentiles, normally used the term "kingdom of God." According to Jewish tradition, when a Jewish scribe wrote the name of God, he would first bathe, change his clothes, and use a new quill with which to continue writing.

We Christians too should take this command seriously. In our day, many people use God's names ("God," "Lord," "Jesus," "Christ," etc.) lightly, largely because they do not respect Him. Our speech and our behavior should reflect the fact that we honor and respect God. How we speak and behave reflects on God's reputation (a synonym for His "name"). Moreover, respect for the person of God is something that God's people should advocate in their world, even among unbelievers (Matt. 6:9).

The fourth commandment 5:12-15 (cf. Exod. 20:8-11)

This is the most positively stated of the Ten Commandments: "Keep the Sabbath day." Only one other commandment appears in the affirmative, namely, the fifth. The fourth commandment is a charge to refresh oneself physically and spiritually. The Hebrew noun *sabat*, translated "Sabbath," is related to the verb translated "to rest" (cf. Gen. 2:2-3).

Before God gave the Mosaic Law He told the Israelites to refrain from gathering manna on the seventh day of the week (Exod. 16:22-30). Later God made abstinence from work on the Sabbath Day a law for the Israelites (Exod. 20:8-11). Besides providing a weekly rest, the reasons God gave for making it a commandment were: to memorialize God's creation of the universe (Exod. 20:11), and to memorialize His creation of the nation Israel (Deut. 5:15).

"There are two versions of the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament, and both give different reasons for the observation of the sabbath. In Exodus 20:11, the Hebrews are enjoined to observe the sabbath on the basis of God's creation of the world. But in the second version, Deuteronomy 5:15, the sabbath is to be observed in commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt. At first sight the two reasons given for the observation of the same commandment seem very different, but the new understanding of the Song of the Sea [Exodus 15:1-18], in its Canaanite/Ugaritic background [which I explained in my notes on Exodus], indicates just how close the two reasons are. The sabbath was to be observed, first in celebration of the creation of the world, and second in commemoration of God's creation of Israel in the Exodus."¹

"The principal theological truth to be seen here is the changing theological emphases of the unchanging God. For a people freshly delivered from Egyptian overlordship by the mighty exodus miracle, God as Creator is a central truth. Therefore it is most appropriate that the Sabbath focus on him as Creator and the cessation of that creative work, the very point of the Exodus commandment. From the perspective of the Deuteronomy legislation, some forty years later, creation pales into insignificance in comparison to the act of redemption itself. With the benefit now of historical retrospection and with the anticipation of the crossing of another watery barrier—the Jordan—and the uncertainties of conquest, Israel was to recall its plight as slaves and its glorious release from that hopeless situation. Sabbath now speaks of redemption and not creation, of rest and not cessation. ...

"All this gives theological justification for the observance by the Christian of Sunday rather than Saturday as the day set apart as holy. For the Christian the moment of greatest significance is no longer creation or the exodus—as important as these are in salvation history. Central to his faith and experience is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, a re-creation and redemptive event that eclipses all of God's mighty acts of the past. Thus by example if not by explicit command

¹Craigie, *The Book ...*, pp. 89-90.

Jesus and the apostles mandated the observance of the first day of the week as commemorative of his triumphant victory over death."¹

"The Sabbath symbolizes the Old Covenant of Law: you labored for six days and then you rested. The Lord's Day commemorates the New Covenant of grace: it opens the week with rest in Christ and the works follow."²

God gave this commandment for the physical and spiritual welfare of His people. Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," (Mark 2:27). The Pharisees later made Sabbath observance stricter than what God had intended (cf. Mark 2:18—3:6).

God did not command Christians to observe the Sabbath (cf. Rom. 10:4; 14:5-6; Gal. 3:23-29; 4:10; Col. 2:16-17). From the birth of the church on, most Christians have observed the first day of the week (Sunday), not the seventh (Saturday), as a memorial of Jesus Christ's resurrection (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). In Russian, the first day of the week is called "Resurrection Day."

The reason for this Christian custom is that the Resurrection vindicated everything that Jesus claimed and did. It therefore memorialized God's creation of the church. Even though God did not command it, resting and remembering God's great acts have become customary among Christians down through the centuries. The Christian who works on Sunday, however, is not disobeying God. The early Gentile Christians were mainly slaves who had to work on Sundays and who met in the evening for worship. For them Sunday was not a day of rest but of work *and* worship.

To speak of Sunday as "the Christian Sabbath," as some do, may be misleading. True, it is a day of rest for many Christians, but God has not commanded us to observe the Sabbath as He commanded Jews under the Mosaic Law. Seventh Day Adventists and other sabbatarian groups disagree.³ They believe that, since this is part of the moral code of the Mosaic Law, it remains in force for Christians. Some Christians appeal to Hebrews 4:9 for support that we should observe Sunday as the Sabbath. But the rest in view in that verse probably refers to our heavenly rest, after

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 152.

²Wiersbe, p. 385.

³E.g., Calvin, 2:3:9; Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments*, p. 95.

we go to be with the Lord. Still other Christians argue for observance of the Sabbath on the basis that it was a creation institution that antedated the Mosaic Law. But God did not command Sabbath observance until the Mosaic Law.

In short, many Christians observe Sunday as a special day devoted to spiritual rather than physical matters, and God's interests, rather than our selfish interests, because we choose to do so. We do not do so because God has commanded us to do so.

Making Sunday special has two benefits at least: First, it contributes to public health. God made man in His image. God ceased His labor after working six days in creation. Man, likewise, constitutionally needs a refreshing change after six days of labor—including six days of study if one is a fulltime student. It is not healthy physically, psychologically, or socially to work seven days a week. Note that God made the Sabbath for mankind, not just for Jews (Mark 2:27).

Second, making Sunday special promotes civil liberty. It guards against the exploitation of workers. Sabbath observance was a symbol of freedom to the Israelites. Today ceasing from labor for one day each week enables people to rest and refresh themselves with friends and family, to enjoy a measure of freedom from the daily grind. Failure to do so reduces life to the proverbial rat race, in which people live as animals rather than as human beings. People who work seven days a week fail to enjoy the rest that God intended for them (cf. Matt. 11:28).

"There's nothing wrong with setting aside special 'remembrances days' when we review the goodness of the Lord toward us."¹

This is the only one of the Ten Commandments that Jesus Christ or the apostles did not restate as a Christian obligation in the New Testament. New Testament references to the repetition of nine of the Ten Commandments, as binding upon Christians, appear in my notes on Exodus 20.²

¹Wiersbe, p. 458.

²See also the table in Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:209-10, for a side by side comparison of the Ten Commandments and New Testament verses that rephrase them.

The fifth commandment 5:16 (cf. Exod. 20:12)

The first four commandments deal primarily with peoples' relationship to God. The last six deal with peoples' relationship to each other (cf. Matt. 22:37-39).

The first part of this verse contains a precept. "Honor" means to regard with great respect, to esteem, to admire, to defer to, to look up to, to appreciate, to value, to cherish, to adore, to reverence, to revere, and to venerate (cf. Lev. 19:3; John 19:26-27). All parents are worthy of their children's honor in word and deed, regardless of the parents' personal characters, because they are responsible for giving life to their children.¹ As we should honor God for His creative activity (v. 15; Exod. 20:11), so we should honor our parents for theirs—even though they may be worthy of honor for no other reason. Parents are God's instruments in giving us life.

"Essentially *kabbed* (the *piel* imperative of *kabed*) carries the nuance of weighing down with honor or respect. In the particular stem used here the idea is declaring to someone or effectively conveying to something the quality of honor. The command to honor therefore is a command to demonstrate in tangible, empirical ways the respect people must have for their parents."²

Obedience is one manifestation of honoring someone. In the New Testament era God has commanded children to obey their parents as well as to honor them (Col. 3:20; cf. Luke 2:51). This responsibility to obey lasts only as long as they are children. When they cease to be children, the responsibility to obey ends, but the duty to honor continues.

The second part of the verse contains a promise. God promised the Israelites long life in the Promised Land of Canaan (cf. 4:40; 5:9-10). He has promised obedient Christian children long life on the earth (Eph. 6:1-3). Normally children who honor and obey their parents get into fewer situations that shorten their lives.

¹Charlie Trimm, "Honor Your Parents: A Command for Adults," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60:2 (June 2017):247-63.

²Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 153.

The sixth commandment 5:17 (cf. Exod. 20:13)

The meaning of the Hebrew word *ratsah*, translated "kill" in the AV, refers specifically to "murder," as modern English translations have rendered it. Humans rather than animals are in view. Both forms of murder, premeditated and non-premeditated, are in view. The Israelites distinguished and punished these various forms of murder differently, and manslaughter (second-degree murderers) suffered less punishment than murderers.

The exceptions to this commandment, in which God commanded the Israelites to take another human life, were: the corporate and public execution of certain law-breakers, and participation in holy war. He first gave the command to execute murderers to Noah, before the Mosaic era (Gen. 9:6). This preexistent law of capital punishment provided the foundation for civilized government. God simply incorporated it into the Mosaic Law. Even though God has terminated the Mosaic Law (2 Cor. 3:7-11), God's command to execute murderers continues—since it was already in force before the Mosaic Law.¹

There are several reasons for the sixth commandment. The first is the nature of man. Not only did God create man essentially different from other forms of animal life (Gen. 2:7; cf. Matt. 19:4), but He also created humans in His own image (Gen. 1:26-28). Consequently when someone murders a person, he or she obliterates a revelation (a kind of "copy") of God. Second, murder usurps God's authority. All life belongs to God, and He gives it to us "on lease" (cf. Ezek. 18:4a). To take a human life without divine authorization, therefore, is to appropriate for oneself authority that belongs only to God. Third, the consequences of murder, unlike the consequences of some other sins (e.g., lying, stealing, coveting), are fatal and irreversible.

We must interpret Jesus' words about hatred being as bad as murder, in Matthew 5:21-22 (cf. 1 John 3:15a), in their context. Jesus was stressing the fact that attitudes are as important to God as actions—in the Sermon on the Mount. He was correcting false teaching by the Pharisees that external actions were more important than internal attitudes. He was not

¹See Charles C. Ryrie, "The Doctrine of Capital Punishment," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129:515 (July-September 1972):211-17, reprinted in his book, *You Mean the Bible Teaches That ...*, pp. 23-32.

saying that the consequences of hatred and murder are the same. Obviously they are not.

The Apostle John's teaching, that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him (1 John 3:15b), means that an abiding Christian will not commit murder (cf. 1 John 3:6a, 24a). This should be clear from the way John uses the word "abide" in his epistles (cf. John 14—17). A Christian has the capacity to commit murder (cf. 1 Pet 4:15), but if he does so, he is not "abiding in" a close relationship with Christ when he commits murder.

In view of the sixth commandment we should not murder other people or ourselves (suicide).¹ We should also punish those who commit murder as God has commanded (Gen. 9:6). The fact that the judicial system is not perfect does not free us from this duty. Moses, David, and Paul were all murderers—whom God specially pardoned (Exod. 3:10; 2 Sam. 12:13; 1 Tim. 1:13). Moreover, we should fully recognize the seriousness of hatred and deal with it in our own lives.

The seventh commandment 5:18 (cf. Exod. 20:14)

This commandment deals with the sexual sin of adultery only. Whereas murder violates life itself, adultery violates the most important and sacred human relationship: marriage.² God dealt with other forms of sexual sin elsewhere (cf. chs. 22—25). Adultery is the sexual union of a man and a woman, when one or both of them is married to someone else. Adultery is an act that a person may commit, not a state in which one may live, as is likewise true of all the other prohibitions in the Ten Commandments (cf. Matt. 5:27-28).

God established marriage long before He gave the Mosaic Covenant, and He intended it to be a permanent relationship (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:3-8). A special new relationship, based on mutual commitment and a spiritual union, comes into existence when marriage vows are taken and a couple consummates their marriage with sexual intercourse. Adultery violates that commitment and union, and it weakens the basis of the relationship. When adultery takes place the unfaithful partner temporarily abandons that commitment, and future faithful commitment becomes uncertain. Thus the

¹See J. P. Morgan, "The Morality of Suicide: Issues and Options," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):214-30; Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Answers to Tough Questions*, ch. 7: "The Question of Suicide," pp. 87-94.

²Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 154.

relationship is not what it was. Adultery erodes the foundation of a marriage, which consists of faithfulness to a commitment (the covenant of marriage) and a spiritual union before God. It does so by breaking that commitment and by establishing an intimate relationship, however temporary, with another partner (1 Cor. 6:16). It also incurs God's judgment.

Under the Old Covenant the Israelites dealt with adulteresses more severely than adulterers. Under the New Covenant Christians should not execute adulteresses or adulterers. God has promised that He will deal with both (Heb. 13:4; cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-10). Adultery does not terminate a marriage in God's sight. Much less does it terminate one's salvation. However adultery might eventually result in the termination of a marriage through divorce and remarriage.

How should a Christian marriage partner respond to a spouse who has committed adultery? He or she should forgive the unfaithful mate (John 8:1-11). How often should the violated partner do this? How often has God forgiven you for being unfaithful to Him (cf. Matt. 18:21-35)? Remember God's instructions to Hosea concerning his unfaithful wife, and how God used Hosea's situation as an illustration of His own love for Israel (cf. Ezek. 23:37; James 4:4; Deut. 5:2).

But does not forgiveness encourage infidelity? Perhaps, but godly love forgives. God allows us to abuse His mercy, but appreciation for His love and grace will result in our wanting to remain faithful to Him. We should deal with one another as God deals with us, namely, graciously (John 13:34). If a spouse continues to be unfaithful, it may be wise or necessary to separate (action), but there must be continuing forgiveness (attitude).

How can we guard against committing adultery? First, Scripture stresses the importance of guarding our own hearts, the seat of our affections (Matt. 15:19; Prov. 4:23; 7:25). Second, we should realize that God has a claim on our bodies, not just our souls (1 Cor. 6:13-20). Third, we should cultivate our relationship with our spouses (1 Cor. 7:1-5). The husband-wife relationship is more fundamental than the parent-child relationship. Husbands need to take the initiative in cultivating this relationship (Eph. 5:25-31).¹

¹See Gregory L. Jantz, *Too Close to the Flame*.

The eighth commandment 5:19 (cf. Exod. 20:15)

Stealing means taking something that belongs to another person against that person's will. Theft violates one's property rights, just as adultery violates marriage and the family.

Usually what is stolen is some material possession—such as a vehicle, household goods, or cash. Pilfering is stealing small amounts of something. Swindling involves deceiving someone into believing that his money is going one place, while really all, or part of it, is going somewhere else. Usually it is going into the pocket of the swindler. A person can be guilty of theft by falsifying accounts (e.g., paper theft, as on one's income tax forms; cf. Amos 8:4-6; Rom. 13:7). He can also do so by misusing personal discount privileges, or stealing from an employer by not working all the hours his employer is paying for. He could also do so by not paying debts (e.g., alimony, child support, bankruptcy), or by not returning items that he has borrowed. A person can even steal the spouse of another, as King David did.

Stealing can involve robbing a person of his personal freedom—by kidnapping, taking hostages, hijacking an airliner, human trafficking, or enslaving someone in debt (cf. Gen. 37:22-28). One can rob a person of his reputation by withholding or distorting the truth, thereby stealing his promotion or job (cf. the third commandment). One can steal other people's legitimate personal rights—such as their joy, time, or even their life. It is even possible to steal from God what we owe Him (e.g., money, praise, ourselves).

The Israelite was to return what he had stolen, if possible, to make full restitution, and to add 20 percent of the value as a penalty for his theft (Lev. 5:16; 6:5; Num. 5:7; cf. Luke 19:8). God has not commanded Christians to pay the 20 percent penalty, but we should at least make full restitution, as well as confess this sin to God (John 13:34-35; Eph. 4:28; 1 John 1:9).

The ninth commandment 5:20 (cf. Exod. 20:16)

God worded this commandment differently from what we might expect. He might have said: You shall not lie. The wording indicates the emphasis, which was specifically being an untruthful witness, namely, engaging in character assassination. This is really another form of killing and stealing.

The word "testimony" (Heb. *ed*) refers to testimony given in legal cases. "Neighbor" (Heb. *rea'*) focuses on a fellow member of the covenant community, but it is broad enough to include all other human beings (cf. Exod. 11:2; Lev. 19:18, 34; Luke 10:29-37). Integrity, honesty, and faithfulness in speech are in view, especially in such situations in which someone's testimony determines a person's fate. The more general prohibition against lying appears elsewhere (Lev. 19:11-12). The ninth commandment deals with our speech, as does the third (cf. James 3).

This command covers all kinds of slander (cf. Ps. 101:5), but perjury in court is primarily in view. Nevertheless, any time we distort the truth when we speak we have the potential of ruining or even destroying a life (cf. the fates of Naboth and Jesus Christ). Satan is the source and father of lies (John 8:44; cf. Acts 5:3). The Fall resulted from a lie (Gen. 3:4). God hates lying (Prov. 6:16-19), and He is the infallible lie detector. Flattery can be a form of lying. Even a question can slander (Job 1:8-9), as can silence, if, by keeping silent, we give tacit approval to a lie. However, we do not always need to tell all we know. Withholding information does not always constitute lying. Lying, and giving false testimony, in particular, should never characterize the Christian (Col. 3:9-17).

The tenth commandment 5:21 (cf. Exod. 20:17)

Coveting means inordinately (excessively) desiring to possess what belongs to another person. Another definition is: wanting more and more of something one already has enough of. This commandment deals with motivation rather than deed, with attitude rather than action. It gets at the spirit that often leads to the forbidden sins listed in commandments six through nine. The attitude that coveting reveals is selfishness, or self-centeredness. One writer titled a chapter in which he expounded this commandment: "The Selfish Life Denounced."¹

The seriousness of this sin is obvious from the fact that God forbade it many times in Scripture (e.g., Ps. 10:3; Prov. 28:16; Mark 7:21-23; Luke 12:15; Rom. 1:28-29; Eph. 5:3, 5; 1 Tim. 6:9-10; 2 Tim. 3:1-5). Coveting is attractive to many because people can practice it without ever experiencing public exposure. Notwithstanding, God knows our hearts (Acts 1:24). The covetous attitude itself is sinful (cf. Matt. 5:21-48), and it often leads to overt sin (e.g., Eve, Lot, Achan, David, Ahab, Judas Iscariot,

¹Lehman Strauss, *The Eleven Commandments*, p. 149.

Ananias and Sapphira). Coveting is the root attitude from which every sin, in both word and deed, against a neighbor grows.

We cannot escape this sin completely. It is one of the most deadly spiritual viruses that attacks us, and it flourishes in our materialistic society. Nevertheless, like bacteria, we can keep it under control with God's help. A prescription for the control of covetousness might include four ingredients:

First, as with all other temptations, we must recognize our need for God's help (grace) in combatting it (John 15:5) and ask Him for that help (James 4:2; Ps. 55:22; 1 Pet. 5:7).

Second, we need to learn to be content in our present condition (Phil. 4:6, 11, 19; 1 Tim. 6:6; cf. Deut. 5:21).

Third, we need to evaluate why we want the things we want. Desiring something we do not have is not necessarily wrong in itself (cf. 1 Cor. 12:31). The reason we want it makes it right or wrong (cf. James 4:2-3). Do we want it in order to exalt self, or to better serve God, our family, friends, or the needy (cf. Mark 10:45)?

Fourth, we need to make sure that we are valuing spiritual things higher than material things (Col. 3:2).¹

Concluding narrative 5:22-33

This pericope (section of text) is another brief historical résumé.

5:22-27 The whole nation of Israelites had heard God speaking the Ten Commandments "with a great voice" (v. 22). Then God wrote the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone and gave them to Moses. The leaders of the Israelites appealed to Moses to be their mediator between themselves and Yahweh so that the fire that proceeded from Mt. Sinai—fire that somehow accompanied the LORD's words—would not consume and kill them. They asked Moses to relay God's words to them. Obviously the giving of the Ten Commandments was a terrifying experience for the Israelites.

¹See also Daniel I. Block, "'You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor's Wife': A Study in Deuteronomistic Domestic Ideology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53:3 (September 2010):449-74.

"Life is what differentiates Yahweh from other gods ... [v. 26]"¹

5:28-29 God said that the Israelites had done well by fearing Him. But He revealed to Moses that, unfortunately, the heart of the people would not retain this reverential attitude. These words of God reflect His great love for Israel, and His desire that His people experience His blessing. This is the heart of God.

"The best interests of his people are deep in the heart of God. This view of divine compassion shows how the Lord's love focuses on what is best for his people. Here is no vindictive god in contrast to a loving NT Lord. No, this glimpse into the heart of God is in harmony with the most compassionate depiction of Christ in the NT."²

5:30-33 As for the people, the LORD told Moses to send them back to their tents. God would not speak to them directly any more. As for Moses, the LORD told him to stay with Him to receive all the commandments, statutes, and judgments that He had for the people. God revealed the rest of the covenant only to Moses, not to all the Israelites, but Moses reported this revelation to the people sometime after God revealed it to him privately. God concluded His words to Moses with the promise that if the Israelites obeyed these laws they would live long lives in the Promised Land.

This chapter teaches Christians that the proper response to God's Word is reverence for Him, and obedience—not only because God is Who He is, but because He also desires peoples' welfare.

"The Decalogue 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."³

¹Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 39.

²Kalland, pp. 61-62.

³Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 149.

2. Exhortation to love Yahweh ch. 6

John Walton suggested that chapters 6 through 26 expand the Decalogue with the intent of addressing the spirit of the law.¹ He believed that the structure of the book supports his contention that the writer chose exemplary cases. Moses intended, in these chapters, to clarify the attitudes implied by the Ten Commandments, rather than only giving specific commands on a variety of subjects. Walton identified four major issues that he believed the Decalogue addresses, and around which chapters 6 through 26 seem to be organized. He saw the structure of this section as follows:

MAJOR ISSUES	GODWARD	MANWARD
AUTHORITY	Commandment 1 Expounded in chs. 6—11	Commandment 5 Expounded in 16:18—18:22
DIGNITY	Commandment 2 Expounded in ch. 12	Commandments 6, 7 & 8 Expounded in chs. 19—21; 22:1—23:14; and 23:15—24:7 respectively
COMMITMENT	Commandment 3 Expounded in 13:1—14:21	Commandment 9 Expounded in 24:8-16
RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES	Commandment 4 Expounded in 14:22—16:17	Commandment 10 Expounded in 24:19—26:15

¹ John H. Walton, "Deuteronomy: An Exposition of the Spirit of the Law," *Grace Theological Journal* 8:2 (Fall 1987):213-25.

Walton's basic thesis appears sound, but some of his conclusions seem questionable to me.

"Before the principles, that is, the general stipulations, of the covenant are spelled out, Moses devotes a great deal of attention to describing their nature and how they are to be applied and transmitted. Thus once more the strictly 'legal' or technical parts of the document are set within a hortatory [aiming to exhort] framework as part of a major Mosaic address."¹

Exhortation to observe the principles 6:1-3

These verses announce the commandments that follow and give the reason for obeying them: God's promised blessing. God's blessing would come in the form of long life, peace and prosperity, and numerous descendants. The "fear" of God (v. 2; cf. 5:29, 35; et al.) is the respect that comes from an appreciation of His character.

"It is a fear that produces not obeisance [a gesture expressing deferential respect] but obedience, not worry but worship (6:13)."²

"Israel's continued enjoyment of a habitation in God's land, like Adam's continued enjoyment of the original paradise, depended on continued fidelity to the Lord."³

W. H. Griffith Thomas considered verse 3 to be the key verse in Deuteronomy.⁴

The essence of the principles 6:4-5

Here the actual exposition of the Decalogue begins, with an explanation and implications of the first commandment. Moses presented Yahweh as the one true God who requires complete devotion.

"With this chapter we come to the pivot around which everything else in Deuteronomy revolves—the Shema or Great

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 160.

²Sailhamer, p. 439. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:11.

³Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 163.

⁴W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Through the Pentateuch Chapter by Chapter*, p. 166.

Commandment, as it has also come to be known (6:4-5). ... In turn, the statutes and ordinances explicate [analyze and develop] 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)."¹

The idea in verse 4 is not just that Yahweh is the only God, but that He is also one unified God.

"It is possible to understand verse 4 in several ways, but the two most popular renderings of the final 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 *'ehad* ('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 Yahweh 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. Yahweh is indeed a unity, but beyond that he is the only God. For this reason the exhortation of verse 5 has practical significance."²

This affirmation made inappropriate both polytheism (the belief in many gods) and henotheism (the worship of one god without denying the existence of other gods).

"Yahweh was to be the sole object of Israel's worship, allegiance, and affection."³

¹Miller, p. 97.

²Merrill, "Deuteronomy ...," p. 24. J. Gerald Janzen, "On the Most Important Word in the Shema (Deuteronomy VI 4-5)," *Vetus Testamentum* 37:3 (July 1987):280-300, believed the second of these meanings was the proper one.

³Thompson, p. 121.

"Deuteronomy more than any other Old Testament book concerns itself not only with the obligation to worship and the rules for doing so, but also with the subjective aspect of worship—with the feelings of the worshipper and the spirit in which he or she worships."¹

"The heart (*leb*) is, in Old Testament anthropology, the seat of the intellect, equivalent to the mind or rational part of humankind. The 'soul' (better, 'being' or 'essential person' in line with the commonly accepted understanding of *nepes*) refers to the invisible part of the individual, the person *qua* [as being] person including the will and sensibilities. The strength (*me'od*) is, of course, the physical side with all its functions and capacities."²

There is no word in Hebrew for "mind" or "brain."

"The demand [in v. 5] 'with all the heart' excludes all halfheartedness, all division of the heart in its love. The heart is mentioned first, as the seat of the emotions generally and of love in particular; then follows the soul (*nephesh*) as the centre of personality in man, to depict the love as pervading the entire self-consciousness; and to this is added, 'with all the strength,' *sc.* [that is to say] of body and soul. Loving the Lord with all the heart and soul and strength is placed at the head, as the spiritual principles from which the observance of the commandments was to flow (see also chap. xi. 1, xxx. 6)."³

"First and foremost of all that was essential for the Israelite was an unreserved, wholehearted commitment, expressed in love for God."⁴

The only individual in the Old Testament—of whom it was said that he turned to the LORD with all his heart, soul, and might—was King Josiah (2 Kings 23:25). Jesus Christ quoted verse 5 as the greatest of all God's commandments (Matt. 22:37-38; Mark 12:28-30; cf. Luke 10:27).

¹Whybray, p. 99.

²Merrill, "Deuteronomy ...," p. 25.

³Keil and Delitzsch, 3:323.

⁴Schultz, p. 40.

"The verse does not invite analysis into ideas of intellectual, emotional, and physical parts. The words behind heart, soul, and strength basically relate to what a person is or how a person directs himself toward another person. It is, therefore, not inaccurate for the NT writers to quote (or translate) the Hebrew words, which are often synonymous, by differing Greek words, which are also often synonymous, since the words taken together mean to say that the people are to love God with their whole selves."¹

The statement begun here (vv. 4-5; cf. 11:13-21; Num. 15:37-41) became Israel's basic confession of faith. This is the "Shema" (lit. "Hear," from the first word). Pious Jews recite it twice daily even today.²

"If the Ten Words are the heart of the stipulations as a whole, the principle of the Words is encapsulated in the so-called Shema (6:4-5), which defines who the Sovereign is and reduces the obligation to Him to one of exclusive love and obedience."³

"The Shema' [the single quotation mark after "Shema" indicates the Hebrew letter aleph] is included in the should not be taken out of context and interpreted as a great monotheistic confession. Moses had made that point in 4:35, 39: 'For Yahweh (alone) is God; there is none beside(s) him.' Nor is the issue in the broader context the nature of God in general or his integrity in particular—though the nature and integrity of his people is a very important concern. This is a cry of allegiance, an affirmation of covenant commitment in response to the question, 'Who is the God of Israel?' The language of the Shema' is 'sloganesque' rather than prosaic [lacking poetic beauty]: 'Yahweh our God! Yahweh alone!' or 'Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone!' This was to be the

¹Kalland, pp. 64-65. See Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 165-66, for further explanation of the variations that exist in the Gospel references to this verse compared with the Hebrew text here.

²Isidore Epstein, *Judaism*, pp. 162-63.

³Merrill, "A Theology ...," p. 78. Cf. E. W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition*, p. 46.

distinguishing mark of the Israelite people; they are those (and only those) who claim Yahweh alone as their God."¹

In other similar passages, only two of these entities are mentioned: heart and soul (4:29; 10:12; Josh. 22:5). In still other passages, another is added: mind (Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). The meaning is the same in all cases: wholeheartedly, or "all that is within me" (Ps. 103:1).

Exhortation to teach the principles 6:6-9

This section contains instructions for remembering and teaching these great truths to the following generations.

6:6 "In the psychology of the Old Testament the heart is not the center of emotional life and response but the seat of the intellect or rational side of humankind. To 'be upon the heart' is to be in one's constant, conscious reflection."²

6:7 "The reason for this emphasis on the children is clear. Deuteronomy is always aimed at the next generation. It takes the present (next) generation back to the past and brings the past afresh into the present. The children are now the ones before whom all the choices are laid, and some day their children will be there and the divine instruction will confront them (e.g., 30:2). Can they learn afresh what it means to love the Lord wholeheartedly?"³

Note the emphasis in these verses on the importance of parents diligently using opportunities, as they arise daily in the course of their everyday movements and activities, to equip their children to live dependently upon God.

"When our children are ignorant of the past, they will have no hope for the future."⁴

¹Daniel I. Block, "How Many Is God? An Investigation into the Meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4-5," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47:2 (June 2004):211.

²Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 167.

³Miller, p. 107.

⁴Wiersbe, p. 391.

A Japanese girl who studied at an American college enjoyed living in the United States, but one thing she longed to see was the inside of a truly Christian home. She spent her Christmas vacation in the home of one of her Christian classmates, and she had a delightful time. As she was about to leave, the mother said, "How do you like the way we Americans live?" "Oh," said the girl, "I love it! Your home is truly beautiful. Yet, there is one thing I miss." A faraway look came into her eyes as she continued, "I have been with you to your church and have seen you worship there, but I have missed God in your home. In Japan we have a 'god shelf' in every home, so we can worship right in our house. Excuse me, but don't you Americans worship God in your homes?" Her host felt convicted, for there was little to reveal that theirs was a Christian home, not even a time when the family prayed and read the Bible together.

One day in a seminary class, I asked my students to suggest some ways that parents can perpetuate the knowledge of God in their children. A young man proceeded to explain that his wife had grown up in Brazil, where her parents had practiced the custom of writing down evidences of God's faithfulness to their family and putting the paper into a matchbox. At the end of each year they glued that year's matchbox onto others from previous years. While the girl was growing up, she saw her parents construct a little house made out of these matchboxes. When the family ran into trouble, they would often open up one or more of the matchboxes, read the record of God's faithfulness, and be encouraged.

Friends of ours used to keep a special gallon jar on the counter in their kitchen. When God showed His faithfulness in some dramatic way, they wrote what happened on a slip of paper and put it into the jar. Then, when the going got tough, they opened the jar and reminded themselves of how God had been faithful to them in the past.

6:8-9

God gave the command to instruct the children in figurative language. The point is that the Israelites were to meditate on God's words without ceasing. The fact that they sought to fulfill this command literally with Scripture holders, on their

bodies (Heb. *tefillin*, Gr. *phylakterion*, phylacteries) and on their doorframes (Heb. *mezuzot*, mezuzahs), was commendable but misguided.¹ Another view is that the literalness of verse 9 argues for a literal interpretation of verse 8.² The Lord Jesus later condemned the Jews' pride in these physical objects, and their reliance on them to produce godliness (Matt. 23:5), but He did not criticize their use of them.

Observant Jews still often mount little holders on the frames of their front doors, into which they place a small parchment scroll. Exodus 13:1 through 16, Deuteronomy 6:4 through 9 and 11:13 through 21, and the name "Shaddai" appear on these papers, as a visible sign and reminder of their faith. In addition, sometimes Jews place the Decalogue, and/or Exodus 13:1 through 16, and/or Numbers 10:35 and 36 in these holders. W. M. Thomson wrote that the passages written were generally Deuteronomy 6:4 through 9 and 11:13 through 30, in his day (mid-nineteenth century).³ The Jews call the scroll and its holder a *mezuzah* (lit. "doorpost").

"It's much easier to wear a gold cross on our person than to bear Christ's cross in daily life, and to hang Scripture texts on the walls of our homes than to hide God's Word in our hearts. If we love the Lord and cleave to Him, we will want to know His Word and obey it in every area of our lives."⁴

The fact that God commanded the Israelites to "write" anything at all reveals that literacy was widespread in Israel.

"Ancient Hebrew written documents, recovered by archaeology, demonstrate both that there were readers and writers in ancient Israel, and that they were by no means rare. Few places would have been without someone who could write, and

¹See Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, pp. 106-7.

²Mayes, p. 177.

³W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 1:141.

⁴Wiersbe, p. 402.

few Israelites could have been unaware of writing."¹

Israel's kings were later to write their own copy of the Torah, but at this time most kings in the ancient Near East were virtually illiterate.² Thus there seems to have been a higher level of literacy in Israel compared to her neighbor nations.

Exhortation to give Yahweh exclusive recognition, worship, and obedience 6:10-19

"The constant corollary of the demand for loyalty in ancient suzerainty treaties was the prohibition of allegiance to any and all other lords."³

Prosperity (vv. 10-15) and adversity (vv. 16-19) would equally test the Israelites' devotion to Yahweh (cf. Prov. 30:8-9; Phil. 4:11-13).

The danger of prosperity 6:10-15

6:10-11 The Israelite were about to possess cities, houses, cisterns, vineyards, olive trees, and many other things that they had built, planted, or cultivated. They would inherit these things from the Canaanites whom they were to destroy. Occupation with these material blessings would tempt them to forget Yahweh. We face the same temptation today.

6:12-15 So the LORD warned the people not to forget Him and what He had done for them when He redeemed them from Egypt. They were to fear Him alone and not follow the gods of the Canaanites. If they did not follow Him faithfully and wholeheartedly He would destroy them (i.e., put them to death, "wipe you off the face of the earth"). Swearing "by His name" means appealing to Him as one's authority (cf. 5:11; 10:20).

