

# Deuteronomy

The Hebrew title of the book of Deuteronomy comes from the first two words in the book, *eleh ha-devarim*, translated “these are the words.” This is appropriate since Deuteronomy records the final words of Moses before the people entered the Promised Land. The English title, “Deuteronomy,” comes from the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), which had as its title *deuteronomion*, meaning “second law.” This title is inaccurate, coming from a mistranslation of a phrase in Deut. 17:18 where Yahweh commanded Israel’s kings to make a “copy of this law” for themselves. The Septuagint translators mistakenly translated this phrase as “this second [repeated] law.” However, within Deuteronomy is Moses repeating the Law of Yahweh to a new generation of Israelites, so the title does apply to the book. Deuteronomy is the fifth and final book in the Torah.<sup>1</sup>

The first word of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers has a prefix—the Hebrew letter *waw*. This is called a *waw*-consecutive, which creates a conjunction with the meaning of “and” or “and the.” Meaning that they were meant to be read as the sequel to Genesis—and sequentially from there. Conversely, the book of Deuteronomy does not begin with the conjunction *and*, while the books of Joshua through Kings do begin with the conjunction *and*. Thus, Genesis through Numbers are linked together and tell of Israel outside of the Promised Land. Deuteronomy is the bridge between Israel not being in the land and Israel being in the land. In the same way, Joshua through Chronicles are linked together and tell about Israel in the Promised Land. Deuteronomy is the beginning of what scholars call the Deuteronomic History, which includes the books of Deuteronomy through Kings. While the Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy) tells the story of Israel being promised the land of Canaan and brought to its border. The Deuteronomic History tells the story of Israel living in the land before its exile in 722 and 586 BC.

Deuteronomy was written by Moses after the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt and their forty years in the wilderness right before they were to enter the Promised Land. Though many dispute Moses as the author of the Torah, Scriptures affirm his authorship (Ex. 17:14; 24:4; Num. 33:1-2; Deut. 31:9; Josh. 1:8; 2 Kgs. 21:8). Jesus Christ also attributed authorship to Moses (Matt. 19:8; Mark 7:10; Luke 18:29-31; 20:37; 24:27; John 7:19).<sup>2</sup>

## Setting

Genesis began by revealing Yahweh as the unique and sovereign creator over all creation. Yahweh created humanity as His image bearers to rule and subdue creation and to dwell with Him. Yet, humanity lost this intimate relationship with Yahweh when they chose self-autonomy over obeying Yahweh. However, because Yahweh is also a loving and covenantal God, He chose Abraham and His descendants to work out His plan of redemption for all of humanity and

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<sup>1</sup> *Torah* is the Hebrew name for the first five books of the New Testament. The name means “teachings” or “instructions” and was considered the foundational teachings of the Jewish faith and, later, the Christian faith. The purpose of the Torah is to teach that people can experience Yahweh’s blessing by trusting Him and by obeying His will.

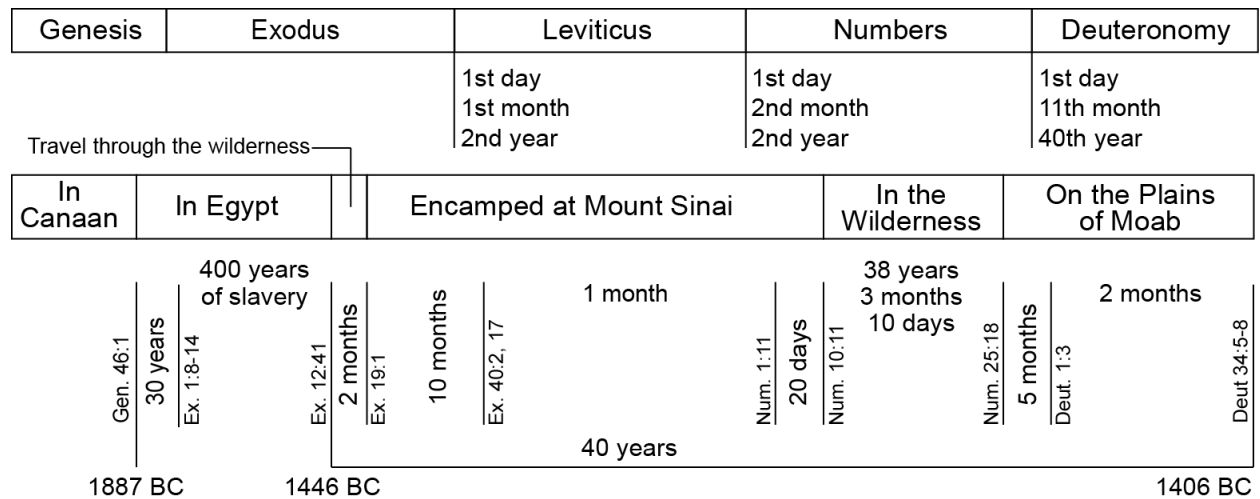
<sup>2</sup> Jesus Christ did not specifically say that Moses wrote Exodus, but in His day Jews regarded the Torah as a whole unit and recognized Moses as its author. Thus, they would have understood what Jesus said about any of the five books of Moses as an affirmation of Moses’ authorship of them all. Oswald T. Allis’s *The Five Books of Moses* is a rebuttal of the denial that Moses wrote the Torah. No one has discredited it, though liberal scholars have ignored it.

creation. Yahweh promised to give them land, to make them a great nation, to bless them, and to make them a blessing to the whole earth. Yahweh’s ultimate goal was to make Abraham into the great nation of Israel, which would serve Him by becoming a righteous people who would represent Him as His image; in doing so, they could bless the entire world by restoring the world back to what was lost in the Garden of Eden.

The book of Exodus tells of how Yahweh delivered His people from bondage and led them to Mount Sinai, where they would be brought into the presence of Yahweh and officially become His chosen nation. It is here that Yahweh gave them the Law (Ex. 19-24), the instructions for the tabernacle (Ex. 25-31), and the sacrificial system (Leviticus). The Law would reveal Yahweh’s righteous standards by which they were to live so that they could be the image of God to the world. The tabernacle would be a means for Yahweh to dwell with His people and guide them. This is the beginning of the restoration of the Garden. And the sacrificial system taught Israel what it meant to be clean and unclean, holy and common, along with the means to become clean and holy after one had become defiled by sin or death.

After a year at Mount Sinai, the book of Numbers records Israel’s journey to the Promised Land. Upon their arrival, however, Israel refused to enter and take the Promised Land because of their lack of trust in Yahweh’s ability to give it to them. Thus, Yahweh condemned Israel to wander in the wilderness for 38 years until the current generation died. The book ends with the new generation returning to the Promised Land and ready to enter the land (Deut. 1:3).

The book of Deuteronomy begins with Israel encamped in the Transjordan on the eastern side of the Jordan River ready to enter the Promised Land. Here, Moses gave three farewell speeches before He passed his mantle of leadership to Joshua.



## Purpose

The basic principle for interpreting the theology of Deuteronomy is understanding it as a covenant document. The primary feature of the covenant lies in its nature as a relational bond between Yahweh and His covenant people. The source of the covenant bond lies solely in Yahweh. The purpose of Deuteronomy was to teach Israel that it was in love that the covenant was initiated by Yahweh in the first place, and by love the people were to maintain their close relationship to Yahweh. Though Yahweh was the first to demonstrate His love to Israel and

establish a covenant relationship with them, He desired that they would then respond in obedience to Him, out of love and not out of a legalistic demand or a fear of judgment. Deuteronomy makes it very clear that the covenant was not to be seen as a legal contract automatically binding humans to Yahweh. Rather, the nature of the covenant demanded of humans not a legalistic but a loving commitment to Yahweh.<sup>3</sup>

The second purpose of Deuteronomy was to teach Israel the need to remember what Yahweh had done for them in the past and to teach their children throughout the generations so that they could have a full and blessed life in the land. Moses instructed Israel on how they were to view the events of the last forty years and why they happened—so that the people would better understand Yahweh and their relationship to Him. The key to remaining faithful to Yahweh was to constantly remember who He is and what He had done for Israel. For in remembering His past deeds, the people would come to better understand His character.

For the author of Deuteronomy, history is not a series of unbroken events of causes and effects, which happens in a closed system, free from the intervention of a transcendent God. Rather, history reflects the will of Yahweh, in word and deed, within the creation of Yahweh. For Yahweh and the people of the ancient Near East, history was not a scientific endeavor or an interest in the past, but rather history revealed what Yahweh had done for His people. The past portrays the faithfulness of Yahweh within His relationship with His people and holds the promise for the continuation of the relationship into the future.<sup>4</sup>

## Themes

The emphasis of the book of Deuteronomy is on the heart of Yahweh and His unending love for Israel. The idea is that when one truly realizes Yahweh's love for them, then they will in return obey out of love for Him.

### ***The Uniqueness of Yahweh as a Loving God***

The major point of the Bible—and especially seen in the book of Deuteronomy—is that Yahweh is unique to all the other gods in that He is love and everything that He does is motivated by His love for Israel. Yahweh was faithful to Israel because He loved them (Deut. 4:32-40; 33:2-5). Not only is the inauguration of the covenant initiated by love, but Yahweh's constant pursuit of Israel when they continually violate the covenant is driven by His love of them.

The imagery used throughout the book of Deuteronomy is that of a father's love for his son. Deuteronomy begins by showing that it was Yahweh's love that caused Him to redeem Israel from their bondage in Egypt and adopt them as His chosen firstborn. His covenant with them would enable them to learn what it meant to be righteous and live in a righteous way, that they could experience great blessing and life to the fullest because they would be operating in creation the way that they and creation had been designed to interact together. Everything that had been done for them and everything that they had was because of Yahweh's love. Deuteronomy calls the people to respond to Him out of their own love for who He is and what He has done so that they can experience a relationship with Him and life to the fullest. No other god is so motivated by love and pursues a relationship with its people the way Yahweh does.

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<sup>3</sup> See Peter C. Craige. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> See Peter C. Craige. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 40.

### ***Obedience Is Love***

Once Israel realized how much Yahweh loved them, they were to respond in love to Him. The best way that one can demonstrate their love to Yahweh is through obedience. Moses makes the point that only by knowing Yahweh's love and having love for Him will one be adequately motivated to be obedient to Yahweh (Deut. 5:9-10; 6:4-5; 7:9; 10:12-13; 11:1, 13-14, 22-23; 13:1-13; 19:8-9; 30:6, 15-20). Though it is possible to obey without love, it is impossible to consistently and completely obey without love. These laws were not meant to limit Israel's freedom or ruin their fun but to keep them from evil so that they might enjoy their freedom and experience joy without pain and regret. Yahweh did not expect perfection but a heart that desired to know Him and please Him. When the people got this, they declared that Yahweh was their God (Deut. 26:18). Yahweh's declaration involved the promise that He would set His people above all other nations; they were to be a holy people (Deut. 26:19). The people's declaration was not simply a statement of fact but a submission of obedience to the law of Yahweh.<sup>5</sup>

The command to love, however, does not reduce the covenant to a legalistic relationship. Love must be a response toward Yahweh from humanity's heart. The command to love recognizes that it is in the nature of humans to forget and to be faithless.<sup>6</sup> To break the commandments was to disrupt the relationship of love; when there was no love, there could be no covenant.

The laws embraced communal and individual responsibility, and implicit in the laws is the relationship between the two; the community remains healthy in its relationship to Yahweh only as long as its members are faithful. But the individual's responsibility was vital, not only for their own well-being, but because each of their actions was a part of the life of the whole community. When they failed, they were to deal with the sin between them and Yahweh quickly in repentance so that they could be right with Him again.

### ***Remembrance Is Necessary***

Moses recaps selective events in the life of Israel from the time of the exodus to their entrance into the Promised Land in order to emphasize the need to reflect on the past and learn from those events. Moses emphasized the importance of remembering Yahweh's past faithfulness in order to appreciate His power and love so that one would trust Him in the present and future (Deut. 1:6-4:40). Forgetfulness was a sin that would lead Israel to not appreciate Yahweh for who He was and what He had done for them, which would then lead to ingratitude and, ultimately, to apostasy. Remembering the past is the key to knowing who Yahweh is and what He has done for you; love for Him would grow into confidence in who He is, then creating trust in Him. Moses also called Israel to remember the idolatry and rebellion of their parents and the judgment they received for their sin so that present Israel would not make the same mistake and go after the gods of the Canaanites in the Promised Land.

There were two major ways Israel was to remember Yahweh and what He had done for them. First, every generation was required to read and renew the covenant with Yahweh. Because the covenant was a continuing relationship, the covenant was to be renewed regularly, but in each renewal the event at Sinai was recalled. Therefore, each generation would enter the covenant

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<sup>5</sup> See Peter C. Craige. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> See Peter C. Craige. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 41.

fully aware of who Yahweh was, what He expected of them, and willingly submit to the covenant of their own choice.

Second, they were to continually teach their children who Yahweh is and what He had done for them on a daily basis (Deut. 6:4-9). Yahweh stressed that one should know Him so well that He would constantly be a part of their vocabulary and conversations, that they would create an environment of Yahweh in their homes and families. Thus, Yahweh would be the very air that their family and children breathed on a daily basis. This would then become a part of their children's lives on a foundational level that would then permeate every aspect of their lives. Thus, the children would remember and know Yahweh and be obedient to Him out of love.

## Structure

The structure of Deuteronomy is based on an ancient Near Eastern suzerain vassal treaty. This is a treaty that a greater king or overlord would make with a client king or servant. The first type of suzerain vassal treaty is a grant treaty where the overlord promises to protect the rights of the servant when he is in trouble. Deuteronomy is the second type, which is a vassal obligation treaty. This is when the king has acquired a people through warfare. He has not known them long enough to know if they will be faithful or not, so he imposes a treaty to protect himself against their disloyalty.

In Deuteronomy, Moses gave three speeches to the people, followed by final covenant stipulations that follow the structure of a suzerain vassal treaty. The first part of a suzerain vassal obligation treaty is the preamble (Deut. 1:1-5). The preamble gives the purpose of the covenant and identifies the parties of the covenant. In this case it is Yahweh and Israel with Moses as the mediator.

The second part is the historical prologue (Deut. 1:6-4:49). This is to remind the vassal of the great benefits that the king had bestowed upon them to motivate them to show undivided loyalty to the king in order to fulfill the covenant. The point is to motivate the vassal to love the king. This is Moses' first speech to the people.

The third part is the stipulations of the treaty (Deut. 5-26). This is to protect the rights of the king against the disloyalty of his people. The language contains a lot of "if you do this, then I will do this." This is Moses' second speech to the people. Here, it is broken into three parts. A summary of the stipulations, which is the ten commandments, an exposition on the great commandment of loving Yahweh with all their heart, soul, and strength, an explanation of the secondary commandments.

The fourth part is the covenant sanctions (Deut. 27-30). This gives details to how the people of the covenant will be treated appropriately for their loyalty or disloyalty. This is the section with all the cursings and blessings. Where Deuteronomy differs from those treaties of the ancient Near East is that they only have cursings and never blessings like Deuteronomy does. This is Moses' third speech to the people.

The fifth part is the dynastic disposition (Deut. 31-34). This is where the king would make sure there was a successor in place, if something would happen to him, and that the successor was bound by the treaty as well. Yet Israel had no king, and Yahweh would never die. So, here Yahweh established Joshua as the next representative over the people. The song of witness (Deut. 32) that is sung through the generations will remind Israel of their responsibility in the

covenant and their certain and continuing failure in it. They should learn the song of the covenant so that they would be called back to covenant loyalty. Then Deuteronomy ends with the final blessings of Moses (Deut. 33).

## Outline

- I. Moses' First Speech: Review of Yahweh's Faithfulness (1:1–4:43)
  - A. Yahweh Brought Israel to the Promised Land (1:1–3:29)
  - B. Exhortation to Observe the Law Faithfully (4:1–43)
- II. Moses' Second Speech: Exposition of the Law (4:44–26:19)
  - A. The Essence of the Law and Its Fulfillment (4:44–11:32)
  - B. An Exposition of Selected Covenant Laws (12:1–26:19)
- III. Moses' Third Speech: Exhortation to Obedience (27:1–30:27)
  - A. Preparations for Renewing the Covenant (27:1–28:68)
  - B. The Covenant Renewal (29:1–30:20)
- IV. Moses' Last Acts (31:1–34:12)
  - A. Moses Gives Leadership to Joshua (31:1–29)
  - B. The Song of Witness (31:30–32:47)
  - C. Moses' Blessing of the Tribes and His Death (32:48–34:12)

## I. Moses' First Speech: Review of Yahweh's Faithfulness (1:1–4:43)

This division in the treaty reminds Israel of the great benefits that their King had bestowed upon them, which would motivate them to show undivided loyalty to Him in order to fulfill the covenant. In this first speech of Moses—with his exhortation that Israel observe the law faithfully out of love because Yahweh first loved them (Deut. 4:1-40)—is one of the greatest revelations of Yahweh's character in the First Testament. Here, Moses points out Israel's unfaithfulness, not to condemn them but to emphasize how great is Yahweh's faithfulness to them. Moses urges this new generation to learn from their parents' sin and rebellion and to respond in love to this uniquely faithful God so that they may experience life and joy.

### A. Yahweh Brought Israel to the Promised Land (1:1–3:29)

Moses begins his summary of Israel's history at Horeb (Mount Sinai) because this was where Yahweh had adopted Israel as His chosen nation under the Mosaic Covenant. Moses did not include any more information than was already in his first four books nor did he retell the events in detail as he had before. Moses assumes that one is familiar with the history of Israel as revealed in the Torah and was summarizing the events to make the point about Yahweh's covenantal faithfulness.

“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.”<sup>7</sup>

**1:1-5** These verses are the preamble of the treaty, which gives the purpose of the covenant and states that the covenant is between Yahweh and Israel, with Moses as the mediator. Israel is currently located in the Transjordan, which is on the eastern side of Jordan River, which is the eastern border of Canaan. The narrator states that it normally takes 11 days to get from Mount Sinai, where Israel received the law, to Kadesh Barnea, which is the southern point of Canaan. However, with Israel it took 38 years. The narrator begins with this point in order to emphasize that this is why the covenant was needed. Israel was not a faithful and obedient people, and so the covenant was to teach them what loving obedience to Yahweh looked like and to make it clear that whatever blessings Israel lost was and would be a result of their disobedience and not Yahweh's fault.

**1:6-18** The events discussed in these verses are recorded in Numbers 10-12. Moses recounted Israel's journey from Mount Sinai to Kadesh Barnea, which was south of Canaan in the Negev, emphasizing that they left because they were ready to receive the Promised Land. The references to “the river Euphrates” (Deut. 1:7) and “numerous as the stars of the sky” (Deut. 1:10) alludes to the fact that Yahweh was taking them to the Promised Land in fulfillment of His promises that He had made in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-3; 15; 17; 22). The main point here is that Yahweh had the ability and was faithful to fulfill His promises to Israel.

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<sup>7</sup> Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 94.

Moses stated that because of Yahweh's blessings upon Israel, they had become too numerous for him to handle and govern. So, with the approval of Yahweh and the people, Moses appointed godly and wise leaders over them. But most importantly, they were not to discriminate among people and were to acknowledge that, ultimately, judgment belonged to Yahweh and not them. The principle that judgment belongs to Yahweh was enormously important, for it removed the basis and authority of the law from the human realm and placed it firmly on an absolute principle of divine authority.<sup>8</sup> Israel was to recognize that they would not be a nation of kings and human rulers but that Yahweh was their divine king and ruler; they answered to no one other than Him.

**1:19-25** The events discussed in the rest of Deuteronomy 1 are recorded in Numbers 13-14. Moses continued to tell of the faithfulness of Yahweh in bringing Israel to the Promised Land, just as he told Abraham and, later, Israel at Mount Sinai. Yahweh then commanded them to enter and take the land for He had promised it to them. The Hebrew verb *yarash* has the sense of both "possessing" and "dispossessing," meaning they were to remove the Canaanites from the land before they could settle the land. One of the tests of their covenant loyalty was the killing of the Canaanites. Yahweh desired their exclusive and passionate commitment to Him, and this meant removing all the pagan gods and influence that were in the land of Canaan.

However, in a lack of trust, Israel wanted to spy out the land first. Yahweh and Moses allowed it to test the faith of the people. When they entered the land, the spies found it to be just as abundant in crops and fruit as Yahweh had already told them.

**1:26-33** In contrast, the people's focus had been not on the goodness of the land but on the difficulty they would experience in possessing it. The people's rebellion completely perverted their understanding of the nature of their God. They said, "Yahweh hated us," and yet the essence of the covenant was the *love* of Yahweh.

Moses encouraged them not to be afraid, for Yahweh their God had gone ahead of them, and with such a forerunner the murmurings of the people were futile. They were to remember that Yahweh "will fight for you" as He had always done. Yahweh had continuously carried, protected, and provided for them in every way imaginable. The father-son imagery is one of several ways in which the theme of the *love* of Yahweh is developed in Deuteronomy. Yahweh was even physically dwelling with them in the fire and cloud.

However, the people's experience of Yahweh in their history was not sufficient for them, for they had to be constantly reminded of all those experiences in order to overcome their anxieties, which tended to erase their memory. There was no ground for rebellion and fear, but the people could not lift their sight above their fears, and so they ignored the covenant faithfulness of Yahweh and rebelled against Him despite their covenant promises they had made at Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:3-4).

**1:34-40** Yahweh, in His anger, swore an oath that everyone twenty years and older would not enter the Promised Land. The verb used, *shaba*, translated "oath," is the same as that employed for the covenant promise to the patriarchs and the Israelites. Just as Yahweh was faithful to His covenant promises, He is also faithful to His promises of judgment. They did not believe nor want to enter the land, and Yahweh gave them exactly what they wanted. The reason Israel did not enter the Promised Land was not because Yahweh had failed them but that they had failed to place their faith in Yahweh. They did not remember that the same God who delivered them from

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<sup>8</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 98.



Egypt was the same God who was with them at the border of Canaan and would deliver these enemies into their hands as well.

The exception to this judgment was Caleb (and later Joshua) because he was faithful to Yahweh. “Because he followed Yahweh wholeheartedly,” which is a Hebrew idiom, rendered literally “he completely filled (himself) after Yahweh.”<sup>9</sup> Caleb had made Yahweh so much a part of his thinking and life there was no room for the fears of the world. The mention of Moses’ failure (Deut. 1:37; Num. 20:1-13) makes the point that the people’s constant rebellion had even caused their great leader Moses to sin. Moses’ identification with them as their leader meant that he also accepted with them the result of their failure.

Yet no matter how much Israel disobeyed, and even when their leader Moses failed, Yahweh was still faithful to them and provided a new leader in Joshua to guide their children, whom they feared would be killed, into the Promised Land. Their concern for the children was valid but misplaced since it implied that Yahweh was not capable of protecting His own people.

**1:41-46** However, when Yahweh told them not to enter the land, they disobeyed Him and tried to enter anyway, subsequently experiencing defeat because Yahweh was not with them. The irony is that they had acknowledged their sin and lack of trust and obedience to Yahweh, yet they responded with continued lack of trust and obedience. There was a fine balance in the nature of the covenant that they constantly failed to grasp. First, they could not really trust in Yahweh, who would fight for them and protect them. Then, when they rose to weak confidence in Yahweh, they forgot the seriousness of their task in fighting against such a great enemy without Yahweh’s help.<sup>10</sup>

**2:1-23** Moses skipped the next 38 years of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness in his recounting of their history. The events discussed in these verses are recorded in Num. 20:14-21:20. Following the judgment at Kadesh Barnea, Israel then moved from the southern part of Canaan, moving east through Negev and coming across the Edomite, Moabite, and Ammonite nations. Yahweh commanded that Israel was not to attack Edom, Moab, or Ammon since they were connected to Abraham and the promises that Yahweh had made to them. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, son of Isaac (Gen. 36), and the Moabites and Ammonites were the descendants of Lot’s two sons (Gen 19:36-38). The fact that Yahweh commanded Israel not to attack the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites shows His faithfulness to His promises and to the descendants of Abraham. Even though they were not the chosen nation that Yahweh would use to bring about the covenant promises and the Messiah, they were still descendants of Abraham, whom Yahweh had promised to bless (Gen. 12:1-3; 17). Moses kept reminding the people that Yahweh had promised them a different land and was faithful to provide for them as they moved around these nations to the Promised Land.

Moses recounts Yahweh’s faithfulness to Ammon by driving out the Rephaites, who previously lived in the land that they now occupied. The word *Rephaites* means “terrible ones” or “defunct ones.” They were a tall and fierce people whom Yahweh gave Ammon the ability to wipe out. The point is that if Yahweh was able and faithful to deliver the Rephaites into the hands of Ammon, then how much more would He deliver the Canaanites into the hands of Israel, His own chosen people. In light of this, their lack of faith stands out even more.

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<sup>9</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 104.

<sup>10</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 106.

**2:26–3:11** The events discussed in these verses are recorded in Num. 21:21-35. After Israel passed the Dead Sea, they turned north, moving into Amorite territory in the Transjordan region east of the Jordan River. The spies of Israel had feared the giants and the walled cities of Canaan. However, Moses reminds Israel that they were able to defeat the Amorite kings Sihon and Og, the second being a giant himself (Deut. 2:11).

Moses sent a letter to King Sihon asking for safe passage. The good intention lying behind the message is stressed in two ways. First, the Israelites had already passed through Seir and Moab peacefully; their transit had been without incident or war. Second, Moses made it clear that the Amorite territory was not his main objective.<sup>11</sup>

“The statements about Sihon does not reflect a view of determinism but rather reflect a part of the Hebrew theology of history. Humans are free and responsible in action, but the actions of all humans are set within the sphere of history, and Yahweh is the God of history.”<sup>12</sup>

As a result of Israel’s faith, Yahweh gave them victory over the cities of King Sihon. The term *city* does not refer to a city in the modern sense but more like settlements. The people were clearly involved in the battle, but in the recollection of military success, that success was seen as Yahweh’s doing.

Israel then went on and defeated Og of Bashan. Og’s defeat was significant, for he was one of the last of the Rephaim, but his kingdom was seen as an Amorite kingdom. He was also a giant with a coffin that was recorded as measuring 13½ by 6 feet. The Hebrew term *‘eres*, traditionally translated “bed,” is likely a basaltic (volcanic) stone sarcophagus. Its iron-like color and texture caused it to be described as an iron container.<sup>13</sup> This victory that Yahweh had given Israel shows that the delay in Israel’s entering the Promised Land was not due to the lack of might or faithfulness of Yahweh but of Israel.

“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.”<sup>14</sup>

**3:12-22** The events discussed in these verses are recorded in Numbers 32. Yahweh shows that though the Transjordan was not the original territory within the Promised Land that Yahweh had wanted Israel to settle, the fact that Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh were able to settle there is a further testament to Yahweh’s faithfulness in giving Israel the land He had promised them. And because the tribes had already conquered the Transjordan region, they could leave their women and children there while they conquered the land of Canaan.

**3:23-29** Moses pleaded with Yahweh to enter the Promised Land, but Yahweh did not allow it. In contrast to the people who were forbidden from the Promised Land but chose to disobey and try to enter it, Moses submitted to the will of Yahweh. This shows that although he was a sinner and failed to always obey Yahweh, he was submissive to the will of Yahweh.

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<sup>11</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>12</sup> Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, pp. 117.

<sup>13</sup> See A. Millard, “King Og’s Iron Bed: Fact or Fancy?” BR 6 (1990): 16-21, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Patrick D. Miller. *Deuteronomy*, p. 40.

Through all the years of Israel's rebellion against the almighty and loving Yahweh who had brought them salvation, Yahweh showed that He would be faithful to them no matter what because it is His character. This same God wanted to bless the new generation of Israel as they entered the Promised Land—if they would only be obedient to Him. If Yahweh never abandoned them in their rebellion, how much more could they experience in their obedience to Him?