Several years ago a young Frenchman captured the attention of the world by walking a tightrope between the twin towers of New York's World Trade

¹Alan R. Millard, "The Question of Israelite Literacy," *Bible Review* 3:3 (Fall 1987):31. See also Christopher A. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel*.

²Sailhamer, p. 454.

³Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 164.

Center, 1,350 feet above the streets below. A few months later, however, while practicing on a relatively low wire in St. Petersburg, Florida, he fell 30 feet and was injured. As he lay waiting for help, he reportedly beat his fist on the ground saying, "I can't believe it! I can't believe it! I *never* fall!" I don't know what caused his accident, but I would guess that he became careless about his concentration—because he was working at a low level where the risk didn't seem very great. Overconfidence in one's abilities, based on previous successes, is one form of the danger of prosperity.

The danger of adversity 6:16-19

At Massah the Israelites had complained about their lack of water (Exod. 17:1-7). This had tested the LORD's patience with them. They should have simply trusted Him to provide for them as He had promised. The Israelites were now in the position of testing Him again by disobeying what He had told them to do when they entered the land. What He had told them to do was to drive out all their enemies from the land, to destroy the idols, sacred pillars, high places, and shrines, which, by the way, was a rare policy in the history of warfare.¹ Obviously the prospect of going to war and annihilating the Canaanites would have caused the Israelites to balk. So the LORD reminded them to do what He had commanded them to do. If they did, they would indeed take possession of the land. We too need to face adversity boldly, trusting the promises of God.

Exhortation to remember the past 6:20-25

God explained more fully here the teaching of children that He had hinted at previously (v. 7). We can learn from these verses how to maintain and transmit a realistic consciousness of the true God from one generation to the next. Teaching children what God has done in the past is important because it encourages them to trust Him as they face their challenges in life.

This whole chapter deals with the implications of the first commandment in the Decalogue.

"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.

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 171.

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)."¹

Three perils lay before the Israelites that Moses warned them about in this chapter: prosperity, adversity, and parenting.

"The basic *truth* laid down in Deuteronomy is that which is expressed in chapter vi. 23—'And He brought us out from thence, that He might bring us in, to give us the land which He swore [*sic*] unto our fathers.'"²

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 be careful to perpetuate the knowledge of God in the next generation.

3. Examples of the application of the principles chs. 7—11

"These clearly are not laws or commandments as such but primarily series of parenetic homilies [exhortations intended primarily for spiritual edification] in which Moses exhorted the people to certain courses of action in light of the upcoming conquest and occupation of Canaan. Within these sections, however, are specific and explicit injunctions based upon the Decalogue and anticipatory of further elaboration in the large section of detailed stipulations [requirements] that follows (12:1—26:15)."³

The command to destroy the Canaanites and their idolatry ch. 7

This chapter is a logical development of what Moses said in chapters 5 and 6. God had called on His people to acknowledge that He is the only true God and to be completely loyal to Him. In Canaan they would encounter temptations that might divert them from their fidelity (cf. 6:14). Now

¹Ibid., p. 175.

²Baxter, 1:217.

³Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 176.

Moses gave a full explanation of how the Israelites were to deal with these temptations. These instructions amplify the second commandment (5:8-10).

Commands and warnings 7:1-6

7:1 Moses mentioned seven nations that resided in Canaan here (v. 1), but as many as 10 appear in other passages (cf. Gen. 15:19-21; Exod. 34:11; Num. 13:28-29; Judg. 3:5). Perhaps Moses named seven here for rhetorical purposes, seven being a number that indicates completion or fullness.

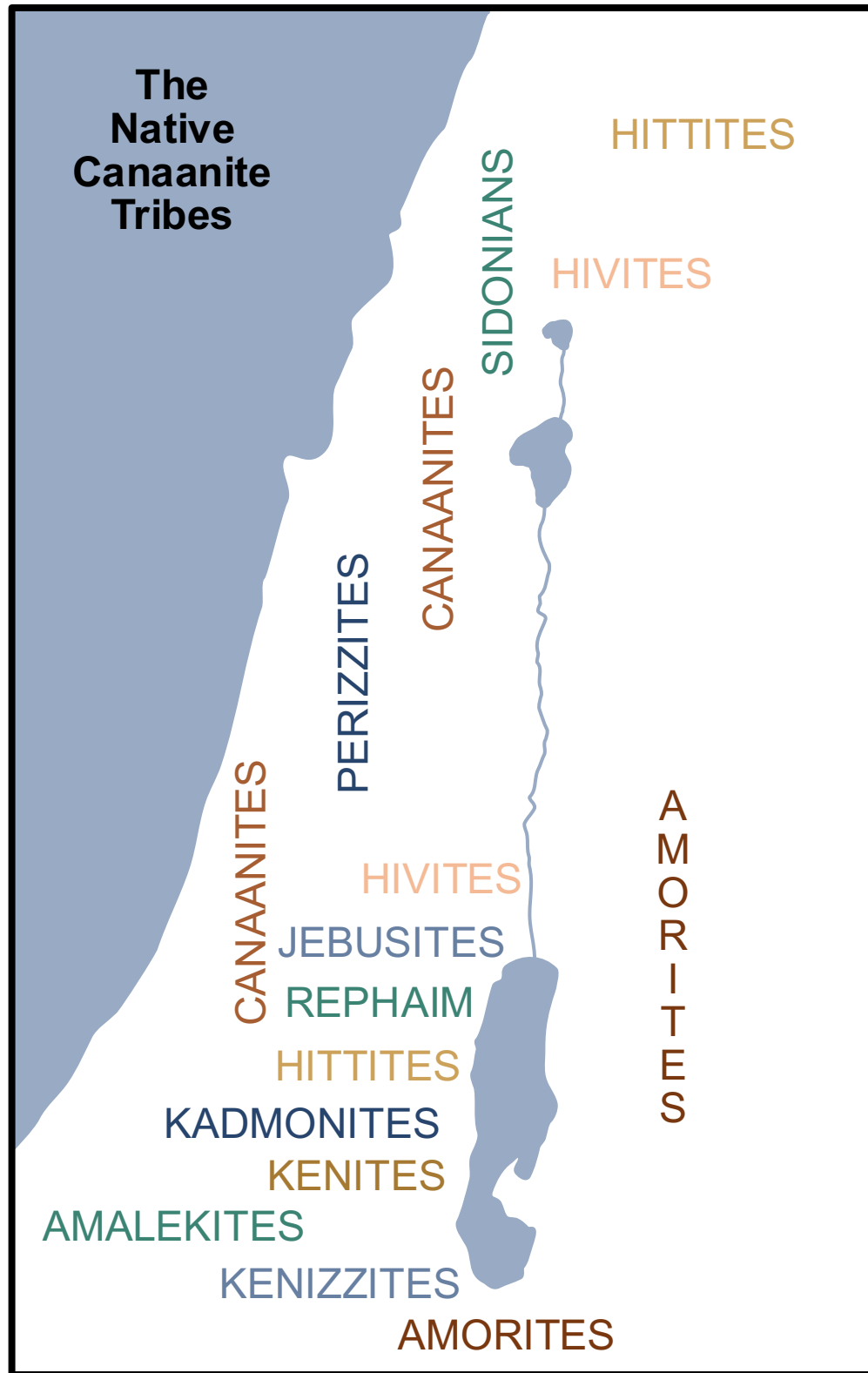
Some Hittites had migrated from Asia Minor (modern Turkey; cf. Gen. 23:10) into Canaan.

"The reference is something of a problem, for the historical Hittite empire of the Late Bronze Age lay considerably north of Palestine. It should be understood either that there were in fact many Hittite migrants into Palestine (enough to justify Gen. 10:15, which lists Heth, from whom the Hittites descended, as a son of Canaan), or that the use of the term came to be very vague, as a result of a loose use of the name of the land of the Hittites to cover an area much more extensive than that to which it properly applied."¹

The origin of the Gergashites is uncertain (cf. Gen. 10:16; 1 Chron. 1:14). The Amorites were native inhabitants who lived mainly in the mountainous areas of Canaan. The Canaanites were native inhabitants who lived mainly on the coastlands and the flatter areas. The Perizzites were native inhabitants who lived in the hill country of Canaan. The Hivites were native inhabitants who lived in the north of Canaan, just south of the Lebanon mountains. And the Jebusites were native inhabitants who lived in and around Jerusalem.²

¹Mayes, pp. 182-83.

²*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 305.



7:2

One reason for God commanding the total extermination of these idolaters was the evil effect their corrupt worship would

have on the Israelites and their relationship with Yahweh (v. 4).¹ They deserved to die, not only for their many vile and violent sins (9:4-5), but also for their persistent hatred of God (v. 10; cf. Gen. 9:25-26; 10:15-18; Exod. 23:23). The Israelites were to make no covenants with these people nor were they to be gracious to them. Likewise Christians today should deal ruthlessly with sin in our lives (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6).

"Thus he [Moses] is not speaking of those Canaanites who actually forsook their idols and followed the Lord [such as Rahab]."²

- 7:3-4 Intermarriage with these enemies would result in the hearts of the Israelites turning away from Yahweh to follow pagan deities. God promised to punish this apostasy with death.
- 7:5 The idolaters' "memorial stones" were their standing stone monuments, examples of which have been found at Gezer and Hazor. These may have originally been phallic symbols used in fertility rites of worship. Sometimes a sacred pillar (Heb. *massebah*) marked a place where a supposedly supernatural event occurred (e.g., Gen. 35:14). Later the Hebrew term refers to a legitimate element of cultic apparatus in Israel's worship (e.g., Hos. 3:4). Hezekiah condemned the sacred pillars (2 Kings 18:4), and they are usually listed among the unacceptable objects involved in Israel's worship (e.g., 12:3; 16:22; Exod. 23:24; 34:13; Lev. 26:1; et al.).³ "Asherim" is the masculine plural form of the feminine singular "Asherah." It may have been a carved wooden image of the goddess Asherah, rather than simply an upright wooden pole.⁴
- 7:6 Israel was to be different from other nations (i.e., "holy") because God had chosen to bless her by being a people for His own special possession.

¹See Tremper Longman III, "The Divine Warrior: The New Testament Use of an Old Testament Motif," *Westminster Theological Journal* 44 (Fall 1982):290-307.

²Sailhamer, p. 440.

³Mayes, p. 184.

⁴Ibid.

Israel's election and its implications 7:7-11

7:7-8 Israel's election was not due to anything in her that merited God's favor but only to God's free choice to bless whom He would bless (Num. 22:6; cf. Gen. 12:3; Num. 23:30; Rom. 9).

"Israel had a priestly tribe, the tribe of Levi, but the nation as a whole was also to be a priesthood. The historical function of a priest was to represent man to God. The tribe of Levi represented Israel before God; and the nation Israel was to represent the Gentile nations before God."¹

God's promises to the Israelites' forefathers, and His deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, were demonstrations of the love that lay behind God's election of them. His motive of love comes through clearly in these verses. The reason for this love was not that its recipients were attractive or great in number or power, but that its Giver is a loving Person.

7:9-11 "Upon God's faithfulness rests our whole hope of future blessedness. Only as He is faithful will His covenants stand and His promises be honored. Only as we have complete assurance that He is faithful may we live in peace and look forward with assurance to the life to come."²

"God's people don't live on explanations; they live on promises."³

Blessings for obedience 7:12-16

7:12 Obedience would bring blessing to the Israelites. The "covenant" that Yahweh promised to keep with the Israelites, if they obeyed Him, was the suzerainty Mosaic Covenant (cf. Exod. 19:5). In suzerainty covenants both partners in the covenant had responsibilities to keep. If one partner failed to keep his part of the covenant, the covenant was broken. Here

¹Fruchtenbaum, p. 115.

²Tozer, p. 87.

³Wiersbe, p. 393.

Yahweh promised to keep His part of the covenant if the Israelites would keep theirs.

- 7:13 Furthermore, if the Israelites would obey Him, He would love them and bless them and make them numerous and prosperous. Grain, wine, and oil represent the three principal food products of Canaan.¹

Here it sounds like God would only love them if they obeyed Him, but He had already chosen to love them (vv. 7-8). He would love them even more if they were obedient (cf. John 14:21). Similarly, good parents love all their children, but the child who is obedient to the parent draws out even more affection from the parent.

- 7:14-16 God promised to bless His obedient people "above all peoples." He would make the fertile and healthy, and He would make their enemies sick. He would make them "consume" their enemies, if they thoroughly destroyed them and did not serve their gods.

Promises to encourage obedience 7:17-26

- 7:17-19 The Israelites would be able to obtain encouragement in battle by remembering God's past mighty works in the Exodus.
- 7:20-21 Probably the reference to "the hornet" should be taken figuratively (cf. Exod. 23:28; Josh. 24:12). Being pursued by a hornet is a vivid image of trying to escape a painful fate. In contrast to being pursued by a hornet, Israel should not be afraid, because Yahweh promised to be in His people's midst.
- 7:22 God told the Israelites He would drive out the Canaanites gradually. He would not allow them to destroy the Canaanites totally until they had grown large enough, numerically, to care for the land adequately (cf. Exod. 23:27-33). This gradual extermination would be hard for the Israelites, in that the temptations to idolatry would continue to abound on every hand. Nevertheless, it would be better for them than the

¹S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, p. 103.

sudden annihilation of their enemies, because in that case the land would become wild and unmanageable.

7:23-24 The LORD promised to fight for His people and to keep them safe until they had destroyed their enemies.

7:25-26 The Israelites were not to take the gold and silver from the Canaanite idols for themselves, as tempting as this would be. The whole idol was under "the ban" (Heb. *herem*), and they were to destroy it.

"... all that truly love God hate what he hates."¹

Believers should not make defiling alliances with unbelievers who are pursuing lives of rebellion against God, but should oppose their actions (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Warnings against pride and forgetfulness of God ch. 8

"Two important lessons from the past are now referred to. First, the experience of God's care in the wilderness period, when the people of Israel were unable to help themselves, taught them the lesson of humility through the Lord's providential discipline. The memory of that experience should keep them from pride in their own achievements amid the security and prosperity of the new land (8:1-20)."²

The Israelites were not only in danger of compromising with the Canaanites (ch. 7), but they were also in danger of becoming too self-reliant when they entered the land (ch. 8). Note the two double themes, of remembering and forgetting, and the wilderness and the Promised Land, in this chapter. They lead to the warning in verses 19 and 20. Four times in chapters 8 and 9 Moses commanded the Israelites to remember (8:2, 18; 9:7, 27), and four times he warned them not to forget (8:11, 14, 19; 9:7).

8:1-6 God humbled the Israelites, in the sense that He sought to teach them to depend on Himself for all their needs. Feeling totally dependent on God reflects true humility. God's supernatural provision of manna to eat, and clothing to wear,

¹Henry, p. 183.

²Thompson, p. 134.

should have taught the people that they were completely dependent on His provision for all their needs—not just food and clothing.

"Imagine having a suit of clothes that would not wear out. I know the ladies would not like this at all. Year after year the wife could tell her hubby that she needed a new dress, and year after year the husband could say that the one she was wearing looked brand new. I tell you, after that went on for forty years, the women would be pretty far behind in the styles. However in the wilderness the styles didn't change; so it really didn't make any difference. Seriously, this is marvelous; it is a miracle."¹

"I have been told by a medical missionary that one of the causes of foot-swelling in the orient is an improper diet. It is interesting that the manna had all the vitamins they needed to keep their feet from swelling as they journeyed through the wilderness."²

"Life is a school (Ps. 90:12) and we often don't know what the lesson was until we failed the examination!"³

"The devil tempts us to bring out the worst in us, but God tests us to bring out the best in us."⁴

What comes out of God's mouth (v. 3) does not refer to the spoken revelations of God exclusively, but, more comprehensively, to all that comes from God to man.⁵

¹McGee, 1:555.

²Ibid., 1:254.

³Wiersbe, p. 395.

⁴Ibid.

⁵See Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p. 72; Raymond Van Leeuwen, "What Comes out of God's Mouth: Theological Wordplay in Deuteronomy 8," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (January 1985):53-57; Miller, p. 116.

"The third means of divine self-disclosure in the context of the Deuteronomic covenant [in addition to historical event and theophany] was by word. It is important to note, however, that in the ancient Near East and in the Old Testament there is no essential distinction between act and word, for the act is produced by the word and the word is never without effective purpose. It is dynamic, entelic [actual], purposeful, creative, powerful (cf. Gen. 1:3, etc.). It does not exist (as in Greek philosophy, for example) as a theoretical or neutral abstraction. In terms of revelation, and especially in Deuteronomy, it is necessary to see the powerful word as a covenant instrument; the word of the Sovereign commands and communicates, but it also effects, empowers, and creates."¹

The contrast intended is not just between physical bread and the special revelation of God in Scripture. It is, more generally, between what man provides for himself and what God provides for him. God was warning the Israelites against excessive self-reliance (cf. Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4).

"Just as the Genesis narratives used God's act of providing clothing for Adam and Eve to demonstrate his care for humankind after they were cast out of the Garden (Ge 3:21), so God's care for Israel in the wilderness is pictured here in his providing for their clothing (Dt 8:4). Moreover, the same picture of God as a loving father, which permeates the early chapters of Genesis ... is recalled again here: 'As a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you' (Dt 8:5; cf. 32:6)."²

8:7-10 God gave His people concrete examples of what He meant by Canaan being a "good land." It contained plenty of water and

¹Merrill, "A Theology ...," p. 64.

²Sailhamer, p. 441.

fertile soil that would yield bountiful crops. And it was rich in natural resources. It would satisfy their needs.

The list of good products that awaited the Israelites in the Promised Land (v. 8) has led some enterprising Americans to produce and sell the "Bible Bar." This is a snack-bar made from the ingredients listed in this verse, which is available for purchase in some grocery and convenience stores.

"It was [Nelson] Glueck who actually found the evidence of copper in the region to the south of the Dead Sea, which showed the accuracy of this statement in Deuteronomy [v. 9: "out of whose hills you can dig copper"]."¹

8:11-17 "The proper response to plenty is thanksgiving and worship. It is Jewish custom to pray after certain festive meals because of the phrase ['']when you have eaten and are full [v. 12].['']"²

When the people had settled in the land, and were experiencing God's blessing of material wealth, they would face the temptation to think they were responsible for it—rather than God. The prevention of this spiritual delusion—in that future time of blessing—would be to remember what God had taught them in the past. It had been He, not themselves, who had been responsible for their prosperity.³

"The Word of God was given so that we might better know the God of the Word."⁴

8:18-20 "'To remember' [v. 18] means literally to remember the body, to bring the separated parts of the community of truth back together, to reunite

¹ Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, p. 122.

² *The Nelson ...*, p. 307. See also Wiersbe, p. 397.

³ See Eugene H. Merrill, "Remembering: A Central Theme in Biblical Worship," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:1 (March 2000):27-36.

⁴ Wiersbe, p. 457.

the whole. The opposite of re-member is not forget, but dis-member."¹

As God's people today move toward the realization of the inheritance that He has promised us, we need to remember His faithful provision in the past. If we do not remember, we may turn aside and stop following Him faithfully in the present. Failure to remember, and follow faithfully in the present, will also result in God's disciplinary punishment in the future (cf. 1 Cor. 3:12-15).

"Always remember to forget
The troubles that passed your way,
But never forget to remember
The blessings that come each day."²

This chapter has great application value for Christians, especially those who enjoy material prosperity. God clearly revealed the essence of pride and humility here, as well as the way to maintain a realistic outlook on material blessings. God wanted Israel to learn that material blessings are basically not rewards for godliness but sovereignly given gifts of grace from her loving LORD. They were tools with which to serve Him.

There are basically two reasons that, or conditions in which, God blesses people: One is that God sovereignly chooses to bestow a blessing on a particular person or group or nation, and not on another (cf. Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:13). The other condition is that when a person chooses to walk in God's will, be he or she a believer or a non-believer, that person will enjoy more of God's blessing than the person who chooses not to walk in God's will.

Warnings against self-righteousness and rebelliousness 9:1—10:11

"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

¹A. J. Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, p. 61.

²Anonymous.

(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."¹

This pericope contains a second important lesson from the past—the first being the lesson of humility through the LORD's providential (involving His timely foresight and intervention) discipline:

"Secondly, any success they might enjoy in the coming conquest was not to be interpreted as a mark of divine approval for their own righteousness (9:1-6). In fact, both in the incident of the golden calf (9:7-21) and in a number of other incidents (9:22, 23), Israel had proved herself stubborn and rebellious. She was delivered only after the intercession of Moses (9:24-29). Past experience should remind the people that they needed discipline for their rebellious ways. Yet through all their recalcitrance [their stubbornly uncooperative attitude] Yahweh remained faithful, even to the extent of granting them two more tables of stone when the first ones were broken (10:1-11; cf. Ex. 32:19; 34:1-4). All the experiences of the past would underline the fact that Israel was dependent on Yahweh for divine care, provision, protection, and forgiveness. To forget these facts was to display base ingratitude and self-deifying pride."²

"Besides the more vulgar pride which entirely forgets God, and attributes success and prosperity to its own power and exertion, there is one of a more refined character, which very easily spreads—namely, pride which acknowledges the blessings of God; but instead of receiving them gratefully, as unmerited gifts of the grace of the Lord, sees in them nothing but proofs of its own righteousness and virtue. Moses therefore warned the Israelites more particularly of this dangerous enemy of the soul, by first of all declaring without reserve, that the Lord was not about to give them Canaan because of their own righteousness, but that He would exterminate the Canaanites for their own wickedness (vers. 1-6); and then showing them for their humiliation, by proofs drawn from the immediate past, how they had brought upon

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 189.

²Thompson, p. 134.

themselves the anger of the Lord, by their apostasy and rebellion against their God, directly after the conclusion of the covenant at Sinai; and that in such a way, that it was only by his earnest intercession that he had been able to prevent the destruction of the people (vers. 7-24), and to secure a further renewal of the pledges of the covenant (ver. 25—chap. x. 11)."¹

The key to Israel's victories 9:1-3

These verses form something of a preamble to what follows. The Israelites were not literally crossing the Jordan "today." Moses used "today" in the sense of: in the very near future. Neither were the cities literally "fortified to heaven." But the Anakim were literally "great and tall." (2:21; Num. 13:33). Moses used the figure of a forest fire sweeping through Canaan to describe how Yahweh would go before the Israelites in their conquest of the land.

The charge of Israel's self-righteousness and rebelliousness 9:4-6

9:4-5 Moses explained the reasons God was giving Canaan to the Israelites. In addition to God's promises to the patriarchs (v. 5), God was using Israel as a broom to sweep away the spiritually and morally filthy Canaanites. Israel was to be His instrument of judgment. The people of God should not conclude that their righteousness was what merited God's blessing: victory over the Canaanites. Their righteousness was not essentially superior to that of the Canaanites. God's choice rested on His purposes in electing Israel (cf. Eph. 1:4).

9:6 Essentially the Israelites were a stubborn people, unresponsive to God's will—as the Canaanites had been. The word "stubborn" ("stiffnecked" AV) pictures unwillingness to submit to the yoke of God's sovereign authority (cf. Exod. 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9; Isa. 48:4). God's choice to bless the Israelites was not due to their righteousness.

Self-righteousness became a besetting sin of the Israelites. The only way Christians can avoid it is to remember our own

¹Keil and Delitzsch, 3:334-35.

sinfulness. God has chosen Christians, not because of our righteousness, but in spite of our sinfulness.

The proof of Israel's self-righteousness and rebelliousness 9:7-24

Again Moses called on the Israelites to remember their past (cf. 4:10; 5:15; 7:18; 8:2). Moses provided ample evidence of Israel's stubbornness in these verses.

9:7 From the time Israel had left Egypt until the present day the people had been rebellious against the LORD.

9:8-21 Moses gave their rebellion at Horeb extended attention in this address because it was it was one of their most serious offenses. The people followed the reception of God's greatest blessing, the revelation of Himself and His will, with immediate apostasy.

"The very finger of God [v. 10]. This is a double figure of speech (1) in which God is ascribed human features (anthropomorphism) and (2) in which a part stands for the whole (synecdoche). That is, God, as Spirit, has no literal finger nor, if he had, would he write with his finger. Rather, the sense is that God himself—not Moses in any way—was responsible for the composition of the Ten Commandments (cf. Exod 31:18; 32:16; 34:1)."¹

"To 'blot out the name' [v. 14] is, in the context of covenant disloyalty, tantamount to the Lord's termination of his relationship with his people."²

Moses fasted for 40 days and nights following the Golden Calf incident, neither eating bread nor drinking water (v. 18), which reflects his total dependence on God—and God's supernatural preservation of him.

9:22-23 Moses also reminded the Israelites of their failures at Taberah, Massah, Kibroth-hattaavah, and Kadesh. He did not name

¹ *The NET2 Bible* note on 9:10.

² Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 193. Cf. Thompson, p. 140.

these incidents in chronological order but in the order of their importance, proceeding from the lesser to the greater offenses. This presentation should have had great rhetorical and persuasive impact on Moses' original audience—and it should have the same effect on us.

- 9:24 Moses also referred to God's faithfulness to His people in spite of their failures, that further demonstrated how wicked these sins really were. This verse concludes and restates verse 7, like a closing bracket around Moses' record of Israel's apostasies.

"It is good for us often to remember against ourselves, with sorrow and shame, our former sins, and to review the records conscience keeps of them, that we may see how much we are indebted to free grace, and may humbly own that we never merited at God's hand any thing but wrath and the curse."¹

Moses' intercession for the people 9:25-29

Moses returned, in these verses, to the rebellion at Sinai, to further illustrate how Israel had no basis for boasting of her own righteousness before God. God had preserved Israel only because of His mercy and covenant faithfulness in response to Moses' intercession.

The renewal of the covenant 10:1-5

God renewed the broken covenant with Israel because of Moses' intercession, not because Israel deserved it. Moses made the ark (v. 3) in the sense that he directed Bezalel to make it (cf. Exod. 25:10; 37:1). "Ark" was a common English word for box, chest, or basket in seventeenth-century England, and most modern English translations still use this old word. "Acacia" (Heb. *shittim*) wood was "a hard, durable, orange brown wood, still common in desert regions of Palestine."²

Other evidences of God's grace 10:6-11

- 10:6-7 Other evidences of God's grace were His appointment of another high priest when Aaron died (i.e., Eleazar his son, v. 6), and His provision of water in the wilderness (v. 7). Moserah

¹Henry, p. 184.

²Mayes, p. 204.

(v. 6; Num. 33:31) may be another name for Mt. Hor (Num. 33:38), or the district in which Mt. Hor stood. Or Moserah might not be a place name at all, but a common noun (Heb. *mosera*, meaning "chastisement"), indicating the reason for Aaron's death rather than the site.¹ Another possibility is that the order Beeroth Benejaakan to Moserah, in verse 6, may refer to a second visit to these sites, whereas the order Moserah ... Bene-jaaken, in Numbers 33:31, may refer to a first visit.²

10:8-9 God also set apart the tribe of Levi as the priests' assistants, even though the nation had failed in its calling as a kingdom of priests. The Levites were to carry the ark of the covenant and the tabernacle (vv. 8-9). Again, the order of events here is logical rather than chronological.

10:10-11 In spite of Israel's apostasy at Mt. Sinai, Yahweh continued to allow Moses to receive His instructions concerning how the Israelites could have fellowship with Himself. And He gave His permission for the nation to continue its journey to the Promised Land.

Excessive self-reliance (ch. 8) and self-importance (9:1—10:11) would erode Israel's proper concept of God. That is, the people would regard God as less than He was. This was a violation of the third commandment (5:11), which aims at keeping man's view of God's reputation (name) consistent with His character.

An admonition to fear and love God 10:12-22

Having recited what God had done for the Israelites, Moses now called on them to respond and make a commitment to Him.

"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

¹See R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 511.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 149.

binds the whole together is v. 17, a confession of the sovereignty of God and of his justice."¹

10:12-13 In view of His past grace to His people, what did God require from them? Moses summarized Israel's responsibility: They were to fear the LORD, walk in all His ways, love Him, serve Him with all their heart and with all their soul, and keep the LORD's commandments and His statutes. Note the verbs: fear, walk, love, serve, and keep.² God expected total allegiance to Himself and obedience to His covenant.

"They were to fear Him, that is reverence; to walk in His ways, that is obedience; to love Him, that is worship; to serve Him, that is co-operation; to keep His commandments, that is fidelity."³

"The Book of Deuteronomy is one long, varied plea for hearty obedience to God, based on the two grand motives of love and godly fear."⁴

"These are the central ideas not only of Deuteronomy but of the whole Pentateuch in its final shape."⁵

"Not everybody listening gets the message the first time [cf. 8:6], and some who do might forget it."⁶

The "fear" of the LORD includes the response that springs from one's knowledge of his personal sinfulness, as he realizes that he stands before a holy God.

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 201.

²See James W. Knox, "What Does Yahweh Ask of You: The Five Infinitives of Deuteronomy 10:12-13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 180:717 (January-March 2023):38-53.

³Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 81.

⁴Newell, pp. 244-45.

⁵Sailhamer, p. 444.

⁶Wiersbe, p. 399.

"Reverence, obedience, total commitment are the ingredients of the fear of the Lord."¹

10:14-19 The rationale behind this response was that, as God had demonstrated love for her, so Israel was to demonstrate love for God (vv. 14-15). The phrase "highest heavens" (v. 14) is a Hebrew idiom indicating the totality of heaven; it does not mean that there are multiple levels of heaven.²

"Above all, therefore, they were to circumcise the foreskin of their hearts [v. 16], i.e., to lay aside all insensibility of heart to impressions from the love of God (cf. Lev. xxvi. 41; and on the spiritual signification of circumcision, see vol. i. p. 227), and not stiffen their necks any more [v. 16], i.e., not persist in their obstinacy, or obstinate resistance to God (cf. chap. ix. 6, 13). Without circumcision of heart, true fear of God and true love of God are both impossible. As a reason for this admonition, Moses adduces in vers. 17 sqq. the nature and acts of God."³

"God chose Israel to be an elect nation, not true of any other nation in this world. However, national election does not guarantee the salvation of every individual member of that nation. Individual salvation is based on individual election on God's part and faith on man's part. In verse 16, individual members of the elect nation are encouraged to 'circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart.' Whereas circumcision of the flesh is a sign of one's membership in the elect nation, circumcision of the heart is a sign of individual election."⁴

¹Miller, p. 107.

²Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 204; Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 203.

³Keil and Delitzsch, 3:344.

⁴Fruchtenbaum, p. 115.

10:20-22 "... Moses emphasized a vital relationship with God as fundamental to all other issues in life. Second to this was a genuine love relationship with fellow-man."¹

"... cleave' ['cling,' v. 20] ... is synonymous with love (cf. Gen. 34:3; 1 Kg. 11:2) or devotion to a leader (2 Sam. 20:2). In the Pentateuch it is only Deuteronomy which uses the word in connection with the relationship of God and Israel (cf. also 11:22; 13:4; 30:20, and ... in Jos. [Joshua] 22:5; 23:8)."²

The consequences of obedience and disobedience ch. 11

The section of Deuteronomy, which deals with general stipulations of the covenant, ends as it began (in 5:1-5), with an exhortation to covenant loyalty (cf. 4:32-40).

"This chapter is to be understood as a re-emphasis of these principles [that were to govern Israel's life] before the detailed laws of the so-called Deuteronomic Code (12:1—26:19) are presented."³

11:1-7 In these verses Moses developed the requirement of love for God more fully. God's acts toward Israel had been for their discipline (or instruction, v. 2), not just punishment. What Moses was saying was not just for future generations of Israelites to benefit from, he told them, but for the present generation in particular (vv. 3-7).

11:8-9 Since the present generation had witnessed all the great things that God had done for them, they had a responsibility to keep all of the commandments that God had given them. If they did, they would live long in the Promised Land.

11:10-12 The force of the comparison of Egypt with Canaan in these verses is that irrigation was absolutely necessary in Egypt. But

¹Schultz, p. 48. Cf. Matt. 22:37-39.

²Mayes, p. 211.

³Thompson, p. 151.

in Canaan the people would not need it, because God would send rain from heaven on that land. Most farmers would actually have preferred the rich topsoil of the Nile delta region to land that depended on rain, which might or might not come. Perhaps Moses was comparing Egypt, disdainfully, to a small, green vegetable garden, irrigated by dirty water, with the extensive farmlands of Canaan that God watered with clean rain.¹

"watered it with your foot [v. 10]: the significance of this is not entirely clear. It is sometimes taken as an allusion to the irrigation channels which are hollowed out by foot in soft earth, or to a way of regulating by foot the flow of water in such irrigation channels, or to a water wheel turned by the foot, or even as a metaphorical allusion to physical labour."²

11:13-15 Moses held out the blessings for obeying God as an additional motivation for the Israelites. God would send rain on the land (v. 14a) that would result in agricultural productivity (vv. 14b-15).

"I do not understand why people think that if things come easily, they have done it; if things come with difficulty, then God must be in it."³

"The early and late rain" (v. 14) refers to the rains that marked the beginning and end of the rainy season, which was usually between October-November and March-April.⁴

11:16-17 The punishment for disobedience would be that God would withhold the rain, the ground would not produce, and the people would quickly perish.

¹L. Eslinger, "Watering Egypt (Deuteronomy XI 10-11)," *Vetus Testamentum* 37:1 (January 1987):85-90.

²Mayes, p. 214.

³McGee, 1:562.

⁴Mayes, p. 215.

- 11:18-21 Therefore the Israelites should keep God's commandments constantly before them. Moses pictured this as having them tied on their hands and strapped on their foreheads (cf. 6:8). They should teach them to their children and discuss them throughout the day (cf. 4:9). They should remind themselves of them when they departed from their houses and when they entered them (cf. 6:9). The expected result would be obedience, which would then lead to long life in the land.

"The first priority is ... given to Scripture as the means of teaching the greatness and grace of God [to the next generation, vv. 18-19]."¹

- 11:22-25 God would then also drive out all the Canaanites and give Israel all the land that He had promised Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:18).

"... the foot [v. 24] is a symbol of power, so that for example, to put under foot means to subjugate (cf. Ps. 110:1), while to walk over an area of land is the act of taking possession of that land ..."²

- 11:26-28 These verses are a concluding summary. The decision Israel faced, about following or not following the LORD wholeheartedly, would result in either a blessing or a curse.

"One of the most frequently used words in Deuteronomy is 'today.' It occurs almost a hundred times, most frequently in the phrase 'the commandment that I am commanding you today.' This usage is of great significance for the theological understanding of the book. Basically it is used to indicate the crucial nature of the moment at which the covenant at Horeb is established and the people are summoned to obedience."³

¹Sailhamer, p. 445.