## **B. Exhortation to Observe the Law Faithfully (4:1-43)**

In the first three chapters of Deuteronomy, the speech of Moses contains an account of the experience of Yahweh in history and what they should learn from it. The remembrance of Yahweh in history continues, but it now assumes a secondary role. Here, Moses begins to focus on the purpose of the covenant and the law in light of their past history. They were now to remember these things and stay faithful to Yahweh so that they could receive the covenantal blessings. This conclusion to Moses' first speech prepares the way for the presentation of the Ten Commandments and the other laws, which begins in Deuteronomy 5.<sup>15</sup>

**4:1-8** Moses appeals to this current generation to listen to and obey Yahweh if they wanted to receive the covenant blessings. The nature and purpose of the law are expounded here, so that the obedience that is called for will not be blind obedience but an obedience based on understanding. The law was not simply a written code, rather it was meant to teach Israel how to love.<sup>16</sup> Moses used the recent incident of the Moabite seduction of Israel (Num. 25:1-9) to remind them of the consequences of not listening to and obeying Yahweh.

But the current generation had been faithful to Yahweh and so were entering the Promised Land. It was not wealth, government, or military power that were the basis of their greatness, rather their greatness lay in the wisdom and discernment that were the result of obedience to the law, so that their neighbors would say, "This great nation is a wise and discerning people." It is this characteristic that would attract the other nations to Israel so that they too could know Yahweh.

Moses mentioned two things that allowed Israel to be so wise. First is that no other god had drawn so close to its people as Yahweh had with His people. Their relationship with Yahweh was a moral and spiritual one, for they could call upon Him whenever they wanted. Second, no other nation had laws that were truly just and dealt with the people in a just way.

**4:9-14** The key to Israel's faithfulness and success was to remember who Yahweh is and what He had done for them, and to teach their children these things. Moses reminded Israel that, unlike the pagan gods, Yahweh had come down to them, making Himself known to them at Mount Sinai. He also gave them His law so that they would know what righteousness looked like. In contrast, the pagan gods not only did not lower themselves into the affairs of people, but their expectations of their people were never clear or consistent. People lived in fear, not knowing whether the gods were angry with them. When Israel was judged for their sin, they knew that what they had done was wrong and so were not confused about the consequences and judgment of their actions.

"The theology of the nations at large taught that the supreme gods were remote and inaccessible. Though they were perceived in highly anthropomorphic 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. 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."<sup>17</sup>

Remembering what Yahweh had done for them was important, for the pagan gods were physical and visual as idols. Countering the continual images of the pagan gods would require great care,

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<sup>15</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, pp. 128-129.

<sup>16</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 129.

<sup>17</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. *Deuteronomy*, p. 117.

and so Moses urged such care, “lest you forget the things your eyes have seen.” They had never literally seen Yahweh, but they had seen what He had done. In contrast, the people had seen images of the pagan gods but had never seen what they had done, for they had done nothing.

This is also why it was crucial for the people to teach their children, not about Yahweh, but to know Yahweh. The theme of teaching the children, which continues throughout Deuteronomy, is important in the context of the covenant. The covenant promise of the land to Abraham and the patriarchs spanned into the future with the children. Forgetfulness led to failure, and so it was crucial that the people of Yahweh not only remember their experience of Yahweh’s deeds, but also that they pass on these memories and experiences to their children.

However, their religious life did not consist only of remembering the experience of Yahweh in the past; rather, it also functioned to produce continual obedience to the law of Yahweh, which would lead to the continual experience of the presence and deeds of Yahweh.

**4:15-24** Moses reminded Israel that because Yahweh is unlike any of the other gods, they were not to worship Him with images as the other gods were; Yahweh is separate from and Creator of creation, not a part of creation like the pagan gods. The reality of Yahweh’s presence could not be doubted, for they had heard His voice and sensed the awe of His presence in the cloud and fire. If in their most powerful encounter with Yahweh, He had no physical form but only His voice, any attempt to represent Yahweh in form would be totally inadequate and misleading.

Moses’ first warning was against making an image. This was the greatest danger of all since, in the Israelite conception of Yahweh being a personal God, the most obvious way of attempting to represent Him would have been in human likeness. A human attempt to contain and limit Yahweh, whether in material form or in theological propositions, is to fail to be aware of His transcendence and infinitude.<sup>18</sup> It should be stressed that the warning in this verse was not against the worshiping of other gods in the form of images but against any attempt to represent Yahweh in a physical manner.

The second warning is not explicitly that of making an image, but rather of worshiping the sun, moon, stars, and the whole host of heaven. The role of the heavenly host, in later Israelite religion, was to reflect the glory of Yahweh (Ps. 19:1). The Canaanites no doubt understood that their physical images were not in themselves divine but only representations of divinity. However, the sun was awe inspiring.

Israel was not to have any image of Yahweh, for they *were* the image that Yahweh had created to represent Him (Gen. 1:26-27), not to be worshiped but to point all of creation to Him as its creator. This was the point of the image of God.

**4:25-31** Moses then warned that if Israel ever went after these pagan gods, then Yahweh would have no choice but to judge them just like He had judged the pagan nations. Moses invoked the sky and earth as a witness to this threat. These witnesses were permanent and unchanging things in contrast to the finite and fickleness of humans. And the sky and earth are always obedient to Yahweh, and He would use them to carry out the blessings and curses of the covenant.

There are two positive aspects to the warning. First, if the people were punished through their disobedience, then the consequences of their actions would drive them back to Yahweh. Second, even in the midst of the warning is an element of promise: though the people might be unfaithful,

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<sup>18</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 135.

Yahweh would be faithful to them.<sup>19</sup> Thus, this warning ends on a more positive note, emphasizing the compassion of Yahweh. His compassion is manifested in His continual readiness to pursue and receive Israel back to Himself, even though their violation of the covenant dissolved, in a legal sense, the commitment of Yahweh to His people. This is huge because even though Yahweh has every right to condemn and abandon His people, according to the covenant, His character does not allow Him to.

**4:32-40** These verses are the climax of Moses' argument for why Israel should obey Yahweh. The two primary sources of their knowledge of Yahweh were His deliverance of them through the exodus and His manifestation of Himself before them at Mount Sinai in order to adopt them as His people.

“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.”<sup>20</sup>

Moses emphasized the uniqueness of Yahweh in that no other god had ever loved them, saved them, and blessed them, for no merit of their own, like He had. This truly is what makes Yahweh unique from every god and philosophy—past, present, or future—that He loves His people, and this moves Him to action in their lives.

Throughout the history, Yahweh has been teaching them that there is no other god like Him, and He has been proving it in word and deed. The word “discipline” or “teach” comes from the Hebrew word *yasar* (used in Deut. 8:5) and is used in the sense of a father disciplining his son. Yahweh did this all for Israel because from the very beginning He chose them to be His people and promised to bless them.

“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.”<sup>21</sup>

Moses called Israel to obey the law so that it would go well with them in the land they were receiving. The good life, for the Israelites, lay in obedience to the law of Yahweh rendered out of love. Obedience would make the people live long with great blessings. Moses shows here that Yahweh's greatest desire is to be in a reciprocal relationship with Israel. Because Yahweh first demonstrated His love by saving them, Israel was to respond in obedience out of their own love so that Yahweh could bless them in His continued abundance of love.

**4:41-43** After the completion of Moses' first speech to the people, he moved on to dealing with a legal issue. Yahweh had selected cities of refuge in the land of Canaan (Num. 35) to which people could flee if they had committed an act of manslaughter. Now that they had conquered the Transjordan, Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh had requested to live in the conquered area. Here, Moses assigns three cities of refuge for these tribes in the Transjordan since they were not

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<sup>19</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 140.

<sup>20</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. “A Theology of the Pentateuch.” In *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 63.

<sup>21</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. *Deuteronomy*, p. 133.

originally meant to settle there. The reasons for the cities are presented in detail in Deut. 19:1-13 and will be discussed there.

This seems out of place, but the first speech was about the past. So it was important to deal with legal issues concerning the past events before Moses moved onto the second speech, which begins to cover Israel's future in the Promised Land.

## II. Moses' Second Speech: Exposition of the Law (4:44–26:19)

After reviewing Yahweh's faithfulness to Israel in the first speech, Moses emphasized Israel's need to remember and teach about the faithfulness of Yahweh so that they could respond in loving obedience. Moses first focuses on *why* they were to obey Yahweh and then on *how* to obey. These are the two major questions that drive any covenantal relationship.

“This address, which is described in the heading as the law which Moses set before the Israelites, 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 Yahweh 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.).”<sup>22</sup>

### A. The Essence of the Law and Its Fulfillment (4:44–11:32)

Moses began by repeating the Ten Commandments given to them at Mount Sinai (Ex. 20), which state what loving Yahweh and loving others looks like in practice. The Ten Commandments are at the heart of the message of Deuteronomy and are the standard for Yahweh's continuing His relationship with His people. The legal and relational nature of the Ten Commandments is much like a wedding contract. A marriage may be legalized by a marriage license, but it is a true marriage only when the legal terms of the contract are demonstrated in love, which maintains the marital relationship. Likewise, the law was legally binding, but not in a restrictive sense, for it was an expression of Yahweh's love for His people, and it called for a returned response of love from His people (Deut. 6:4-5). It demanded a response of love, not because obedience would gain credit in the sight of Yahweh but because the grace of Yahweh drew out a response from His people in gratitude.<sup>23</sup>

**4:44–49** These verses are similar to Deut. 1:4-5 in that they make historical references to where Israel was camped when listening to Moses. Israel at this time was located in the Transjordan, which is on the eastern side of the Jordan River, at the eastern border of Canaan.

**5:1-5** Moses called Israel to “hear” or “listen” to his words. The word “hear” comes from the Hebrew word *shama*, which carries the idea of hearing in order to obey. The full implication of a proper hearing of the law is that they were to learn and then put it into practice.

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<sup>22</sup> C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch*, p. 3:318.

<sup>23</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, pp. 149-150.



Moses reminded Israel that Yahweh had made His covenant not with ancestors who lived long ago but with this current generation—since many of them had heard Yahweh speak at Mount Sinai. The whole point of Yahweh’s covenant was that it was a relational covenant that was meant to draw His people into a relationship with Him. Therefore, it was not to be seen as some ancient document that founded a people, rather one into which people could currently and actively enter to know Yahweh.

**5:6** The basis for Yahweh’s Ten Commandments was that He is the sovereign creator of creation and that He had redeemed His people from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 13:4-5; Ex. 20:3; Lev. 26:13; Num. 15:41). Before Yahweh gave Israel His law, He first delivered and redeemed them. Yahweh always acts first with grace and then asks for a response of obedience. Thus, the exodus is the gospel of salvation placed at the head of the law. The covenant was a law for a people already redeemed, not a law designed to redeem the people.

Now it was because of what Yahweh had done for His people that He was in a position to give them certain obligations. Because He had delivered Israel from their previous corrupt master, He had become their new master. However, He had acted in love for His people, and the obligations laid upon them in the law reflected His love for them.

**5:7** The meaning and theology of the Ten Commandments has already been discussed in detail in Exodus 20 of the *Exodus Notes*.<sup>24</sup> The focus here will be on understanding the Ten Commandments in relation to the people of Israel moving into the Promised Land and their need to maintain their covenant with Yahweh and to instruct their children in the covenant.

This command implies that there are other gods/divine beings/unearthly beings that could be worshiped (Ps. 82). Yet it maintains that Yahweh is the sole and unique deity that is worthy of their devotion and worship. The command to worship Yahweh alone is clearly stated all throughout the Scriptures (Deut. 6:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Tim. 2:5; Acts 14:15; Jam. 2:19; 1 Jn. 5:20-21). Although the English translation may seem to imply it, the command does not allow for the worship of other gods as long as Yahweh takes priority.

Yahweh clearly stated, as He did in Ex. 20:3, that He is the only true God of creation who is worthy of their worship and therefore the only one they should love and be dedicated to. Yahweh made His uniqueness evident in the fact that He is the only God who created everything in creation and therefore is sovereign and transcendent over creation in a way that no other god comes close to. Second, He is the only God who loves Israel so much that He pursued them, delivered them, adopted them as His own, and was now bringing them into a land flowing with milk and honey.

Unlike in the wilderness, where Israel was isolated from other nations, in the Promised Land they would be surrounded by nations who worshiped many false gods. They would be taking on an agricultural way of life that would be strange to them after coming out of slavery and through the wilderness. In Canaan, they would find that agriculture was directly linked to the worship of the pagan gods. According to the Canaanites, the gods were nature gods who were intertwined with the things of nature, and so one’s devotion to these gods was essential to the success of one’s crops.

Yahweh had demonstrated to Israel on many occasions that He was God not only in the realm of history but also in the realm of nature. In Deuteronomy, Yahweh promised He would grant them

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<sup>24</sup> See *Exodus Notes* at [www.knowingthebible.net](http://www.knowingthebible.net).

the harvest of the field. The Hebrews had known Yahweh's presence in the exodus and the wilderness, but would they also be able to sense His presence in the new lifestyle they were about to adopt? Here, in a sense, lies not only the obligation, but also the challenge of the commandment.<sup>25</sup> The relationship with one God must dominate every sphere of life, whether in thought, emotion, word, or deed. There can be no area of life in which a person or thing comes before the commitment to one God.

**5:8-10** This commandment guards against two possible dangers.<sup>26</sup> First, it warned against the danger of conforming the worship of Yahweh to the images and forms of the surrounding culture's worship. As Israel entered the Promised Land, they would be introduced to a land that was filled with images and idols of various gods. Yahweh had not made Himself visible to Israel, except by the pillar of fire and smoke, in any concrete or detailed way like the idols that portrayed the pagan gods. The temptation to seek the more visual assurance that the fertility cult pretended to offer would be difficult to avoid. Israel would be tempted to mix these images with Yahweh, thus diluting the grandeur of His sovereignty and uniqueness, or to walk away from Him completely to gods who were not relational and were significantly limited in their power. Yahweh restricted their worship so they would not experience anything less than the awesomeness of Himself.

Second was that the images based in creation would confine the greatness and transcendence of Yahweh. The things of creation are so finite in their essence and their function that nothing could hope to accurately communicate the limitlessness of who Yahweh is and what He can accomplish. Thus, an image would restrict in the Israelites' mind their knowledge, relationship, and trust in Yahweh.

Anything that detracted from this essential relationship of covenant, the commitment of love, led to jealousy of Yahweh. And such false forms of worship had consequences for future generations.

**5:11** Not only did this command warn against misrepresenting Yahweh's character through one's words and actions (as discussed in the *Exodus Notes*), but it also warned against attempting to manipulate Yahweh for personal ends. The *name* of a person or god, in the ancient Near East, was considered to have power, and using it in a certain way gave one control of that god's powers so that one could manipulate the world around them to their own will. One may call on the name of Yahweh in prayer, but prayer can also be misused in an attempt to channel Yahweh's power toward some selfish or worthless purpose.

**5:12-15** The Sabbath is the day on which the Israelites would cease working or doing anything that kept them from the presence of Yahweh. This cessation of work let them enter His presence and experience Him as the only true God of creation. This was especially crucial now that they would be spread out in the land, making weekly access to the tabernacle less feasible for everyone. Also, in a land filled with idols, it was crucial that they entered the presence of Yahweh on a regular basis to remind themselves how much greater the power and love of Yahweh was in comparison to the other gods of the surrounding nations.

**5:16** The first four commandments were concerned with humanity's proper relationship with Yahweh. Without a proper relationship with Yahweh, a proper relationship with other humans

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<sup>25</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 153.

<sup>26</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 153.

was impossible. The last five commandments deal with humanity's relationship with other people. This commandment is the transition from the first four and the last five, for it deals with the earthly authority that Yahweh has placed over the children of Israel. Just as Israel was to obey their heavenly God, they were to obey their earthly parents. Yet just as Yahweh taught His people and they were to learn from Him, so parents were to teach their children as their children learned from the faith of their parents. The children honored their parents by living out the faith of their parents. Just as the covenant involved certain commitments from both parties to the covenant—Yahweh and His people—so too there was to be a joint commitment within the human family.

“In the second commandment, the parents of children were aware of a heavy responsibility; the danger of imagery could lead to a false relationship with the Lord of the Covenant, which in turn could affect even their great-grandchildren (5:9). Here, the reciprocal side of that responsibility is stated; children were charged: *honor your father and your mother*. The second part of the verse clarifies the specific significance of the commandment *so that you may live long and it may go well for you on the land*. The close parallel between these words and 4:40 indicates that the basic issue involved in the commandment was the continuity of the covenant. Parents were responsible to teach their children concerning the covenant, and by so doing, both children and parents would prosper in the land (4:9-10, 40) and see the fulfillment of the covenant promise of God. But to teach effectively, there must be a receptive audience. If children did not honor their parents and were rebellious and self-centered, they would not be able to learn about the covenant relationship with God which had been so central to the lives of their parents. And as a consequence of dishonoring their parents, they would not prosper in the Promised Land, for they would not know intimately the Lord of the covenant promise.”<sup>27</sup>

**5:17** The command to not murder does not specifically forbid killing, for Yahweh commanded capital punishment and holy war. However, He prohibited taking a human life without divine authorization, as an act of selfishness. The commandment protected the individual in the covenant community from any danger at the hands of a fellow member of the community and thus enabled him to experience the blessings of Yahweh in the Promised Land (Deut. 4:40).

**5:18** Adultery is sexual intercourse when one or both partners are married (or engaged, under Israelite law; Deut. 22:23-29) to someone else. Therefore, adultery, more than any sinful action, has to do with unfaithfulness in a covenant relationship. Thus, adultery destroys marriage as ordained by Yahweh (Gen. 2:24); the home, being the foundation of society (Matt. 5:27-28; 1 Cor. 6:9-20); and the health of the community that Yahweh's covenant was meant to protect. And like worshipping false images, adultery is the mixing of the true and the false and distorts and destroys the covenant relationship. It is the emphasis of Deuteronomy that faithfulness, expressed in obedience, must permeate every sphere of life that gives a distinctive character to the Israelite law on adultery. Adultery by one partner in a marriage involved not only unfaithfulness to the other partner but also unfaithfulness to Yahweh.

**5:19** This commandment is concerned specifically with relationships between persons within the covenant community, rather than property. Thus, the primary focus is against the abduction of people (Deut. 24:7). Any action involving the manipulation of another human for personal gain is considered the theft of their well-being. To abduct or manipulate someone was to rob them of

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<sup>27</sup> Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 158.

their life and blessing in the land and therefore violated everything that the covenant existed to protect.

**5:20** The command to not bear false testimony is a legal term: in a court of law, one must not bear false testimony against another. This deals not only with lying to someone directly but with lying about someone to another. Evidence given against the defendant in a court case determined their future, so it was vital that all evidence given should be true evidence. A God of faithfulness, who did not deal deceitfully with His people, required of His people the same transparency and honesty in personal relationships. How could one uphold the covenant and their relationship if they could not be honest with the people of the covenant?

**5:21** Unlike the other commandments, which are directed at the external actions, the command against coveting is directed at internal desires and motivations. This command deals with selfishness and prohibits desires that do not fit with the character and covenant of Yahweh. In a way, this also summarizes all the previous commands and covers any other situation that may have not already been covered.

**5:22-33** Deut. 5:22 acts as a conclusion to the Ten Commandments and leads into the next section concerning Moses' role as the mediator of the covenant. The verse emphasizes the divine origin of the commandments and their comprehensive and complete nature.

When the people of Israel heard the commands of Yahweh, they realized that Yahweh was an awesome God but that they could also have a relationship with Him and not die. However, Israel was filled with fear at the sound of His voice, despite what they had just experienced and learned, and backed away from Him, requesting that Yahweh speak only to Moses and Moses to them. Moses made it clear that they chose him to speak to them on behalf of Yahweh so they would not be tempted into thinking these commandments were his law rather than Yahweh's. The temptation to disobey could take the form of assuming that the law was only the words of Moses.

When Yahweh heard this, He made it clear that He wanted the people to fear Him—not as though He were scary and untrustworthy but in realization of who He truly is: the God of creation worthy of obedience. And, in the context of Deuteronomy, that they would obey Him because this awesome God loved them, therefore they would love Him in return through their obedience to His law. Yahweh did not want a distant, fearful obedience but a drawing close to Him—a respectful and loving obedience.

Yahweh stated that His greatest desire was that they fear Him and obey Him consistently throughout their lives; knowing that they would not brought Him sorrow. Here, Moses showed that the reason Yahweh gave His law to the people was because He loved them and desired the best life for them.

**6:1-3** The whole point of receiving the law was so that they could put the principles of the law into practice when they were living in the land with their God and each other. It was essential for them to do not just this but also to teach these principles to their children throughout the generations. The life and blessing of the people was dependent upon the whole community living and modeling the covenant of Yahweh in relationships and community. The point is not that if they obeyed, then God would give them rewards; rather, if they loved Yahweh through obedience, then they would be blessed with the fruit of their relationship with Yahweh, resulting in a holistically healthy life in the land.

**6:4** Deut. 6:4-9 is at the heart of Deuteronomy (Matt. 22:37-38) and communicates that the most important point for Israel to get is making Yahweh the first and only devotion in their lives and teaching this to their families every moment of the day. Moses was not declaring that Yahweh is the only God but that He is the only one worthy of their devotion (Deut. 6:14; 7:9; 10:17). It is similar to there being many women in the world, yet a husband is to be devoted to only one woman, his wife. This grammatical structure is used in Song of Songs 6:8-9, in which the groom states: “There may be sixty queens, and eighty concubines, and young women without number. But she is one.” Yahweh neither denies the existence of the other gods nor allows for their presence in the lives of His people. This is a significant point because Yahweh knew that there were many other gods that were trying to steal Israel’s devotion and lives from the only one who could truly offer life and joy. True devotion could only happen when Israel acknowledged that there were other options for devotion but that those options paled in comparison to the sovereign and loving God of the universe. Therefore, if Yahweh is the only one worthy of Israel’s devotion, then they ought to give all of their heart, soul, and strength to Him. The phrase to seek or love Yahweh “with all your heart and with all your soul” is repeated many times in throughout the rest of Deuteronomy and the Bible (Deut. 4:29; 6:5; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3; 26:16; 30:2, 6, 10; Josh. 22:5; 23:14; 1 Sam. 14:7; 1 Kgs. 2:4; 8:48; 2 Kgs. 23:3, 25; 1 Chr. 22:19; 2 Chr. 6:38; 15:12; 34:31; Ps. 84:2; Jer. 32:41; Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27).

“The word expresses not only the uniqueness of but also the unity of God. As one God, when He spoke there was no other to contradict; when He promised, there was no other to revoke that promise; when He warned, there was no other to provide refuge from that warning. He was not merely first among the gods, as Ba’al in the Canaanite pantheon, Amon-Re in Egypt, or Marduk in Babylon; He was the one and only God and as such He was omnipotent. It was this all-powerful, unique God who imposed on Israel the charge to love Him, thereby revealing another aspect of His character.”<sup>28</sup>

**6:5** The word “hear” comes the Hebrew word *shama*, which carries the idea of hearing in order to be moved to action from what one hears (Ex. 19:5; Ps. 27:7). Loving Yahweh requires commitment and action.

The word “love” comes from the Hebrew word *ahavah*, which refers to the care and affection that a person shows to another. As demonstrated by Yahweh, He does not love because Israel deserves to be loved but simply because He loves (Deut. 7:7-8; Jer. 31:3). Love here is both the feeling of affection as well as an action (Deut. 4:37). The injunction to love was based on the precedent of Yahweh’s love, which had been shown to the Israelites in the exodus and the wilderness. Thus, Israel was to respond to Yahweh with a love of affection as well as action (Deut. 10:12-13). Israel was to both feel and do love.

The word “heart” comes from the Hebrew word *lev*. In the ancient Near East, the heart was thought of in four different ways. First, the heart was a physical organ in the body that kept a person alive (1 Sam. 25:37). Second, the heart was where all one’s emotions and feeling dwelt and from which they were expressed (Jer. 15:16). Third, the Hebrews had no concept of the brain and had no word for it. They believed that a person’s intellectual activity happened in the heart. The heart is where you know, discern, and understand things (Prov. 2:10; 16:21). Fourth, the heart was the center of one’s desire and will (2 Sam. 7:3; Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 6:17). Therefore, the

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<sup>28</sup> Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 169.

heart was the center of all parts of human existence (Prov. 4:23). Israel was to love Yahweh with all their emotions, thoughts, desires, and choices.

The word “soul” comes from the Hebrew word *nefesh*. The idea of the soul referring to a non-physical, immaterial part of a person that is contained in a person’s body only to be released at death is totally foreign in the Bible and comes from the ancient Greeks. The Hebrew word *nefesh* should not be translated as “soul” but as “life” or “whole being.” The word *nefesh* often refers to the throat (Num. 11:6; Ps. 105:18). Since your whole body and life are dependent on what goes through your throat, it is also used to refer to the whole person and their life (Gen. 46:15). And when the person is dead, he is called a dead *nefesh*, not that the *nefesh* has left. People do not have a *nefesh*, rather they are a *nefesh*. People can also refer to themselves as a *nefesh*, which gets translated as “me” or “I” (Ps. 119:175). Thus, to love Yahweh with your *nefesh* was to long for Yahweh and devote your all of your physical existence to Yahweh, your creator and king (Ps. 42:2-3)

The word *strength* comes from the Hebrew word *me’od*, which is an adverb meaning “very” or “much.” Though the word *strength* is a decent translation, it is too narrow to communicate the entirety of the meaning of *me’od*. This is the only place in the Bible *me’od* is translated “strength.” In Gen. 1:31, Yahweh called the entire creation week “very (*me’od*) good,” and when the flood waters in Gen. 7:18 were rising, they became “very (*me’od*) powerful.” When the biblical writers wanted to really emphasize something, they would use the word *me’od* twice, as in “very, very” (Gen. 30:43; Num. 14:7). Therefore, Deut. 6:5 is saying that one is to love Yahweh with all their “muchness.” *Me’od* is being used to intensify the meaning of heart and life, to one’s full capacity, and by the fact it is being used on its own—not specifically modifying another word—it would basically mean you are to love Yahweh with your “everything.” It means devoting every possibility, opportunity, capacity, and all the energy and resources you have to Yahweh. *Me’od* can refer to anything and everything.

Thus, the Yahweh who had given them life as their creator and redeemer expected them to give every aspect of their life back to Him in building His kingdom and benefiting the community in that kingdom. They were to affectionately and actively to love Yahweh with everything that they were and had because He had first loved them.

**6:6-9** Israel’s primary task was to live out these truths in their lives. The people were to think on them and meditate on them, so that obedience would be not a matter of formal legalism but a response based on understanding. By understanding the path of life set down by the commandments, they would at the same time be discovering the way in which Yahweh’s love for them was given expression.

Every day the people were to read the Word of Yahweh out loud to themselves and then talk about it with the people in their family and community, making connections and making it a part of their lives. The commandments were to permeate every sphere of their lives. And as they interpreted the Word, the Word would begin to change them and conform them into the image of God.

Their second task was to teach this in words and actions to their children every moment of the day. The point is the Word of Yahweh would become so important to them that it would permeate their language and whole life and fill their homes. Thus, the Word would be lived out in a living and active way. This was then to be demonstrated before their children, in word and deed, so they would pick it up in their own lives. Thus, they would come to know Yahweh and

become a part of the covenant as well. The point here was not that they were just to teach their children the Bible stories or to obey the commandments. The point was that it would be real in their lives and become evident to their children. Remembering and teaching were to be so important that they were to write this truth on their houses and bodies so that everywhere they looked they would be reminded of who Yahweh is, what He had done for them, and how they were to respond to Him.

“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?”<sup>29</sup>

**6:10-15** These verses create a circular cause-and-effect situation. If Israel did what Yahweh commanded in Deut. 6:1-9, then they would not fall away from Him (Deut. 6:12-13). Yahweh showed His love to them (Deut. 6:14-15) by giving them a land that they did not build (Deut. 6:10-11). If they remembered this (Deut. 1-9), then they would be able to remain faithful to Him and not fall away (Deut. 6:12-13), which would be a testimony to others about how great He is (Deut. 6:1-9).