²Mayes, pp. 216-17. See Richard D. Patterson, "The Biblical Imagery of Feet as a Vehicle for Truth," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:649 (January-March 2006):35.

³Whybray, p. 95. Cf. Isa. 49:8; 2 Cor. 6:2.

11:29-31 God commanded that, when the Israelites entered the land, they should assemble beside the oaks of Moreh near Shechem, where Abraham had received the promise of the land (Gen. 12:6-7). "Gilgal" may have been another name for Shechem, or a town close to Shechem. This is probably not the same Gilgal that stood near Jericho. Shechem was near the geographic center of Canaan. There the people were to recite the blessings and curses—from the two mountains on either side of the site (i.e., Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal; cf. chs. 27—28; Josh. 8:33; 24:1-28). This ceremony would repeat and reinforce the instructions that Moses gave here in Deuteronomy after Israel had entered the land.

"... it is usually supposed that the background to the association of these two mountains with blessing and curse is a covenant ceremony near Shechem in the valley between Gerizim and Ebal. Gerizim is chosen as the mountain of blessing because, lying on the south and therefore the right-hand side [when facing east] ..., it was the place of good fortune; Ebal, on the other hand, lay on the north, the left-hand side and so is associated with misfortune. This explanation should be complemented with that of Bülow, *Z[eitschrift des] D[deutschen] P[alästina-] V[ereins]* 73, 1957, 105ff. ..., who points out that because of their different geological structures Ebal and Gerizim present starkly different appearances: the latter being fruitful and the former bare and barren. This would have been ascribed to the action of Yahweh: fruitfulness being the result of blessing, and sterility the result of his judgment and curse; so the curse is associated with Ebal and the blessing with Gerizim."¹

11:32 This first part of Moses' second address concludes with an exhortation to obey God's covenant.

¹Mayes, p. 218.

Peter Craigie pointed out the chiastic structure of the major blessing and curse references in Deuteronomy as follows:

- A The blessing and curse in the present covenant renewal (11:26-28)
- B The blessing and curse in the future covenant renewal (11:29-32)
- C The specific legislation (12:1—26:19)
- B' The blessing and curse in the future covenant renewal (27:1-26)
- A' The blessing and curse in the present covenant renewal (28:1—29:1).¹

This arrangement stresses the consequences of obedience and disobedience in the present and in the future.

In this part of his speech to the Israelites, Moses explained and emphasized the essence of the Law. His words expounded the meaning of the first three commandments in the Decalogue. Moses urged Israel to be absolutely faithful to God. Because He had loved His people, they should love Him in return.

B. AN EXPOSITION OF SELECTED COVENANT LAWS CHS. 12—25

Moses' continuing homiletical exposition (preached explanation) of the Law of Israel, which follows in chapters 12 through 25, explains reasons for the covenant laws that grew out of and were related to the Ten Commandments. God gave the Israelites specific laws that would help them keep the Ten Commandments. This address concludes with directions for celebrating and confirming the covenant anew (26:1-15).

These chapters contain a mixture of laws previously revealed to the Israelites and other laws not previously revealed in the code given at Sinai: the so-called Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:1—23:19). This is instruction preached, rather than instruction codified as comprehensive legislation. Many of these laws involved situations that were unique to the Israelites'

¹Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 212. A chiasmus is a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form, often to highlight the central element in the chiasm.

culture. For example, when the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they were to destroy all the pagan places and objects of worship. This is not something that Christians are commanded to do. But Christians can learn from this command that we need to guard ourselves against having other gods than Yahweh.

"The specific laws in this section were given to help the people subordinate every area of their lives to the LORD, and to help them eradicate whatever might threaten that pure devotion."¹

There is an obvious general movement from laws dealing with Israel's religious life (12:1—16:17), to those affecting her civil life (16:18—22:8), and then, finally, to those touching personal life (22:9—26:15).

Two insightful writers suggested the following outlines for these chapters.² Though their understanding of the scope of each sections varies, the general progression of the material is clear.

Commandment	Merrill	Kaufman	Description
1	12:1-31	ch. 12	Fidelity
2	12:32—13:18	ch. 12	Worship
3	14:1-21	13:1—14:27	Name of God
4	14:22—16:17	14:28—16:17	Sabbath
5	16:18—18:22	16:18—18:22	Authority
6	19:1—22:8	19:1—22:8	Murder
7	22:9—23:18	22:9—23:19	Adultery
8	23:19—24:7	23:20—24:7	Theft

¹Deere, p. 283.

²Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 218-331; and Stephen A. Kaufman, "The Structure of the Deuteronomic Law," *MAARAV* 1 (1978-79):105-58.

9	24:8—25:4	24:8—25:4	False witness
10	25:5-19	25:5-16	Coveting

"... the entire second discourse of Moses (Deut. 5—26) is a single literary unit that convincingly demonstrates that the moral law informs the statutes, judgments ... and commands of God."¹

In contrast with the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:1—23:19), the Deuteronomic Code, as some scholars prefer to call this section (chs. 12—26), is a popular exposition rather than a formal legal code, as has been said. Its purpose was to explain, to the generation entering the land, all the laws that needed clarification, emphasis, and application, in view of Israel's imminent entrance into Canaan. These laws reflect a centralized, monarchical society, Yahweh being the Monarch.

The value of this section of Scripture to the Christian today lies primarily in its revelation of the heart, mind, and will of God. The modern student of these chapters should look for this kind of insight in these chapters. This is the revelatory value of the Law.

1. Laws arising from the first commandment 12:1-31

The first commandment is: "You shall have no other gods besides Me" (5:7). The legislation that follows deals with worshipping Yahweh exclusively.

The central sanctuary 12:1-14

"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."²

¹Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, p. 129.

²Miller, p. 129.

12:1 This verse is an introduction to all the laws that follow through 25:16.

12:2-3 When Israel entered the land, the people were to destroy all the places and objects used in pagan worship by the Canaanites. They were to leave no references to them, by obliterating the names of the pagan gods. Pagan peoples generally have believed that worshipping on elevated sites brings them into closer contact with their gods than is the case when they worship in low-lying places, unless those places had been the sites of supernatural events. The Canaanites typically visualized their gods as being above them.

"'Places' (*hammeqomot*) is a quasi-technical term referring to sites thought to be holy because of a special visitation by deity. These were usually in groves of trees (representing fertility) and on high hills, esteemed by the very height to be in closer proximity to the gods. In contrast to such 'places' would be the 'place' where the Lord must be worshipped. Seven times (vv. 5, 11, 13, 14, 18, 21, 26) this single place (*maqom*) is mentioned in this passage in which the exclusiveness of the Lord is emphasized."¹

"The contrast with Canaanite worship, with its multitude of temples and open-air shrines (v. 2), is enormous. It is a very common pattern for conquerors and invaders of a country to take over old shrines for their own forms of worship ..."²

12:4-7 Rather than converting pagan worship sites into places where they would worship Yahweh, the Israelites were to worship Him only at the place that Yahweh would choose for them.

The tabernacle was to be the place of Israel's public worship, because God's "name" was there. That is, God manifested His immediate presence there, as nowhere else in Israel. Whenever

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 220.

²David F. Payne, *Deuteronomy*, p. 79.

the Israelites came to the tabernacle (or the temple later), they were coming to God. The Israelites erected the tabernacle first in the land at Gilgal (Josh. 4:19; 5:10; 9:6; et al.).¹

"The centralization requirement must also be understood in terms of Deuteronomy's nature as a suzerainty treaty. Such treaties prohibited the vassal's engaging in any independent diplomacy with a foreign power other than the covenant suzerain. In particular, the vassal must not pay tribute to any other lord. Similarly, all the requirements and prohibitions of Deuteronomy 12 were calculated to secure for the Lord all Israel's tributary sacrifice and offering. Israel must not pay any sacrificial tribute to other gods, for such an impossible attempt to serve two masters would be rebellion against the great commandment of God's covenant."²

12:8-9 The contrast in view here is between the unsettled lifestyle of the Israelites in the wilderness and their settled lifestyle in the Promised Land. Everyone was "doing what is [was] right in his own eyes" does not mean that the Israelites were doing what they wanted to do in contrast to what the LORD wanted them to do, as this clause does mean in Judges 17:6 and 21:25. It means that what was permissible during their itinerant manner of life would not be allowable when they settled in the land.³ Their worship center, the tabernacle, had moved from place to place during the wilderness sojourn, but when Israel settled in the land it would remain at one place, the place that Yahweh would choose.

Moses described the Promised Land as "the resting place and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you" (v. 9).

"Yet there was more to this 'rest' than geography.
Rest was where the presence of God stopped (in

¹See Daniel I. Block, "The Joy of Worship: The Mosaic Invitation to the Presence of God (Deut. 12:1-14)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:646 (April-June 2005):131-49.

²Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 171.

³Thompson, p. 168. See also Craigie, p. 218.

the wilderness wanderings—Num. 10:33) or where He dwelt (1 Chron. 28:2; Ps. 132:8, 14; Isa. 66:1). No doubt it was for this reason that David stressed the aspect of belief and trust as the basis of entering into that rest in Psalm 95:11. The condition was not an automatic one."¹

"Rest was no blank check in which future generations could slide by God's standards on their fathers' laurels. This promise was to be theirs only if they would appropriate it by faith—that was the spiritual and immediate benefit of 'rest.'"²

The "inheritance" in view is the land (cf. v. 12; Num. 26:53).

- 12:10-12 Israel was only to worship Yahweh at the one central sanctuary that He would appoint, first using the tabernacle, and later the temple.

"The religion of the Old Testament shares with every other the belief that the deity reveals himself at particular places and that, therefore, worship is not to be offered at any spot which may happen to be convenient, but only at these sites in particular."³

"The emphasis is not upon *one* place so much as it is upon the place *the Lord chooses*. ... The central activity of Israel's life, the worship of the Lord, is fully shaped and determined by the Lord."⁴

- 12:13-14 These verses summarize and restate the command to worship Yahweh in the land only at the place that He would appoint.

This restriction on the place of worship distinguished Yahweh worship from Canaanite worship, that was polytheistic and

¹Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, p. 128.

²Ibid., p. 130.

³Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:102.

⁴Miller, pp. 131-32.

pantheistic. Later in Israel's history the people broke this law and worshipped God at various "high places." The high places were sites of pagan worship, or places modeled after them (1 Kings 14:23; 15:14; 22:43; et al.).

This law governed public worship. Israelites could, of course, pray to God and praise Him anywhere.

"Believers do not meet in one *place* to worship God today; we meet around One *Person* and that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ [cf. John 4:21-24]."¹

Regulations concerning blood 12:15-28

- 12:15-16 God explained that, in the Promised Land, the Israelites could slaughter and eat clean animals in their hometowns ("within any of your gates," vv. 15, 17, 18; i.e., "in all your villages," NET2), as long as they drained the blood out before eating the animals. They did not need to slaughter them at the tabernacle, as He had required them to do in the wilderness (cf. Lev. 17:3-6). This freedom contrasts with the requirement to worship Yahweh only at the appointed place (vv. 1-14).
- 12:17-18 The Israelites were not to eat in their hometowns, but only at the sanctuary, gifts and sacrifices that they brought to the LORD.
- 12:19 And they were not to forget to provide for the Levites as long as they lived in the land.
- 12:20-25 These verses expand and restate the permission to eat meat away from the sanctuary provided the blood was drained out (cf. vv. 15-16). Verse 23 gives the reason that eating blood was forbidden: blood is the life-carrying fluid of the body. So to eat or drink blood was to violate the sanctity of even animal life.
- 12:26-27 The laws just given (i.e., to bring all their offerings to the central worship location, vv. 17-18) were to remain in force, even though God would enlarge Israel's territory after the

¹McGee, 1:564.

nation entered the land. This enlargement would take place as the Israelites gradually drove the Canaanites out (7:22). But additional land would only be added whenever God extended their territory as a reward for faithful obedience to Him (Exod. 23:27-33).

"No worship in the home was to be taken as a substitute for public worship."¹

12:28 This verse is another concluding exhortation (cf. vv. 13-14).

Pagan gods 12:29-31

12:29-30 The Israelites were not to investigate the pagan religious practices of the Canaanites with a view to worshipping their gods or following their example in the way they worshipped Yahweh (v. 30; cf. Rom. 16:19; Eph. 5:12). Moses developed this idea further in the next chapter. This pericope is transitional, moving from the worship of Yahweh (ch. 12) to the worship of idols (ch. 13). Chapter 12 opens and closes with warnings against pagan religion.

12:31 Again Moses charged the Israelites to keep God's laws exactly as he had delivered them to them.

How does God want His people to worship Him? His people should worship Him exclusively, and only as He has instructed them (cf. Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 22:19; John 4:20-23). God determines how people should worship Him. When we show respect for life, we honor God. Studying pagan religions can be dangerous if it is done in order to follow their example.

2. Laws arising from the second commandment 12:32— 13:18

The second commandment is: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them ..." (5:8-10).

¹Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 82.

"In the ancient suzerainty treaties it was required of the vassal that he must not connive at [conspire with] evil words spoken against the suzerain, whether they amounted to an affront or to a conspiracy. The vassal must report the insult or the fomenting of revolt. In case of active rebellion, he must undertake military measures against the offenders. Moreover, he must manifest fidelity to his lord in such cases no matter who the rebel might be, whether prince or nearest relative. All of this finds its formal counterpart in Deuteronomy 13."¹

The writer mentioned three different cases in this section: The prophet or receiver of a dream (12:32—13:5), The relative or friend (13:6-11), and the town (13:12-18).

The prophet or receiver of a dream 12:32—13:5

- 12:32 This last verse of chapter 12 in the English Bible is the first verse of chapter 13 in the Hebrew Bible (13:1). It concludes the preceding section and introduces what follows, and it acts as a transitional exhortation (cf. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19).
- 13:1-2 God permitted some people who claimed to have direct revelation from God, or to speak for God, or who praised God, to arise in Israel and even to perform miracles ("a sign or a wonder"), even though some of them advocated departure from Yahweh. The primary meaning of "prophet" (Heb. *nabi'*) is "proclaimer" or "forth-teller" (cf. Exod. 4:15-16; 7:1)² A prophet was, then, a spokesman for God who represented Him before other people.³ "A dreamer of dreams," in this context, was a person who claimed to have had a dream in which God told him or her to follow other gods and serve them.
- 13:3-5 God permitted such people to utter false prophecies in order to test His people's love, specifically, to see if they would remain loyal to Him (cf. Exod. 20:20). The acid test of a false prophet was his or her fidelity to the Mosaic Covenant. If he

¹Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 172.

²J. Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, pp. 36-38.

³Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 230.

led the people away from God, the civil authorities were to put him to death.

Some false prophets would seemingly foretell the future (e.g., diviners, soothsayers, etc.), but they received this information from the evil spirit world. Some of them could even perform signs and wonders (supernatural acts), which would appear to substantiate their claim that their power came from God. Enticement to idolatry was a very serious crime in Israel, because it led the people away from allegiance to the LORD their God.¹

"The method of execution was stoning so that all the people could participate and cast their vote against the worship of idols. Either one person's sin affects the whole nation (Josh. 7), or the whole nation must deal with that one person's sin."²

The closing command ("So you shall eliminate the evil from among you," v. 5) occurs at least eight more times in Deuteronomy (17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 22, 24; 24:7; cf. 1 Cor. 5:13).

"The modern Jews appeal to this passage as justifying their rejection of Jesus Christ. But He possessed all the characteristics of a true prophet, and He was so far from alienating the people from God and His worship that the grand object of His ministry was to lead to a purer, more spiritual and perfect observance of the law."³

The relative or friend 13:6-11

13:6-8 It was not just professed prophets and dreamers who suffered for this crime. Any Israelite, whether that one was one's brother, son, daughter, wife, or friend was to be executed if that person sought to lead others into the worship of any other

¹See Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, ch. 7: "False Prophecy in Israel," for a good discussion of this subject.

²Wiersbe, p. 408.

³Jamieson, et al., p. 151.

god. The Israelites were not to have pity on such a person or try to save him or her from their divinely appointed fate.

"During my years of pastoral ministry, I was occasionally contacted by heartbroken ministers who were unable to deal with flagrant sinners in the church because the offenders had relatives on the board or in the congregation. How sad it is when the testimony of a church is totally destroyed because of people who put their family ahead of God and His Word. ... On the other hand, I have seen godly people stand with the congregation in disciplining their own relatives who had brought disgrace to the name of Christ and the church."¹

13:9-11 The Israelite who first heard the enticement to idolatry was to be the first person to initiate his or her stoning, and the other Israelites were to join in the execution.

Moses set forth the deterrent value of capital punishment as a reason for its practice ("Then all Israel ... will not do such a wicked thing among you again," v. 11; cf. 17:13). In modern times, advocates of the abolition of capital punishment have argued that this practice does not deter crime, but the scriptural testimony is that it does.

"Since humans are made in the image of God and derive their life from God, to murder someone is to attack God and to rob that person of God's gift of life."²

"Statistical analysis by Isaac Ehrlich of the University of Chicago suggest that capital punishment is a deterrent.³ Further cross-sectional analysis has confirmed these original

¹Wiersbe, p. 408.

²Ibid., p. 406.

³Isaac Erlich [*sic*], "The Deterrent Effect of Capital Punishment: A Question of Life and Death," *American Economic Review* (June 1975).

conclusions.¹ His research has shown that if the death penalty were used in a consistent way, it might deter as many as eight murders for every execution carried out. If these numbers are indeed accurate, it demonstrates that capital punishment could be a significant deterrent to crime in American society."²

The renegade town 13:12-18

13:12-14a Here is an example of a whole group of people advocating the abandonment of Yahweh worship for the worship of a false god. If such a group was discovered in a town, the whole town was to be destroyed. Evidently it is assumed that the residents of the town shared the guilt since they did not punish the offenders but allowed them to live. The Israelites were to "investigate, search out, and inquire thoroughly" whether the town was indeed guilty before punishment was to be given.

13:14b-16 If the residents of the town were guilty, the Israelites were to attack it with the sword and kill everyone in it, including the animals, and burn everything that they could have taken as plunder in the middle of the town as a whole burnt offering to Yahweh. And they were never to rebuild that city.

"This doom, which goes contrary to the common practice of rebuilding towns on the ruins of the site, as the stratigraphic remains of tells in the Middle East plainly show, indicates how serious the Lord considered any defection from him."³

13:17-18 The Israelites were to take nothing at all from the city for themselves, but they were to regard the whole city and everything in it as devoted to Yahweh. If they were obedient to this command, the LORD would bless His people greatly.

¹ *Journal of Legal Studies* (January 1977); *Journal of Political Economy* (June 1977); and *American Economic Review* (June 1977).

² J. Kirby Anderson, *Moral Dilemmas*, p. 95.

³ Kalland, p. 98.

Achan (Josh. 7) was an Israelite who violated God's command to take nothing "designated for destruction" (Heb. *herem*, v. 17). Ai was not an Israelite town when Achan committed his sin, but God's dealings with Achan show how important the observance of this law was.

The closest example of a whole town apostatizing, that occurred in Israel and that Scripture records, appears in Judges 20: the case of Gibeah, a city in Benjamin (cf. Sodom). The circumstances were not exactly the same, but the other Israelites did discipline this town because of its gross sinfulness.

"Of all potential crimes in ancient Israel, the one described in this chapter was the most dangerous in terms of its broader ramifications: to attempt deliberately to undermine allegiance to God was the worst form of subversive activity, in that it eroded the constitutional basis of the potential nation, Israel. In its implications, the crime would be equivalent to treason or espionage in time of war."¹

Agitation that promoted sedition received careful attention and strict penalties in other ancient Near Eastern political treaties, as well as in the Deuteronomic Code.²

God's people need to be aware of the serious danger of idolatry and deal with it in their midst. The Israelites were to execute those among them who engaged in spiritually seditious activities. Christians are to separate from false teachers, except for purposes of evangelism and instruction (cf. 2 Tim. 3:13-17; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; 3:17-18; 2 John 9-11; Jude 17-25).

The sources of temptation that these laws suggest are preachers and teachers (including those on radio and TV in our day), friends, family members, and large groups of people. These were the main sources from which the temptation to depart from God arose. The standard by which the Israelites were to judge all these appeals was their fidelity to God's revealed Word (vv. 4-5).

¹Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 222.

²Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, pp. 91-100.

3. Laws arising from the third commandment 14:1-21

The third commandment is: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain" (5:11). The essence of this command is to treat God as special (i.e., different, holy, other; cf. Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2). This section of laws deals with the exclusiveness of the LORD and His worship as this pertains to Israel's separation from all other nations (cf. Lev. 11).

The theme of refraining from Canaanite practices continues in this chapter. However, in this section it is not the obviously idolatrous practices, but the more subtle ones associated with Canaanite religion that Moses proscribed. The whole chapter deals with eating. The Hebrew verb *bal* ("eat") occurs in verses 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 19, 20, 21, 23, 26, and 29.

14:1-2 Because the Israelites were God's "sons"—because of their special intimate relationship with Yahweh—they were "a holy [unique] people" and were to eat and act as He directed them (cf. 1:31; 8:5; 32:5, 19; Exod. 4:22-23; Ps. 103:13; Isa. 1:2-4; 30:1; Hos. 11:1; Matt. 6:9).

"Our English word 'holy' comes from an Old English word meaning 'to be whole, to be healthy.' What health and wholeness are to the body, holiness is to the inner person. ... It's depressing to read statistical surveys and discover that, when it comes to morality, professed Christians don't believe or live much differently from unconverted people. And yet God's people are supposed to be 'set apart, marked off, different' so we can 'advertise' the glorious virtues of the Lord (1 Peter 2:9)."¹

Self-mutilation ("cut yourselves," carving one's skin, tattooing) and shaving the hair off above the forehead were pagan practices associated with idolatry. The Canaanites did these things to express passionate sorrow for the dead. Laceration (cutting one's skin deeply) may have been a

¹Wiersbe, pp. 412, 413

seasonal rite in the Baal fertility cults as well (cf. 1 Kings 18:28).¹

"The external appearance of the people should reflect their internal status as the chosen and holy people of God."²

This is the first of two affirmations of Israel being God's "personal possession," His chosen people, in Deuteronomy (cf. 26:18; though see Exod. 19:5-6).³

- 14:3-6 The diet of the Canaanites likewise had a connection with their holiness. As in the Garden of Eden, God first specified the animals that the Israelites could eat (cf. Gen. 2:16). These were all land animals.
- 14:7-8 Then He specified the land animals that He did not want His people to eat—or touch if the animal was dead (cf. Gen. 2:17).
- 14:9-10 God also specified the aquatic creatures that they were and were not permitted to eat.
- 14:11-20 Likewise God did the same with the birds. One characteristic of all the forbidden birds, despite the problem of identifying some of them exactly, seems to be that they all consumed carrion.⁴
- 14:21 Finally, the Israelites were to eat no animal that died of itself, in contrast with those that died because they had been slaughtered. It seems clear that this law was not designed to guard the Israelites from unhealthful food, since they could sell animal carcasses to other non-Israelites. It was probably simply to make the Israelites' diets different from the non-Israelites. Boiling a kid in its mother's milk may have been a Canaanite practice (cf. Exod. 23:19; 34:26).

¹John Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan*, p. 252.

²Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, p. 272.

³See Fruchtenbaum, pp. 114-15.

⁴J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, p. 159.

Perhaps some of the animals that God forbade would have been unhealthful for the Israelites to eat for reasons we do not know (cf. Lev. 11).¹ The main reason for the prohibitions may have been that certain animals did not conform to what the Israelites considered normal or typical.² Another view is that the distinctions between clean and unclean animals were deliberately arbitrary, in order to teach the Israelites that God's election of them from among the other nations had also been entirely His choice.³ Others believe that only some of these distinctions were arbitrary.⁴ The best view, I think, is that these animals had a symbolic connection with the cursed earth and death.⁵

In the present dispensation all foods are clean (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:15; Rom. 14:14; et al.). However, we too should avoid foods that are unhealthful, since our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Moreover, we should avoid practices that may lead us away from God's will, or may appear to others that we have departed from God's will (1 Thess. 5:22). This dishonors God's name in that other people get the wrong idea of what He is like as they observe the behavior of His people.

What the Israelites ate and did not eat expressed their respect for God. Since Jesus declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19), what we eat and do not eat does not necessarily express our respect for God. Of course, a Christian might abstain from certain foods as an act of worship, for example during Lent, but abstaining from food is not something that God requires of Christians, nor is it something that makes God love us more than He already does.

But what does express our respect for God? Observance of other distinctions that He has called us to observe does, such as moral and ethical distinctions, and His priorities and values—how we behave. Do we "follow"

¹See Jay D. Fawver and R. Larry Overstreet, "Moses and Preventive Medicine," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:587 (July-September):270-85.

²M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 53-55; Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 169.

³Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 236; idem, "A Theology ...," p. 80; et al.

⁴E.g., Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 174.

⁵See my comments on Leviticus 11 in my notes on Leviticus. For a survey of the various interpretations of the motives behind these prohibitions (e.g., hygiene, association with pagan religions, etc.), see Deere, pp. 287-88; and Kim-Kwong Chan, "You Shall Not Eat These Abominable Things: An Examination Of Different Interpretations On Deuteronomy 14:3-20," *East Asia Journal of Theology* 3:1 (1985):88-106.

Him, "fear Him," "keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him" (13:4)?

4. Laws arising from the fourth commandment 14:22—16:17

The fourth commandment is: "Keep the Sabbath day to treat it as holy" (5:12). The reasons for observing the Sabbath day were: Yahweh's redemption of Israel from bondage in Egypt, and His consequent adoption of the Israelites as His chosen people (5:15). In the ancient Near East nations expressed their gratitude, loyalty, and worship to their sovereign by bringing him offerings periodically. What follows in this section are the laws concerning how Israel was to do this. Their offerings and festivals were an outgrowth of the spirit of gratitude that the Sabbath day epitomized.

The application of the tithe of produce and animals 14:22-29

There was a yearly tithe (vv. 22-27), and an additional three-year tithe (vv. 28-29), in Israel. (Josephus wrote that Moses specified three tithes: one for the Levites, one for the festivals, and one for those in want.¹ But this does not seem to correspond to the biblical revelation.)

The yearly tithe 14:22-27

- 14:22 The Israelites were to give to the LORD one tenth of the produce that grew in their fields every year (cf. Lev. 27:30).
- 14:23 They were to eat this offering, plus the firstborn of their herds and flocks, in the LORD's presence (i.e., at the tabernacle). This would teach them to fear Him always. That is, it would reinforce their commitment to Him. Yahweh was the Possessor of the land (its Landowner or Landlord), and He provided that His servants, the Levites, would receive sustenance from its bounty.²

"The fear of the Lord is not merely a feeling of dependence on Him, but also includes the notion of divine blessedness, which is the predominant

¹Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 4:8:22. Cf. Mayes, p. 246.

²Merrill, "A Theology ...," p. 80.

idea here, as the sacrificial meals were to furnish the occasion and object of rejoicing before the Lord."¹

- 14:24-26 If making the trip to the tabernacle with all of these offerings was impossible for the Israelite, he was to convert his tithes into money, then travel with his household to the tabernacle, then purchase offerings of his choosing, and joyfully eat them there in the LORD's presence.

The Hebrew word *shekar*, translated "strong drink" (v. 26, NASB, NRSV, NEB, ESV, AV) or "fermented drink" (NIV, TNIV) or "beer" (HCSB, CEV, NET2) or "similar drink" (NKJV) refers to some type of fermented beverage made from grain. God did not forbid the consumption of this beverage in Israel, but He did condemn drunkenness (cf. Gen. 9:21; 1 Sam. 1:14; 25:36; 2 Sam. 11:13; 1 Kings 20:16; Eph. 5:18; et al.). Near Easterners did not distill liquor until the seventh century A.D., so the beverages in view here were not very high in alcohol content.²

- 14:27 The Israelites were to invite the Levites to share the celebration at the tabernacle each time they brought the yearly tithe.

The three-year tithe 14:28-29

This was another tithe in addition to the yearly tithe. The Israelites were also to invite both the Levites and the needy (the stranger, orphan, and widow) to this celebration every third and sixth year in the seven-year sabbatical cycle, which they held in each town. So every third year the Israelites were to offer 20 percent of their produce to the LORD. God wanted His people to use what He gave them to provide for others as well as for themselves.

The yearly celebration evidently coincided with the Feast of First fruits in the spring (in March/April; cf. Lev. 23:9-14; 27:30-33; Num. 18:21-32).

¹Keil and Delitzsch, 3:367-68.

²Deere, p. 289.

The third-year feast occurred at the end of the religious year, earlier in the following spring (v. 28).

"As the Israelites were to sanctify their food, on the one hand, positively by abstinence from everything unclean, so they were, 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."¹

"The purpose of this section is not so much to give a comprehensive statement of the tithe law as to guard tithing procedure from being prostituted to idolatrous ends; that is, to prevent Israel from honoring the Canaanite fertility deities for their harvests."²

The LORD does not require these tithes of Christians, but He has taught us to express thanksgiving to Him for His provisions, and to demonstrate His compassion. We should have compassion on those who serve God, and the especially needy, by sharing what God has given us with them (1 Cor. 9:11, 14; Gal. 6:6, 10; et al.).

"If believers under Law could give the Lord 10 percent of their income, that's certainly a good place for believers who live under the New Covenant to start their giving. However, we shouldn't stop with 10 percent but should give systematically as the Lord has prospered us (1 Cor. 16:1-2)."³

The rights of the poor and vulnerable in Israel 15:1-18

The Israelites were not only to care for the Levites (14:27, 29), and the aliens, orphans, and widows (14:29), but also other individuals in the nation who needed help (15:1-18). This concern was to mark them as the people of Yahweh.⁴

¹Keil and Delitzsch, 3:367.

²Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 174.

³Wiersbe, p. 406.

⁴See Peter T. Vogt, "Social Justice and the Vision of Deuteronomy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:1 (March 2008):35-44.

Having explained what the Israelites were to do every year (14:22-27) and every three years (14:28-29), God now explained what they were to do every seventh year. This section of Deuteronomy expands what Moses previously revealed about the sabbatical year in Leviticus 25:1 through 7.

God's provision for the poor 15:1-11

15:1-3 At the end of every seventh year the Israelites were to cancel all debts that their fellow Israelites owed them. This was an extremely gracious provision of the law. They were not required to cancel the debts that foreigners owed them.

"At the end of every seven years" (v. 1) is an idiom meaning "during the seventh year."¹ There is some debate among interpreters whether God wanted the Israelites to terminate debts permanently² or only suspend them for a year, as the following quotation argues:

"The present passage is a further exposition of the Sabbath year release recorded in Exodus 23:10 and Leviticus 25:2-7. The premise of the exposition offered here is that if the land was left unused in the Sabbath year, the landowner would not have money to pay his debts. To alleviate this hardship on the landowner, the debts were to be released for one year during this time. The sense of the word *release* is not 'to cancel,' as may be suggested in some English translations (e.g., NIV), but rather 'to postpone.' The debt was postponed for a year. This provision was not intended for the 'foreigner' (Dt 15:3); it applied only to those who lived permanently in the land. The 'foreigner' was one who stayed only temporarily in the land. Such a one was not a 'sojourner,' that is, a non-Israelite who had come to live permanently in the land."³

¹Deere, p. 290.

²Thompson, pp. 186-87; Payne, p. 93; Schultz, p. 56; Mayes, p. 247; Deere, p. 290; Miller, p. 135; Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 242; Kalland, p. 104; Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 175.

³Sailhamer, pp. 449-50. Cf. Driver, p. 175; Keil and Delitzsch, 3:369-70; Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 236.

I tend to favor the complete cancellation view.

"God's system guarded against extreme wealth and extreme poverty."¹

15:4-6 The intent of this law was to prevent Israelites from becoming so burdened with debt that they became poor. If they obeyed Him, Yahweh would bless them so greatly that they would not become poor. In fact, they would become so rich that they would be able to lend to other nations rather than having to borrow from them. And they would thus control ("rule over") other nations rather than having them control them.

15:7-10 The Israelites were to generously lend to the poor who lived among them. They were not to be "mean-spirited" and give the poor nothing in view of the coming sabbatical year, in which all loans were to be cancelled (v. 1). Their attitude toward the poor was important; they were to be generous and not begrudge helping the poor. God added His blessing for their obedience.

"Sometimes there is as much charity in prudent lending as in giving [cf. v. 8], as it obliges the borrower to industry and honesty and may put him into a way of helping himself."²

15:11 Even though the ideal was that there should be no poor in Israel, because the Israelites would help them, the reality was that there would always be some who were poor in Israel. Therefore the Israelites were to give help to the poor and needy in the land.

"In Deuteronomy, poverty did not just happen. It was the result of conscious decisions that people made to ignore the divine will for Israel as expressed in the covenant."³

¹McGee, 1:570.

²Henry, p. 188.

³Leslie J. Hoppe, "Deuteronomy and the Poor," *The Bible Today* 24:6 (November 1986):371.

"... poverty among Yahweh's vassals was a disgrace ..."¹

Proverbs 19:17 says, "One who is gracious to a poor person lends to the LORD," implying that Yahweh will pay back such a person with grace. The Old Testament prophets and Jesus had much to say about caring for the poor. The New Testament does not legislate or dictate how Christians should care for the poor, or how much of what is ours we should give to them, but it does urge us to be generous and to help them (cf. Gal. 2:10; 6:10).

God's provision for slaves 15:12-18

"It is appropriate to deal with the law of release at this point, since it is best interpreted as an extension of the agrarian principles of the fallow year for the land, rather than a *slave* release law, linked in some way to the Hebrew slave release laws of Ex. 21:1-7 and Dt. 15:12-18."²

15:12 Moses turned now from the poor to slaves. These people also had rights in Israel. God did not condemn slavery as an institution; He permitted it in Israel. However, "slavery" in Israel amounted to long-term household service. God strongly forbade the enslavement and oppression of individuals, as these verses and others make clear (cf. Exod. 21). Israelites could sell themselves either as slaves (servants) or as hired men and women (employees).³ All Israelite slaves were to go free at the beginning of each sabbatical year.⁴ Another view is that slaves went free at the end of seven years of service, irrespective of whether it was Israel's sabbatical year.⁵

15:13-14 Freed Israelite slaves were not only to be set free, but they were to be given what amounted to a severance payment

¹Merrill, "A Theology ...," p. 80.