The land’s richness and goodness could lull the people into an attitude of forgetfulness, which would be disastrous. In this good land, they were to remember their past and remember Yahweh who brought them out of slavery in Egypt, that He was the one who had given them this land and that they had done nothing to build it. Thus, they were to commit themselves solely to Him in obedience and love. These words come to be synonymous with the true worshiper of Yahweh (Ps. 63:11). Therefore, they were not to commit themselves a god that had no value and had done nothing for them. To follow another god was to confess a god or suzerain other than Yahweh and to reject the grace of Yahweh already shown to them throughout their history (Deut. 4:24).

**6:16-19** The reason Israel was not to test Yahweh was that He had already proven to them who He is, what He was able to do, and that He wanted to bless them. To constantly demand that someone prove their friendship to you shows you do not truly appreciate or know the person and demonstrates a dysfunctional relationship. Yahweh asked that they trust Him based on how He had already revealed and proven Himself to them.

**6:20-25** Moses explained what the parents were to teach their children (Deut. 6:4-9) when the children asked about Yahweh’s law and why they were to obey. The parents were to teach them about how great Yahweh is and what He had done for them. Children are naturally curious and ask a lot of questions. If the parents have already filled their homes and lives with memorials to Yahweh, then the child will naturally seek to know what they mean. The focus is not on how they were to act or what they were forbidden from doing but on who Yahweh is. The behavior would follow a heart that knew who Yahweh is.

The nature of the question implies a good family relationship, the kind envisioned in the fifth commandment. The youth was already instructed in obedience but now wished to know and understand the meaning and significance of the commandments that shaped his daily life.

“True covenant keeping in the final analysis is a matter of faith, not merely of works and ritual. Thus the central feature of the covenant stipulations is their providing a vehicle by

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<sup>29</sup> Patrick D. Miller. *Deuteronomy*, p. 107.

which genuine saving faith might be displayed (cf. Deut. 24:13; Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; 4:1-5; Gal. 3:6-7).”<sup>30</sup>

**7:1-6** When Israel entered the land of Canaan, they were to kill everyone, destroy everything, tear down all the altars, and refuse to enter into any kind of treaty with them, either political or marital. Any kind of treaty would be a compromise and would lead to disaster. The Israelites were to systematically destroy the physical religious vessels of the Canaanites, indicating their complete lack of recognition of the gods of the Canaanites. The Hebrew word *berit*, translated “treaty,” is the same word translated as “covenant.” The word gives a clue to the reason for the harsh policy of war to be employed by the Israelites. The Israelites were bound primarily by their *berit* with Yahweh, religiously and politically. Making a treaty with other nations would indicate a lack of faithfulness on the part of the Israelites to their suzerain God.

How could Yahweh, as a loving God, command the destruction of the Canaanites?<sup>31</sup> First, the Canaanites were extremely evil—involved in idolatry, child sacrifice, gross sexual immorality, and many other sins. Yahweh judged and removed the Canaanites because they had made their choice to abandon all love for Him and others, while Yahweh had not. Yahweh as the God of creation has every right to judge and condemn people for their sins. Even in the modern world, humans would not tolerate a God who did not execute justice against people who were continuously wronging others. One cannot appreciate how truly horrific and grievous our sin is when they are sinners ourselves. Only Yahweh can truly understand the evil in the world.

Second, He is God of all creation and has the right to do whatever He wants. He is the one who put them in the land, and He had every right to take them out of the land. This is no different from Yahweh sending the flood (Gen. 6-8), the plagues of Egypt (Ex. 7-13), the many battles He fought on Israel’s behalf, or the fact that people are condemned to hell for their rejection of Yahweh. At the same time, Yahweh has proven Himself over and over as being a God of love and quick to forgive. Yahweh has shown Himself to be a good God. Therefore, one needs to trust that even though they do not fully understand what is going on, Yahweh is good and cares about people more than they do. If a forgiving God sees fit to destroy a sinful people, then one needs to trust that it is just.

Third, Yahweh commanded the Canaanites’ removal from the land so that they would not corrupt the Israelites and lead them to the same destruction. The focus in this passage and every other time the Canaanites’ destruction is mentioned is on maintaining the righteousness of Israel and their worship of Yahweh. The Canaanites’ idolatry and total lack of righteous love toward others are the two greatest offenses to Yahweh and the most destructive of people’s lives. Yahweh could not have His chosen people, who were supposed to be a blessing to the world, act in the same way.

**7:7-11** The reason for Israel’s policy of war lay in their election and holiness, which is seen in two important religious themes, which are related to the covenant. Moses explained why Yahweh chose Israel: to keep them humble and to demonstrate how great He is. They were not chosen because of how great they were; in fact, they were the least in the entire world. It was because they were least that Yahweh had chosen them so that He could turn them into the

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<sup>30</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. *Deuteronomy*, p. 175.

<sup>31</sup> For a fuller and more detailed discussion see *The Extermination of the Canaanites* at [www.knowingthebible.net](http://www.knowingthebible.net).



greatest—to show the world what He was capable of so that the world would desire to know Him. The reason for Yahweh’s love, though it had a purpose, remains a mystery.

“Thus God’s love and choice of his people could not be known clearly in a philosophical or theological sense; it was known rather through the experience of God maintaining his covenant and loving kindness (v. 9) with his faithful people for a thousand generations (a phrase which has its beginning in the past, but which has relevance still for the future). His faithful people were known by two characteristics: they were those that love him and those that keep his commandments. The close relationship between the love of God and obedience to his commandments has already been described in 6:4-9. In contrast, the one that openly hates him (and as a consequence disobeys God’s commandments) invites God’s speedy retaliation and judgment.”<sup>32</sup>

**7:12-15** If Israel remembered Yahweh, obeyed Him out of love, and removed wickedness and evil from the land, then they would experience blessings from Yahweh. The ground would be fruitful and produce grain, new wine, and fresh olive oil. These three items were the principal food products of Israel. This would then give them more reasons to worship and obey Him and more to teach to others. All the blessings described earlier could come to pass only after the Israelites had expelled the Canaanites from the land. This was not a command to fight but a promise of military success.

The course of the people’s lives and future would be dependent upon their obedience to the covenant. This does not mean that obedience resulted in Yahweh’s blessing; rather, their obedience maintained their covenant relationship with Yahweh, and they would experience the blessings of Yahweh only while in covenant relationship with Him.

**7:16-26** When urging Israel to go into the land of Canaan and destroy the pagan nations there, Moses reminded the people that no matter how strong the enemy was, Yahweh was stronger. He urged them to remember the awesome power that Yahweh had demonstrated when He brought them out of Egypt and that this same God would go with them into the land of Canaan to conquer the enemy.

The initial conquest, however, would be more gradual, which would avoid the danger of the land returning to a primitive state of natural anarchy of nature. Yahweh was also going to use this strategy to make them dependent on Him and to grow them in their trust of Him over time. Moses also called them to not love or become attached to the possessions of the Canaanites as they took the cities because these things would draw them away from Yahweh (1 Jn. 2:15-17).

Moses reminded them that Yahweh did not play favorites, for if they entered into the same practices as the Canaanites, He would bring upon them all the judgments He brought on Egypt and the Canaanites. This makes it clear that Yahweh’s extermination of the Canaanites has nothing to do with a land grab, power, or race but is Yahweh’s divine judgment on sin.

**8:1-10** Moses reminded Israel that the reason they spent forty years in the wilderness was that Yahweh was disciplining them for their sins and that He wanted to humble them. Humility was the characteristic Yahweh desired from His people. First, the desolation of the wilderness removed all the natural things on which they would depend. It would cause them to depend upon Yahweh, who would provide for them. Second, the severity of the wilderness undermined the shallow confidence of those who were not truly trusting in Yahweh. The wilderness makes or

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<sup>32</sup> Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 180.

breaks a person. It proves strength of character, which is not a self-sufficiency but a strength of knowing Yahweh.

Only when Israel recognized that their worth and ability were found solely in Yahweh, who had created them and sustained them, could they experience the victories and joy in life that they desired. If not, then they would go after the pagan gods and the ways of the Canaanites, become enslaved by them, and eventually be destroyed.

In Deut. 8:3 Moses stated that the major lesson of the wilderness was to teach Israel that they could not live on bread alone (what humanity can provide) but that they also needed to live on the words of Yahweh (what Yahweh can provide).

“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, 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.”<sup>33</sup>

“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).”<sup>34</sup>

**8:11-20** Moses warned them against the pride over how good their life was after their victory and the building of their homes and villages. They were to remember that it was Yahweh who had given them the land. Even though it was they who had physically fought the enemy and conquered the land, it was Yahweh who had given them the ability to do so (Ex. 17:8-16; Josh. 6:12-19; 7:1-5).

If they did not heed this warning, then Yahweh would discipline them as He had disciplined the pagan nations. Just as Yahweh had not chosen them because they were special in and of themselves, so He would also not play favorites with them when disciplining them for their wickedness. As stated previously, Yahweh disciplines those whom He loves.

**9:1-6** Deut. 9 shifts the focus to the stubbornness of the people, which continually provoked Yahweh. Moses warned Israel against the sins of colonialism and imperialism. The temptation for Israel, chosen by Yahweh and conquering wicked nations, was that they would see themselves as more righteous than and as superior to the other nations. First, they were not to think that their righteousness was the reason Yahweh gave them the land. It was due to Yahweh’s judgment on the Canaanites. Yahweh is the God of all the nations and therefore has the right to deal with them according to His righteous law. Second, Yahweh was honoring His promise to the patriarchs to give their descendants this land. Third, they were not a righteous but

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<sup>33</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. “A Theology of the Pentateuch” in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 64.

<sup>34</sup> John. H. Sailhamer. *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 441.

a stubborn people. If His generosity were based on their righteousness, then they would never be receiving the Promised Land. This emphasizes the gracious gift of Yahweh. Remaining in the land, however, would be dependent on their righteousness.

**9:7-29** Moses then reminded them that they naturally had a heart of rebellion like the other nations, which they had demonstrated in the wilderness. Even though it was their parents' generation that had sinned against Yahweh (the golden calf), they were their parents' children and capable of the same rebellion. Moses reminded them that the only thing that spared Israel from being wiped out after the golden calf incident was that he had interceded on their behalf, and Yahweh had forgiven them. Remembering this would help prevent them from thinking that they were superior or exceptional to the Canaanite people. For if the people had been guilty of provoking Yahweh in the midst of the awesome wonders they saw Him perform in the wilderness, then the danger was no less present in the Promised Land.

“The prayer of Moses expresses his understanding and knowledge of God: the justice of God is balanced by the mercy of God, and it was to God's mercy that Moses appealed. But the prayer expresses boldness, for it involved the attempt, in humility, to turn aside the wrath of a righteous God. Thus the recollection of the prayer in Moses' address served to bring a sobering influence on his audience; in the past, there had been moments when the whole future of the people of Israel had been in the balance. In the present, therefore, the people were to remember the past mercies of God and to commit themselves wholeheartedly in allegiance to their Lord.”<sup>35</sup>

**10:1-5** The love and forgiveness of Yahweh after the golden calf was also demonstrated in that Yahweh restored and renewed the covenant, seen in His carving the Ten Commandments again on new stones. Israel had no right to be a part of Yahweh's covenant, according to the stipulations of the covenant. Yet Yahweh in His grace chose to renew it, knowing that they would break it again. Thus, Moses' audience should truly appreciate the renewal of the covenant as they now stand and listen to him, for they are just as undeserving and dependent upon the grace of Yahweh.

“Past experience should remind the people that they needed discipline for their rebellious ways. Yet through all their recalcitrance 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.”<sup>36</sup>

**10:6-11** The reason Israel was given the law of Yahweh was so that they, as a wicked people, would know what righteousness looked like, know what it meant to obey Yahweh, and experience life and not death. Yahweh gave Israel the law because He loved them; they should thus obey the law out of love for Him. Yahweh wanted them to be a special nation of priests who would obediently demonstrate His love and blessings to the world so that it would know Him as well. However, when Israel rebelled against Yahweh in worshiping the golden calf, they lost the right to be priests and to enter His presence because of their sin. Only the Levites got to be

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<sup>35</sup> Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 198.

<sup>36</sup> J. A. Thompson. *Deuteronomy*, p. 134.

priests because of their loyalty to Yahweh. Moses showed that obedience brings blessings and privileges.

Likewise, Yahweh commanded Moses to lead Israel to the Promised Land, which was also an act of Yahweh's grace in light of the golden calf. So also Israel now stood at the border of Canaan, ready to enter the land, because of the gracious forgiveness of Yahweh.

Deut. 10:11 serves as a transition from the previous section to this address by Moses. The Sinai covenant was almost disrupted, but through the grace of Yahweh and the intercessory prayer of Moses, disaster was averted. The emphasis is now on Yahweh's present requirement of His people.

**10:12-22** Moses commanded the children of Israel regarding four things: revere Yahweh, obey all His commandments, love Him, and serve Him. These perfectly sum up all that is required of the true believer. To revere Yahweh is to acknowledge Him as the creator of the universe, who is greater than all things, and upon whom you are dependent for your existence. Therefore, you are to obey Him because He is worthy of this obedience. But obedience is also to be done out of an affectionate and active love for Him because of the salvation that He has granted you. Thus, one's whole life belonged to Yahweh and was to be given back to Him in complete service. All of your being was to be dedicated to Him in loving affection and active service (Deut. 6:4-5).

Most of the current generation of Israel had not seen Yahweh's great demonstration of power because they were not there when it happened. This point demonstrated the need for their parents to teach them who Yahweh is and what He had done for them.

In light of Israel's past, Yahweh commanded them to circumcise their hearts and stop being stubborn. Circumcision here refers to the physical sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17:9-14). The point of circumcision is first, the sign was a reminder of Yahweh's promise of fertility to Abraham. It is from the male reproductive organ that this seed of life will come, which would multiply into a great nation. The marking of this organ, responsible for children, would be a reminder of Yahweh's promises. At the very heart of the promises of Yahweh to Abraham is the promise of the seed that will be a great nation and ultimately bless the whole world. Thus, the organ responsible for the procreation of the seed must be consecrated to Yahweh (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4).