²Christopher Wright, "What Happened Every Seven Years in Israel?" *Evangelical Quarterly* 56:3 (July 1984):132.

³See Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 247-48.

⁴See N. P. Lemche, "The Manumission of Slaves—The Fallow Year—The Sabbatical Year—The Jubel Year," *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (January 1976):38-59.

⁵Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 175.

when they departed. The Israelites were to give them "generously" from their flocks, threshing floors, and wine vats as the LORD had blessed them. Note again the graciousness of this provision.

- 15:15 The memory that the Israelites had themselves been slaves in Egypt was to motivate them to be open-handed with their former slaves.
- 15:16-17 If, at the sabbatical year, the slave did not want to leave his or her master, he or she could choose to remain in the master's household. But he or she would have to have his or her earlobe pierced. This would identify him or her as a voluntary slave and would free the master from unnecessary criticism that he had not liberated his slave as the Law commanded.
- 15:18 The LORD addressed what the Israelites' attitude to the law requiring the freedom of slaves should be (cf. v. 9). They should not begrudge having to let the slave go, but they should remember, gratefully, the service that the slave had rendered. Hired workers were employed to perform various tasks, but slaves were members of the household that rendered service all the time.

God values each person equally as an individual. This perspective comes out clearly in this section (15:1-18). God instructed His people to show concern for the welfare of every individual, regardless of his or her economic or social position (v. 7; cf. Prov. 11:24).

"The humanitarian spirit of Mosaic legislation permeates these civic and religious aspects of the Israelite society. It stands in contrast to the lack of dignity accorded to the common man in contemporary cultures of the Mosaic age."¹

"Elsewhere in the ancient Near East men were treated in terms of their status in the community rather than as individuals."²

¹Schultz, p. 57.

²Thompson, p. 185.

The promise of blessing for obedience appears four times in this chapter (vv. 4, 6, 10, 18).

For more detailed information concerning the year of release, see Exodus 23:10 and 11 and Leviticus 25:1 through 7. In Deuteronomy, Moses emphasized the importance of love for God and man—principles more than procedures.

The year of release (of debts and slaves) was a provision of the Mosaic Covenant that God has not carried over into the present dispensation. However, as Christians we do have revelation concerning how to deal with our debtors and with those who serve us. We should settle our disputes with our Christian brethren out of court and privately, or in the church if necessary (1 Cor. 6:1-6). We may take unbelievers to court, but if we cannot resolve our conflicts with our brethren out of court, we should take the loss (1 Cor. 6:7) and forgive them (Matt. 6:12, 14-15). We should also be compassionate and share with others, believers and unbelievers alike, who may be in need (Matt. 25:34-40; 2 Cor. 8—9; Gal. 6:10; Heb. 13:16).

The sanctification of firstborn cattle 15:19-23

Moses had finished what he had to say about provisions for the needy (the Levites, aliens, orphans, widows, the poor, and slaves; 14:22—15:18). Here his thoughts turned back to the subject of the firstborn of animals (herd or flock) that he had mentioned previously when he addressed the sacrificial meals (12:6, 17; 14:23).

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 were to eat these animals at the tabernacle at one of the annual festivals—which one is unspecified here (see ch. 16). 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.¹

¹Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 249; Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 250.

As Christians, we too should acknowledge God's goodness if He increases our possessions. Our sacrifices need not be literal firstborn animals of our herds or flocks, but they might be: verbal thanksgiving (Heb. 13:15), and our labor, our money, indeed our very lives (Rom. 12:1-2). We too should give Him our best.

The celebration of Passover, Weeks, and Booths 16:1-17

The point of connection in this section with what precedes is the sacrificial meals. Moses repeated here the instructions regarding those important feasts, which included sacrificial meals that the people would eat at the tabernacle (cf. Exod. 12; Lev. 23; Num. 28-29).

Passover and Unleavened Bread 16:1-8

16:1-4 "Abib" was the name of the first month on the Israelite calendar.¹ It was on the tenth day of this month that the Israelites were to celebrate the Passover (during our March/April; cf. Exod. 12:1-13; Num. 28:16-25). They were to eat no leavened bread at this meal, and they were to have no contact with leaven during the following seven days, which was called "the Feast of Unleavened Bread." They were to eat this meal at the tabernacle (later at the temple, "the place where the LORD chooses to establish His name"). The whole Passover lamb ("from the flock" or "the herd") was to be totally consumed; none of it was to be left over and eaten later. This would distinguish it as a sacrifice from a regular meal.

16:5-8 The Israelites were to sacrifice the Passover lamb at sunset, because it was at sunset that their forefathers left Egypt. The Israelites roasted the Passover lamb (Exod. 12:9), but they evidently boiled the additional offerings for that day (cf. 2 Chron. 35:13).²

"The immense number of victims that had to be immolated [roasted] on the eve of the passover—i.e., within a space of four hours—has appeared to some writers a great difficulty. But the large number of officiating priests, their dexterity and

¹See Appendix 1: The Hebrew Calendar, in my Notes on Exodus.

²Sailhamer, p. 452.

skill in the preparation of the sacrifices, the wide range of the court, the extraordinary dimensions of the altar of burnt offering and orderly method of conducting the solemn ceremonial, rendered it easy to do that in a few hours, which would otherwise have required as many days."¹

In the morning, after they had finished eating the Passover, the Israelites were to return to their tents. On the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread they people were to have a "festive assembly" and do no work.

The Feast of Weeks (also called Harvest, Pentecost, and First fruits) 16:9-12

Seven weeks after the Israelites began to harvest their spring wheat crop they were to celebrate this feast (cf. Exod. 34:22; Num. 28:26-30). This date normally fell on the seventh day of the ninth month (Sivan, during our May/June). It was called "the Feast of Weeks" because it was held seven sevens (weeks) after Passover. The Israelites were to offer to the LORD voluntarily a proportional amount according to how He had blessed them. The whole nation, including visitors ("the stranger"), were to gather at the tabernacle to celebrate the LORD's bountiful provision and His deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt.

The Feast of Booths (also called Tabernacles and Ingathering) 16:13-15

This seven-day feast was to take place at the tabernacle on the fifteenth through the twenty-first days of the seventh month (Tishri, our September/October), at the end of the summer harvests (cf. Exod. 23:16; Lev. 23:33-44). Like the Feast of Weeks, this feast was also to be observed by all the Israelites and non-Israelites who were in the land.

Additional instructions for the observance of these feasts 16:16-17

All the male Israelites were to appear before the LORD at all three of these feasts. And they were to come with offerings to Him. These three feasts focused on "thankfulness for past deliverance, joy in present grace, and

¹Jamieson, et al., p. 153.

hope in future glory."¹ They amounted to a pledge of allegiance to Yahweh, the Israelites' Suzerain (Lord) and God, each time the Israelites celebrated them. They came to His presence (i.e., to the tabernacle) to do so—like their Near Eastern neighbors similarly returned to their kings, periodically, to honor them.

"The ancient requirement that the men of Israel should report to the central sanctuary three times a year has an interesting parallel in the Near Eastern treaty requirements. It was common practice for suzerains to require their vassals to report to them periodically, in some cases three times a year, in order to renew their allegiance and to bring tribute."²

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 that God encourages Christians to remember at the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-28), as well as at other times.

"Two of the churches I pastored celebrated significant anniversaries while I was serving them, and during those special years we took time in our worship services to remember the goodness of the Lord and thank Him for all He had done. It was helpful for the younger members to learn about the sacrifices people had made in the past, and it was good for the older members to receive a new challenge for the future. After all, the church isn't a parking lot; it's a launching pad!"³

5. Laws arising from the fifth commandment 16:18—18:22

The fifth commandment is: "Honor your father and your mother" (5:16). What follows is legislation that advocates respecting authority figures in the nation, which functioned like an extended family.

"With the regency of Yahweh and the proper protocol by which He had to be approached having been established, the

¹Thomas, p. 176.

²Thompson, p. 198.

³Wiersbe, p. 418.

covenant text then addresses the human leaders who serve Him and exercise authority over the nation at large."¹

"Just as in its religious worship the Israelitish nation was to show itself to be the holy nation of Jehovah, so was it in its political relations also. This thought forms the link between the laws already given and those which follow."²

Judges and similar officials 16:18—17:13

As in the other sections of Deuteronomy, here too Moses emphasized underlying principles and attitudes more than procedures. Here he stressed the principle of justice.

16:18-20 Probably the people chose their 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.³ The number of these in each town probably varied according to the needs of the community.

"For most of us today, the notion that it is always and everywhere wrong for a judge to take a gift from a litigant probably seems so obvious as to be virtually self-evident. Nevertheless, the fact remains that that idea has historically been far from apparent to a large part of humankind. In the ancient Near East, for instance, almost every society regarded the practice of judges taking gifts from litigants as being perfectly moral and absolutely legitimate ...

"... a gift-giver placed upon a recipient a binding moral obligation to respond in kind ...

¹Merrill, "A Theology ...," p. 80.

²Keil and Delitzsch, 3:378.

³Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 247.

"Importantly, such reciprocity is *not* considered morally reprehensible. Indeed the failure of either judge or litigant to reciprocate is what is deemed *immoral* and unjust ..."¹

In this respect, then, Israel was to be different from other nations (i.e., holy).

"... in Israel, as in much of the ancient world, the human judge was considered proxy for the divine judge. For instance, ... in II Chronicles 19:6-7 ..."²

"Deuteronomy is passionately concerned about *justice* (Hebrew *tsedeq*, *mishpat*): 'Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue' (16:20, which makes this a condition of living and prospering in the land). This follows from the doctrine of Israel as a community of 'brothers' equal before God."³

16:21-22

"... in order to give the people and the judges appointed by them a brief practical admonition, as to the things they were more especially to observe in their administration of justice, Moses notices by way of example a few crimes that were deserving of punishment (vers. 21, 22, and chap. xvii. 1), and then proceeds in chap. xvii. 2-7 to describe more fully the judicial proceedings in the case of idolaters."⁴

An "Asherah" was probably a sacred tree, or group of trees, or a wooden pole, that the Canaanites used in the worship of their female fertility goddess: Asherah. "Asherah" was evidently both the name of the Canaanite goddess and a cult object used in her worship. The Canaanites usually made this "image" (v. 22, AV) or "sacred pillar" (NKJV, NET2, NEB, HCSB, cf. ESV) or "sacred stone" (NIV, TNIV, CEV) or "stone pillar" (NRSV) out of stone, and they used it in the worship of Baal,

¹Goldberg, pp. 15-17.

²Ibid., p. 22.

³Whybray, p. 101.

⁴Keil and Delitzsch, 3:379-80.

the male Canaanite god of fertility, and Asherah. But evidently the Canaanites also worshipped wooden Asherahs.

"In Canaan the '*asherah*' ('trees,' 'pillars,' or 'groves') were associated with oracular verdicts by their gods and goddesses."¹

The judges were not to tolerate the planting of these Asherah trees or poles, which were so common in Canaan that the people regarded them as a prominent part of the native culture.

Judges customarily dispensed justice in the open space near the main gate of each town. This area was the main congregating place of the community (cf. Ruth 4:1-12).

17:1 This brief note reminded the Israelites that no animal sacrifice that had a blemish or defect would be accepted by the LORD (cf. 15:21).

17:2-7 God specified the method of execution as stoning, not only for idolaters, the violators referred to in this passage, but other capital offenders as well. Rocks were, and still are, present everywhere in Canaan. At least two, and preferably three witnesses, had to be willing to take the lead in stoning the convicted offender (vv. 6-7). The stoning was to take place at the gate of the town, which made it a public affair. These requirements were safeguards against injustice and perjury.

"The *evidence* must be adequate and credible; and anyone ready to make a serious accusation must be prepared to be executioner as well as *witness*."²

Josephus claimed that Moses told the Israelites the following:

¹Schultz, p. 61. See Andre Lemaire, "Who or What Was Yahweh's Asherah?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 10:6 (November-December 1984):42-51; and especially John Day, "Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105:3 (September 1986):385-408.

²Payne, p. 104.

"But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex; nor let servants be admitted to give testimony, on account of the ignobility of their soul; since it is probable that they may not speak the truth, either out of hope of gain, or fear of punishment."¹

These added requirements were probably the result of Jewish tradition.

17:8-13 Verses 2 through 7 explain a specific example of how the judges were to deal with a particular type of case. In verses 8 through 13 we see the legal procedure they were to follow in general.

When the priests later set up the tabernacle in the land, the nation was to establish a national "supreme court" in order to provide judgment in cases too difficult for the local judges. The location of this legal center may have been at the tabernacle², or it may have been at some other place.³ Kline believed that it was at the tabernacle, and that this requirement reminded the people that the God who dwelt at the central sanctuary was Israel's Supreme Judge.⁴

At least two men would decide the case: a judge and a Levitical priest. The priest's function was to clarify how the law of God related to the case. The decision of this court was final, and the people were to regard it as the will of God. People who rejected the decisions of this court were to die, because to do so was to rebel against the will of God (v. 12).⁵

"When Woodrow Wilson was President of the United States, he said, 'There are a good many problems before the American people today, and before me as President, but I expect to find the

¹Josephus, 4:8:15.

²Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 252

³Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 261-62; I. Cairns, *Word and Presence: A Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy*, pp. 163-64.

⁴Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 179.

⁵See Anderson, ch. 7: "Capital Punishment."

solution of those problems just in the proportion that I am faithful in the study of the Word of God.' Statesman Daniel Webster said, 'If we abide by the principles taught in the Bible, our country will go on prospering and to prosper; but if we and our posterity neglect its instruction and authority, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us and bury our glory in profound obscurity.' Living as we do in a democratic pluralistic society, we can't expect the government to make the Bible its official guidebook, but it would help the nation if professed Christians and Christian churches would major on preaching, teaching, and obeying the word of God."¹

Kings 17:14-20

Moses recognized that when Israel settled in Canaan and took on the characteristics of other nations (e.g., a homeland, political organization, etc.), her people would desire a king. Earlier in Israel's history, God had revealed that kings would come from among the Israelites, specifically, from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 17:6, 16; 35:11; 49:10; Num. 23:21; 24:7).

"The earthly kingdom in Israel was not opposed to the theocracy, *i.e.* to the rule of Jehovah as king over the people of His possession, provided no one was made king but the person whom Jehovah should choose. The appointment of a king is not *commanded*, like the institution of judges (chap. xvi. 18), because Israel could exist under the government of Jehovah, even without an earthly king; it is simply *permitted*, in case the need should arise for a regal government."²

As Moses revealed the mind of God here, a king was permissible, but the chosen monarch had to qualify in certain respects.³

¹Wiersbe, p. 420. His quotations are from G. M. Day, *The Wonder of the Word*, pp. 165-66, 170.

²Keil and Delitzsch, 3:384.

³See John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):182-200.

1. He had to be an Israelite ("from among your countrymen," v. 15). This was essential since Israel's king would be the vice-regent of Yahweh. The king therefore had to be a member of the covenant community.
2. He must not build up a large military organization by multiplying horses (v. 16). This would lead to a false sense of security and power, and departure from dependence on God. Egypt was a major horse market in the ancient Near East, and horses were the main military transport of the day.¹

"... the multiplication of horses would inevitably lead to many evils, to increased intercourse with foreign nations, especially with Egypt, to the importation of an animal to which the character of the country was not suited [?], to the establishment of an Oriental military despotism, to proud and pompous parade in peace, to a dependence upon Egypt in time of war, and a consequent withdrawal of trust and confidence in God."²

Since the context warns against relying on Egyptian horses (rather than on the LORD), the command "You shall never again return that way" (v. 16) evidently means that the Israelites should not return to Egypt with the intent of relying on, getting help from, or conforming to the Egyptians. Or possibly the command was intended to discourage the Israelites from moving to Egypt and living there permanently. Still another possibility is that what was intended was the prevention of trading Israelites as slaves or mercenary soldiers in return for horses, which would have resulted in those Israelites' loss of freedom and return to the old bondage in Egypt.³ Obviously some motive was behind this command, but what that motive was is not stated. Any of these explanations can help us understand that when the angel commanded Mary and Joseph to travel to Egypt (for a short time to get away from Herod, Matt. 2:13-15), He was not contradicting God's command.

¹For a helpful discussion of horses in the ancient Near East, see D. R. Ap-Thomas, "All the King's Horses," in *Proclamation and Presence*, pp. 135-51.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 154.

³Mayes, p. 272; von Rad, p. 119.

3. He was not to multiply wives (v. 17), since these women would tend to turn the king's heart away from devotion to, and concentration on, Yahweh. Furthermore, God's standard for marriage has always been monogamy (cf. Gen. 2:24; 1 Kings 11:1-13).
4. He was not to amass a large personal fortune (v. 17). This too would lead to a false sense of security and a divided allegiance (cf. Luke 16:13).

"A richly furnished harem, and the accumulation of silver and gold, were inseparably connected with the luxury of Oriental monarchs generally; so that the fear was a very natural one, that the future king of Israel might follow the general customs of the heathen in these respects."¹

"Riches, honours, and pleasures are the three great hindrances of godliness (*the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life*), especially to those in high stations: against these therefore the king is here warned."²

5. He was personally to transcribe a copy of the law of God (v. 18). This is probably a reference to the covenant text of Deuteronomy (cf. 1:5; 4:44; 27:3, 8, 26; 29:21, 29; 30:10).³ This task would encourage his thoughtful mental interaction with God's revealed will for Israel.
6. He was to read this law throughout his lifetime: "all the days of his life" (v. 19). Note that this and the preceding command assume that the king could read and write. This constant reading and study would normally produce three conditions: First, he would get to know God personally and would thus be inclined to fear Him. Second, he would learn to be humble. Third, he would be able to obey God's will (vv. 19-20).

"Three conclusions may be drawn from these admonitions. There is, first, a clear *limitation on power*,

¹Keil and Delitzsch, 3:386.

²Henry, p. 190.

³Thompson, p. 206; Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 266.

to avoid tyranny and the danger of the king's assuming the Lord's rule of the people. ...

"Second, these restrictions and injunctions serve the main purpose of Deuteronomy, *to enjoin a full and undivided allegiance to the Lord*. ...

"Finally, the law of the king places upon that figure the obligations incumbent upon every Israelite. In that sense, Deuteronomy's primary concern was that the king *be the model Israelite*."¹

"It is a remarkable fact that nowhere in the Old Testament is the king represented as having anything to do with the making of laws."²

Yahweh, Israel's True King, made Israel's laws, and He was to make the choice of Israel's human kings. The people were not to select a monarch without God's approval. The earthly king would only be Yahweh's vice-regent. In some of Israel's neighbor nations the king was regarded as a god, but in Israel God was the True King.

"It is noteworthy that in the secular suzerainty treaties, a similar oversight of the vassal's choice of king is exercised."³

When Israel later entered the land and requested a king, Samuel the prophet became greatly distressed (1 Sam. 8:6). His reaction was evidently not due to the request itself, but to the motive behind the request. The people were turning away from their True King to their dream of a human king (1 Sam. 8:7-8). God granted the people's request, even though it sprang from the wrong motive, but He disciplined them in the years that followed through the king that they requested: Saul. Similarly, God had earlier conceded to the Israelites' request for meat in the wilderness, but He disciplined them for their choice by allowing them to get sick from it (Num. 11; Ps. 106:15).

This pericope makes very clear that, in civil life, God wants justice for all (cf. 16:18-20), but, at the same time, He wants His people's wholehearted

¹Miller, pp. 148-49.

²Whybray, p. 108.

³Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 179.

devotion to Himself (16:21—17:7; cf. Phil. 3:20). Submission to civil authority (17:8-13; cf. Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-15), and leaders who follow Him (17:4-20; cf. 1 Tim. 2:1-7), are also important to God.¹

Priests and Levites 18:1-8

18:1-5 The Levites lived as sojourners among the other Israelites. While they had their own cities, they did not possess land and territorial inheritances as the other Israelites did. The privilege of serving God in their special role and calling was a much greater compensation than physical benefits. They could eat the produce of the land. In addition to the tithes, the Levites also received the parts of the sacrifices allotted to them, which included meat of various kinds, wine, oil, and wool (vv. 3-4).

18:6-8 Evidently not all the Levites served at the tabernacle. Some simply lived in their assigned cities. Participation in sanctuary services was apparently voluntary to some extent. God did not preserve in Scripture the plan whereby individual Levites served in carrying out their various duties at this time in Israel's history (cf. Num. 18). This passage refutes the Wellhausian view that all Levites could be priests.²

One writer argued that verse 8 permitted the Levites to sell the remains of a sacrificed animal.³ Most translators believed this verse allowed them to sell their family possessions ("estates").

Prophets 18:9-22

The context of this section is significant, as usual. Verses 1-8 deal with people who ministered to Yahweh in various ways for the people, and verses 15-22 concern the delivery of God's revelations to His people.

¹For an exposition of this pericope, with excellent applications for leadership, see Daniel I. Block, "The Burden of Leadership: The Mosaic Paradigm of Kingship (Deut. 17:14-20)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:647 (July-September 2005):259-78.

²See also Rodney K. Duke, "The Portion of the Levite: Another Reading of Deuteronomy 18:6-8," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106:2 (1987):193-201.

³Logan S. Wright, "MKR in 2 Kings XII 5-17 and Deuteronomy XVIII 8," *Vetus Testamentum* 39:4 (October 1989):445, 448.

- 18:9-14 These verses contrast illegitimate types of religious personnel and practices with the legitimate kinds that Moses dealt with in the surrounding sections.

"Of the three major institutions of ancient Israelite social and religious life—royalty, the priesthood, and prophetism—only the last was charismatic [having a divinely conferred power or ability] and nonsuccessive. Prophets were men and women raised up individually by God and called and empowered by him to communicate his purposes to the theocratic community. Frequently this ministry would take the form of a word of instruction or even rebuke to the leaders of the people as well as messages addressed to the present and future promises of covenant accomplishment and fulfillment."¹

It is helpful to think of the prophets as preachers (and worship leaders), and the priests as teachers (and worship facilitators).

The burning of children (v. 10) may have had some connection with determining or discovering the future course of events (cf. 2 Kings 3:26-27). However, it was probably a separate type of abominable practice from divination.² The pagans used various phenomena as instruments to "divine" (foretell) the future. These devices included: the patterns of birds as they flew, the arrangement of the organs of an animal offered as a sacrifice, and the relationship of the heavenly bodies to one another. Soothsayers practiced witchcraft, which involved dealing with Satan and his demons to obtain desired ends. Omens were signs of coming events or conditions. Sorcerers cast spells. Mediums and spiritists supposedly called up the dead, though actually demons responded (cf. 1 Sam. 28:8-

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 270.

²Miller, p. 151.

14).¹ The precise distinction between some of the terms in verses 10 and 11 is not certain.²

In the rest of this chapter God assured the Israelites that He would provide as much knowledge as He wanted His people to have, and that they would need, in the future, so they would not need to resort to the pagan practices that He had just proscribed to obtain that knowledge (cf. Gen. 3:6).

18:15-19 God promised (through Moses) that when Moses was dead, He would provide guidance for the nation through another prophet like Moses, whom He would raise up from among the Israelites. The Israelites were to listen to the LORD's words through that prophet, and if they did not, God would hold them responsible.

"Abraham is called a prophet in Genesis 20:7, and the existence of prophets is presupposed in the Pentateuch (Ex 7:1; Nu 11:29; 12:6; Dt 13:2-3). The present text, however, is the first to discuss the office of the prophet. ...

"The historical basis for the office is Israel's request for a mediator at Sinai (Ex 19:16-19; 20:19-21). Fearing to stand in God's presence, the people asked Moses to go before the Lord and return God's words to them. Thus the prophet was to be 'like Moses.' This suggests that the office of the prophet was to play an important role in the further history of God's dealings with Israel. Indeed, a major section of the OT canon is devoted to the work of the prophets (Isaiah-Malachi). The prophet was to be God's mouthpiece to the people."³

¹For an exposé and critique of Spiritualism, written by a former Spiritualist minister and medium, see Raphael Gasson, *The Challenging Counterfeit*; Merrill F. Unger, *Demons in the World Today*; and Kurt E. Koch, *Between Christ and Satan*, pp. 123-66

²Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 260; Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 271-72.

³Sailhamer, p. 456. Cf. Exod. 7:1.

Was Moses predicting one particular coming prophet, many prophets, or both?

"Moses's words in Deuteronomy 18:15-22, while perhaps initially anticipatory of Joshua's ministry, prove to point beyond a near fulfillment to a greater and ultimate future fulfillment."¹

"This order [the prophetic order] is first spoken of in the singular—'a prophet like me' and 'listen to him'—but the continuing context makes it clear that the term is 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 incomparable eschatological prophet 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 being expressed in the grammatical singular is a common Old Testament device employed to afford multiple meanings or applications to prophetic texts. [Footnote 30:] This is seen most clearly in the singularity and plurality of the Servant in the 'Servant Songs' of Isaiah (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13—53:12)."²

Another example of this singular/plural reference device is the Hebrew word *zera* ("seed"), which can have a singular or plural referent. The "seed" of Abraham, for example, sometimes

¹Jonathan J. Routley, "The Prophet Joshua? The Neglected Ministry of the Prophet of the Conquest," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65:1 (March 2022):58-59.

²Merrill, "Deuteronomy ...," p. 28. See H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), pp. 15-17; Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 181; R. P. Carroll, "The Elijah-Elisha Sagas: Some Remarks on Prophetic Succession in Ancient Israel," *Vetus Testamentum* 19:4 (October 1969):408-14; Johnson, pp. 186-87; Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, pp. 56-64; John A. Witmer, *Immanuel*, p. 28.

refers to Christ and sometimes to all (or a portion of) Abraham's descendants.

Jesus Christ was one of the prophets that God raised up as promised here, and He is the ultimate fulfillment of this promise (v. 15; Matt. 17:5; John 4:25; 5:45-47; 12:48-50; Acts 3:22-23; 7:37).

"When ... the Messiah was predicted as a prophet it was predicted [because He would be a "prophet"] that He should be the great organ of God in communicating his [God's] mind and will to men."¹

"When finally Christ appeared upon earth, the promise was fulfilled in its highest and fullest sense. It [this prophecy] is, therefore, a Messianic promise."²

"Jesus was like Moses in numerous ways. He was spared in infancy (Ex. 2; Mt. 2:13-23); He renounced a royal court (Heb. 11:24-27; Phil. 2:5-8); had compassion for the people (Num. 27:17; Mt. 9:36); made intercession (Deu. 9:18; Heb. 7:25); spoke with God face to face (Ex. 34:29-30; 2 Cor. 3:7); and was the mediator of a covenant (Deu. 29:1; Heb. 8:6-7). The greatest revelation in the Old Testament era came through Moses. This revelation was only surpassed in the coming of Christ, who not only revealed God's message but provided salvation through His death."³

Another important comparison is that both Moses and Jesus laid the foundation for the kingdom of God on earth, and both

¹Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:463.

²Young, p. 35.

³Schultz, p. 64. See also Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*, "Moses the Type of Christ," 1:142-48; and David Moessner, "Luke 9:1-50: Luke's Preview of the Journey of the Prophet Like Moses of Deuteronomy," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102:4 (December 1983):575-605.

of them called on the Jewish people to prepare for it (cf. Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15; Acts 3:22; 7:37).

Jesus was superior to Moses in at least seven ways: (1) He provided salvation through His death. (2) He arose from the dead. (3) He ascended into heaven. (4) He continued to give revelation from God after His death (through the New Testament prophets). (5) He presently intercedes for His own. (6) He will return for us. (7) And He will literally bring us into God's presence.

"While the New Testament use of Deuteronomy is pervasive (all but chapters 3, 12, 15, 16, 20, 26, 34 being cited at least once), it is striking that four passages stand out as being the clear centers of focus: 6:4-5; 18:15-19; 21:22-23; and 30:11-14."¹

Merrill observed that of the 42 New Testament references to verses 15 through 19, 24 of them appear in John's Gospel.²

18:20-22 God told His people how to distinguish true prophets from impostors, because various people would step forward in Israel with claims to be prophets with messages from God or other gods. The people could identify false prophets when their predictions failed to materialize. Some predictions of false prophets did come true (cf. 13:1-3). But if a prophet's predictions did not come true, it would be a sign to the people that he was a false prophet. Also, if someone claimed to be a prophet, but he sought to lead the people away from the law, the people should recognize that God had not inspired him (cf. 13:1-3). During a prophet's ministry it would become clear whether he was a false or true spokesman of Yahweh (cf. Matt. 7:15-16).³

People who claimed to be prophets, but who distorted or misrepresented the Word of God, were subject to execution in

¹Merrill, "Deuteronomy ...," p. 23.

²Ibid., p. 27.

³See Young, pp. 20-37, for an exposition of verses 9 through 22.

Israel. This shows the importance of presenting the Word of God accurately. Let preachers and Bible teachers take note!

"Satan is a counterfeiter (2 Cor. 11:13-15) who knows how to lead undiscerning people away from Christ and the truth. They think they're filled with the Spirit when they're really fooled by the spirits."¹

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

¹Wiersbe, p. 411.

Later were divided by "courses"	Later lived in "schools"
Were gifts from God to the people	Were gifts from God to the people

How does chapter 18 fit into the civil legislation of Israel? Priests, Levites, and prophets were important civil as well as religious leaders in the theocracy. They represented the people before Israel's heavenly King, and they served as mediators between the King and the people. All God's people should honor those in authority over them (cf. 1 Pet. 2:13-17).

"Some legislators have permitted their governments to be under monarchies, others put them under oligarchies, and others under a republican form; but our [i.e., the Jews'] legislator [i.e., Moses] had no regard to any of these forms, but he ordained our government to be what, by a strained expression, may be termed a Theocracy."¹

When Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount, part of what He was doing was helping His audience understand God's original intent in giving them the Law, in contrast to the Pharisees' teaching, which was just: Obey the letter of the Law. Jesus reminded them of its spirit, and that is exactly what Moses was doing here as he expounded the Law in this section of Deuteronomy. Respect for authority in civil and religious affairs is simply an extension of the respect that God commanded in domestic affairs in the fifth commandment.

6. Laws arising from the sixth commandment 19:1—22:8

The sixth commandment is: "You shall not murder" (5:17). The representative laws in this chapter all protected people who were vulnerable for one reason or another. Criminal law, specifically crimes against persons, is in view.

Manslaughter 19:1-13

God revealed the law concerning how the Israelites were to deal with manslaughter earlier (cf. Num. 35:9-34). In Israel this kind of crime was a

¹Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2:17.

domestic rather than a civil court matter; in other words, families were to deal with it rather than civil judges.

19:1-3 The instructions given here urge application of this law and explain the need for three additional cities of refuge west of the Jordan River. Moses had already designated three towns on the east side of the Jordan (4:41-43). The provision of the six cities of refuge taught the Israelites how important human life is to God. The cities of refuge were, conceptually, extensions of the horns of the bronze altar in the tabernacle courtyard—as places of asylum.¹

19:4-7 These verses explain the purpose of the cities of refuge, namely, to provide a place of refuge for manslayers.

19:8-10 There is no indication in the Bible that the Israelites ever set aside this second set of three more cities of refuge. If they did not, it may have been because they never secured the full extent of the Promised Land. However, silence is not a good basis for argument, so the lack of reference to these cities may not necessarily mean that they were not set aside and used.

"The extension of the power of Israel to the Euphrates under David and Solomon, did not bring the land as far as this river into their actual possession, since the conquered kingdoms of Aram were still inhabited by the Aramaeans, who, though conquered, were only rendered tributary. And the Tyrians and Phoenicians, who belonged to the Canaanitish population, were not even attacked by David."²

19:11-13 People who sought refuge in one of these cities, claiming to be manslayers, should be put to death if it was discovered that they were really murderers.

¹Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 181.

²Keil and Delitzsch, 3:398. Cf. Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 267.

Witnesses 19:14-21

The previous pericope alluded to the need for witnesses, and this one explains their role.

19:14 A common cause of hostility between individuals that sometimes led to homicide was a failure to agree on common boundaries and to respect property rights (cf. 1 Kings 21:1-26; 22:37-38).¹ In the ancient world boundary markers protected the property rights of individuals. Many nations, in addition to Israel, regarded them as sacred as well. Stones several feet high marked the boundaries of royal land-grants.² The Romans later executed people who moved boundary markers.³ Tribal boundaries were particularly significant in the Promised Land because Yahweh, the owner of the land, determined them.

19:15-21 In Israel, judges were to assume that a person was innocent until proven guilty. These verses explain what they were to do if they suspected some witness of giving false testimony. Normally at least two witnesses were necessary (17:6), but sometimes there was only one. In such a case the trial was to go to the "supreme court" at the tabernacle ("before the LORD, before the priests and the judges," v. 17; cf. 17:8-13). False witnesses received the very punishment they sought to bring on the persons they falsely accused (vv. 19, 21).⁴ God here extended, to all criminals, the safeguards formerly guaranteed to capital offenders.

Jesus did not deny the validity of this principle for the courtroom, but He forbade its application in interpersonal relationships (Matt. 5:38-42).

¹Kaufman, p. 137.

²Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 182.

³Keil and Delitzsch, 3:399.

⁴See Chris Wright, "Principles of Punishment in Deuteronomy," *Third Way* 6:7 (July-August 1983):15-16. On verse 21, see Eugene J. Fisher, "*Lex Talionis* in the Bible and Rabbinic Tradition," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 19:3 (Summer 1982):582-87.

God's concern for His people's possessions and reputations, as well as their lives, stands out clearly in this chapter.

War ch. 20

These instructions deal with how Israel was to come into possession of the Promised Land (cf. Num. 33:50-56). They are given in the context of civil legislation because Israel did not have a standing army. Soldiers volunteered to go into battle as needed. Warfare and its conduct are relevant to the subject of taking life, and thus to the sixth commandment. This section provided a manual of warfare for the Israelites, outlining their attitude and approach to national enemies.¹

"Because Yahweh was God not only of Israel but also of all the earth, these interests [of warfare] extended far beyond Israel's narrow concerns. He was, however, Israel's God in a special way, and as such He would lead His people in battle as the divine warrior (20:4)."²

20:1-4 In all wars, Israel was to remember that God was with her, and to rely on His help with confidence ("do not be afraid of them," v. 1), regardless of the enemy's strength ("the LORD your God is the One who is going with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you," v. 4). We who are Christians, too, should recall God's past faithfulness when we encounter adversity, and gain courage from His promises that He will be with us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5-6; et al.). The priest who accompanied the army in battle (v. 2) was not necessarily the high priest (cf. Num. 31:6).

"In the ancient world, priests and interpreters of omens were regular members of military staffs (cf. Num 10:8, 9; 31:6; I Sam 7:9ff.). The function of the Israelite priest was not analogous to that of a modern army chaplain. He rather represented the sanctuary in the name of which the Israelite host advanced; he consecrated the battle to the

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 282.

²Idem, "A Theology ...," p. 82.

glory of the Lord of hosts and of his covenant kingdom."¹

God's people today, as well, should conduct their *spiritual* warfare confident of God's presence, power, and ultimate victory (cf. 2 Cor. 10:3-4; Eph. 6:10-17; Col. 2:15).

20:5-8 All soldiers with new responsibilities (new houses, vineyards, or fiancées) that would have distracted them from concentrating on their work as warriors, as well as fearful soldiers (v. 8), did not have to participate in a given battle.

"Beginnings were important in the Semitic mind and hence also in Israel. Since death in battle would deprive certain groups of men from commencing particular enterprises, exemptions were made."²

"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."³

"In each of these instances death in war resulted in the dispossession of blessing and its appropriation by someone else who otherwise had no just claim to it. Mixed with the demand for compulsory military service, then, was a leaven of compassion that made possible to all men the enjoyment of that which constitutes life in its fullest—home, sustenance, and family love."⁴

God's purpose was to use only the best soldiers, those who were confident of God's promise of victory. Israel did not need a large army, since God Himself would fight for her.

¹Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 183.

²Thompson, p. 220.

³Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 283.

⁴*Ibid.*, 284.

20:9 But God's promise of His assistance did not preclude careful preparations on the part of the soldiers.

20:10-15 The cities far from the Promised Land (v. 15), contrasted with Canaanite cities, were evidently not as degenerate as the Canaanite towns. Aramean women adopted the religions of their husbands, which is why Abraham insisted that his servant get a wife for Isaac from the Aramean culture, rather than from among the Canaanites (Gen. 24). Thus the women and children and plunder of these more remote lands were to be spared (v. 14) and did not have to die. King Ahab later married a Canaanite woman, Jezebel, who did not adopt her husband's faith—but instead imported Baalism into Israel.

The Israelite commanders were to offer terms of peace to each city they attacked outside the Promised Land (v. 10). Israel was not to shed blood unnecessarily. If the city accepted the terms, the population would serve the Israelites (cf. Josh. 9:3-27). If it refused, the Israelites were to kill all the males but spare the females, animals, and spoil.

20:16-18 On the other hand, the Israelites were to utterly destroy anything that breathed within the Promised Land.¹

"The central purpose of these instructions is to emphasize that Israel's warfare was not intended for foreign aggression or personal wealth (cf. Ge 14:21-24)."²

If one has no problem with God destroying the whole human race (except Noah and his family), plus its animals, in a universal flood, he or she should have no problem with Him destroying the inhabitants of Canaan and their animals with the Israelite army.

20:19-20 The law guarding fruit trees seems intended for application in sieges against the Canaanites cities. Fruit trees were part of God's bountiful provision of food for His people in "the land of

¹See Peter C. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament*, pp. 46-47; and Kaiser, *Toward Old ...*, pp. 172-80.

²Sailhamer, p. 458.

milk and honey." Other ancient nations wreaked total havoc in the territories they conquered.¹ Even though Israel was not to destroy the important natural resource of fruit trees, they could use other trees to make implements of warfare.

"... the precise form which siegeworks took in Israelite war is uncertain, but wooden battering rams and siege towers and ladders are known from sculptures to have been employed in Near Eastern warfare."²

Unsolved murders 21:1-9

"The reason for grouping these five laws [in ch. 21], which are apparently so different from one another, as well as for attaching them to the previous regulations, is to be found in the desire to bring out distinctly the sacredness of life and of personal rights from every point of view, and impress it upon the covenant nation."³

Cities were responsible to account for murders committed within their jurisdictions and to make atonement for them. This indicates that there is such a thing as corporate guilt in God's government of humanity. The ritual prescribed removed the pollution caused by bloodshed.

The "heifer" (young cow, v. 3) 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. 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 which was executed on his substitute. The blood of the heifer would fall on unplowed ground that would absorb it. Its blood would disappear into the topsoil, 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 entire ritual removed the impurity that would otherwise have rested on the people of the city because someone they could not find had shed

¹Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 276.

²Mayes, p. 297.

³Keil and Delitzsch, 3:404.

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.¹

Wives and children 21:10-21

Everything in this section has some connection with the sixth commandment, remote though it may seem in some cases. In all cases, respect for human life is in view.

Limits on a husband's authority 21:10-14

An Israelite man could marry a woman from a distant conquered cities who had been taken as a prisoner of war. If the man was previously unmarried, this would be his first wife. But if he was already married, he would be guilty of polygamy.

Such a woman had to shave her head and trim her nails. These were rituals of purification customary in the ancient Near East.² She could take one full month to mourn her parents. This may presuppose that her parents had died in the battle, or that she had been permanently separated from them. Or she may have been allowed to mourn because she had cut off all ties to her former life.³

"Such kindly consideration is in marked contrast with the cruel treatment meted out to women captured in war among the neighboring nations ..."⁴

"This legislation could have two basic results: the men would be restrained from rape, and the women would have time to become adjusted to their new condition."⁵

¹David P. Wright, "Deuteronomy 21:1-9 as a Rite of Elimination," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49:3 (July 1987):387-403.

²Keil and Delitzsch, 3:406.

³Mayes, p. 303.

⁴Thompson, p. 228.

⁵Kalland, p. 132.

The provision for divorce (v. 14) receives further clarification later (24:1-4).

We should not interpret the fact that God legislated the rights of sons born into polygamous families as tacit approval of that form of marriage. Monogamy was God's will (Gen. 2:24; cf. Matt. 19:4-6).¹ However, God also gave laws that regulated life when His people lived it in disobedience to His will. In other words, God did not approve of polygamy, but He tolerated it in Israel—in the sense that He did not execute or punish polygamists through civil procedures. Similarly, He did not approve of divorce, but He allowed it in this case (cf. Gen. 21:8-14; Ezra 9—10; Mal. 2:16).²

God did not feel compelled to comment in Scripture whenever people disobeyed him. That is, He did not always lead the writers of Scripture to identify every sinful practice as sinful whenever it occurs in a text. This was especially true when the people's sins produced relatively limited consequences. He did comment more on the Israelites' sins that directly involved their relationship to Himself, and their sins that affected other people. This fact reflects God's gracious character, as well as His particular concern for His own people (cf. Luke 15:12).

Limits on a father's authority 21:15-17

Here is another example of God guarding the rights of others who lived under conditions that were not His will. The firstborn son was to receive the traditional double portion of his father's inheritance. This was to be Israel's practice even though the firstborn may have been the son of an unloved wife, whom her husband loved less than his other wife (cf. Gen. 25:5-6).³ The father's authority, therefore, was not absolute in the Israelite home. Ancient Near Easterners regarded the firstborn son as the beginning of the father's strength (cf. Gen. 49:3). Just as men were to treat their

¹See Sailhamer, p. 460; and Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 292.

²See Joe M. Sprinkle, "Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:4 (December 1997):529-50.

³For refutation of the view of Gunkel and Noth, that the Hebrew word translated "double" in v. 17 should be rendered "two-thirds," see Eryl Davies, "The Meaning of *Pi Senayim* in Deuteronomy XXI 17," *Vetus Testamentum* 36:3 (July 1986):341-47. See also Barry J. Beitzel, "The Right of the Firstborn (*Pi Senayim*) in the Old Testament," in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, pp. 179-90.

wives with consideration (vv. 10-14), so too were fathers to treat their children with consideration (vv. 15-17).

The punishment of an incorrigible child 21:18-21

The previous ordinance guarded a son from a capricious father. This one maintained the rights of parents whose son (or daughter, presumably) was incorrigible ("stubborn and rebellious," v. 18). While the problem in view was one of lack of respect for parents (the fifth commandment), the offense could result in the death of the child (the sixth commandment).

This case presupposes a long history of rebelliousness. The son had become "thoughtless and given to drinking" (v. 20). That is, he had developed a lifestyle of deviant behavior. Before any loving parents would have taken the step available to them in this law, they would doubtless have tried every other means to secure their son's correction. This was the last resort for the parents. This law withheld the presumed right of parents to slay their own children for rebelliousness, while at the same time preserving parental authority fully. The fact that this "trial" was conducted "at the gateway of his hometown" (v. 19) indicates that it was a public affair and would have deterred other children from rebelling against their parents.

Commenting on the terms "stubborn" and "rebellious," David Marcus wrote the following:

"Both terms form a hendiadys to indicate a juvenile delinquent. Now when one examines how these terms are used in the Hebrew Bible one sees that they belong to the didactic vocabulary of biblical literature.¹ They generally connote disobedience, in particular in Israel's relationship to God. (The pertinent references may be found in Bellefontaine's article [see below] from which the present author has greatly profited.) For example, in Psalms 78:8 the generation of the desert is termed *sorer umoreh* [stubborn rebellious]. Isaiah castigates the people for being *sorer* and following its own way (Isa. 65:2). Jeremiah proclaims that Israel has a heart which is *sorer umoreh* (Jer. 5:23). Israel is portrayed as rebellious and disloyal, and in so doing repudiating its God and its relationship

¹Weinfeld, p. 303.

with him.¹ In like manner, the son, by being rebellious and disloyal, has repudiated his parents and his relationship with them. The authority of the parents has been rejected by the son since he has refused to obey them. The son, in renouncing his relationship with his parents, has effectively declared, if not by his words, then certainly by his deeds, what the adopted son in the Mesopotamian adoption contracts says when he abrogates his contract, 'I am not your son; you are not my parents' (Ibid., 17)."²

It may appear at first that God was commanding the Israelites to exercise less grace with their own children than He showed the whole nation. After all, God had previously promised never to cut off His people ("I will make you into a great nation," Gen. 12:2). The Israelites were to be God's instruments of judgment in many specific situations, as we have already seen in Deuteronomy. The punishment of sinners, be they Canaanites or Israelites, for specific types of sin, was imperative for Israel to fulfill God's purpose for her in the world (Exod. 19:5-6).

This legislation teaches us that parents should put their love for God above their love for their children.

Respect for life 21:22—22:8

This section opens and closes with references to death (21:22; 22:8), placing it within the legislation that deals with the sixth commandment.³

The burial of a hanged person 21:22-23

"The preceding law had proceeded from parental to official judicial authority and had prescribed the death penalty. The present case takes the judicial process a step beyond the execution, to the exposure of the corpse as a monitory [warning], public proclamation of the satisfaction of justice."⁴

¹Elizabeth Bellefontaine, "Deuteronomy 21:18-21: Reviewing the Case of the Rebellious Son," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 13 (July 1979):18.

²David Marcus, "Juvenile Delinquency in the Bible and the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 13 (1981):47. Cf. Luke 15:11-24.

³See Kaufman, pp. 134-37.

⁴Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 185.

The method of public execution prescribed in Israel was normally stoning. After criminals had died, sometimes their executioners impaled their bodies on a pole, cross, or tree for all to see, as a deterrent to others against committing similar crimes (cf. v. 21; 1 Sam. 31:9-13).¹ Hanging by the neck was not a form of execution practiced in ancient Israel.²

This law required that, in such corpse-hanging cases, those responsible had to bury the body the same day as the execution, in order to avoid defiling the land further because of death (cf. Num. 35:33-34; Lev. 18:24-27). Hanging the body up for public viewing was the result of God's curse, not its cause.

The fact that Jesus Christ's enemies crucified Him on a wooden cross, for all to see, demonstrated that God had cursed Him—because He bore our sins as our Substitute. His hanging on a tree (poetic usage that can mean a pole or a cross) was not the cause of God's cursing Him but the result of it (John 19:31; Gal. 3:13).

Preventing accidental death 22:1-8

All of the laws in this pericope taught the Israelites, and they should teach us, to respect life.

22:1-4 Love, expressed in care and concern for one's neighbor and his property, comes through in several concrete situations in these verses. Failure to get involved and/or to help a neighbor in need is also wrong under the New Covenant (James 2:15-16; 1 John 3:17).

22:5 Men appeared in women's clothing, and vice versa, in some of the worship rituals of Astarte.³ Furthermore, transvestitism (cross dressing) did, and still does, have associations with certain forms of homosexuality.⁴

"In the ancient Middle East, dressing in the clothing of the opposite sex was a magical practice intended to bring harm to people. For

¹Thompson, p. 232.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 325.

³Thompson, p. 234.

⁴Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 288.

example, a transvestite male would predict that the soldiers of another army would be as weak as females."¹

Perhaps, for these reasons, God gave the command to wear clothing appropriate to one's own sex—as well as because God intended to keep the sexes distinct. Homosexuality was punishable by death in Israel (Lev. 20:13).

"There are positive values in preserving the differences between the sexes in matters of dress. The New Testament instruction in Galatians 3:28, that there is neither male nor female, but that Christians are all one in Christ Jesus, applies rather to status in God's sight than to such things as dress. Without being legalistic some attempt to recognize the relative difference of the sexes, within their common unity as persons, is a principle worth safeguarding."²

22:6-7 These verses show that God cares for the least of His creatures, and He wanted His people to do the same. Israelites could not kill both mother birds and their young at the same time.

"The affectionate relation of parents to their young which God had established even in the animal world, was to be kept just as sacred [among animals as among humans]."³

Another view of this law is that it taught the Israelites to protect an important source of food, namely, eggs.⁴

¹ *The Nelson ...*, p. 326.

² Thompson, p. 234. See also Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, p. 151.

³ Keil and Delitzsch, 3:410.

⁴ Deere, p. 302. On the law of the bird's nest (vv. 6-7), see Robert M. Johnston, "The Least of the Commandments: Deuteronomy 22:6-7 in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 20:3 (Autumn 1982):205-15.

22:8 Building parapets on their flat-roofed houses, in order to keep people from falling off, reminded the Israelites of the value of human life, and of God's command to love their neighbors.

People should respect life, especially the life of other human beings, not only because all life belongs to God, but also because He has created people in His own image.

7. Laws arising from the seventh commandment 22:9— 23:18

The seventh commandment is: "You shall not commit adultery" (5:18). Adultery involves "mixing" people in a way that they should not mix. The Israelites were to keep things that were properly apart separate.

"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."¹

Illustrations of the principle 22:9-12

These laws against mixing seed, animals in yoke, and fibers in clothing may have had a double significance. They taught the Israelites the importance of purity, and they taught them to keep certain things distinct "... because the order of the world must not be endangered."² They may have also illustrated the importance of remaining separate from the Canaanites (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-18). An ox and a donkey would not have been a good combination when yoked together, because they pull the plow at different speeds and in different ways.

"Well, in marriage I have seen many an ox and an ass hitched up together!"³

Wool was the fiber from which the Israelites made their clothing. However the Canaanites, especially the Canaanite priests, dressed in linen.⁴ Tassels

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 299.

²C. Houtman, "Another Look at Forbidden Mixtures," *Vetus Testamentum* 24:2 (1984):227.

³McGee, 5:6.

⁴See Calum Carmichael, "Forbidden Mixtures," *Vetus Testamentum* 32:4 (1982):394-415.

(v. 12) were visual aids as scriptural reminders of the Israelites' distinctiveness from other people (cf. Num. 15:37-41).

"One of the ways the purity of the people is to be maintained, one that sounds rather strange in the contemporary world, is the insistence that *things be kept in order and not mixed up inappropriately*."¹

The marriage relationship 22:13-30

Moses considered seven types of cases in these verses:

22:13-19 The first case is of a man who marries a woman and then, after consummating the marriage, falsely accuses her of "shameful behavior" (i.e., not being a virgin when he married her, vv. 14, 17). If the girl's parents could prove her virginity, her husband would have to pay a large fine (cf. 2 Sam. 24:24) to her father and remain married to the girl. Note that this law indirectly implies that God permitted divorce among the Israelites in some situations (because of the hardness of their hearts, cf. vv. 28-29; 21:14; 24:1-4).

The evidence of the girl's virginity is usually understood to be the blood on her dress or bedclothes, from the wedding night, resulting from her first sexual union. Another view is that the evidence was menstrual blood, which indicated that the girl was not pregnant.² Some Bedouin and Moslem parents still retrieve and keep this evidence to prove virginity if necessary.³

22:20-21 The second case involved a similar situation, but in this instance the girl was proven not to be a virgin. The young bride was to suffer stoning for playing the harlot, which was a capital offense in Israel.

These verses reveal that sexual intimacy before marriage is sinful, and very serious in God's sight (cf. 1 Cor. 7:1-2). Premarital sex presumes to seize the highest privilege in

¹Miller, p. 162.

²Gordon J. Wenham, "*Betulah*—a girl of marriageable age," *Vetus Testamentum* 22 (1972):331-33.

³Keil and Delitzsch, 3:411; Kalland, p. 138.

marriage (i.e., intimacy through sexual union that results in the "one flesh" relationship). It does so without shouldering the responsibility incurred by having sex, namely, permanent commitment to one another (expressed as "be joined" in Gen. 2:24). It therefore perverts marriage, the basic institution of society, and it presumes to dictate to God by altering His plan.

Not everyone who has participated in premarital sex has thought these things through, but they are the basic reason premarital sex is wrong. To the engaged couple who are committed to one another, but are 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, and as what takes place after the couple has completed everything else involved in the establishment of marriage (cf. Gen. 2:24).¹

22:22 The third case decreed that a man who committed adultery with a married woman would die along with the woman.

22:23-24 The fourth case dealt with a man who had intercourse with an engaged girl in a city. Israelites regarded an engaged girl as virtually married, and they even called the girl in this case "his neighbor's wife" (v. 24). Thus they treated the man as having committed adultery, as in case three. Both individuals were to die by stoning. The girl died because she did not cry out for help; she consented to the act. Apparently Moses was assuming that if she had cried out, someone in the city would have heard and rescued her. The execution was to be a public affair.

22:25-27 The fifth case involved a situation similar to case four, but the intercourse (rape in this case) took place in an isolated field. In this instance only the man died, assuming the girl cried out for help but no one heard her. Presumably, if it was clear that she did not cry out, she would have been executed as well.

22:28-29 The sixth case had to do with a man and a virgin who had intercourse (presumably by rape) before they became

¹A good book to give teenagers tempted to have premarital sex is Al Haffner's *The High Cost of Free Love*.

engaged. In this case they had to marry and could not divorce. In addition, the man had to pay a penalty of 50 shekels of silver to his new father-in-law (cf. Exod. 22:16-17). Israel's laws concerning rape protected women better than the laws of their neighbors—and perhaps more effectively than modern legal systems.¹

22:30 The seventh case Moses stated in terms of a general principle. God forbade incest in Israel. Uncovering someone's garment is a euphemism for sexual intercourse in Scripture (27:20). To do this means to encroach on another person's marital rights. To cover the garment, in this sense, represents committing to marry (cf. Ruth 3:9).

"One of the most important and difficult tasks in the interpretation of the Scriptures in general and of the passages that deal with women and marriage in particular, is the need to discern which elements are cultural, temporary, and variable, and which ones are transcultural, timeless, and universal."²

God designed these laws to stress the importance of monogamy and faithfulness to one's spouse in a polygamous culture.

Marital "... purity and fidelity are essential to the well-being of society."³

God's people need to keep sex in its proper place in relation to marriage (cf. Heb. 13:4). The focus of this entire chapter is how to express love properly, namely, with God's blessing.

Public worship 23:1-8

In the preceding chapter Moses explained the proper types of marital union. In this chapter he set forth the proper types of union of individuals with the covenant community. This section of verses also deals with people who

¹See Sandra L. Richter, "Rape in Israel's World ... and Ours: A Study of Deuteronomy 22:23-29," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 64:1 (March 2021):59-76.

²Edwin Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July-September 1978):241.

³Thompson, p. 238.

were not born in Israel, but who wished to worship publicly with the Israelites.

23:1 God apparently excluded eunuchs (the "emasculated") from public worship because lack of wholeness symbolized lack of holiness.

"The 'assembly' (*qahal*) 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' (*bo*) throughout the passage (vv. 1-3, 8), a verb that suggests participation with the assembly and not initial introduction or conversion to it."¹

23:2 Likewise God excluded an "illegitimate" child—probably one born out of incest, adultery, or the union of an Israelite and a Canaanite (v. 2; cf. Zech. 9:6).² This restriction would have discouraged Israelites from marrying Canaanites, since their children could not participate in public worship, and public worship events were the most important ones in Israel. The illegitimate child category may also have included the offspring of Canaanite temple prostitutes.³ "To the tenth generation" means forever.⁴

"One was an Israelite and therefore a member of the covenant community by birth. Only by some act of his own will could he lose that privilege. On the other hand, Israelite birth did not automatically qualify one for full participation in community worship, the very point of vv. 1-2."⁵

23:3-6 The Israelites were to admit no Ammonite or Moabite into public worship. The Ammonites and Moabites were

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 307. Cf. Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 296; Kalland, p. 140.

²Keil and Delitzsch, 3:413-14.

³Payne, p. 130.

⁴Keil and Delitzsch, 3:414.

⁵Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 308.

descendants of Lot through his incestuous relationship with his daughters; they were illegitimately born (v. 2; cf. Gen. 19:30-38). In spite of this restriction, Ammonites, Moabites, and any other people, could become members of the nation of Israel by becoming proselytes to Yahwism (cf. 2:9, 19; Exod. 12:38; Ruth 4:10; 1 Sam. 22:3-4). Evidently they were excluded, however, from the public worship of Israel at the tabernacle, and later at the temple.

"Disbarment from the assembly was not synonymous with exclusion from the covenant community itself as the one example of Ruth the Moabite makes clear. ... There can be no doubt that Ruth was welcomed among the people of the Lord as one of their own though presumably never with access to the assembly."¹

Another possibility is that the Israelites did not enforce this law, and that Ruth did participate in public worship.

The main reason for the exclusion of the Ammonites and the Moabites, however, was the extreme hostility that these nations demonstrated toward Israel when the Israelites were approaching the Promised Land. Evidently Ammon participated with Moab in resisting Israel's passage, in seeking to curse the Israelites with Balaam's assistance, and/or in corrupting the Israelites through sacred prostitution (Num. 22—25).

23:7-8 God treated the Edomites and the Egyptians less severely. The great-grandchildren of people from these nations could become public worshippers with the Israelites. The rationale for this, again, was in Israel's relationships to these two nations in the past.

Even though not all these peoples could participate in Israel's public worship at the central sanctuary, they could, of course, trust in Israel's God and experience personal salvation. Many biblical individuals, who were not even members of the covenant community, enjoyed personal salvation (e.g.,

¹Ibid., p. 309.

Melchizedek, Job, the widow of Zarephath, the God-fearers among the Gentiles in Jesus' day, et al.).

From these verses, we learn that God's people should be careful about whom they allow to worship with themselves, or admit to full privileges among themselves (cf. Rom. 16:17-18). We also learn that God regards the identity of the person we marry as very important (cf. 1 Cor. 6:14—7:1). Also, monogamy is important. Our marriage partner will impact our relationship with God and His relationship with us.

Personal hygiene 23:9-14

Various practices—most of which we have discussed previously in these notes, or in the notes on Exodus and Leviticus—rendered the Israelite encampment ceremonially unclean. The laws in these verses applied to Israel after she entered the land and, specifically, while her armies engaged in battle. The connection with the seventh commandment is that which is unseemly, especially in the area of sexual associations.

23:9 "The soldiers themselves must take heed of sin, for sin takes off the edge of valour; guilt makes men cowards."¹

23:10-11 The Israelites were to regard human waste products as unclean. The Mosaic Law considered unclean everything that proceeded out of the human body. Perhaps this taught the Israelites that there is nothing good in man. Though excrement was unclean, the private actions involved in producing it were not in themselves shameful.

23:12-14 The Israelites were to acknowledge God's presence among them by burying their own excrement, and thereby keeping their camp free of human refuse. This would hallow His name as He "walked" among them (i.e., as He moved among them and observed their activities).

"There was nothing shameful in the excrement itself [v. 14]; but the want of reverence, which the people would display through not removing it,

¹Henry, p. 194.

would offend the Lord and drive Him out of the camp of Israel."¹

"... much of the information found in the [ancient] Egyptian medical texts was medically hazardous. For example donkey feces were used for the treatment of splinters, which probably increased the incidence of tetanus because of tetanus spores present in feces. Crocodile feces were used for birth control. In contrast Moses wrote that God instructed the Israelites to cover their excrement because it was 'unclean' (Deut. 23:12-13). At no time did Moses resort to adding the popular medical techniques of his day, though he was 'educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians' (Acts 7:22), which certainly included their medical wisdom."²

God's people even today should conduct themselves with God's presence among them in mind (cf. Eph. 5:3-4).

The treatment of the disadvantaged 23:15-16

Slaves from other nations who fled to Israel for refuge were to receive permanent asylum. God's people were to show compassion to the oppressed and were not to join with oppressors ("you shall not mistreat him," v. 16; cf. Heb. 13:3; Gal. 6:2).

"It is an honourable thing to shelter and protect the weak, provided they be not wicked."³

Cult prostitutes 23:17-18

Israelites were not to become or to dedicate any of their children as a "cult prostitutes," as the Canaanites did. They were not to offer to God money earned by prostitution (the "earnings of a prostitute" or "money for a dog") to pay for a vow to Him either. The "dog" (v. 18) was a male

¹Keil and Delitzsch, 3:413.

²Fawver and Overstreet, p. 275.

³Henry, p. 194.

prostitute (cf. Rev. 22:15). Such men were common in Canaanite religion.¹ The Hebrew terms used here to describe cult prostitutes (*qedesa* and *qades*) set them off from regular Israelites who practiced prostitution (*zonah* and *keleb*). Obviously any type of prostitution violated the spirit, if not the letter, of the seventh commandment.

God's people should not rationalize immoral behavior by thinking that it will result in the greater glory of God (cf. Rom. 6:1-2; Acts 5).

8. Laws arising from the eighth commandment 23:19— 24:7

The eighth commandment is: "You shall not steal" (5:19). All the laws in this section of Deuteronomy have some connection with respecting the possessions of others.

"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."²

Lending with interest 23:19-20

The Israelites could charge interest when they made loans to non-Israelites, but they were not to charge interest to their fellow countrymen (vv. 19-20; cf. Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-37).³

"... the evidence shows that ancient rates of interest were exorbitant."⁴

¹Thompson, p. 242; Payne, p. 132.

²Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 187.

³See Claus Issler, "Lending and Interest in the OT: Examining Three Interpretations to Explain the Deuteronomy 23:19-20 Distinction in Light of the Historical Usury Debate," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59:4 (2016):761-89.

⁴Payne, p. 132.

God's people should be especially gracious with their needy fellow believers (cf. Gal. 6:10).

Making vows 23:21-23

Vows to God were voluntary, but the LORD wanted His people to keep them after they made them. Failure to do so amounted to stealing from God.

God's people should follow through with their commitments to Him and to others (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9-10).

Eating standing crops 23:24-25

God permitted traveling Israelites to glean (pick and eat) the grapes and grain from any fields they passed through in the land, but they were not to harvest their neighbors' crops or collect them (cf. Matt. 12:1; Mark 2:23; Luke 6:1). Harvesting them would amount to stealing them. Here is another way in which the Israelites were to love their neighbors as themselves.

God's people should be gracious toward the needy, and should not abuse the graciousness of their fellow believers (cf. Heb. 13:5; 1 Tim. 6:8).

Marital duties and rights 24:1-5

A discussion of divorce and remarriage also fits into this context, because both practices involve respect for the rights of others.

24:1-4 The first of the two situations Moses dealt with, in this section, concerns a married, divorced, and remarried woman.

"In modern society, marriage and divorce are not only regulated by law, but are invalid unless conducted or decreed by accredited officials in accredited places (churches and register offices, or law-courts in the case of divorce). In Israel, however, both were purely domestic matters, with no officials and scarcely any documents involved; the *bill of divorce* was the exception, and it was essential, to protect the divorced woman from

any charge of adultery, which was punishable by death (cf. 22:22)."¹

Moses allowed divorce for the "hardness of heart" of the Israelites, but God's preference was that there be no divorce at all (Gen. 1:27; 2:24; Mal. 2:16; Matt. 19:8). This, then, is another example of God regulating practices that were not His desire for people, but that He permitted in Israel (e.g., polygamy, slavery, etc.). The worst situation envisaged in these verses is divorce, remarriage, divorce, and then remarriage to the first spouse. The better situation was divorce and remarriage. Still better was divorce and no remarriage. Best of all was no divorce.

"Marriage is in effect an election before being a covenant and that, much more than Israelite law, gave to the husband the right to repudiate his wife."²

The Egyptians practiced divorce, and gave written certificates of divorce, so perhaps the Israelites learned these practices from them.³ Divorce was common in the ancient Near East, and it was easy to obtain.⁴ However the Israelites took marriage more seriously than their neighbors did.

The reason for the granting of the divorce by the husband, who alone had the power to divorce, was "some indecency" in his wife (v. 1). This could not have been simply adultery, since the Israelites were to stone adulteresses (22:22). But it is debatable whether the Israelites enforced the death penalty for adultery.⁵ It could not have been just the suspicion of adultery either, since there was a specified procedure for dealing with that (Num. 5:5-31).

¹Ibid., pp. 133-34.

²Jacob, p. 202.

³Keil and Delitzsch, 3:417.

⁴Thompson, p. 244.

⁵Henry McKeating, "Sanctions Against Adultery in Ancient Israelite Society," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 11 (1979):57-72.

Two schools of rabbinic interpretation of this phrase developed in time: (1) Rabbi Hillel's liberal position was that God permitted a divorce "for any reason" (Matt. 19:3), for example, burning the husband's food. (2) Rabbi Shammai's conservative position allowed divorce only for fornication (any type of sexual sin). Jesus said that God permitted divorce for fornication, but He warned against remarrying after such a divorce (Matt. 19:9).¹

Divorce not permitted by God, followed by remarriage—which involved post-marital adultery for the woman—resulted in the moral defilement and uncleanness of the woman ("she has been defiled," v. 4; cf. Lev. 18:20; Num. 5:12-14).

The point of Moses' legislation was that when a couple divorced, and then wanted to remarry, the woman's first husband could not marry her again—if she had married someone else following her divorce. Evidently Israel's neighbors would divorce their mates, marry someone else, and then remarry their first spouse after their "affair." This ordinance would have discouraged hasty divorce as well as strengthening second marriages in Israel.² It encouraged husbands to respect their wives rather than treating them as a piece of property that could be bought and sold at will.³

"Thus the intent of the legislation seems to be to apply certain restrictions on the already existing practice of divorce. If divorce became too easy, then it could be abused and it would become a 'legal' form of committing adultery."⁴

¹See Appendix 2 at the end of these notes for a detailed discussion of the major interpretive problems in Deut. 24:1-4. See also Appendix 3 for some suggestions for preventing divorce.

²For discussion of other possible purposes, see J. Carl Laney, "Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and the Issue of Divorce," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:593 (January-March 1992):9-13.

³Wiersbe, p. 433.

⁴Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 305.

"... God doesn't agree to wife-swapping, which this would amount to. There is to be no trading back and forth."¹

One scholar argued well that the giving of a certificate of divorce implies not only a legal permission for divorce, but also the legal permission for the woman to remarry. He also believed that the improper behavior for which divorce was allowed was behavior that fundamentally violated the essence of the marriage covenant.²

Jesus taught His disciples not to divorce (Matt. 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12). Matthew included Jesus' clarification of the condition for divorce that God permitted (Matt. 19:9; cf. Deut. 24:1), but Mark did not. Paul restated Jesus' point (1 Cor. 7:10-11), and he added that a believing spouse need not remain with an unbelieving mate if the unbeliever departs (i.e., divorces; 1 Cor. 7:12-16). After a divorce, he encouraged remarriage to the former spouse, or else remaining single (1 Cor. 7:11).³

In Israel, the will of God was the same as national law. This is not true in the United States or anywhere else today. Some Christians think that because their government permits divorce for various reasons, God also permits it for those same

¹McGee, 1:591.

²Sprinkle, pp. 529-32 and 546-47.

³Some of the best writings on marriage, divorce, and remarriage are these, from my viewpoint: For the view that God permitted divorce and remarriage for immorality and desertion, see John Murray, *Divorce* (scholarly); Jay E. Adams, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage* (popular); and Tim Crater, "Bill Gothard's View of the Exception Clause," *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 4 (1980):5-10 (popular). For the view that God permitted divorce and remarriage for unlawful marriages, as the Mosaic Law specified unlawful marriages, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Matthean Divorce Texts and Some New Palestinian Evidence," *Theological Studies* 37:2 (June 1976):197-226 (scholarly); J. Carl Laney, *The Divorce Myth* (popular); and Ryrie, *You Mean ...*, pp. 45-56 (popular). For the view that God permitted divorce and remarriage in Israel for unfaithfulness during the betrothal period, see Abel Isaksson, "Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple," pp. 7-152 (scholarly); and Mark Geldard, "Jesus' Teaching on Divorce," *Churchman* 92 (1978):134-43 (popular). For the view that God permitted divorce but not remarriage, see William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce* (scholarly). A helpful general resource is James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*.

reasons. This is incorrect. It is important that we distinguish between what God permits and what our national laws permit.

Furthermore, we need to remember that what God permitted under the Old Covenant, and what He permits under the New Covenant, are not necessarily what He desires (i.e., His standards, His directive will). Malachi 2:16 indicates God's standard, His ideal for marriage, namely, no divorce. Nevertheless, God permitted divorce because of the hardness of people's hearts (Matt. 19:8; cf. 1 Cor. 7). Some of the laws under the Old Covenant clarified the limits of what God permitted, even though they fell short of His standard. This is similar to how we live within our families. Parents have standards for their children, but when the children do not live by those standards, other restrictions come into play.

In Scripture, God has consistently counseled believers to work through their marriage problems, if possible, and to forgive each other rather than getting a divorce (cf. Hosea 1—3). Divorcing for reasons other than those specified will likely result in even worse and more difficult consequences. God wants to bless His people, and His laws were for that purpose.

Some American Christians have overreacted somewhat against divorced people. Divorce is an act that always results in consequences, but people can still live under the blessing of God, and they can still serve God—even if they have a divorce in their past. God forgives past sins, and so should we. He deals with us where we are, in view of the consequences of our previous actions, rather than abandoning us—and so should we.