Second, the male and female genitalia are the only organs in the human body that produce both life (seed/egg) and death (urine). The idea is that if one is not marked by Yahweh, then the flesh can only produce death. But if one is marked by Yahweh, then one can produce life and blessings. Yahweh commands Abraham and his descendants to cut off this part of their flesh, or they would be cut off from the covenant blessings. They would be without life. Spiritually, it would have been a frequent reminder to every circumcised male of Yahweh's promises involving seed and a symbol that they had repudiated "the flesh" in favor of trust in Yahweh and His spiritual promises. It is possible, since Yahweh does not require child sacrifice, that this is a substitutionary sacrifice of the body to Yahweh.

Moses used circumcision in order to make these points about the heart. Yahweh created humans in His image and chose Israel to live righteously, to expand His garden/kingdom, and to be a blessing to others. However, Moses makes the point in Deuteronomy that humanity and Israel would never be able to do this because their hearts were corrupted with sin and thus produced death rather than life (Ps. 14:1-3; Jer. 9:25; 17:9; Ezek. 11:19). The Bible makes it clear that the

hearts of all humanity are evil (Ecc. 9:3; Jer. 17:9). Therefore, Israel's heart would have to change, would have to be circumcised, so that they could produce righteousness and life and be able to obey the commands of Yahweh. But because they could never do this, it would have to be God who circumcised and transformed their hearts. Spiritual circumcision (cleansing of the heart) signifies more internally a commitment to be conformed and obedient to the will of Yahweh (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:26). It was not the outward sign of the covenant that was important but the inward attitude of those who were renewing their allegiance to Yahweh (Deut. 10:16).

The First Testament looked forward to the day Yahweh would come and give Israel a new heart so that they could produce life (Deut. 10:10-16; 30:6; Ps. 51:10-12; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 11:17-19). Paul later makes the point that it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that performs the circumcision of the heart and transforms the believer into a new person (Rom. 2:29; 8:1-8; 12:1-2). Only with the Holy Spirit is true Israel able to desire, love, and obey Yahweh, producing life and becoming a blessing to the world in the way Yahweh and Deuteronomy envisioned.

Yahweh requires love, but those who outwardly obeyed the commandments without loving Yahweh were, in effect, offering Him a bribe. The impartiality of Yahweh and the impossibility of bribing Him are illustrated in the need to take care of the orphans, widows, and foreigners, which will be discussed in more detail in Deut. 24:17-22. Here, the topic is presented principally to illustrate the character of Yahweh and the implications of that character for the life of humans. There were two reasons the Israelites should love the foreigner. First, Yahweh had a particular concern for those in the community whose social and economic status was not secure and thus should receive just and proper treatment. Second, they were to remember they too were foreigners. All of them knew what it was like to be slaves or to not have a home and be a foreigner in a land. Moses urged them to never forget this, to never fail to accept and love the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan, for they too were this. Just as Yahweh showed love to them as the outcast and downtrodden, so they were to show love to the outcast and downtrodden.

**11:1-7** Moses then spoke to the parents who had seen the plagues of Egypt and were delivered, urging them to teach their children about who Yahweh is and what He had done for them. All those who were twenty years old and younger at the time of the exodus escaped the judgment of Yahweh and were thus allowed to enter the Promised Land (Ex. 14). These people would now be forty to sixty years old and have children of their own to teach. The only way that these children could experience the salvation and life they had received was if the parents taught them to know and obey Yahweh out of love because He had first loved them.

**11:8-15** Moses emphasized that obedience to the commandments of Yahweh would bring Israel two blessings in the land. First, their obedience would give them the strength to conquer a people who was much stronger than they were because Yahweh would be with them and go before them. Second, their obedience would allow them to enjoy the fruit of the land and to have a long and good life in the land because Yahweh would be with them.

It was even more important to pay attention to and obey the commands of Yahweh now because the land that they were entering was not as naturally lush and fruitful as the land of Egypt. This land required Yahweh to personally provide rain so that the land would produce. Therefore, the only way that they would experience life in the land was if they depended upon and obeyed Yahweh. Yahweh had chosen this land to make Israel depend on Him since crops only grew when there was rain, which came only from Him.

**11:16-25** Moses summarized his earlier points—that they were to obey Yahweh and teach their children to do likewise, first, so that they could experience life in the land. Second, obedience would allow them to escape the judgment of Yahweh that their parents had experienced and that the Canaanites were about to experience. Third, if they obeyed Yahweh’s commands, He would bless them with a powerful and influential empire in order to make Himself known to the world.

**11:26-32** The context of this passage is important. It is a conclusion to the previous section and causes the readers to make a decision: “Today.”

“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.”<sup>37</sup>

The covenantal relationship that Yahweh had established with Israel at Mount Sinai was based on obedience and love. If Israel responded to the sovereign and loving God of creation with a loving obedience, then they would experience life and blessings. However, if they responded with rebellion, then they would be cursed and judged because a sovereign and loving God could not tolerate wickedness in His creation. These blessing and cursing were to be pronounced on Mount Gerizim and Ebal, which will be discussed in Deut. 27.

The blessing and cursing are contingent upon obedience to the law, which was about to be presented to the people in its detailed specifications. Thus, the passage serves not only as a conclusion to the preceding part of the speech but also as an introduction to what follows, which sets the subsequent chapters within their immediate and proper context.

“Again it becomes clear that the commandments were not simply a body of legislation which was to be obeyed for its own sake. The commandments reflected a way of life, the good way of life which God determined for his people; therefore, to disobey (or not listen to) the commandments was to turn aside from the way that alone could lead to happiness and prosperity in relationship with God, and to take a false trail that could lead only to separation from God and disaster. Thus, in the exposition of the details of the law that follows, Moses’ role was not that of a great legalist or jurist, but was that of a man deeply concerned that the people who were under his charge should enter into the fullness of life that was potential in the covenant relationship with God.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> R. Norman Whybray. *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, p. 95.

<sup>38</sup> Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 212-213.

## B. An Exposition of Selected Covenant Laws (12:1–26:19)

In this section, Moses expounded on the Ten Commandments and explained to this new generation entering the land of Canaan all the laws that needed clarification and emphasis in light of Israel's entrance into Canaan. These laws reflect a centralized, monarchical society. The section covers topics in relation to and in the order of the Ten Commandments (Deut. 5:7-21). All of these laws were discussed in detail in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Thus, these laws will be briefly discussed here.<sup>39</sup>

### Laws Concerning the First Commandment

**12:1-14** When Israel entered Canaan, they were to destroy all the idols on the high places so that the idols would not become a snare to them and lead them away from Yahweh. The Canaanites put their idols and altars on the tops of hills and mountains believing that this brought them closer to the gods, as in the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9).

“‘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 worshiped. 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.”<sup>40</sup>

Yahweh commanded Israel that they were to worship Him only at the place He chose. The emphasis is not so much on *one* place but on the place *Yahweh would choose*. The Israelites were allowed individually to pray to and worship Yahweh wherever they wanted; this command regulated the public and corporate worship and sacrifices of Israel.

“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.”<sup>41</sup>

**12:15-28** When Israel was in the wilderness, they were not allowed to eat meat not sacrificed in the tabernacle. This was because they were all gathered around the tabernacle in close proximity. In the Promised Land, they would be scattered geographically and no longer be gathered around the tabernacle. Therefore, it would be extremely difficult for the people to only eat meat sacrificed in the tabernacle. Moses clarified here that the Israelites were allowed to kill and eat clean animals at their homes when they entered the Promised Land even though they had not been allowed while in the wilderness (Lev. 17:3-6). However, they still were not to consume the animal with the blood still in it or make sacrifices outside the tabernacle.

**12:29-32** Not only was Israel to destroy the idols and altars of the pagans, they were not to adopt the practices and worship of the pagans. Just as Israel had a different God from the pagans, they were to worship Him in a different way.

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<sup>39</sup> For a detailed discussion on the laws found in Deut. 12-26 see the *Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers Notes* at [www.knowingthebible.net](http://www.knowingthebible.net).

<sup>40</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. *Deuteronomy*, p. 220.

<sup>41</sup> Patrick D. Miller. *Deuteronomy*, p. 129.

## Laws Concerning the Second Commandment

**13:1-5** The primary meaning of *prophet* is “proclaimer.” The prophet was responsible for communicating the will of Yahweh to the people. Because prophets brought the will of Yahweh, the pagan gods also had their own prophets who would come to deceive the people. The test was that any prophet who proclaimed a different god and covenant from that of Yahweh and the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants was a false prophet. Prophets would have private encounters with the divine, which they were then to take to the people. In order to be legitimate, these private encounters and visions must line up with the very public and grand revealing of Yahweh and His covenant at Mount Sinai. Even if they performed miracles or their prediction came true, what made them true or false was what they said about Yahweh. Miracles and correct predictions do not necessarily originate from Yahweh; what one believes about Yahweh determines whether they know Him and are from Him.

“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.”<sup>42</sup>

**13:6-18** It did not matter if the person proclaiming this false message was a stranger, a family member, or a city, they were to be destroyed because their message would eventually lead many Israelites away from Yahweh and to their destruction. Additionally, the one accusing them of being false must be the first to strike them down. Not only did this ensure that the false prophet was brought to an end but that no one would falsely accuse another knowing that they would personally have to carry out the death sentence. The death of a false prophet who was intentionally violating the covenant of Yahweh, to which they had pledged allegiance, was nothing compared to the death they would be bringing to an entire community if they led them astray with false teaching.

## Laws Concerning the Third Commandment

**14:1-21** The Israelites were to look and act different from the Canaanite people. In the ancient Near East, there was no separation between the religious and the everyday part of life. Everything one did and wore reflected their gods and religious practices. Therefore, the way that they acted, dressed, and ate reflected who Yahweh was. Israel was to act, dress, and eat differently than the Canaanites. Self-mutilation and shaving one’s head and body was a common practice among the pagans. Moses repeated the laws of clean and unclean animals (Lev. 11) as a reminder to stay separate. The clean animals represented righteous people, and the unclean animals represented sinful people. The Second Testament did away with these distinctions since the Church was now able to go into the world with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:15; Rom. 14:14).

“The external appearance of the people should reflect their internal status as the chosen and holy people of God.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 222.

<sup>43</sup> Gordon J. Wenham. *The Book of Leviticus*, p. 272.



Yahweh had already explained which animals were clean and unclean in Lev. 11. Only clean animals could be eaten by the Israelites. The distinction between clean and unclean seems to have been that certain animals did not conform to what the Israelites considered normal.<sup>44</sup>

No one is completely sure what to “cook a young goat in its mother’s milk” means (it is repeated in Ex. 34:26 and Deut. 14:21). The most common view is that it is a commandment to Israel to be separate from the Canaanites. It was a common practice among the Canaanites to offer to their gods a lamb boiled in the milk of its mother. Some scholars say that they did this ritual because it would magically stimulate the powers of nature to procreate, producing more fertile crops (Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:9) since mother’s milk is a symbol of fertility. J. Milgrom argues that it is a prohibition of commingling life and death and showed disrespect for the God-given relationship between parent and offspring.<sup>45</sup>

“...various Canaanite cults regularly engaged in the practices of seething a kid in its mother’s milk as a fertility rite of sympathetic magic intended to coerce the deity into granting fertility to the wives, fields, and flocks of the cults’ adherents. Such rites of sympathetic magic ‘worked’ on the premise that the gods were in some way part of and subject to the same natural created order that human beings also inhabited. By finding the common natural connection points, human beings could ‘push the right buttons’ and thus manipulate the gods...”

“Israelites do not, through an act of sympathetic magic, try to *coerce* the deity into blessing them with fertility for *the year to come*; but instead, *after* the year’s crops have been harvested and *whether that year’s harvest has been fruitful or not*, Israelites bring a tithe to God as an *act of gratitude* [cf. vv. 22-29].”<sup>46</sup>

### Laws Concerning the Fourth Commandment

**14:22-29.** The Israelites were to offer a yearly and three-year tithe to Yahweh as a thanks offering for who He was and what He had done for them. Sacrificing their first and best also taught them to trust and depend upon Yahweh that He would provide for them.

“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.”<sup>47</sup>

“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 idea here, as the sacrificial meals were to furnish the occasion and object of rejoicing before the Lord.”<sup>48</sup>

**15:1-18** Just as Yahweh had cared for Israel as slaves and foreigners by bringing them out of bondage in Egypt, they, too, were to honor Him by caring for the slaves, foreigners, and orphans who came to them. Every seven years, all debts were to be canceled and all slaves set free (Ex.

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<sup>44</sup> See *Leviticus Notes* at [www.knowingthebible.net](http://www.knowingthebible.net).

<sup>45</sup> See J. Milgrom, “You Shall Not Boil a Kid in Its Mother’s Milk,” *BRev* 1 (1985): 48-55.

<sup>46</sup> Michael L. Goldberg. “The Story of the Moral: Gifts or Bribes in Deuteronomy?” *Interpretation* 38:1 (January 1984):21-22.

<sup>47</sup> C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch*, 3:367.

<sup>48</sup> C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch*, 3:367-68.

23:10-11; Lev. 25:1-7). Not only did this show love to the debtor, but it also required trust in Yahweh's taking care of them since they were now out that money and servant.

“The apparent contradiction between verses 4 and 11 is explainable as follows. The statement that “there shall be no poor among you” (v. 4) rests on the condition that the Israelites would be completely obedient to God (v. 5). The statement that “the poor will never cease to be in the land” (v. 11) expresses what would really exist since Israel would not be completely obedient. It also represents what would exist among Israel's neighbor nations even if Israel was completely obedient.”<sup>49</sup>

Because the character of Yahweh included extreme generosity to the Israelites, they were to likewise show love to the poor and anyone in need. They were not only to give to the poor; they were to do it with a generous heart without requiring anything in return.

**15:19-23** Not only was Israel to offer up their first and best animals to Yahweh, they were also not even allowed to work these animals or shear them for money. This means that the animal was sacrificed to Yahweh in every way.

**16:1-8** Only four of the seven festivals of Yahweh are repeated here (Ex. 12; Lev. 23; Num. 28-29). Moses only repeated the most important ones, which required a sacrificial meal to be eaten in Yahweh's presence at the tabernacle.

“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.”<sup>50</sup>

Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are technically two separate festivals, but because they fall in the same week they were often celebrated as one festival. Passover got its name because it celebrated the night that Yahweh *passed over* the firstborn males of all families who sacrificed a lamb in their place (Heb. 11:28). Their faith in Yahweh, that He would do what He promised, is what saved them that night. Ex. 12:14 states, “you will celebrate it perpetually as a lasting ordinance,” meaning that those who belong to Yahweh are to celebrate this festival forever.