24:5 The second situation that Moses dealt with in this section concerns a recently married man. Such a person did not have to participate in military service for one year. 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.

Stealing livelihood and life 24:6-7

- 24:6 To steal a millstone from a person amounted to depriving him of his ability to grind his grain (for food), and to make his daily bread. Evidently a small ("upper") millstone is in view here, not a large (lower) one that required an animal to turn.
- 24:7 Kidnapping violated the right to freedom of choice, which God wanted every Israelite to enjoy (v. 7; cf. Exod. 21:16).

9. Laws arising from the ninth commandment 24:8—25:4

The ninth commandment is: "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (5:20). There may be a deliberate descending order of hierarchy in the list of offended parties in this section, beginning with the highest to the lowest.¹

Leaders 24:8-9

The reference to Miriam recalls the incident of her speaking against Moses and her punishment (Num. 12:1-15). The Israelites, especially the leaders like Miriam, were to be careful to submit to the Levites' teaching or they might contract leprosy. Miriam had given false testimony against a Levite: Moses, and she had contracted leprosy as a result.

Debtors 24:10-15

The Israelites were not to take advantage of their poorer brethren because of their vulnerable condition.

- 24:10-13 God looked out for them. They were not to withhold their clothing and wages from them (cf. James 5:4). Specifically, they were not to humiliate a debtor by entering his house and demanding repayment of a debt. They were to allow the debtor to initiate repayment.

"To stand and *call* is a very common and very respectful mode; and thus it was in Bible times, and to it there are many very interesting allusions

¹Kaufman, pp. 141-42.

[cf. Deut. 24:10; Acts 10:17-18; 12:13, 16]. Moses commanded the holder of a pledge to stand without [i.e., outside], and call to the owner thereof to come forth. This was to avoid the insolent intrusion of cruel creditors."¹

Perhaps the connection with the ninth commandment is that by taking the initiative and demanding payment, the creditor was saying something about the debtor that was not necessarily true, namely, that he was unable and/or unwilling to repay the debt.

24:14-15 The Israelites were not to take advantage of their hired workers, either native Israelites or foreign born "strangers," by withholding their wages. In Israelite culture laborers received their pay at the end of each day. So to withhold it was unloving.

Individual responsibility 24:16

The Israelites were not to punish children for the crimes that their parents committed. To do so charged innocent people unjustly with guilt.

"... it was a common thing among heathen nations—e.g., the Persians, Macedonians, and others—for the children and families of criminals to be also put to death (cf. Esther ix. 13, 14 ...)." ²

In the cases where God executed the families of criminals, He may have done so because the family members were also responsible for the crime (v. 16; cf. Josh. 7:24-26). In any case, God has the right to do things He does not allow His people to do. It is one thing for children to suffer physically and socially because of their parents' sins (Exod. 20:5; Deut. 5:9). It is something else for human authorities to punish them for criminal acts that they have not committed.³

¹Thomson, 1:192.

²Keil and Delitzsch, 3:420.

³See also Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Rizpah's Torment: When God Punishes the Children for the Sin of the Father," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 175:697 (January-March 2018):50-66.

The indigent 24:17-22

God guarded the rights of strangers (non-Israelites living in Israel), orphans, and widows, since they were not as capable of defending themselves as other Israelites were (vv. 17-22).

"The spirit of all these ordinances is very instructive, and the goodness and the tenderness of God, who deigns to take knowledge of all these things, and to teach His people delicacy, propriety, consideration for others, sensitiveness, and those feelings which, by removing brutality, and softening the hardness of the heart of man, fashion his ways according to that love with which the Spirit of God clothes Himself when He acts in the heart of man."¹

Criminals 25:1-3

Beating was a form of punishment used in Israel for various offenses. But the safety and personal dignity of the person being beaten was important to God, even though he or she deserved the beating. These things were also to be important to God's people.

"This was the Egyptian mode of whipping, as we may see depicted upon the monuments, when the culprits lie flat upon the ground, and being held fast by the hands and feet, receive their strokes in the presence of the judge. ... The number forty was not to be exceeded, because a larger number of strokes with a stick would not only endanger health and life, but disgrace the man. ... If he had deserved a severer punishment, he was to be executed. ... The number, forty, was probably chosen with reference to its symbolical significance, which it had derived from Gen. vii. 12 onwards, as the full measure of judgment. The Rabbins [some of the old Jewish rabbis] fixed the number at forty save one (*vid.* 2 Cor. xi. 24), from a scrupulous fear of transgressing the letter of the law, in case a mistake should be made in the counting; yet they felt no conscientious scruples about using a whip of twisted thongs instead of a stick."²

¹J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 1:330.

²Keil and Delitzsch, 3:421.

"... the number forty also appears in prescribed punishments in extra-biblical law (e.g. Middle Assyrian Law A 18; cf. *ANET*, 181)."¹

Verse 1 points out very clearly that "justify" (AV, NKJV) means to "declare the righteous innocent" (NASB) or "exonerate the innocent" (NET2) or "acquit[ing] the innocent" (NIV, TNIV, ESV) or "clear the innocent" (HCSB). "Justify" does *not* mean to *make* someone righteous in his or her behavior. This distinction is very important to a correct understanding of the doctrine of justification as God has revealed it in Scripture. Justification is a legal verdict that a guilty person is no longer chargeable for his or her crime or sin. He or she is not chargeable because adequate compensation has been provided to satisfy the law's demand.

Some of the Protestant Reformers failed to express this distinction clearly. To combat the Roman Catholic charge that the Reformers taught that justification by faith alone leads to antinomianism (living without restraint; lit. being against law), some of the Reformers went beyond the proper definition of justification and taught that the truly justified believer will inevitably persevere in faith and good works. The Bible teaches that believers should persevere in faith and good works, but it does not teach that they will inevitably do so. In fact, it exhorts believers to persevere, and it warns them of the danger of not persevering.²

Animals 25:4

God's care for animals as His creatures lay behind this law. The Apostle Paul expounded the significance of this command (1 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18).

"The purpose clearly was not only to provide for the ox itself but to make the point by *a fortiori* argument that if a mere animal was worthy of humane treatment, how much more so was a human being created as the image of God."³

¹Mayes, p. 327. His reference is to James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*.

²See Dillow, pp. 14, 25-41.

³Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 325. In an *a fortiori* argument a conclusion follows with even greater logical necessity than another conclusion already accepted in the argument.

10. Laws arising from the tenth commandment 25:5-19

The tenth commandment is: "You shall not covet ... anything that belongs to your neighbor" (5:21). The four laws in this section all deal with desire or intention as well as deed.

Selfishness in levirate marriage 25:5-10

The purpose of the levirate marriage ordinance was to ensure that a man who died before fathering an heir would obtain one, and consequently his name and estate would continue. "Levirate" comes from the Latin word *levir* meaning "husband's brother."

"The practice was common in the patriarchal period [cf. Gen. 38:1-10]. ... Presumably the prohibition of sexual union with a brother's wife in Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21 refers to such an act while the brother is still living."¹

"The taking off of the shoe was an ancient custom in Israel, adopted, according to Ruth iv. 7, in cases of redemption and exchange, for the purpose of confirming commercial transactions. The usage arose from the fact, that when any one took possession of landed property he did so by treading upon the soil, and asserting his right of possession by standing upon it in his shoes [cf. e.g., Gen. 13:17]. In this way the taking off of the shoe and handing it to another became a symbol of the renunciation of a man's position and property ... But the custom was an ignominious one [deserving of public disgrace] in such a case as this, when the shoe was publicly taken off the foot of the brother-in-law by the widow whom he refused to marry. He was thus deprived of the position which he ought to have occupied in relation to her and to his deceased brother, or to his paternal house; and the disgrace involved in this was still further heightened by the fact that his sister-in-law spat in his face."²

The Israelites were to practice levirate marriage only in cases where the brothers had lived together (v. 5) and the remaining brother was not already married (cf. Gen. 2:24). Living together meant living in the same

¹Thompson, p. 251.

²Keil and Delitzsch, 3:423.

area, not necessarily residing under the same roof.¹ When another male relative voluntarily assumed the responsibility of the surviving brother, that brother was apparently under no obligation to marry his sister-in-law (cf. Ruth 4).

"Can you imagine how this would affect a family in Israel? Suppose there was a family of four sons living on a farm in Ephraim country. Suppose that night after night one of the boys went off with the lantern and when he came back to go to bed, he would be whistling. Pretty soon the family would get into a huddle and the brothers would ask him, 'Where are you going every evening?' They'd do a little investigating of their own and find there was a daughter in the family that lived down the road. So the brother would admit, 'I believe in the good-neighbor policy, and I have been going down there to visit that family that just moved in.' And he would admit that he was thinking of marrying the girl. Now, if those brothers didn't care too much for that girl, can you imagine what would happen? They'd say, 'Listen—before you get any notions, you go to the doctor and have a physical check-up. We want to be sure you are in good health before you marry her, because none of us want to get stuck with her.' Believe me, they got down to business. Getting married was a family affair."²

There were several reasons for the levirate marriage provision. These reasons were: the importance of descendants in God's purposes for Israel, the welfare of the widow, and the demonstration of love for one's brother and his wife (cf. Gen. 38).³ If an Israelite man refused to perpetuate his dead brother's line, by refusing to marry this brother's widow, he was demonstrating covetousness and selfishness (cf. Ruth 4:6).

"Sin is really a selfish act. It's all about bringing ourselves pleasure caring little about the toll it will take on someone else."⁴

¹Ibid., 3:422.

²McGee, 1:593.

³See Dale W. Manor, "A Brief History of Levirate Marriage As It Relates to the Bible," *Near Eastern Archaeological Society Bulletin* NS20 (Fall 1982):33-52.

⁴Charles R. Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion & Destiny*, p. 282.

Unfair defense by a wife 25:11-12

God forbade an Israelite woman from gaining an unfair advantage over her husband's adversary in hand-to-hand fighting. This is a rare example of punishment by mutilation in the Pentateuch ("you shall cut off her hand"; cf. Exod. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21). It is the only place in the Old Testament where God prescribed physical mutilation as a punishment, apart from the *lex talionis* (an eye for an eye, etc.).¹ Here coveting the outcome of the fight in view is evidenced by the woman's action.

Dishonest weights and measures 25:13-16

The Israelites were to use the same weights and measures for both buying and selling—in order to ensure fairness in business transactions. Determining to cheat someone by using different measurements evidenced covetousness.

Desire for peace at any price 25:17-19

When the Israelites had entered the Promised Land, and had attained a measure of rest there, they were to remember that God had commanded them to exterminate the Amalekites. They were to do this because of the Amalekites' treatment of Israel in the wilderness (cf. Exod. 17:8-16; Num. 24:20; 1 Chron. 4:42-43). They were not to covet the possessions of these enemies of Israel.

"Particular importance is attached to the fate of the Amalekites in the Pentateuch, especially as a sign of God's faithfulness in fulfilling his promises."²

"Taken together, the laws of love and hate amount to the single requirement to love God, and consequently to love whom he loves and hate whom he hates."³

¹Mayes, p. 330.

²Sailhamer, p. 469.

³Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 189.

C. COVENANT CELEBRATION, CONFIRMATION, AND CONCLUSION CH. 26

This chapter concludes the "purely legal material"¹ begun in chapter 5.

1. Laws of covenant celebration and confirmation 26:1-15

The ordinances with which Moses concluded his second address (chs. 5—26) not only specified the Israelites' actions in further respects, but also focused their thinking on the goodness of God.

The presentation of the first fruits 26:1-11

When the Israelites entered the land they were to bring a special offering of first fruits ("the first of all the produce of the ground," v. 2), which they had harvested from the land, to Yahweh at the tabernacle (cf. 14:22-27). It was to be an expression of their gratitude to God for fulfilling His promise to bring them into the land. This was to be a combination of the Feast of First Fruits and a ceremony of covenant renewal.² They were not only to remember their humble origins, but were also to express gratitude for their present blessings.

"Now from this law we may learn, 1. To acknowledge God as the giver of all those good things which are the support and comfort of our natural life. 2. To deny ourselves. What is first ripe we are most fond of; those that are nice and curious expect to be served with each fruit at its first coming in. 3. To give to God the first and best we have. Those that consecrate the days of their youth, and the prime of their time, to the service and honour of God, bring him their first-fruits."³

"A pious heart acknowledges God Himself in the blessing, before enjoying it."⁴

The "father" referred to (v. 5) was Jacob. The Israelites were to describe him as an Aramean because he lived many years in Paddan-aram, and it was there that he married his wives and began his family. Jacob was essentially

¹Thompson, p. 253.

²W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, p. 116.

³Henry, p. 196.

⁴Darby, 1:334.

a simple semi-nomad whom God had blessed (cf. 18:4; Exod. 23:19; Num. 18:12-20).

It was common for Semites to regard a part of the whole as representing the whole (v. 9; cf. Josh. 21:43-45; 2 Sam. 5:6-10; 1 Kings 13:32; Jer. 31:5). They did not think of the first fruits that they offered to God as the only portion they owed God. They viewed it as representing all that God had given them, all of which belonged to Him.¹

God's people should acknowledge God's goodness to them publicly, not forgetting their former condition (cf. Heb. 13:15; Eph. 5:4; Phil. 4:6; Col. 2:7; 3:16; 4:2; 2 Cor. 9:15).

The presentation of the third year tithe 26:12-15

The offering and commitment to the LORD described in verses 1 through 11 was only part of the Israelites' responsibility. They also needed to love their fellow dependent Israelites (vv. 12-15; cf. 6:5).

"Every third year the tithe was kept in the villages for the relief of the poor (14:28, 29) and was thus outside the control of the priests. To prevent irregularities in its distribution, and at the same time to preserve the religious character of the obligation, the man of Israel was required to make a solemn declaration at the central sanctuary that he had used the tithe according to the divine law."²

Thompson assumed that the Israelites made this declaration at the tabernacle, but verses 12 and 13 seem to indicate that they did this wherever the Israelites lived.

"All this is most suggestive, as it teaches us that our worship can be perfected only in service to our fellow men."³

¹See A. J. Mattill Jr., "Representative Universalism and the Conquest of Canaan," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 35:1 (1967):8-17.

²Thompson, p. 257.

³Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 87.

Offering food to the dead (v. 14) was a Canaanite religious practice, and putting food in a grave with a dead body was a common Egyptian and Canaanite practice.¹

Adam Day pointed out several reasons why God made humans eat, according to Deuteronomy:

"(1) Food leads to a recognition of dependence on God (ch. 15). (2) It points to Yahweh's provision for his people (ch. 8). (3) Food teaches Israelites to fear and trust Yahweh (chs. 6, 14). (4) It shows that true satisfaction is found in Yahweh's word (ch. 8). (5) Food is a means of participating in joyful worship of Yahweh's goodness and cultivating thankfulness (chs. 12, 16, 26)."²

God's people should continue to trust Him for the fulfillment of promised blessings yet unrealized (cf. 1 Thess. 1:2-10; 2 Pet. 3:3-18).

"Stewardship doesn't mean that we give God a part and then use the rest as we please. True stewardship means that we give God what belongs to Him as an acknowledgment that all that we have is His. We then use all that is left wisely for His glory. To bring the Lord 10 percent and then waste the 90 percent that remains is not stewardship. It's foolishness."³

2. Summary exhortation 26:16-19

"The presentation of the commandments and the statutes and ordinances that will guide Israel's life in the land is over now. Verse 16 serves as a concluding bracket around chapters 5—26, matching Moses' introduction to the whole in 5:1 as well as his introduction to the section setting forth the statutes and ordinances in 12:1 ..."⁴

"If we regard the long section 5:1—26:15 as containing the heart of the covenant law, both in terms of the general

¹Kalland, p. 156.

²Adam Warner Day, "Eating before the Lord: A Theology of Food According to Deuteronomy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57:1 (2014):86.

³Wiersbe, p. 423.

⁴Miller, p. 184.

principles and of the specific stipulations (even allowing that in the present setting the material is 'law preached' rather than 'codified law'), we may regard this small pericope [26:16-19] as in the nature of an oath of allegiance (cf. 29:10-15; Ex. 24:7). In form, the pericope looks like a contract in which the two parties bind themselves by means of a solemn declaration. Moses acts as a covenant mediator between Israel, who declares that she will be Yahweh's people, and Yahweh, who declares that He will be Israel's God (cf. Ex. 6:7; Je. 31:33; Ezk. 36:28). In fact the wording of the pericope makes it clear that both declarations refer to the obligations which must be fulfilled by Israel alone. Yahweh has no obligations to keep, but in grace He has blessings to bestow."¹

"It is not difficult to see in this utterance the Lord's missionary goal for Israel in a nutshell."²

Obedience to the revealed will of God will result in maximum blessing for God's people. Moses proceeded to develop this idea further in chapters 27 and 28. This summary exhortation, then, concludes Moses' second address to the Israelites.

V. PREPARATIONS FOR RENEWING THE COVENANT 27:1—29:1

Moses now gave the new generation its instructions concerning making a fresh commitment to the covenant when Israel would enter the land.

"The ratification of the new covenant which Moses was making with the second generation was to unfold in two stages. That was customary procedure in securing the throne succession to the appointed royal heir. When death was imminent, the suzerain required his vassals to pledge obedience to his son; then, soon after the son's accession, the vassals' commitment was repeated. Similarly, Moses and Joshua formed a dynasty of mediatorial representatives of the Lord's suzerainty over Israel. Hence the succession of Joshua, which symbolized the

¹Thompson, p. 258.

²Daniel I. Block, "The Privilege of Calling: The Mosaic Paradigm for Missions (Deut. 26:16-19)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:648 (October-December 2005):388.

continuing lordship of Israel's God, was ensured by the oath elicited from Israel before Moses died, and again later by a ratification ceremony after Joshua's accession. The pronouncing of curses and blessings is prominent in each of these ratification rituals."¹

A. THE CEREMONY AT SHECHEM 27:1-13

When the people entered the Promised Land, they were to assemble at Shechem (vv. 1-8; cf. 11:29-30). This would be the second stage of the covenant renewal; it was to be conducted on the other side of the Jordan River in Canaan. Moses exhorted the Israelites now to obey the covenant requirements then (vv. 9-10), and he prepared them to invoke the covenant sanctions there (vv. 11-13).

General instructions for the renewal ceremony 27:1-8

27:1 Moses and the elders of Israel charged the people to obey all the commandments that Moses had given them.

"It is probable that the joint form of address is designed to impress more urgently on the elders their future responsibilities in the leadership of the people."²

27:2-3 "On the day" when the Israelites crossed the Jordan they were to set up large stones, coat them with lime, and write on them "all the words of the Law." There is no record in Scripture that the Israelites did this on the very day that they crossed the Jordan, but they may have done so.

"On the other hand the expression *on the day you pass over the Jordan* may simply mean 'once you have crossed the Jordan' without any reference to time."³

¹Kline, "Deuteronomy," pp. 190-91.

²Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 327.

³Thompson, p. 263.

"All the words of the Law" has been understood to mean several different things: the Ten Commandments,¹ the blessings and curses referred to in this chapter and the next,² the legal parts of the law,³ the most important parts of the laws reiterated in Deuteronomy,⁴ or the entire Book of Deuteronomy.⁵ Some ancient steles and standing stones that have been discovered contain much information, and that may have been true of these stones as well.

"So that you may enter the land" (v. 3) sounds strange: If the Israelites were to erect these stones after they entered the land, how could their erecting them be a condition for entering the land? Perhaps Moses meant that the Israelites' commitment to conduct this ceremony in the land was a condition for their entering the land.

27:4-8 The Israelites were to assemble at Mount Ebal (the hill that flanked Shechem to the north), near the center of the land, and set up several large stones as monuments (cf. Exod. 24:4-8). They were to coat (or "whitewash" NKJV, v. 2) these with "lime" (or "plaster," most English translations), and then write the words of the law on the stones. This was a common way of posting important public announcements in Canaan.⁶ The purpose of this act was to declare to all people, Canaanites as well as Israelites, that the Mosaic Law was Israel's standard of faith and practice: its national constitution.

"The practice of writing laws on a plastered surface was known in other lands, notably Egypt, where the texts were painted rather than engraved."⁷

The people were also to build an altar there on Mt. Ebal at the same time (vv. 5-7). They were to fashion it out of uncut

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 342.

²Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 4:8:44.

³Keil and Delitzsch, 3:431.

⁴Kalland, p. 160.

⁵Deere, p. 309.

⁶J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla*, pp. 23-28.

⁷Thompson, p. 262. Cf. Driver, p. 296.

stones (cf. Exod. 20:25). Then the nation was to offer burnt and peace offerings of worship to Yahweh, thereby committing themselves to Him as the LORD their God. Abram received God's promise of the land, and he built his first altar in the land at this site (Gen. 12:6-7). Jacob buried his idols there, and again, this site was at the center of the Promised Land.

- 27:9-10 The new generation of Israelites would become a people for Yahweh when they took on themselves the responsibilities and privileges of the Mosaic Law. As their fathers had done this at Mt. Horeb (Exod. 19:8), so the new generation would do it at Mt. Ebal.

"We might say that each generation are tenants and they are to pay rent. God is the land owner, and that rent is *obedience* to God."¹

"The ceremonial feast was usually part of the ratification activities when suzerainty treaties were signed in countries neighboring Israel during the Mosaic era."²

"This day" (v. 9) refers to the day when the people would fulfill these instructions in the land (Josh. 8; cf. Josh. 24).

- 27:11-13 We should read the instructions for this ceremony together with Joshua 8:30 through 35, where God recorded the Israelites' obedience to Moses' commands. Mt. Gerizim was the southern of the two small mountains, and Mt. Ebal the northern, on either side of Shechem. As Israel faced east, Mt. Gerizim would have been on her right hand, the traditional place of blessing, and Mt. Ebal on her left, the traditional place of cursing.

The representatives of the six tribes who stood on Mt. Gerizim were all sons of Leah and Rachel (Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin). The tribes on Mt. Ebal were descendants of the maids of these women (Gad, Asher, Dan, and Naphtali), plus Reuben and Zebulun. Reuben was the son

¹McGee, 1:597.

²Schultz, p. 85.

of Leah who had lost his birthright because of his sin, and Zebulun was the youngest son of Leah.

It is also important for Christians to publicly profess their commitment to Jesus Christ, like the Israelites publicly professed their commitment to Yahweh when they entered the Promised Land (cf. Rom. 10:9-10).

B. THE CURSES THAT FOLLOW DISOBEDIENCE TO SPECIFIC STIPULATIONS
27:14-26

This is the first of two sections of curses (cf. 28:15-68) that sandwich one section of blessings between them (28:1-14). The present group of curses explains the consequences of disobedience to specific stipulations of the covenant, whereas the second group of curses clarifies the consequences of disobedience to general stipulations of the covenant.

27:14 The Levites were to pronounce these curses to the Israelites.

27:15-25 The twelve curses were probably designed to correspond to the twelve tribes. The idea was not so much that the practice mentioned in each curse had been that specific besetting sin of one of the tribes. Each tribe received a warning against disobeying the whole Mosaic Law by receiving each specific injunction. God seems to have selected the warnings somewhat at random. They dealt with idolatry (v. 15), breaches of love for one's neighbor (vv. 16-19), sexual irregularities (vv. 20-23), and bodily injuries (vv. 24-25).

"The matters taken up are not a neat, ordered collection; they deal with fundamental aspects of the order of Israel's existence: the exclusive worship of the Lord, honor of parents, protection of life and property, justice for the weak and powerless, and sexual relations. These curses have often been regarded as a kind of ancient collection of laws analogous to the Ten Commandments, which have no curse expressions attached but do seem to have a sense of

absoluteness implied and in other contexts are given the penalty of death."¹

- 27:26 The last curse covers the violation of any other command in the law not specified in this list. Paul used this verse to emphasize the fact that no one can obey God perfectly (Gal. 3:10-14). The unifying theme, in these 12 curses, seems to be that these were all pronounced against sins that the Israelites could commit in secret.²

C. THE BLESSINGS THAT FOLLOW OBEDIENCE 28:1-14

"For the purpose of impressing upon the hearts of all the people in the most emphatic manner both the blessing which Israel was to proclaim upon Gerizim, and the curse which it was to proclaim upon Ebal, Moses now unfolds the blessing of fidelity to the law and the curse of transgression in a longer address, in which he once more resumes, sums up, and expands still further the promises and threats of the law in Ex. xxiii. 20-23, and Lev. xxvi."³

- 28:1-2 Moses began positively: by holding out blessings as inducements to obedience (cf. Gen. 1:28-30). He stated the greatest blessing, and the one that comprehends all those that follow, first: Israel could become the most exalted of all the nations on the earth. The condition for this blessing was obedience to all the commandments of Yahweh. So important was this condition that Moses stated it three times in this section—at the beginning (v. 1), middle (v. 9), and end (vv. 13-14; cf. vv. 15, 45, 58, 62)—in both positive and negative terms.
- 28:3-6 God would give His people blessing everywhere: domestically, economically, and militarily. Specifically, he enumerated six

¹Miller, p. 195.

²Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 331.

³Keil and Delitzsch, 3:435.

benefits using four merisms in each of which representative extremes describe the whole.¹

28:7-14 Then, in the typical hortatory (exhorting) fashion characteristic of Deuteronomy, Moses elaborated on these blessings. They would include victory in battle (v. 7), agricultural productivity (v. 8), political security (v. 9a, 10), many children, flocks, and herds (v. 11), rain (v. 12), and leadership and control of others (v. 13a).

"The Canaanites believed that Baal had a house in the heavens with an opening in the roof from which the rains were sent. Whether this constitutes the background for the figure underlying the storehouse in the heavens here [v. 12], Moses did insist that it was the Lord who would either bless Israel with abundant rain or withhold rain because of her disobedience."²

"It was only in feeble commencement that this blessing was fulfilled upon Israel under the Old Testament; and it is not till the restoration of Israel, which is to take place in the future according to Rom. xi. 25 sqq., that its complete fulfillment will be attained."³

"Israel depended upon their own obedience to get their blessings in the land. Christians get their blessings because of *Christ's* obedience *in their stead*."⁴

The key to Israel's blessing would be her obedience to God (vv. 9b, 13b-14). It does not take a brilliant person to become a great Christian; it takes an obedient person.

¹A merism is a figure of speech in which there is a substitution of two contrasting or opposite parts in place of the whole.

²Kalland, p. 168.

³Keil and Delitzsch, 3:436-37.

⁴Newell, p. 239.

D. THE CURSES THAT FOLLOW DISOBEDIENCE TO GENERAL STIPULATIONS
28:15-68

In this section Moses identified about four times more curses than blessings, which he had listed previously (vv. 1-14). The lists of curses in other ancient Near Eastern treaty texts were also typically longer than the lists of blessings.¹ The reason was probably to stress the seriousness of violating the covenant, by describing the consequences in detail.² Israel was entering a very dangerous environment in Canaan and needed strong warnings against yielding to the temptations she would encounter there (cf. Gen. 3:14-19).

28:15-19 Note that, after a general statement (v. 15; cf. vv. 1-2), the six formal curses (vv. 16-19) correspond almost exactly to the six blessings already mentioned in verses 3 through 6.

Blessings	Curses
"in the city, and ... in the country" (v. 3)	"in the city, and ... in the country" (v. 16)
"children" (v. 4)	"your basket and your kneading bowl" (v. 17)
"the produce of your ground" (v. 4)	"children" (v. 18)
"the offspring of your animals" (v. 4)	"the produce of your ground" (v. 18)
"your basket and your kneading bowl" (v. 5)	"the newborn of your herd, and the offspring of your flock" (v. 18)
"when you come in, and ... when you go out" (v. 6)	"when you come in, and ... when you go out" (v. 19)

¹Gordon J. Wenham, "The Structure and Date of Deuteronomy" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1969), p. 161.

²Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 357.

The exposition of the curses follows in verses 20 through 68 (cf. vv. 7-14). We can divide this section into five subsections of increasingly severe descriptions of God's disciplinary measures (cf. Lev. 26:14-33 for another set of five waves of punishment).

- 28:20-24 In the first description of God's discipline, Moses explained various forms in which Israel would suffer punishment for abandoning Him (v. 20). These would include devastating plagues (v. 21), consumption, inflammation, fever, war, blight, mildew (v. 22), drought (v. 23), and dust storms (24).
- 28:25-37 In the second description, the outlook is worse. Israel would suffer defeat in battle, and their dead bodies would not be buried (vv. 25-26). All kinds of physical ailments would assail the people (vv. 27-28, 34-35). As freedom from Egypt came to epitomize God's grace, so return to Egyptian conditions represented His judgment (v. 27). Israel's enemies would plunder, rule over, and oppress her (vv. 29-33). The LORD would deport His people to a nation unknown to them where they would serve idols (v. 36). And they would become an object of ridicule among the other nations of the world (v. 37).
- 28:38-46 In the third description, Moses saw Israel's potential fate as God removing some of the blessings of covenant fellowship with Himself. Thus there would be crop failures (vv. 38-40, 42), the breakup of family units (v. 41), and subjection to the foreigners in Israel (vv. 43-44).
- 28:47-57 The fourth description pictures the Israelites invaded, conquered, and brutalized by their enemies (vv. 47-52). Their situation would become so horrible that many would starve, and some would even eat their own children, during the enemy's siege warfare (vv. 53-57).
- 28:58-68 The fifth description shows Israel deprived of all the benefits she had formerly enjoyed (cf. 6:21-23; 26:5-9). This section deals with disease and disasters in the land (vv. 58-63), and deportation from the land (vv. 64-68). Both parts picture a reversal of blessings that Israel had enjoyed in her exodus from Egypt.

Perhaps we should understand the clause, "so will the LORD rejoice over you to wipe you out and destroy you," (v. 63), in the sense that He would take pleasure in being faithful to His promise to curse the Israelites if they broke the covenant. Obviously God does not sadistically take pleasure in disciplining His people when they disobey Him. But, being faithful to His Word, He must do so, and remaining true to His Word pleases Him. The CEV translators rendered this verse as follows: "The LORD is happy to make you successful and to help your nation grow while you conquer the land. But if you disobey him, he will be just as happy to pull you up by your roots."

In the later history of Israel, the punishments that God predicted here took place very literally when the people despised, disobeyed, and departed from His Law. What Moses described in verses 32 through 36 happened in both the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Verses 52 through 57 found fulfillment in those captivities as well as in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and Israel in A.D. 70. Verses 64 through 68 have repeatedly been fulfilled: during the Roman siege of A.D. 70,¹ in the Middle Ages, the Russian pogroms, Nazi Germany, and the present day.

"So we have six prophecies. [The first prophecy was given to Abraham. that his descendants would go into Egypt and be enslaved and oppressed there (Gen. 15:13). The second one, also given to Abraham, was that they would return to the land (Gen. 15:16). The remaining four are described here in this chapter.] Five of them have been literally fulfilled. What do you think about the sixth one? I can tell you what I think about it. I think it will be literally fulfilled. It is yet to come in the future."²

God designed these blessings and curses to persuade His people to obey His covenant with them. Stronger proof of the blessing of obedience and the blasting of disobedience is hardly imaginable. God's will was, and is, very clear and simple: obey His Word.

"The importance of Deuteronomy 28 (and the parallel in Leviticus 26) for the understanding of the rest of Old

¹See Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 6:8:2; 6:9:2-3.

²McGee, 1:599.

Testament history cannot be overstated. Possibly more than a thousand references in the prophets allude back to this material. Much of the suffering God's people experienced came as a fulfillment of the curses recorded in this chapter in God's response to their disobedience."¹

This section of Deuteronomy (chs. 27—28) is one of the most important ones in Scripture, because it records the two options open to Israel as she entered the Promised Land: Obedience to the revealed Word of God would result in blessing, but disobedience would result in blasting (punishment). Scholars who do not believe in supernatural prophecy have said that it would have been impossible for Moses to have written these words. They say that the subsequent history of Israel so accurately fulfilled these warnings that someone must have written them much later, perhaps after the Babylonian Captivity.

The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings take pains to point out how God fulfilled what Moses said here, in Israel's later history.² Martin Noth advanced the theory that one man, or a group of men, later in Israel's history, edited Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, in order to validate what the writer of Deuteronomy predicted.³ Internal evidence, as well as Jewish tradition, however, suggest that these books had separate writers, and their writers composed them earlier than Noth proposed.

"For understanding and explaining Israel's history as recorded throughout the Old Testament, there are perhaps no more important chapters than Deuteronomy 28—30."⁴

The purpose of the whole Mt. Gerizim/Mt. Ebal ceremony, which Moses described here, was to impress the Israelites with the importance and solemnity of refreshing and perpetuating their covenant relationship with Yahweh. This ceremony was to be a formal occasion, which the Canaanites as well as the Israelites would perceive as a covenant renewal ritual.

¹Stephen J. Bramer, "Suffering in the Pentateuch," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 96.

²See George Harton, "Fulfillment of Deuteronomy 28—30 in History and in Eschatology" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1981).

³Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*. This was also the view of Mayes.

⁴J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 105.

"When the Greeks invaded Palestine in 332 B.C., the Samaritans sought and obtained permission from the Greeks to build a temple on Mt. Gerizim. This temple was later destroyed and replaced by a Roman temple, but the Samaritans have observed their sacred festivals, including the Passover, on Mt. Gerizim ever since."¹

E. NARRATIVE INTERLUDE 29:1

Chapter 29 verse 1 is the last verse of chapter 28 in the Hebrew Bible. Moses probably intended it to be a summary statement of what precedes rather than an introduction to what follows. The renewed Mosaic Covenant, to which Moses now called on his hearers to commit themselves, contrasts somewhat with the original Mosaic Covenant to which the Israelites committed themselves at Mt. Sinai.

"... the verse forms an inclusio [acts as a bookend statement] with the preamble section of Deut 1:1-5. Both passages begin with the phrase 'these are the words ... which Moses,' both locate the setting in Moab, and both make reference to Horeb and the earlier covenant. Thus the covenant text proper may be said to have been brought to a conclusion in 29:1. ...

"It seems quite clear, then, that a major break occurs between 29:1 and 29:2, with the former bringing all the previous material to a close and the latter introducing at least the epilogic [epilogue] historical review."²

VI. MOSES' THIRD MAJOR ADDRESS: AN EXHORTATION TO OBEDIENCE 29:2—30:20

"The rest of chapter 29 contains many reminiscences of the Near Eastern treaty pattern. It is not presented in a systematic manner but in narrative form. However, elements of the pattern are clearly discernible, making it extremely likely that

¹G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in Its Cultural Environment*, p. 208. Cf. John 4:20.

²Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 373. Cf. Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 353; and Driver, p. 319.

some kind of covenant ceremony underlies the events here reported."¹

The form of this section argues for it being a covenant renewal. There is a historical prologue (29:2-9), reference to the parties covenanting (29:10-15), and basic stipulations (29:16-19). Then follow the curses (29:20-28), Moses' preaching of repentance and restoration (29:29—30:14), and the covenantal decision (30:15-20). The last section has three parts: the choice (30:15-18), the witnesses (30:19a), and the call for decision (30:19b-20).²

"There is general consensus that chaps. 29 and 30 of Deuteronomy (as well as 31:1-8) are not strictly part of the covenant document as such documents were ordinarily crafted.³ This does not mean, of course, that this section does not serve a covenant function in Moses' own unique creation of the book as a covenant instrument.⁴ But even if it doesn't, it is very much at home here as a parenesis [exhortation] that looks to the past, present, and future of the elect nation. It provides a summation of God's past dealings with Israel, restates the present occasion of covenant offer and acceptance, and addresses the options of covenant disobedience and obedience respectively. Finally, it exhorts the assembled throng to covenant commitment. It is most fitting that these summaries and exhortations follow the body of the covenant text and precede the formalizing of the agreement by the Lord and his chosen vassal."⁵

A. AN APPEAL FOR FAITHFULNESS 29:2-29

Moses began his third address to the Israelites with an appeal for them to remain faithful to their suzerain lord (the LORD their God) and His covenant with them.

¹Thompson, p. 279.

²Miller, p. 201. See also Dennis McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, pp. 199-205; and Klaus Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary*, pp. 34-36.

³Mayes, pp. 358-59.

⁴Wenham, "The Structure ...," pp. 208-10.

⁵Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 375.

1. A historical review 29:2-9

The emphasis in this section is on God's faithfulness in bringing Israel to its present geographical location (cf. 1:6—4:40). To do this, God had provided for the people's needs in the wilderness, and He had given them victory over some of their enemies (i.e., Sihon and Og). He had also given them some of the land that He had promised them (in Transjordan—for the Reubenites, Gadites, and the eastern half-tribe of the Manassites). In view of God's past faithfulness, the Israelites should keep "this covenant" (v. 9), the Mosaic Covenant, so that they might prosper in the future. Kenneth Hanna considered verse 9 to be the key verse in Deuteronomy.¹

2. The purpose of the assembly 29:10-15

Moses assembled the people in order to have them commit themselves anew to their covenant with God ("so that you may enter into the covenant with the LORD our God," v. 12). Renewing their commitment to Yahweh and His covenant with them would result in God establishing the Israelites as His special people and Him as their God (v. 13). This would enable the fulfillment of Yahweh's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to bless them. God had made the Mosaic Covenant with all the Israelites, not just the generation that stood before Moses on this occasion (vv. 14-15). "Those who are not with us here today" (v. 15) probably refers to the former generation of Israelites with whom the covenant was made at Mt. Sinai, in view of the context (vv. 16-17). But the implication is that the covenant would affect future generations of Israelites as well as the present generation.

3. The consequences of disobedience 29:16-29

Reflecting on the past 29:16-21

The present generation needed to remember what God had done for their parents by His grace, and what He had done to them in His wrath. This should encourage them to obey the laws of the Mosaic Covenant, under which the nation already lived and was governed.

¹Hanna, p. 98.

Anticipating the future 29:22-28

Abandonment of the Mosaic Covenant (v. 25) would result in the Israelites being driven out of the Promised Land. The generations to come would witness total devastation of the land from plagues, diseases, and foreign invaders (v. 22). Moses painted a picture for his hearers of other nations marveling at the devastation of Israel and pondering the reason for it. They would correctly conclude that it was a result of Israel's breaking her covenant with her God.

The importance of the present 29:29

The "secret things" refer to those things that God knows but has not revealed (cf. Isa. 55:8-9). In the context this refers specifically to how Israel would respond to the covenant in the future. The "things revealed" refer to what God had revealed so that the Israelites might enjoy God's blessings. In the context here, this refers to the Mosaic Covenant. People have a tendency to live in the past or to live in the future. But the Israelites were to live in the present and realize that their responsibility was to obey the Mosaic Covenant—now. The reality of past failure, and the possibility of future failure, should not detract them from their present duty.

"God keeps some knowledge to Himself. There are people who will tell you that they have access to this knowledge, claiming that God has given them a special revelation of His teaching. But God never contradicts Himself. The things He holds in secret are not a different truth that will erase the things we now know. They are simply things that only the Lord, in His infinite wisdom and power, can know. Everything that is essential for life has already been stated in God's Word. We do not have need of any 'extra' revelation. It is enough to be accountable to all that He has already told us within the pages of this Book."¹

The Israelites would enjoy being "leaseholders" of the land, namely, having the right to use it, but not own it—forever. But they could only occupy it to the extent that they obeyed God.

In modern times, the Palestinians have challenged the right of the Jews to occupy this land. According to this passage the Jews do have a right to

¹Charles R. Swindoll, *The Swindoll Study Bible*, p. 245. Paragraph division omitted.

occupy it, but only if they obey God. In the future they will occupy it fully, because the nation as a whole will repent and return to Yahweh in faith and obey Him (Zech. 12:10; Rom. 11:26-27)—when Jesus Christ returns to earth to set up His earthly kingdom (Rev. 19:11—20:6).

B. A CALL TO DECISION CH. 30

Having appealed for the Israelites' faithfulness to the covenant, Moses next called on the people to make a formal public commitment to obey it.

1. The possibility of restoration 30:1-10

This is the second time that God promised the restoration of Israel after the nation had broken the Mosaic Covenant repeatedly (cf. Lev. 26:40-45). The intent of this section of Moses' address was to give the Israelites hope. Why obey if failure is inevitable? Because Yahweh will never cast off His chosen people completely but will remain faithful to His promises to the patriarchs.

- 30:1-5 When they had later been banished to the ends of the earth for breaking the covenant, the Israelites could repent and return to Yahweh in their hearts ("with all your heart and soul," v. 2), purposing to obey Him again. In that event God would do several things for them: He would bring them back to their land, and allow them to occupy it again (vv. 3-5).
- 30:6 He would also permanently change the people's heart-attitude toward Himself (v. 6). Here Moses anticipated a new covenant, at some future date, that would eventually replace the old Mosaic Covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-28; Rom. 10:4-13; Heb. 10:1-9).

"While the repossession of the land can be said to some extent to have been fulfilled by the return of the Jews following the Babylonian exile (cf. Jer 29:10-14; 30:3), the greater prosperity and population was not achieved in Old Testament times. In fact, it still awaits realization in any literal sense (cf. Hag 2:6-9; Zech 8:1-8; 10:8-12). As for the radical work of regeneration described here as

circumcision of the heart, that clearly awaits a day yet to come as far as the covenant nation as a whole is concerned. ...

"Just as circumcision of the flesh symbolized outward identification with the Lord and the covenant community (cf. Gen 17:10, 23; Lev 12:3; Josh 5:2), so circumcision of the heart (a phrase found only here and in Deut 10:16 and Jer 4:4 in the OT) speaks of internal identification with him in what might be called regeneration in Christian theology. ...

"The miraculous, totally regenerating nature of the circumcision of the heart would be manifest by Israel's ability to love the Lord 'with all your heart and with all your soul' (Deut 30:6). This is an obvious reference to the demand of the Shema (Deut 6:4-5), adherence to which was at the very core of covenant commitment."¹

30:7-10 God would, furthermore, punish ("inflict all these curses on") Israel's enemies (v. 7). Because of Israel's eventual obedience, God would prosper her greatly (vv. 8-10). The term "fathers" (v. 9) probably refers to all the pious ancestors of the Israelites here, not just the patriarchs. Obedience to the Mosaic Covenant did not lie beyond the average Israelite's ability, with God's enabling grace, if he or she turned to Yahweh wholeheartedly (v. 10).²

Some premillennial commentators have called Deuteronomy 30:1 through 10 the Palestinian Covenant.³ They have not used this term as much in recent years, because these verses do not constitute a distinctively different covenant. Verses 1 through 10 simply elaborate on the land

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 388, 389. Cf. Deere, p. 315.

²See Calvin, 2:5:12.

³E.g., Chafer, 4:317-23; Pentecost, *Things to ...*, pp. 95-99; idem, *Thy Kingdom ...*, pp. 109-23; McGee, 1:600; *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, note on Deut. 30:3; Robert P. Lightner, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 259; Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, pp. 58-59; Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference*, ch. 8: "The Palestinian or Deuteronomic Covenant," pp. 77-83.

promises made earlier to Abraham and his descendants (v. 5; Gen. 12:7; et al.). They explain what will happen when Israel occupies the totality of the Promised Land.

However, some modern commentators still refer to chapters 29 and 30 as a distinct covenant.¹ I would say this section is a call to commit to the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Josh. 24:1-28) that, at the same time, contains further revelation concerning Israel in the land. The revelation is that, even though the land would be Israel's to occupy, the Israelites could only inhabit it if they were faithful to Him.

The steps in Israel's experience, enumerated here only as possibilities, provide an outline of the history of Israel—since this is how things have happened and will happen for Israel. These steps are seven: dispersion for disobedience (v. 1), repentance in dispersion (v. 2), regathering (v. 3), restoration to the land (vv. 4-5), national conversion (vv. 6, 8), the judgment of Israel's oppressors (v. 7), and national prosperity (v. 9). Israel experienced dispersion for disobedience and went into captivity in Assyria and Babylonia, then repented (partially), and was restored to the land (partially) in Old Testament times. However, The Israelites were again dispersed for rejecting their Messiah, have been and still are dispersed throughout the world, and have yet to repent as a group. Thus we look for the fulfillment of most of these things in the future.

"... the overall purpose of the author of the Pentateuch seems to be to show that the Sinai covenant failed for lack of an obedient heart on the part of God's people Israel. We have also seen that his intention in writing the Pentateuch is not to look back in despair at the failure of man but to point in hope to the faithfulness of God. The hope of the writer of the Pentateuch is clearly focused on what God will do to bring his covenant promises to fulfillment. Nowhere is he more clear on this than at the (structural) conclusion to his work: Deut 30:1-10, where Moses tells the people of Israel that they will fail and that they will be cursed, but God's work with them will not end there. The Lord will again bring them into the *land*, gather them from all the lands where they have been exiled. But this time, things will be different. Israel is going to obey God. God is going to give them a heart that will obey, a heart that will love the

¹E.g., Miller, p. 200.

Lord and keep his commandments. It is on this high note that the Pentateuch finally draws to a close. ...

"If we go beyond the Pentateuch to the other historical books, the Prophets and finally to the New Testament, the fulfillment of Moses' hope is made certain. It is also clear in these later books how God is going to give his people a new heart: 'I will give you a new heart, a new Spirit I will put within you; I will turn away the heart of stone from your flesh and I will give you a heart of flesh. My Spirit I will put within you and I will make you walk in my statutes and my judgments you will keep' (Ezek 36:26, 27). *It is by means of God's Spirit that his people are able to do his will.* No one is clearer on this point than the apostle Paul (Rom 8:4). What is often overlooked, however, is that we needn't go beyond the Pentateuch itself for exactly the same conclusion. The author of the Pentateuch has as one of his central purposes to show that God's work must always be done in God's way: *by means of the Spirit of God.* To show the centrality of this idea in the Pentateuch we need only compare the author's description of God's own carrying out of his will (Gen 1:2b) with that of man's obedience to God's will (Exod 31:1-5)."¹

Later revelation confirms that the conditions that Moses spoke about here, only as possibilities, will actually prevail in the future. Israel will indeed return to the LORD as a nation (v. 2; cf. Ezek. 16:53-63; Amos 9:9-15; Zech. 12:10-12; Acts 15:16-17). The LORD will gather her again to the Promised Land (vv. 3-5; cf. Isa. 11:11-12; Jer. 23:3-8; Ezek. 37:21-28; Matt. 24:29-31). She will experience a permanent change in her attitude toward God as a nation (v. 6; cf. Ezek. 20:33-44; Hos. 2:14-16; Zech. 13:8-9; Mal. 3:1-6; Rom. 11:26-27). She will see her oppressors punished (v. 7; cf. Isa. 14:1-2; Joel 3:1-8; Matt. 25:31-46). And God will prosper her abundantly (v. 9; cf. Amos 9:11-15).

God has not yet fulfilled these predictions. Therefore we look for a future fulfillment of them. The passages cited above indicate that this fulfillment will take place at the Second Coming of Christ, and in His millennial kingdom that will follow that return. A distinctive of dispensational theology is the

¹John H. Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes: Genesis 1:1—2:4a," *Trinity Journal* 5 NS (Spring 1984):81-82.

recognition that God has a future for Israel *as a nation*, that is distinct from the future of the church or the Gentile nations.¹

Non-dispensationalists believe that God will fulfill these promises to the "New Israel," which is their other name for the church. Some of them believe that Joshua and his successors conquered the Promised Land sufficiently to warrant the conclusion that we should look for no future fulfillment. Others of them believe that the land promises are spiritual (not literal), and will find fulfillment in the future, either in heaven or in the new earth.

2. The importance of obedience 30:11-20

The basis for hope continues in this pericope.

30:11-14 God was not asking something impossible of His people (cf. Rom. 10:6-8). He had given them the Mosaic Law so they could obey Him. The Law was very near (accessible to) them, it was designed specifically for them, and it was given to benefit them.

"The point at issue here was not the ease or even possibility of keeping the word of the Lord ... but of even knowing what it was. 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' (*lo' niple'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."²

30:15-20 The choice before the Israelites was ultimately one of life or death (cf. Gen. 1:28; 2:9, 17; 3:8, 22-24; 5:22-24; 6:9; 17:1).³ Moses called the permanent, unchanging heaven and earth to witness the making of this covenant (v. 19). Those

¹See Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 43-47; or idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 38-41.

²Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 391.

³See Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch ...*, p. 474.

who made ancient Near Eastern treaties commonly called witnesses to attest them. God also urged the people to look at the consequences of their choice, and to choose life and obedience deliberately (v. 19). The highest motive, love for God, would enable the Israelites to obey the LORD steadfastly. They would consequently live in the land that God had promised the patriarchs (v. 20).

"The notion of choice, with its implication of freedom to determine one's own actions or mode of life, is one which is characteristic of Deuteronomy. God chooses, but human beings also have that freedom."¹

"You can choose your actions, or you can choose your consequences. But you can't choose both."²

"Participants in Israel's liturgies of covenant renewal, listeners to the word of the Lord and the words of Moses, readers of Deuteronomy then and now are all confronted with one of the most explicit calls for a decision that the Bible presents."³

This final exhortation lifted Moses' third major address to the people to an emotional climax (cf. 4:32-40).

"This decision to love or not to love God is one of life's major decisions."⁴

"The opening words of Moses' first address were 'See, I have set before you the land; go in and take possession' (1:8). Now, as his speaking comes to an end, those words are echoed: 'See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil ... therefore choose life' (30:15). Between those two addresses is all the teaching of the commandments, the

¹Whybray, p. 96.

²Mark Bailey, *To Follow Him*, p. 52.

³Miller, p. 214.

⁴Schultz, p. 102.

statutes, and the ordinances. And therein lies the theological structure of Deuteronomy in a nutshell."¹

VII. MOSES' LAST ACTS CHS. 31—34

Having completed all his major addresses to the Israelites, recorded to this point in Deuteronomy, Moses needed only to make a few final arrangements before Israel was ready to enter the land. The record of these events concludes the book. Chapters 31 through 34 constitute several appendices to the main body of Deuteronomy (cf. Judg. 17—21; 2 Sam. 21—24).

"This final section of the covenant document has as its unifying theme the perpetuation of the covenant relationship. Of special importance is the subject of the royal succession, which is also prominent in the extra-biblical suzerainty treaties ... This succession is provided for by the appointment and commissioning of Joshua as dynastic heir to Moses in the office of mediatorial representative of the Lord (ch. 31). The testamentary assignment of kingdom inheritance to the several tribes of Israel (ch. 33) reckons with the status of all God's people as royal heirs. Included also are two other standard elements in the international treaties. One is the invocation of covenant witnesses, here represented chiefly by the Song of Witness (ch. 32). The other is the directions for the disposition of the treaty document after the ceremony (31:9-13). By way of notarizing the document, an account of the death of Moses is affixed at the end (ch. 34)."²

A. THE DUTIES OF ISRAEL'S FUTURE LEADERS 31:1-29

"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,

¹Miller, p. 214.

²Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 197.

and the ultimate authority of covenant mandate [instruction] over human institutions."¹

1. The presentation of Joshua 31:1-8

Moses' charge to the people 31:1-6

Moses presented Joshua to the nation as God's chosen leader. Joshua would very soon take over the leadership of Israel. Moses gave two reasons that he would not accompany the people into the Promised Land: his extreme old age, and God's prohibition (Num. 20:12; 27:14). But he promised the people that the LORD Himself would go before them and dispossess the native inhabitants. Joshua would be their human leader. He urged the people to "Be strong and courageous" and to not dread the Canaanites, because Yahweh would be with them and would not desert them.

Moses' charge to Joshua 31:7-8

Moses also charged Joshua publicly to "Be strong and courageous" as the nation entered the land, in view of God's promises, presence, and power. "Do not fear and do not be dismayed" (v. 8).

"Courage is only fear soaked in prayer."²

"Commissioning of the community's leader(s), therefore, as encountered in this model, is to a task, not to a position. Authority and standing are dependent upon the nature of the task, not vice versa."³

We observe this fact, too, in the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas to their missionary task (Acts. 13:2-3).

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 395.

²Lewis B. Smedes, "An Introduction to Mission Beyond the Mission," *Theology, News, and Notes* 30:3 (October 1983):3.

³Miller, p. 221.

2. The seventh-year covenant renewal ceremony 31:9-13

31:9 Before he died, Moses left a written document with the leaders of the nation, which the Israelites regarded as God's law (cf. Josh. 1:8). "This Law" probably refers to Moses' exposition of the Law (chs. 5—26), though the exact meaning of the "Law" (*torah*, instruction, vv. 9, 24) here is not clear.

31:10-13 The national leaders were to read this Law to the whole nation ("before all Israel," v. 11) every seventh (sabbatical) year, at the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles). This reading would remind and instruct God's people concerning His gracious will for them and their responsibilities to Him. It was common in other ancient Near Eastern countries for the priests to assemble the people periodically and read them the king's covenant (cf. 16:13-17).

"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."¹

3. The commissioning of Joshua 31:14-23

31:14-15 Whereas previously Moses had presented Joshua to the people (vv. 7-8), now God officially commissioned Joshua to his new responsibility as Moses' successor (cf. Josh. 23—24; Acts 20:17-37). He did this at the tabernacle ("tent of meeting," v. 14), which was the appropriate place for this official ceremony. The importance of this event was further solemnized by the appearance of Yahweh in the pillar of cloud.

¹Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 198.

- 31:16-18 The LORD revealed to Moses that the Israelites would apostatize when they had entered the land. He would then abandon them (temporarily).

The LORD had told Moses at the beginning of his career of leading the Israelites what would happen in the future (Exod. 3:19-22). Now at the end of Moses' career the LORD again told his servant what would happen in the future. These predictions bracket the career of Moses, and they demonstrate the omniscience of God.

The LORD's hiding of "His face" (v. 18; 32:20) is the opposite of making His face shine on His people, and of turning His face toward them (blessing them; cf. Num. 6:25-26).

- 31:19-22 To discourage future apostasy, God gave Moses a song (32:1-43), the words of which he was to write down, and then teach the people, in order to help them remember God's faithfulness. Since it was a song, the people would, once having learned it by heart, remember these words easily and be able to repeat them frequently. The singing of it would later haunt them with how much they had lost for having disobeyed Yahweh—since they would depart from wholehearted commitment to Him.

"Songs often remain after commandments are forgotten, and it was that this might be so that Moses was instructed to write."¹

"National songs take deep hold of the memories and have a powerful influence in stirring the deepest feelings of a people."²

"Too often God's people forget what they ought to remember and remember what they ought to forget!"³

¹Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, pp. 89-90.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 164.

³Wiersbe, p. 444.

31:23 Moses obeyed the LORD and commissioned Joshua. He also charged him with Yahweh's words: "Be strong and courageous ... and I will be with you."

4. The preservation of God's words 31:24-29

Moses charged the Levitical priests with the care and keeping of the law-scroll that he had written ("this Book of the Law," v. 26), either the whole Book of Deuteronomy¹ or the entire Torah (the Pentateuch, Heb. *Tanak*).² It was normal for priests to bear this responsibility in the ancient Near East.³ They kept this written Law-scroll beside, not inside, the ark (v. 26; cf. 2 Kings 22:8). Only the Ten Commandments were in the ark (Exod. 25:16; cf. Exod. 16:33-34; Num. 17:10-11; 1 Kings 8:9; 2 Chron. 5:10). The Levites who carried the ark were Kohathites. The song (vv. 15-16) and the scroll (the Book of the Law) were two witnesses to the people's obedience and disobedience. Moses also warned the priests, the elders, and the officers (tribal heads, military officers, and judges), of Israel's future apostasy, as God had revealed this to him and Joshua (vv. 27-29). It was important for these spiritual leaders to be ready for what was coming.

"What appears to be in view is a miniature preenactment of the ceremony that the whole nation was to engage in at Ebal and Gerizim once Canaan had been overcome and occupied (cf. 27:1-14)."⁴

"The theme of both swan songs by two of Israel's greatest leaders, Moses and Joshua, centered on the momentary fulfillment of that anciently announced promise: a land, a rest, and a place chosen by Yahweh (Deut. 31:2-3, 5, 7, 11, 20, 23; Josh. 23:1, 4, 5, 13, 15). These three features dominated the transition from the Mosaic era to the premonarchical era."⁵

¹Deere, p. 317.

²Randall Price, *Searching for the Original Bible*, p.38.

³Thompson, pp. 290-91.

⁴Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 405.

⁵Kaiser, *Toward an ...*, p. 124.

B. THE SONG OF MOSES 31:30—32:44

The Song of Moses is the song that Moses gave to and taught the people before he died in order to help them remember God's faithfulness and thereby be encouraged (cf. Exod. 15; 2 Sam. 22; the Psalms). Its subject is God. Its theme is God's faithfulness. Its purpose was to encourage Israel to remember God's greatness. This is also the purpose of many Christian songs as well.

"How often we find it so, that long after hard commandments and hard, hard ethic is forgotten by a wanderer in a far country, there will begin to him the lilt of a song he heard his mother sing when he was at home. The song is more powerful than the law, and the last thing Moses had to do at the end was to write a song and teach it to the people."¹

1. The introduction to the song 31:30

Moses recited the words of this song, that God had given him, in the hearing of all the Israelites (cf. 32:44). The song follows the pattern of the Deuteronomic treaty.

2. The song itself 32:1-43

One Old Testament scholar called the Song of Moses "one of the most impressive religious poems in the entire Old Testament."² It contrasts the faithfulness and loyal love of God with the unfaithfulness and perversity of His people. Like other important poems in the Pentateuch (e.g., Gen. 49; Exod. 15; Num. 24), this one also teaches important lessons—originally to the Israelites, but even today to Christians.

"The song embraces the whole of the future history of Israel, and bears all the marks of a prophetic testimony from the mouth of Moses, in the perfectly ideal picture which it draws, on the one hand, of the benefits and blessings conferred by

¹Morgan, *The Unfolding ...*, p. 81.

²W. F. Albright, "Some Remarks on the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy XXXII," *Vetus Testamentum* 9 (1959):339-46.

the Lord upon His people; and on the other hand, of the ingratitude with which Israel repaid its God for them all."¹

"The song of Moses is the key to all prophecy."²

Moses presented this song in the form of a lawsuit in which Yahweh leveled a charge against Israel. This form is very common in many of the writing prophets' oracles.³ Its central theme is "Israel's apostasy and God's threatening judgment."⁴ One expositor divided the song this way: the character of God (vv. 1-4), the kindness (goodness) of God to His people (vv. 5-14), the faithfulness of God in chastening His people (vv. 15-25), and the vengeance of God against His adversaries (vv. 26-43).⁵

32:1-2 Moses called on everyone to listen to what follows ("Listen, you heavens ... and let the earth hear ..."; cf. Isa. 1:2). By comparing his teaching to rain and dew, Moses was saying that it would be a life-giving blessing to the Israelites. Rain and dew were major sources of blessing in the Promised Land, and their absence created serious problems for the inhabitants.

32:3-4 The subject of this song, Moses said, would be Israel's God ("I proclaim the name of the LORD," v. 3).

"The subject of this song is doctrine ["teaching"]; he [Moses] had given them [the Israelites] a song of praise and thanksgiving (Exod. xv.), but this is a song of instruction, for in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, we are not only to give glory

¹Keil and Delitzsch, 3:464.

²Gaebelein, 1:1:437.

³See G. Ernest Wright, "The Lawsuit of God: A Form-Critical Study of Deuteronomy 32," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, pp. 26-67.

⁴Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch ...*, p. 475. For more information on the text of chapter 32, see Patrick W. Skehan, "The Structure of the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy (Deut. 32:1-43)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 13:2 (April 1951):153-63. James R. Boston argued for the origination of this song in the time of Hezekiah or Josiah, as have many other critical scholars, in "The Wisdom Influence upon the Song of Moses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87 (1968):198-202.

⁵Wiersbe, pp. 449-51.

to God, but to *teach and admonish one another*,
Col. iii. 16."¹

The "name" of God is the expression of His character as He has revealed it to His people and the world. The purpose of the song is that everyone would recognize God as the great God that He is, and that His people would respond to Him appropriately.

The description of God as "the Rock" (vv. 4, 15, 18, 30, 31) occurs for the first time here in Scripture, but it appears many times later. This metaphor pictures God as a reliable Refuge and Foundation for His people, on whom they could build, and who had been solidly faithful to them.

32:5-6 Israel, on the other hand, was "perverse and crooked." Moses also called God the "Father" of the Israelites (cf. Mal. 1:6; 2:10), whom His people had repaid with corrupt behavior for His many gifts. Such a response was despicable in the ancient East, even more than it is today.

"We must notice that the Israelites only rarely give to Yahweh the title father when they address him and that only rarely do they call themselves sons of Yahweh. It is rather God who designates himself as father by calling the Israelites his sons. That prevented any mysticism based upon a bond of physical parentage between God and man."²

32:7-14 The writer graphically described God's choice and care of Israel in these verses.³ Of all the nations of the earth, Israel had experienced the greatest blessing. This is the last of 16 times in Deuteronomy that Moses challenged the Israelites to "remember," beginning with 4:10. The "desert land" where

¹Henry, p. 202.

²Jacob, p. 62.

³See David E. Stevens, "Does Deuteronomy 32:8 Refer to 'Sons of God' or 'Sons of Israel'?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:614 (April-June 1997):131-41, for a discussion of this textual problem. He concluded that "sons of Israel" is the preferred reading. Michael S. Heiser argued for "Sons of God" in "Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (January-March 2001):52-74. I prefer the "Sons of Israel" reading.

Yahweh found Israel, was Egypt (v. 10). The "apple of the eye" (i.e., the pupil, lit. "the little man of the eye," v. 10) is the part of the eye that a person protects most carefully (cf. Ps. 17:8; Prov. 7:2). The phrase "apple of the eye" became an English idiom meaning: anything that one holds very dear or cherishes greatly.

- 32:15-18 Israel's rebellion against her "Father" stands in stark contrast to God's gracious care for her. "Jeshurun" (v. 15; cf. 33:26; Num. 23:10) means "Upright One," "Uprightness," or "Righteous Nation." This pet name for Israel reminded the people of their holy calling. Like a fat ox, "Jeshurun" had become unresponsive, due to the "fatness" (blessings) she had gained as a result of God's goodness.

"The chiastic structure by which vv. 4-14 match vv. 15-18 in reverse suggests the reversal of Israel's pledges of covenant commitment to the Lord."¹

- 32:19-25 "The 'jealousy' of God [v. 21] is not a spirit of pettiness prompted by his insecurity, but righteous indignation caused by the disloyalty of his people to his covenant grace ... The jealousy of Israel, however (see next line), will be envy because of God's lavish attention to another nation [cf. Rom. 11:11]."²

God would discipline Israel because of her rebellion. He would make the punishment fit the crime (v. 21). The foolish nation referred to as being "not a people" (v. 21) refers to any nation that had no divine calling as a people—as Israel did. There is no other nation like Israel, in the sense that Israel was the chosen people of God (Exod. 19:5-6). "Fire" (v. 22) is the symbol of God's wrath and judgment (cf. 4:24; Exod. 3:2; Heb. 12:29).

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 416.

²The NET2 Bible note on 32:21.

32:26-38 Israel's unfaithfulness would not thwart God's purposes for her however. God would use other nations ("adversaries," v. 27) to discipline His people, but He would judge these adversaries too ("the LORD will vindicate His people, " v. 36; cf. Hab. 1—2). The Old Testament writers compared Israel to "Sodom" and "Gomorrah" many times (e.g., v. 32), but they never compared the heathen nations to those wicked cities.

"One of the well-known sermons in American history was preached by Jonathan Edwards in 1741 from this verse [v. 35] and particularly from this clause: 'In due time their foot will slip.' The sermon subject was 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.' Edwards thought that the verse was directed at the unbelieving Israelites, but his application of it reached to all wicked people."¹

32:39-43 The biblical writers also represented God frequently as a Warrior-Hero who fought in battle for Israel against her enemies (vv. 41-42; cf. Ps. 7:13). Loving God, as used in Scripture of peoples and nations, indicates faithful covenant obedience (cf. 5:10; 6:5; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20). Hating Him describes those who either have no covenant relationship with Him, or those who have His covenant but live in rebellion against Him (cf. 5:9; 7:10; 2 Chron. 19:2; Ps. 81:15; 139:20-21).

"Again it can be seen that the text portrays the Torah as God's gift of life to his people in much the same way as the Tree of Life was put into the midst of the Garden of Eden (Ge 2:8-17). Just as obedience to the Lord's command not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was the key to their access to the Tree of Life (Ge 2:16-17), so obedience to the Lord's command in the Torah was to be the key to Israel's 'living long in the land' that God had prepared for them."²

¹Kalland, p. 212.

²Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch ...*, p. 476.

This song was one more instrument that God used to teach His people to obey Him—along with Moses' sermons, the rituals, the monuments, the festivals, and the commandments themselves (vv. 46-47).

"It will ... act as a mnemonic, an aid to memory, because during the intervening period it will have lived unforgotten in the mouth of the reader or hearer, ready to come to mind when the troubles arrive. Poetry is thus a kind of time bomb; it awaits its hour and then springs forward into harsh remembrance ... It will live in their minds and mouths, bringing them back, whether they like it or not, to the harsh memory of the desert sojourn. Once learned it will not easily be forgotten. The words will stick, they will be importunate [persistent], they will not let us alone."¹

The lesson this song teaches is that when God's people forget His gracious goodness to them, and turn away from Him to follow idols, they can expect discipline. When God appears to withdraw His blessings we should not question His ability or motives but rather examine the state of our relationship with Him.

3. The conclusion to the song 32:44

This verse is the closing "bracket" that surrounds the song in the text (cf. 31:30). The repetition probably does not indicate a second recital of the song. Both the introductory and concluding verses simply state the circumstances in which Moses and Joshua communicated the song to the nation.

C. NARRATIVE INTERLUDE 32:45-52

This narrative section of Deuteronomy relates a final exhortation that Moses gave the Israelites, and an announcement of his death that he received from the LORD.

¹Harold Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation*, p. 51.

1. Moses' exhortation to obedience 32:45-47

Moses addressed the Israelites once again, after he had taught them his song. He urged them to take to heart, not only the words of the song, but "all the words of this Law" (v. 46), namely, the entire covenant text of Deuteronomy (cf. 17:19; 27:3, 8, 26; 28:58; 29:29; 31:12, 24). He pointed out that these words were not flippant or offhanded matters of human opinion ("not a trivial matter," v. 47), but words that would lead to a fulfilling, longer life in the Promised Land (cf. 8:3; 30:20).

2. The announcement of Moses' death 32:48-52

The very same day that Moses gave his song to the Israelites, God directed him to prepare for his death (cf. Num. 27:12-14). Mount Nebo is one of the peaks in the Abarim mountain range that stands to the east of the Arabah, northeast of the Dead Sea. This mountain range runs generally from north to south. People in the ancient Near East associated heights with nearness to deity, so perhaps both Aaron and Moses died and were buried on mountains in order to symbolize their nearness to God.¹

God permitted Moses to see the whole land of Canaan at a distance, even though his sin at Meribah-kadesh prevented him from entering it.

"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."²

Moses' sin lay in his failure of forgetting to honor God as He deserved ("you broke faith with Me ... you did not treat Me as holy," v. 51). This is essentially the warning of the Song of Moses. Moses had failed God just as

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 430.

²Ibid., p. 429.

Israel had failed Him. So Moses warned Israel against failing Him again in the future.

D. MOSES' BLESSING OF THE TRIBES CH. 33

After receiving the announcement of his death, and as one of his final official acts as Israel's leader, Moses pronounced a prophetic blessing on the tribes of Israel (cf. Isaac's blessing of Jacob in Genesis 27, and Jacob's blessing of the tribes in Genesis 49).

"In the ancient Near East, a dying father's final blessings spoken to his sons were an irrevocable legal testament, accepted as decisive evidence in court disputes. In the case of the Biblical patriarchs, the authority and potency of their last blessings derived from the Spirit of prophecy in them, speaking in the testamentary form [the form of a will] ... As spiritual and theocratic father of the twelve tribes, Moses pronounced his blessings on them just before he ascended the mount to die (Deut 33:1), and thus his words constitute his testament."¹

The introduction to the blessings of the tribes 33:1-5

33:1-2 After a brief introduction to the blessing (v. 1), Moses began by presenting and picturing God as the source of all blessing in the figure of the sun rising on His people gathered at Sinai. The sun is the source of physical blessing. "Seir" (v. 2) refers to the mountain range in Edom, over which the sun would apparently rise as seen from Sinai. "Paran" refers to the mountains near Kadesh that separated the Sinai wilderness from Canaan.