Yahweh required each family on the tenth day of the month of Nisan to choose a male lamb that was spotless and healthy to be sacrificed in place of the family. For four days, the lamb would be inspected for imperfections, and on the fourteenth day it would be sacrificed. The blood of the lamb would be placed on the frame and above and to either side of the door. The lamb is a typological symbol of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ (Jn. 1:29, 36; 1 Cor. 5:6-8; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 7:10; 21:22; 22:21). Just as the lamb would die in place of the family for their sins in Egypt, so Christ would die for the sins of the world (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Gal. 1:3-4; Heb. 9:24-27; 1 John 2:2). The blood that covered the door to their house, marking them as purified, is a foreshadowing and symbol of the blood of Christ that covers our hearts and purifies us (Lev. 17:11; John 19:24; Heb. 9:24-27; 1 John 2:1; 5:6). The absence of yeast was symbolic of the absence of corruption, because the blood was cleansing them of their corruption. The bitter

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<sup>49</sup> Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Deuteronomy*, p. 59.

<sup>50</sup> J. A. Thompson. *Deuteronomy*, p. 198.

herbs—perhaps endive, chicory, and/or other herbs native to Egypt—would later remind the Israelites who ate them of the bitter experiences of life in Egypt.

The Unleavened Bread festival would last from the fourteenth day of the month to the twenty-first day. It would be a time of removing all the yeast from the house and eating bread without yeast to make the Israelites aware of their sin. Yahweh emphasizes the seriousness of the festival by stating those who do not participate will be cut off from Him and removed from the community. There is no salvation for those who are cut off from Yahweh. Once again, Yahweh says of the Unleavened Bread festival in Ex. 12:17, “keep this day perpetually as a lasting ordinance,” emphasizing that this too is to be practiced forever.

It is Passover and the Unleavened Bread festival that Christ fulfilled when He celebrated in the upper room with His disciples, which has since come to be known as the Lord’s Supper (Luke 22:17-20; 1 John 14; Cor. 11:23-29). Christ stated that He was the lamb—that the bread was his body and the wine His blood, broken and given for them.

**16:9-12** The Feast of Weeks was celebrated at the end of the spring harvest, 50 days after Passover (specifically, the day after the seventh Sabbath). This day celebrated the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, and the Israelites would offer up the first fruits of the wheat harvest in the same manner as they had previously with the barley harvest. Thus, this became the second first fruits offering to Yahweh of the harvest season. This was the only festival wherein the Israelites were commanded to eat bread baked with yeast (a symbol of sin) in it.

This feast was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit indwelt the disciples for the first time. In this way, the Law that had been given to the Hebrews at Mount Sinai was now written on the hearts of the disciples in fulfillment of what the prophets had said (Jer. 31:31-34; Joel 2:28-32; Ezek. 11:17-21). Thus, the believer becomes a second first fruits resurrection from the dead through the death and resurrection of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (2 Thess. 2:13; James 1:18; Rev. 14:4).

**16:13-17** On the Feast of Tabernacles, the people built tents out of branches and lived under these for the duration of this eight-day festival as a reminder of their life in the wilderness. They presented many offerings during this holiday (Num. 29:12-38), and it revolved around the harvest of grapes. This was a week during which they looked back at the life of slavery from which Yahweh had delivered them, praised Him for the tabernacle and His glory that dwelt with them, and looked forward to the day that Yahweh would bring the fullness of His kingdom and glory on earth.

Christ gave a glimpse of this when He came and tabernacled with us (Jn. 1:14) in His first coming and revealed His glory to John, James, and Peter on the day of Tabernacles (Matt. 17:1-8). But this will be fully fulfilled in His second coming through His millennium reign and then the new earth, sky, and Jerusalem (Zech. 14:16; Rev. 21).

### **Laws Concerning the Fifth Commandment**

**16:18-20** Most likely the judges were chosen by the people and then appointed by the leaders of the nations. Officers were probably responsible for enforcing the laws. These people were to be righteous and to value justice over money and power.

**16:21–17:7** An Asherah pole was a sacred tree carved into the image of a woman as an idol for the female fertility goddess Asherah. By the time of Joshua through the kings, Asherah had become the major goddess of worship in the Canaanite culture alongside Ba’al (Judg. 6:25-26).

Judges often ruled on cases in open spaces; perhaps the Canaanite judges ruled on cases in the Asherah groves. These trees were not to be tolerated in the nation of Israel.

Yahweh specified that offenders of this command were to be stoned to death. There had to be two to three witnesses in order to maintain justice. The evidence must be sufficient and reliable, and anyone who made a serious accusation must be prepared to be the executioner as well as the witness.

**17:8-13** If there was any case too difficult for the leaders to handle, they were to take it before the Levites, the religious leaders. There, Yahweh would hear the case and rule on it. Ultimately, Yahweh was the judge over Israel, and they were to represent Him.

**17:14-20** Yahweh never directly forbid Israel to have a king but had made clear throughout Exodus and Deuteronomy that they were not to have a king like all the other nations; their kings had absolute power and answered to no one. Israel was to have rulers who acknowledged that Yahweh was their king, serving His will and not their own. But knowing one day Israel would ask for a king (1 Sam. 8:4-5), Yahweh required that the king be separate from all the other nations and represent Him only.

First, the king had to be an Israelite of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, especially if his job was to represent Yahweh.

Second, the king must not accumulate horses. Horses were a symbol of military might. Egypt was a major horse market in the ancient Near East. Therefore, the king must not build a strong military, for he must depend on Yahweh for his military victory (Ex. 17:8-16). Likewise, he would be less likely to be corrupted by power and dominate others if he did not have a massive military.

Third, the king was not to have multiple wives. In the ancient Near East, kings' wives often represented treaties between nations. Each king would marry the daughter of the other king and have children with her. This not only joined the two kings together as family but also ensured that the other would not attack as long as his daughter and grandchildren were living with that king. Yahweh wanted the king to trust Him, not political treaties, for the protection of the kingdom.

Likewise, these foreign wives would bring their pagan gods into the family and tempt the king to devote himself to these gods (1 Kgs. 11:1-13). More wives meant more pagan gods. These would then influence the king and the children of the king, who would inherit the throne after the king's death (Deut. 6:4-9).

Fourth, the king was not to amass a large personal fortune. Once again, Yahweh did not want the king to place his trust in earthly wealth, rather than in Yahweh, for his security and success.

Fifth, the king was to make his own copy of the Torah and then read it throughout his lifetime. This copying of the Torah would cause him to really focus and think on the covenant of Yahweh. If the king was to represent Yahweh and His covenant, then he would have to know it better than anyone.

“Three conclusions may be drawn from these admonitions. There is, first, a clear *limitation on power*, 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*."<sup>51</sup>

"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."<sup>52</sup>

**18:1-8** The Levites were to remain separate from the civil, political rulers and to lead Israel spiritually and not politically. They were not to have land or an inheritance of their own; rather, they were to be completely dependent upon Yahweh. Not all the Levites served in the tabernacle; some just served the people of Israel in their Levitical cities.

**18:9-14** Yahweh regulated how the Israelites were to obtain or hear His will through the prophets. The pagans had many superstitious and ritualistic practices to contact the spirits; here, Yahweh forbids them all.

"Of the three major institutions of ancient Israelite social and religious life—royalty, the priesthood, and prophetism—only the last was charismatic 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."<sup>53</sup>

Not only did the Canaanites sacrifice their firstborn son to their gods, but they would also sometimes sacrifice their son or daughter to the gods to change the circumstances in their life (2 Kgs. 3:26-27). Divination meant using bones, laying out animal intestines, reading stars, and so on to determine the will of the gods. The other forbidden acts relate to conjuring up spirits, talking to the dead, and doing magic, or casting spells. What made these practices especially abhorrent was that the people were going to another, untrustworthy god or source for guidance rather than to Yahweh Himself, who commanded all of creation.

**18:15-19** Yahweh promised Moses that when he died, He would raise up prophets to replace him and lead the nation of Israel. Israel should not and would not need to turn to such demonic, subjective, and pagan practices because Yahweh would speak His words directly to the prophets, who would bring them to the people.

"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."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Patrick D. Miller. *Deuteronomy*, pp. 148-49.

<sup>52</sup> R. Norman Whybray. *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, p. 108.

<sup>53</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. *Deuteronomy*, p. 270.

<sup>54</sup> John H. Sailhamer. *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 456.

“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.”<sup>55</sup>

**18:20-22** The test for determining a true prophet was that all their prophecies must come true. In order to test this, there must be some kind of short-term prophecy or sign that the people can see fulfilled (1 Kgs. 13:1-5). If it did not come to pass, they were to be executed.

### **Laws Concerning the Sixth Commandment**

**19:1-13** Moses assigned three cities of refuge to Israel in addition to the ones assigned in Num. 35:1-34. In a world without police and prisons, these cities helped maintain justice in the land. If someone was guilty of murder, it fell to the victim’s closest relative (the avenger of blood) to seek out the murderer and to execute him according to the Mosaic Law. The murderer, seeking safety from the avenger of blood, would flee to one of these cities to be tried by the Levites living there. If they found the person guilty of premeditated murder, then they would remove him from the city and hand him over to the avenger of blood for execution. If the person was guilty of manslaughter, then he was required to live in the city until he or the high priest died (Num. 35:1-34; Josh. 20:1-9). As long as he lived in the city, he was safe from the avenger of blood, but being trapped in the city was also his consequence for taking a life. This practice ensured that there was justice for both parties. In the ancient Near East, the avenger of blood would often kill the murderer and their family without ever considering the case.

When the high priest died, his blood became atonement for the murderer, who was then set free from the confines of the city. Likewise, the avenger of blood was not allowed to touch him, or he would be considered guilty of murder.

**19:14-21** In the ancient Near East, boundary markers protected the property rights of individuals and were seen by the people as sacred. Violating these boundary markers was a common cause of hostility between people.

In Israel, judges assumed a person was innocent until proven guilty. Yahweh required at least two witnesses in order to prosecute. If there was only one, then the case was taken to the Levites at the tabernacle (Deut. 17:8-13). False witnesses would receive the punishment they sought to bring on the persons they falsely accused.

**20:1-20** When Israel went to war, they were to remember that Yahweh was their God and could do anything. He had delivered them from Egypt and provided them a land that they did not have to take through warfare or prepare for their living there. Their confidence should be in Him—not in armies, horses, or things of the world.

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<sup>55</sup> H. Wheeler Robinson. *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), pp. 15-17. This is most clearly seen in the singularity and plurality of the Servant in the ‘Servant Songs’ of Isaiah (Isa. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12).

When Israel faced potential warfare with a nation *outside* the land of Canaan, they were to offer peace to the enemy first. If the enemy refused, then they were to kill only those who attacked them and take the women and children as slaves (Josh. 9:3-27). These slaves would be set free at the seventh year (Deut. 15:1-18).

“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).”<sup>56</sup>

Concerning the cities *within* the land of Canaan, however, they were to wipe everyone out since the Canaanites were under the judgment of Yahweh for their continued sinful and unrepentant hearts (Gen. 15:12-16). In the ancient Near East, nations would burn everything down after a victory, but Israel was not to harm the land or the life that it produced.

**21:1-9** Israelite cities were responsible for murders committed within their territory, which shows that Yahweh’s government allowed for corporate guilt. The ritual of sacrificing the red heifer as the substitutionary death for an unknown murderer removed the offense of the bloodshed from the land and its people.

**21:10-14** Israelite men were allowed to marry women taken in battle—outside of Canaan—if they did not already have a wife. When she came into the land, she must purify herself and was allowed to mourn the loss of her family. This would restrain the men from rape in battle and give the woman time to adjust.

“Such kindly consideration is in marked contrast with the cruel treatment meted out to women captured in war among the neighboring nations...”<sup>57</sup>

Just because Yahweh talked about how a man was to treat a woman when he divorced her does not mean He condoned divorce. Yahweh knew that people are sinners and would violate His will. This law was meant to communicate how others were to be treated despite the sinful actions of the person.

**21:15-21** Once again, just because Yahweh gave laws concerning the children of multiple wives does not mean that He condoned polygamy. This law protected one child being favored over another.

The law of stoning a child was not for a merely disobedient child but for a child who had demonstrated a lifestyle of drunkenness, gluttony, and rebellion. Before the parents could put the child to death, they first had to have demonstrated that they had disciplined him over the years and tried everything else. The reason for the harsh penalty was to protect the community from such a child, who would instigate further rebellion or hurt others. If a child cannot respect or obey the two people who have loved and provided for him more than anyone else, then he will not respect or obey anyone. The parents were to put their love for Yahweh before their love for their children.

“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.<sup>58</sup> They generally connote disobedience, in particular in Israel’s relationship to God. (The pertinent references may be found in Bellefontaine’s article

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<sup>56</sup> John H. Sailhamer. *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 458.

<sup>57</sup> J. A. Thompson. *Deuteronomy*, p. 228.

<sup>58</sup> Moshe Weinfeld. *Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic School*, p. 303.

[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 with him. 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.’”<sup>59</sup>

**21:22-23** The common form of execution in Israel was stoning, but sometimes the people would hang the body as an example of what happens to those who violate the law. If they did this, then they were to take the body down by the end of the day as to not defile the land (Num. 35:33-34; Lev. 18:24-27).

**22:1-8** The commands of Deut. 22:1-4 make the point that one should always be looking out for their neighbor, their animals, and property. Cross-dressing was not only associated with homosexuality, but it was associated with the practices of the pagan worship rituals in connection to Astarte.

“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.”<sup>60</sup>

The final verse here shows that Yahweh valued all life in His creation, and therefore all life should be viewed as sacred and cared for.

### **Laws Concerning the Seventh Commandment**

**22:9-12** The command against mixing seed, yoked animals, and fibers in clothing seems to have two purposes. First, it emphasized the need to maintain order in life and keep things distinct. Second, it was a constant reminder that they were to remain separate from the Canaanites. The Israelites regarded the ox as a symbol of themselves and the donkey as a symbol of the Canaanites. The Israelites wore clothing made from the wool of their sheep, whereas the Canaanite priests wore linen. The Hebrew word for tassels is literally “twisted threads,” a sign that they were in a covenant relationship with Yahweh.