"The stylized or formulaic nature of such historical résumés allows them to depart from normal patterns of narration in which strict adherence to chronological and geographical sequence is expected. Thus the Lord could come from Sinai

¹Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 201. For a useful study of textual problems in this chapter and a fresh translation, see F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, "The Blessing of Moses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67 (1948):191-210.

and appear from Seir and Paran at the same time, or at least without reference to actual historical movement which, of course, would necessitate the order Sinai, Paran, and Seir (cf. Num 10:12; 13:3, 26; 20:14; 21:4; Deut 1:19; 2:4). The real point here in v. 2 is that the Lord manifested himself gloriously to his people from his earthly dwelling places or at least his usual places of self-disclosure, namely, mountaintops."¹

The "holy ones" are probably angels. Moses described God as accompanied by His countless angelic servants when He revealed His Law to Israel at Sinai.

33:3-5 Some scholars regard verses 2 through 5 as "... among the most obscure in the entire Hebrew Bible."² Moses reminded the Israelites again that Yahweh loved them (cf. 4:37; 7:7, 8, 13; 10:15, 18; 15:16; 23:5). God's love for Israel is a prominent theme in Deuteronomy. The angels follow Yahweh and listen to His words: a good example for the Israelites to follow. In the exalted language of prophecy Moses referred to himself as issuing the Law to the Israelites.

"Though it is possible to argue that the 'king' in 33:5 is meant to be understood as the Lord, the immediate context suggests strongly that it is Moses. This is important because the next chapter, Deuteronomy 34, views Moses as a prototype of the coming prophet who was promised in 18:15. Thus at the close of the Pentateuch, the two central messianic visions of the book—that of a coming king (Ge 49:10; Nu 24:7-9) and that of a prophet (Dt 18:15)—are united in the figure of Moses, the prophet-king. We should note that throughout the Pentateuch

¹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 434.

²Theodor H. Gaster, "An Ancient Eulogy on Israel: Deuteronomy 33 3-5, 26-29," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 66 [1947]:53). Gaster suggested that they glorify Israel rather than Yahweh. Robert Gordis criticized Gaster's treatment in "The Text and Meaning of Deuteronomy 33 27," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67 (1948):69-72.

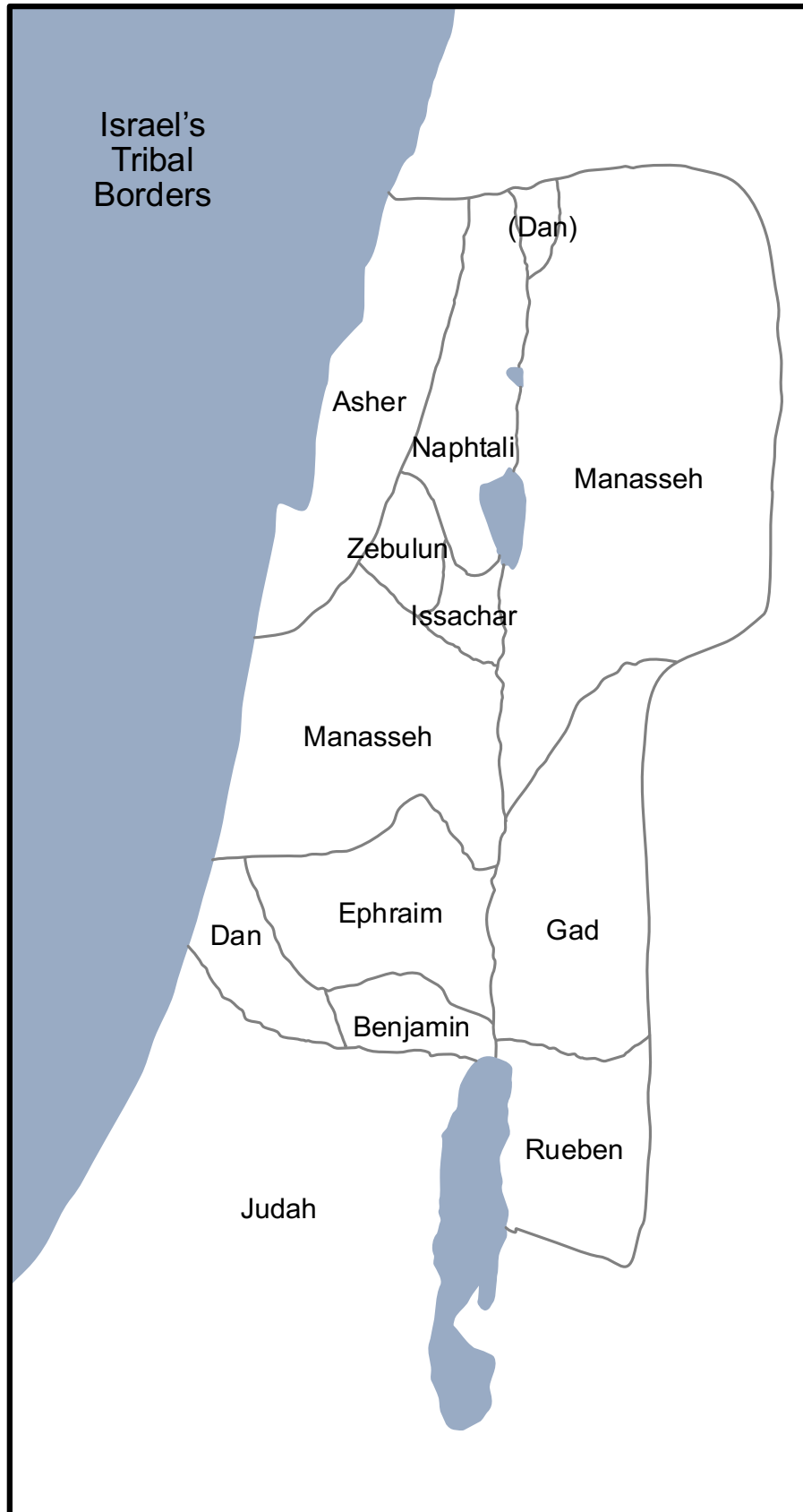
Moses also carries out the duties of priest. Thus in the figure of Moses, the Pentateuch is able to bring together the offices of prophet, priest, and king. The author is always careful to note, however, that Moses was not a priest of the house of Aaron. The Aaronic priesthood is of a different order than that pictured in the office of Moses. If we were looking for an analogy to Moses elsewhere in the Pentateuch, we need look no farther than the figure of Melchizedek, the priest-king from Salem. Thus as Melchizedek the priest-king blessed Abraham at the beginning of the patriarchal narratives ... (Ge 14:19), so here Moses the priest-king blessed the Israelites at the conclusion ... (Dt 33:29)."¹

The blessing of the tribes proper 33:6-25

The arrangement of the tribes in this blessing is unusual. Kalland provided a chart of six lists of the tribes that appear in Genesis, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua, each of which contains a different order.² It appears that God led Moses to base this list on a combination of the past and future histories of each tribe.

¹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch ...*, p. 477.

²Kalland, p. 222.



Reuben 33:6

Moses prayed (and prophesied) that the tribe of Reuben would not die out and that the Reubenites would become numerous. Reuben was the firstborn son of Jacob, but he did not enjoy greatness among the tribes because of his sin. He lost his father's birthright and blessing. Furthermore, no great civil or military leader or prophet ever came from this tribe, as far as Scripture records.

Judah 33:7

Judah received the position of leader among the tribes when his older brothers became ineligible. As in the two earlier tribal blessings (in Gen. 27 and 49), Judah again comes out "on top." Clearly, God had a special destiny for this tribe, namely, the eventual production of Israel's kings, including Messiah. The tribe of Judah also led the other tribes, even in battle (Num. 2:9; Judg. 1:1-2). Moses prayer and blessing for Judah seems to be that Yahweh would hear the men of Judah's cry for help in battle, that they would return home safely after battles, and that God would bless them with the help of His presence in battles.¹

Levi 33:8-11

Levi received a blessing for being faithful to God at Massah and Meribah, when the people complained because of lack of water.

"But these narratives [Exod. 17:1-7; Num. 20:1-13] contain no reference to Levi, so that the precise meaning of the historical reference is not clear unless it be that in Moses and Aaron, leaders of the tribe of Levi, the whole tribe was on trial."²

The specific act of faithfulness to Yahweh that resulted in Levi's being chosen as the priestly tribe occurred after the events at Massah and Meribah. That later event was Levi's standing with Moses and Aaron when the rest of the nation rebelled and worshipped the golden calf at Sinai (Exod. 32:25-29). The "godly man" (v. 8) is probably Levi rather than Aaron (cf. v. 9). The Levites' special privileges and responsibilities included teaching the rest of the Israelites God's Law. The Levitical priests also

¹Craigie, *The Book ...*, pp. 394-95.

²Thompson, p. 310.

burned incense before God, sacrificed offerings (v. 10), and discerned God's will (using the "Thummim" and "Urim," v. 8). "Smash the hips" (v. 11) probably refers to making one incapable of producing progeny (potential offspring), as well as destroying one's strength (cf. 1 Kings 12:10; Prov. 31:17; Nah. 2:2).

Benjamin 33:12

Benjamin was to enjoy God's protection continually, since God would carry this tribe on His back ("between His shoulders"). As a warrior tribe, Benjamin would enjoy God's protection (cf. Judg. 21).

Joseph 33:13-17

Joseph represented Ephraim and Manasseh. Both tribes settled in what proved to be some of the most fertile land in Canaan. The "firstborn of his ox" (v. 17) probably refers to Joseph as "the most powerful of the powerful."¹ Joseph was the firstborn son of Jacob by Rachel. Ephraim was the stronger of Joseph's sons, who were both as strong as "the horns of the wild ox" during the tribes' conflicts with Israel's enemies.

Zebulun and Issachar 33:18-19

These two tribes, that lived close together, would become special channels of blessing to the other nations by means of their commercial wealth.

"While this cannot be documented as having taken place in biblical times, the promise has found startling fulfillment in the modern state of Israel, whose major port is Haifa, located in the area of ancient Zebulun."²

These two tribes would experience God's blessing as they brought riches into Israel. Their inherited territory included the fertile Jezreel Valley. "In your going out" and "in your tents" (v. 18) is a merism meaning "in all that you do."³

¹Mayes, p. 406.

²Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 444.

³Driver, p. 408.

Gad 33:20-21

Gad inherited much area east of the Jordan River that was suitable for agricultural development. Gad was a warring tribe ("as a lion") that was very aggressive in conquering and subduing the land (Num. 32:34-36).

Dan 33:22

Dan settled in an area inhabited by lions (Judg. 14:5), and some of its people migrated to northern Israel to an area that abounded in lions (Judg. 18).¹ The people of this tribe were also similar to lions, like the Gadites, in their aggressiveness and strength.

Naphtali 33:23

Naphtali would enjoy the benefits of a seacoast ("the sea and the south"), the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee), and a comfortable position in relation to that body of water. The towns along the northern and western shores of this sea, including Capernaum and Bethsaida, lay within the territory of Naphtali.

"... 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."²

Asher 33:24-25

Asher (lit. happy, blessed) would benefit from the respect of his fellow-Israelites ("favored by his brothers") and prosperity. "Oil" is probably a metaphor for prosperity here, as elsewhere (cf. 32:13; Job 29:6), though Asher's land was rich in olive trees. Asher's territory on the Mediterranean coast would require fortifications, but God would protect him.

"It is interesting that years ago a pipeline of oil came into the northern part of the kingdom through the land of Asher."³

Moses did not mention the Simeonites in this blessing. Jacob had prophesied that God would scatter the Simeonites in Israel (Gen. 49:7).

¹Keil and Delitzsch, 3:510.

²Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 446.

³McGee, 1:611.

Simeon received no tribal allotment of land but only a few cities in Judah, when Joshua divided the Promised Land. The Simeonites became absorbed into the other tribes, especially Judah.

The conclusion of the blessing 33:26-29

The blessing closes by returning to consider Israel's God again ("the God of Jeshurun"; cf. vv. 2-5). Moses pictured Him as a God who is great enough to give the tribes everything that He had just predicted about them. The key to Israel's blessing was her God and her relationship to Him.

"Israel's greatest danger wasn't the armies around them so much as the appetites within them."¹

"As we might expect, here at the end of the book, Moses pictures Israel's dwelling in the land as a reversal of the events of the early chapters of Genesis, when Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden."²

The LORD has fulfilled these predictions in part, but He will fulfill them completely in the future. This will occur when Israel repents and God brings her back into her land (i.e., during the Millennium).³

E. THE END OF AN ERA: NARRATIVE EPILOGUE CH. 34

"A testament is of force only after the death of the testator [cf. Heb. 9:16-17]. So the Deuteronomic Covenant in its testamentary aspect ... would not become operative until after the death of Moses. Only then would Joshua succeed to the role of vicegerent [a person exercising delegated power] of God over Israel, and only then under the leadership of Joshua could the tribes, according to the declarations of the Lord, enter into their inheritance in Canaan. It was, therefore, appropriate that the Deuteronomic treaty should close with the record of Moses' death, which in effect notarizes the treaty. That the testamentary significance of Moses' death is in view is evidenced by the accompanying attention given to

¹Wiersbe, p. 455.

²Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch ...*, p. 478.

³For a critical study of this chapter, see I. L. Seeligmann, "A Psalm from Pre-Regal Times," *Vetus Testamentum* 14 (1964):75-92.

the land of Israel's inheritance and to Joshua's accession to the royal mediatorship of the covenant."¹

Moses' last act 34:1-4

Moses proceeded up Mt. Nebo as God had instructed him to do (32:48-52), and there he viewed the land across the Jordan River that God had promised to give to Abraham's descendants. The "Dan" in view may have been Dan-jaan in Gilead (cf. 2 Sam. 24:6). What Moses saw was not all the territory that God had promised Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:18), but only the part that Israel was about to enter and hopefully possess. Unfortunately, Moses could not enter the Promised Land because of his sin at Meribah-kadesh (cf. 32:51; Num. 20:12).

"God in His grace forgives our sins, but God in His government allows our sins to work out their sad consequences in our lives."²

"Man in the flesh cannot enjoy the promises."³

"His [Moses'] prayer to enter Canaan was fulfilled at the Transfiguration."⁴

"It was necessary for Jesus to die before entering his rest, because he was the true Mediator who came to reconcile his sinful people unto God; Moses must die without entering the typical rest because as the OT mediator he had by official transgression disqualified himself for completing the mission which prefigured that of the sinless Son of God. Unlike Moses, who after his death was succeeded by Joshua (Deut 33 [*sic* 34]:9), the Messianic Mediator would succeed himself after his death because it was not possible that death should hold him."⁵

¹Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 203.

²Wiersbe, p. 455.

³Darby, 1:348.

⁴Thomas, p. 188.

⁵Kline, "Deuteronomy," p. 203.

Moses' death and burial 34:5-7

"The fact ... that the Lord buried His servant Moses, and no man knows of his sepulchre, is in perfect keeping with the relation in which Moses stood to the Lord while he was alive. ... 'If Jehovah ... would not suffer the body of Moses to be buried by man, it is but natural to seek for the reason in the fact that He did not intend to leave him to corruption, but, when burying it with His own hand, imparted a power to it which preserved it from corruption, and prepared the way for it to pass into the same form of existence to which Enoch and Elijah were taken, without either death or burial.'"¹

Another explanation for Moses' unusual burial is simply that God chose to bury His faithful servant rather than allowing the Israelites to do so. Such a burial is a testimony to the greatness of Moses. Josephus wrote that a cloud suddenly appeared over Moses, and he disappeared.² But Josephus sometimes reflected Jewish legends in his writings.

"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."³

Here is a different explanation:

"Moses is the only person in the Bible whom God personally buried. Did you know that? And then the Lord hid the tomb. Why did He do that? Because that grave would have become a second Mecca. They would still be beating a path up Nebo to this day, building shrines, selling popcorn and peanuts, offering all sorts of rides, maybe running a tram up there, with big banners announcing, 'Moses' burial place!'"⁴

Still another view follows:

¹Keil and Delitzsch, 3:515-16. Their quotation is from Kurtz.

²Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 4:8:48.

³Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 453.

⁴Charles R. Swindoll, *Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication*, p. 346.

"By the time this last chapter was written, the burial of Moses was so far in the past that the location of his grave was uncertain to the writer."¹

This statement rests on the assumption that this account of Moses' death was written long after the event. Moses was 120 years old when he died (v. 7). He had begun his ministry of covenant mediator on one mountain (Sinai), and now he ended that ministry on another (Nebo).

"When you're planning on retirement, don't plan on checking out with people or with God's Word. If you do, you'll be moving away from that which is eternal, and that's the wrong direction, my friend. So stay in touch. Give until you don't have anything else to give, and then tap into G[o]d's reservoirs and give some more. This is what lengthens the meaning and purpose—and sometimes the years—of life."²

"The chapter provides the final statement regarding the Lord's refusal to allow Moses to enter the Promised Land. It thus links up with an important theme in the Pentateuch: Moses, who lived under the Law, was not allowed to enter into God's blessings because he failed 'to believe' (Nu 20:12). According to this chapter, Moses did not die of old age—'his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone' (Dt 34:7). His death was punishment, just as the generation that died in the wilderness during the forty years was punished (Nu 14:22-23). ... From the perspective of the Pentateuch as a whole, Moses died young. He did not live the many centuries of the early patriarchs before the Flood. Thus at the close of the Pentateuch the life of Moses becomes the last example of the consequences of the Fall of the first man and woman. Like them, he was not allowed to enjoy the blessing of God's good land."³

Many students of Moses' life have noticed similarities to Jesus' life, and they regard him as a type of Christ:

¹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch ...*, p. 478.

²Swindoll, *Moses*, p. 348.

³Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch ...*, p. 478. Cf. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 453-54.

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 (Exod. 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).

The mourning of the Israelites 34:8

The Israelites mourned for Moses for 30 days, as they had done for Aaron (Num. 20:29). This long a period of mourning was evidently conventional for a great person,¹ though the normal time of mourning a loved one was apparently seven days (Gen. 50:10).

Moses' successor 34:9

When Moses was dead, Joshua picked up the reins of leadership with the support of the Israelites. God gave him special wisdom for his responsibilities.

"What is stressed here is that Joshua was 'filled with the spirit of wisdom' (34:9) and thus able to do the work of God. Like Joseph (Ge 41:37 [*sic* 38]) and Bezalel (Ex 31:3), who were filled with 'the Spirit of God,' Joshua was able to do God's work successfully. Thus this last chapter of the Pentateuch returns to a central theme, begun already in the first chapter of Genesis: 'and the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the deep' (Ge 1:2). It is the Spirit of God that is the means of doing the work of God [cf. Ezek. 36:26]."²

Moses' epitaph 34:10-12

The final verses in the book, and the Pentateuch, give an evaluation of Moses' ministry. They are his literary epitaph (cf. 2 Sam. 23:1-7). Someone other than Moses probably added them after his death under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Moses was remarkable in several respects that the writer identified. His intimate relationship with God was unique (cf. 18:15-22; Num. 12:6-8). The miracles that God did through him in Egypt, and the powerful acts that he performed in the sight of the Israelites, were also noteworthy. He performed many of these signs when God gave the Mosaic Covenant at Mt. Sinai.

¹Craigie, *The Book ...*, p. 405.

²Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch ...*, p. 478.

"... Moses was never equaled by any subsequent prophet until the coming of Jesus Christ."¹

¹Schultz, p. 123. Cf. Heb. 3:1-6.

Conclusion

One of the greatest revelations of the Bible is that God desires to bless people through a relationship with Himself. The message of the Pentateuch is that people can experience this blessing through trust in God and obedience to God. Each of the five books of Moses reveals important truth concerning God, humankind, and the relationship between people and God.

Genesis reveals that man is a finite creature, made in the image of God, but fallen in sin. He is therefore unable, on his own, to enjoy the relationship with God that God created him to experience. Moses presented God in Genesis as trustworthy. The outstanding characteristic of God in this book, I believe, is His faithfulness. God proved in this book that people can rely on His word. In order for people to have a relationship with God, they must exercise faith. We can trust God because He is trustworthy.

Exodus shows that human sin leads to enslavement. In order to be free to enjoy liberty, and the relationship with God that God intends human beings to experience, we must undergo redemption by God. Moses presented God in Exodus as being sovereign. This, I believe, is His outstanding characteristic in the second book of Moses. Because God is sovereign, He can redeem man, who is a slave because of sin. God can even bring man into an intimate relationship with Himself as His "firstborn (privileged) son." So redemption is the solution of the sovereign God for the sin-enslavement problem that all human beings have.

Leviticus reveals more fully that man is a sinner, and that as such, he is different from, alienated or "cut off" from, and separate from God. God is holy. This is the outstanding revelation of God in this book. Man cannot have the relationship with God that God desires, even as a redeemed person, because of sin. In addition to redemption, God also provided atonement, so that God and redeemed sinners could have fellowship with one another. Our response to God's provision, as His firstborn sons and redeemed sinners brought into fellowship, should be worship.

Numbers illustrates, by Israel's example, how redeemed sinners can enjoy the benefits of atonement, yet fail to trust and obey God. The outstanding characteristic of God in Numbers is His graciousness toward sinful human beings. God disciplines His own in order to teach them to obey Him, because only then can they enjoy all the blessings that He wants them to experience.

Deuteronomy pictures redeemed man as a vassal or servant, and God as a suzerain, lord, or master. This relationship exists by virtue of who God is (i.e., Creator and Redeemer), and who man is (i.e., creature and sinner). Deuteronomy reveals that God loves people, and that people should love God. This relationship is not a formal, impersonal one, but one that love motivates and sustains.

God manifested His love for Israel in the laws that He gave her. Israel was to demonstrate love for God by her obedience to His laws. These laws were in the Mosaic Covenant, and God designed them to bring Israel into as close a relationship to Himself as possible.

The Pentateuch contains all the instruction necessary for the Israelites to enjoy an intimate relationship with God. In the historical books that follow, we see how the principles revealed in the Pentateuch either worked out, or did not work out, for Israel in her history. The Israelites' extent of trust and obedience determined this. God intended their example to be instructive for Christians (1 Cor. 10:1-13; Rom. 15:1-6; Heb. 11). The same principles apply today, though the economy and laws under which we live are different from those under which Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses lived.¹

Whereas Deuteronomy is the last of the five books of Moses, critical scholars tend to group it with the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings—more than with Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. They refer to this body of books as the "Deuteronomistic History," a term that the German scholar Martin Noth coined. This is due to the foundational nature of Deuteronomy, as reflected in the presentation of the later history of Israel that these following books present. Conservative scholars usually tie Deuteronomy in with Genesis through Numbers, as the Jews did, because of authorship and historical sequence. Many of them, however, also recognize that Deuteronomy provides the basis for the evaluation of the nation Israel, which Joshua through Kings presents.²

¹See Merrill, "A Theology . . .," pp. 86-87, for a fine summary of the Pentateuch.

²See Whybray, pp. 136-39.

Appendix 1

Key Verses and Important Commands in Moses' Speeches¹

Speech ²	Verse	Word	Frequency	Meaning
First	"Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen ..." (4:9)	<i>shamar</i>	15 times	Diligently keep; be on one's guard; be careful
Second	"Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments ..." (5:29)	<i>yare'</i>	18 times	Fear; treat with reverence or honor; stand in awe of
Second	"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." (6:5)	<i>ahab'</i>	10 times	Love; be devoted; be committed
Second	"You shall fear the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him, and swear by His name." (6:13)	<i>abad</i>	7 times	Serve; work for; perform acts for as a subject

¹Adapted from *The Nelson ...*, p. 299.

²See the chart of Moses' speeches in Deuteronomy under the genre section of the introduction to these notes above.

Second	"You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name." (10:20)	<i>dabaq</i>	7 times	Hold fast; cling; cleave to; remain with or close to; stay near
Second	" See , I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse." (11:26)	<i>ra'ah</i>	10 times	See; observe; consider; give attention to; behold
Tenth	" Remember the days of old, consider the years of all generations ..." (32:7)	<i>zakar</i>	15 times	Remember; recall; keep in mind; think of; call to mind

Appendix 2

Four Interpretive Problems in Deuteronomy 24:1-4¹

Deuteronomy 24:1 through 4 is a passage that is very important in the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage. There are four problems that need solving for us to determine the correct interpretation of this passage.

Problem #1

What is the protasis (the clause that expresses the condition in a conditional sentence) and what is the apodosis (the clause that expresses the result)?

View #1: The protasis occurs in 24:1a, "When a man ... uncleanness in her." The apodosis occurs in 24:1b through 4, "then let him ... for an inheritance" (as in the AV). God *commanded* divorce on the grounds of "uncleanness" in the wife. He prohibited remarriage to her first husband after the death of, or divorce by, her second husband.

View #2: The protasis occurs in 24:1 through 3, "When a man ... be his wife." The apodosis occurs in 24:4, "then her former ... as an inheritance" (as in the NASB, NIV, and RSV). God *permitted* divorce on the grounds of "indecentcy" in the wife. He also prohibited remarriage to her first husband after the death of, or divorce by, her second husband.

Evaluation: View #2 reflects the opinion of most translators concerning the proper protasis and apodosis relationship. Rather than commanding or encouraging divorce, as the Pharisees interpreted it in Jesus' day, this passage therefore controlled or regulated how a man could obtain a divorce in Israel. It also condemned the practice of a woman remarrying her first husband after her second husband either died or divorced her.

¹Adapted from a paper by Joseph F. Scro presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for R11—Current Biblical and Theological Issues, Dallas Theological Seminary, December 28, 1986.

Problem #2

What is the "indecency" for which a man could divorce his wife?

View #1: Some specific offense is in view. Scholars have suggested several including fornication, anything displeasing to her husband, inability to bear children, or some physical defect. Other options are indecent exposure, embarrassment caused to the husband by the wife's social behavior, lesbianism (one type of fornication), or some other serious offense.

View #2: No specific offense is in view. Instead "indecency" refers to what the husband erroneously judged to be a legitimate ground for divorce. In other words, God permitted divorce when the husband believed his wife had done something illegitimate—even though she had not.

Evaluation: View #2 seems to be better for the following reasons: Adultery was punishable by death, so the indecency could hardly be that offense. The Jews debated the meaning of the term "indecency" in Jesus' day. This probably indicates that no one understood it to refer to a specific offense even when God first gave it. If only one indecent act was in view, this statute would not cover divorce for other reasons. A woman could remarry her former husband only if the first marriage broke up for this specific cause. However, this statute seems to be controlling all illegitimate divorce.

Objections	Responses
This would mean God was making divorce easy.	God was not allowing just any divorce. This statute controls and protects the wife to a degree from <i>any</i> illegitimate divorce, not just one type of illegitimate divorce.
Lexically, "indecent" can mean "indecent exposure."	This would be a rare cause of divorce and would limit greatly the application of this statute in Israelite life. The phrase "to uncover nakedness" is

euphemistic and means "to have sex." If God meant indecent exposure, it would most likely involve sexual sin. This was typically punishable by death in Israel.

Could not lesbianism be in view?

The broad term "indecent" argues against such a limited interpretation. Furthermore the prescribed punishment for lesbians was execution in Israel (Lev. 18:22, 29).

Problem #3

Why does the second marriage defile the wife?

View #1: She has had sex with another man.

View #2: Her status regarding her first husband changed from wife to sister when they got married. If she returned to her first husband (brother) after a second marriage, that union would be incestuous.

View #3: The divorce, not the second marriage alone, changed her status regarding her first husband irreversibly.

View #4: The second marriage constitutes adultery.

Evaluation: View #4 seems best for these reasons: If this passage indeed controls illegitimate divorce, there was no legitimate divorce in Israel. All such divorce would dissolve the first marriage. Therefore the consummation of the second marriage would be adulterous. The word "defiled" suggests adultery (Lev. 18:20). Matthew 5:32 supports this view. Jesus Christ indicated that a man who divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery. It is the remarriage that defiles, not the divorce.

Objections

This view reads the New Testament (i.e., Matt. 5:32) back into the Old Testament.

Remarriage did not bear a stigma, as adultery did, in Israel, and God allowed it.

Responses

Progressive revelation has simply illuminated what the reason for the prohibition was. The Old Testament Israelite may not have understood fully the reason for the law, just the requirement. In Matthew 5 Jesus was clarifying the law (cf. Matt. 5:17).

God conceded to remarriage in the same way He conceded to divorce. Both were taking place, though God did not approve of their practice. Jesus clarified that the spirit of the law was that remarriage after divorce was adultery. The fact that the Mosaic Law did not demand death for adultery under these conditions does not mean that adultery was non-existent. The Mosaic Law did not punish other illegitimate practices even though God did not approve of them. Some examples include a husband's adultery against his wife (cf. Exod. 20:14), polygamy, and concubinage. Other examples are prostitution, except by a Hebrew girl (Deut. 23:18), and incest between an uncle and niece, though the Law did punish incest between an aunt and nephew.

"Defiled" refers to incest, not adultery.

To reduce all references to sexual sin in Deuteronomy 24 to incest is improper. Moses also mentioned adultery, homosexuality, and bestiality in the context (cf. Lev. 18; 20:10-21). While marriage does create close family relationships with the in-laws, in Israel this did not rule out marrying an in-law. For example, a man could marry his wife's sister after his wife died (Lev. 18:18), and a woman could marry her dead husband's brother. Even if blood relations are in view in Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21, this does not mean the first husband and wife had become brother and sister as a result of their marriage.

Problem #4

What was the purpose of Deuteronomy 24:1 through 4 and what are its implications?

View #1: The purpose was to discourage hasty divorce, and the implication is that divorce alone severs the marriage bond and allows legitimate remarriage.

View #2: The purpose was to prevent an incestuous marriage. The implication is that divorce and a subsequent remarriage change the marriage bond to a "one flesh" relationship of a different kind.

View #3: The purpose was to prevent a man from marrying a woman who had committed adultery against him. The implication is that both divorce and adultery together sever the marriage bond.

Evaluation: View #3 seems best for the following reasons: Normally an adulteress would die (under Mosaic Law) or her husband would

divorce her (under Rabbinic law). In the case here, the wife who commits adultery against her husband escapes punishment for two reasons: First, Moses viewed her husband as having caused her to be adulterous by divorcing her. Second, post-marital adultery is not the same crime as marital adultery. If the "defilement" had not dissolved or changed the original marriage bond, there is no reason that the woman could not return to her first husband after her second husband died or divorced her. The law denied the first husband his ex-wife in the same way it would deny him an "outwardly" adulterous wife. An "outwardly" adulterous wife would be one who had committed adultery while married (cf. Matt. 19:9).

Objections

Responses

If the woman was guilty of adultery by remarrying, she should suffer death by stoning.

It is the husband's act of divorcing his wife that results in her remarrying and committing adultery. She could remarry under the Mosaic Law. Her adultery was not a violation of a solid marriage covenant but one that divorce had already flawed. Jesus agreed that such action constituted adultery (Matt. 5:32). Only if the wife remarried, or had sex with another man, could she not return to her first husband.

Marriage is absolutely indissoluble (Gen. 2:18, 21-24).

It is not eternally indissoluble since death ends it (Rom. 7:1-2; Matt. 22:23-33). Whereas God wants marriage to be permanent, He warned against ending it (Matt. 19:6). Thus the breaking of the marriage bond before death is possible. Furthermore if marriage is indissoluble then there is no reason that the wife should not

return to her first husband. Moreover, if marriage is indissoluble, a woman who remarries would have two husbands. However the Mosaic Law did not tolerate polyandry (having two husbands at the same time). In addition, Jesus said the Samaritan woman "had," not "has," five husbands (John 4:18). Finally, if marriage is indissoluble, then every remarriage after divorce is bigamous and illegal. It should end in annulment, as an incestuous marriage would.

Summary

The student of Deuteronomy 24:1 through 4 should divide it into two parts between verse 3 and verse 4. Verses 1 through 3 express the condition and verse 4 the result. If a man divorced his wife, the Mosaic Law did not permit him to remarry her if, after her divorce from him, she had married another man. The "indecency" in view that was the grounds for the divorce was not a specific offense for which the wife was guilty. It was any condition that the husband erroneously judged as suitable grounds for a divorce. A husband could divorce his wife for the flimsiest of reasons in Israel. A divorced woman was free to remarry in Israel. However if she remarried, the law viewed her remarriage as adultery. In the eyes of the law, her first husband was responsible for her committing adultery, since he had divorced her. Notwithstanding, she did not die as an adulteress because the law did not punish this form of adultery with death. Her adultery defiled the woman. She could not return to her first husband if her second husband divorced her (or, presumably, had died), because she had committed adultery against him. Divorce alone did not break the first marriage bond, but both divorce and adultery (sexual relations with a man other than the first husband) did. God did not want the partners in this case to reestablish the first marriage.

Appendix 3

Suggestions for Preventing Divorce

As I have worked with several couples and individuals who were thinking about getting a divorce, I have noticed a pattern of behavior that is quite common.

1. One or both of the partners in the marriage feel frustrated. He or she thinks, "This is not what I want in my marriage."
2. He internalizes his frustration and thinks, "I should be able to handle this." If he can, he forgives wrongs done to him and accepts his imperfect mate as is.
3. If he cannot handle his frustrations, he fails to forgive.
4. His frustration then often turns into bitterness. He thinks, "I'm stuck. I don't like you; you've hurt me." He may also think, "God is not answering my prayers."
5. Finally he explodes—internally if not externally. He says, "I want out of this relationship! I can't take it any longer!"

This problem has its roots in a failure to forgive. The person involved may not realize this, but this is usually the crucial issue.

Here is a procedure to try to help someone who has exploded, or is about to explode, to forgive his or her mate.

1. Go to the person. Tell him that you are concerned for his welfare, that you believe he is making a big mistake, and that you have his happiness and welfare at heart.
2. Encourage him to ventilate his feelings of frustration by telling you how he feels. Ask, "How do you feel about your marriage?"
3. Show him what has been happening in his life by pointing out the five steps outlined above, if these apply.
4. Help him to learn how to deal with his frustrations so they do not build up within him. This involves venting them to God, a friend, and/or his spouse.

5. Motivate him to forgive his spouse by reminding him how much God has forgiven all of us. We all keep offending God, but He forgives us and remains committed to us—as the Pentateuch clearly reveals. He has promised never to leave us. Furthermore He promises grace (help) so we can live one day at a time in His will (2 Cor. 12:9).

In view of how much God has forgiven us, we should forgive each other any and every offense.

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