**22:13-19** All of the seven following cases (Deut. 22:13-30) protected the sexuality of the individual and the sanctity of the marriage covenant.

In this case a man has married a woman and then falsely charged her of not being a virgin when he married her. The family then would then prove her virginity by the blood on her dress or

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<sup>59</sup>David Marcus. “Juvenile Delinquency in the Bible and the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of the Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 13 (1981): 47.

<sup>60</sup>J. A. Thompson. *Deuteronomy*, p. 234.



bedclothes that they had collected after the wedding night. As result, the man would pay a large fine to the family and remain married to the girl.

**22:20-21** This involved a similar scenario as the previous, but here the girl was not a virgin. The punishment for her premarital sex would be stoning. This punishment shows how important remaining pure before and during marriage was to Yahweh.

“Premarital sex presumes to seize the highest privilege in marriage (i.e., intimacy through sexual union that results in the “one flesh” relationship). It does so without shouldering the responsibility, namely permanent commitment to one another (expressed as “cleaving” in Gen. 2:24). It therefore perverts marriage, the basic institution of society. It presumes to dictate to God by altering His plan. Not everyone who has engaged in premarital sex has thought this through, but this is the basic reason premarital sex is wrong.”<sup>61</sup>

**22:22** This verse stated that a man who committed adultery with a married woman would die with the woman.

**22:23-24** This dealt with a man who had sex with an engaged girl, who would have been considered married, in a city. Both the man and the girl would be stoned. The girl died because she did not cry out for help; if she had, it would have been heard in the city and there would have been witnesses.

**22:25-27** This involved a similar situation as the one before, but the act of sex took place in an isolated field. In this case, only the man died because it was assumed that the girl had cried for help but no one heard her.

**22:28-29** This had to do with a man and a virgin who had sex before they became engaged. They were required to marry and could not divorce, and the man had to pay a penalty to his father-in-law.

**22:30** Yahweh forbade a son sleeping with the former wife of his father, which was considered incest in Israel.

**23:1-8** This section deals with people who were not born in Israel but wished to worship with full members of the nation. It is important to remember that Yahweh was not forbidding them from entering into Israel or being a part of the covenant, just from entering into Israel’s corporate worship at the tabernacle. It is hard to know what “to the tenth generation” means. Some have suggested it may be a metaphor for “forever,” based on its use in Deut. 23:3. However, “forever” in the First Testament sense does not mean “for eternity” but “for an indeterminate amount of time.”<sup>62</sup> Yet the reference to the third generation in Deut. 23:8 also suggests that Yahweh has a specific number of generations in mind.

The exclusion of those with crushed genitals most likely forbade priests of Ba’al who had castrated themselves in devotion to Ba’al. The restriction of illegitimate children would have discouraged the marrying of Canaanites, as well as adultery and incest. The Ammonites and Moabites were forbidden because they were the result of Lot’s daughters’ incest with their father (Gen. 19:30-38), because they refused help to Israel on their way to Canaan (Num. 20:14-21:20), and because they seduced the Israelites into sexual idolatry (Num. 25). However, they could become part of the Israelite community by faith (Deut. 2:9, 19; Ex. 12:38; Ruth 4:10; 1 Sam.

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<sup>61</sup> Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Deuteronomy*, p. 76.

<sup>62</sup> See A. Tomasino, *NIDOTTE* 3:346.

22:3-4). The Edomites were to be treated well because they were, as descendants of Esau, a full brother of the Israelites. The Egyptians were not to be hated for their enslavement of Israel but were excluded from corporate worship until the third generation. The emphasis is that Israel was to be careful whom they allowed into the community and how they conducted themselves because it would affect their relationship with Yahweh.

“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.”<sup>63</sup>

**23:9-18** Yahweh already discussed the practices that could render a camp unclean in Leviticus; now these are being applied to the army at war. Human waste was to be dealt with so that it did not bring infection and disease into the camp.

“...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.”<sup>64</sup>

Slaves should be given a place to live in Israel since they, too, were slaves at one time. Not only was Israel not to allow cultic male and female prostitutes into their camp, but also they were not even to bring the money into the sanctuary of Yahweh.

### **Laws Concerning the Eighth Commandment**

**23:19-25** The Israelites could charge interest when they made loans to non-Israelites, but they were not to charge their brethren interest (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-37).

Vows were neither required nor forbidden, but Yahweh wanted His people to make good on them in a timely manner.

The Israelites were allowed to eat the grapes and grain from another’s field when traveling, but they were not allowed to harvest them. This ensured that the poor could eat something but were not allowed to take advantage of the owner of the field.

**24:1-4** The discussion of divorce and remarriage fits here because they both involve respect for the rights of others. Yahweh had already made it clear that He did not condone divorce (Gen. 1:27; 2:24; Mal. 2:16; Matt. 19:8). In fact, divorce goes against the very character of Yahweh, who kept forgiving Israel’s corporate violations of the covenant and pursuing a relationship with them even when they did not deserve it. The book of Hosea illustrates Israel’s rebellion as adultery and Yahweh’s unwillingness to divorce Israel, constantly taking her back as his bride. Moses allowed divorce because of the “hardness of heart” of the Israelites. Yahweh was not allowing for divorce here; rather, He was applying certain restrictions on what the people were

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<sup>63</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. *Deuteronomy*, p. 308.

<sup>64</sup> Jay D. Fawver and R. Larry Overstreet. "Moses and Preventive Medicine." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:587 (July-September), p. 275.

already doing. If divorce became too easy, then it would be abused and become a “legal” form of adultery.<sup>65</sup>

The point of this law was that when a woman got divorced, remarried, and divorced again, she could not remarry her first husband, which was a common practice among the Canaanites. This command would have discouraged rash divorces and treating marriage lightly.

“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).”<sup>66</sup>

**24:5-7** A recently married male was to stay home with his bride in order to strengthen their marriage so that they would be more united and stable throughout the coming years.

To take a millstone from a person amounted to robbing him of his ability to grind his meal to make his daily bread.

Anyone who kidnapped or treated someone else as property was to be executed.

### **Laws Concerning the Ninth Commandment**

**24:8-9** The Israelites were to respect and obey the Levites and not slander them like Miriam had (Num. 12:1-15).

**24:10-15** The Israelites were not to take advantage of their poorer neighbors but were to look out for them in the same way Yahweh had done with them. They were not to withhold the clothing they had taken as collateral or enter the person’s house and intimidate him into repaying loans.

**24:16** They were not to punish children for the crime of the parents, a common practice among the pagan nations that surrounded them (Dan. 6:24; Esth. 9:13-14).

**24:17-22** Once again, the Israelites were to look out for the foreigners, widows, and orphans. They were also not to physically abuse the slaves and animals they owned.

**25:1-3** Though beating people was a form of punishment used in Israel, Yahweh forbid this practice; the dignity of the person being beaten was important to Yahweh.

**25:4** Yahweh also made it clear that He cared about the animals.

“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.”<sup>67</sup>

### **Laws Concerning the Tenth Commandment**

**25:5-16** The levirate marriage is where a brother (unmarried) is required to marry his deceased brother’s wife. This requirement ensures that the widowed woman and her children have a male provider responsible for them. It also ensures that the inheritance of the deceased

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<sup>65</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 305.

<sup>66</sup> David F. Payne. *Deuteronomy*, pp. 133-34.

<sup>67</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. *Deuteronomy*, p. 325.

husband/brother stays within the family. The law required that if the woman had no children, then the brother of the widowed woman's deceased husband was to provide a child through the widowed woman. This child would then take the name and inheritance of the deceased husband/brother, thus maintaining the family name and line.

“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 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 her 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.”<sup>68</sup>

Yahweh forbade a woman from unfairly aiding her husband in a fight. This is a rare example of punishment by mutilation in the Bible (Ex. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21). The Israelites were to be fair in their use of measurements.

**25:17-19** When the Israelites had entered the Promised Land and had begun to achieve victories, they were to remember that Yahweh had commanded them to exterminate the Amalekites for their treatment of Israel in the wilderness (Ex. 17:8-16; Num. 24:20; 1 Chr. 4:42-43).

### **Laws of Covenant Celebration and Confirmation**

**26:1-11** When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they were to celebrate the Firstfruits festival. They were to intentionally remember where they had come from as slaves and how Yahweh had delivered them from bondage and brought them to a land flowing with milk and honey. This would be the first time they were to celebrate firstfruits because they would now be in the Promised Land. The “father” in Deut. 26:5 is Jacob. Moses described him as an Aramean because he lived many years in Paddan-aram with his uncle Laban and married Laban's daughters to begin the nation of Israel (Gen. 29-30; Ex. 23:19; Num. 18:12-20).

“It was common for Semites to regard a part of the whole as 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 firstfruits 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.”<sup>69</sup>

**26:12-15** Not only were the Israelites to tithe with their money, they were also to tithe with their hearts out of love.

“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

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<sup>68</sup> C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch*, 3:423.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Deuteronomy*, p. 87.

required to make a solemn declaration at the central sanctuary that he had used the tithe according to the divine law.”<sup>70</sup>

**26:16-19** The covenant between Yahweh and Israel was that they were to obey all these commands with all of their heart and soul (Deut. 6:4-9), and, in return, Yahweh would make them His special people and make them into a great nation elevated above all the other nations.

“If we regard the long section 5:1-26:15 as containing the heart of the covenant law, both in terms of the general 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 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.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> J. A. Thompson. *Deuteronomy*, p. 257.

<sup>71</sup> J. A. Thompson. *Deuteronomy*, p. 258.

### III. Moses' Third Speech: Exhortation to Obedience (27:1–30:27)

After Moses told Israel about the covenantal faithfulness of Yahweh, emphasized their need to respond in obedient faith, and expanded on the commands of the Mosaic Law, Moses now urged this new generation to renew the covenant with Yahweh so that they might enjoy His presence and blessings in the Promised Land.

“The main section of specific stipulations (Deut. 12-26) is sandwiched between two sections in which the future renewal of the covenant is anticipated: 11 :26-32 and 27: 1-26. The structure at this point is significant for understanding the nature of the covenant relationship and the renewing of that relationship on the plains of Moab. The renewal of the covenant in Moab has two focal points: (1) the remembrance of the past, specifically the forming of the covenant at Horeb (Sinai); (2) the anticipation of the future, when again the covenant would be renewed.”<sup>72</sup>

#### A. Preparations for Renewing the Covenant (27:1–28:68)

Before Israel renewed the Mosaic Covenant with Yahweh, Moses made the curses and blessing of the covenant clear to them. This was a common practice done in the ancient Near East before a treaty was signed between two parties.

**27:1-8** When Israel entered the Promised Land, they were to go to Shechem, which was centrally located in the land of Canaan and lay between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. These two mountains create a valley between them that functioned like an amphitheater. Shechem was sacred because it was where Abraham had built his first altar after coming to Canaan (Gen. 12:6). Also, Jacob had settled at Shechem for a time and had dug a well there (Gen. 33:18-20).

On Mount Ebal, Israel was to erect two large stones covered in limestone and write the law on them, most likely the Ten Commandments. They were then to erect a natural, uncut stone altar and sacrifice fellowship offerings to Yahweh there (Ex. 20:22).

**27:9-13** Then, when Israel was in the Promised Land, half the tribes of Israel were to stand on Mount Gerizim, the mount of blessing, and pronounce upon Israel the blessings of Yahweh recorded in Deut. 28:1-14. And the other half of the tribes of Israel were to stand on Mount Ebal, the mount of curses, and pronounce upon Israel the curses of Yahweh recorded in Deut. 28:15-68. On Mount Gerizim stood all the sons of Leah and Rachel minus Reuben, who was cursed by Jacob (Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4), and Zebulun, who was the youngest. These two along with the sons of Jacob's maidservants were to stand on Mount Ebal. As Israel faced the east, Gerizim would have been on the right and Ebal on the left.

The practice of writing laws on large stones and pronouncing blessings and curses was a common practice in the ancient Near East when establishing treaties. Joshua did obey this command after he entered the land and conquered Jericho and Ai (Josh. 8:30-35).

When Joshua and the Israelites finally brought Canaan under control, they assembled at Shechem as Moses had commanded and undertook a ritual of covenant reaffirmation (Josh. 8:30-35; 24:1, 25). Half the tribes stood on Mount Gerizim and half on Mount Ebal, and they pledged their loyalty to Yahweh before Joshua and the Levites, who stood in the valley below (Josh. 8:33; Deut. 27:11-13).

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<sup>72</sup> Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 327.

The law, the altar, and the covenant blessings and curses are all linked here. This makes it clear that the blessings and curses are directly linked to Israel's obedience to the law. Yahweh did not expect Israel to perfectly obey the law, but they could demonstrate their repentance and worship through their sacrifices of atonement. If Israel was obedient and atoned for their sins with authentic repentance, then they would be blessed, but if they were disobedient, then they would be cursed and could expect to be treated like Egypt and Canaan had been for their disobedience. The altar represented the sacrificial system that provided Israel with atonement for their sins when they violated the law.

**27:14-26** This is the first of two sections of curses (Deut. 28:15-68), with the section of blessings placed between the two (Deut. 28:1-14). This first group of curses states generally that Israel will be cursed in violating twelve specific laws that represented the whole of the Mosaic Covenant, whereas the second group of curses clarifies the consequences of disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant. There were twelve random curses given, representing the twelve tribes. However, these twelve curses represent the whole of the law. These curses were to be pronounced by the Levites.

“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.”<sup>73</sup>

**28:1-14** Here, Yahweh pronounced the blessings that He would pour out on Israel in the land if they were obedient to the law. First is an emphasis on the internal blessing of Yahweh on His people, indicating the health and prosperity of the nation as a whole. Yahweh promised them a land that would produce abundant crops, that their children would be blessed and numerous, and that their livestock would be blessed and numerous. The repetition of these three blessings and the imagery of Yahweh opening the storehouses of heaven to pour out on them emphasizes the generous abundance and sufficiency of Yahweh's blessings of life to the fullest that He would provide Israel.

Second is an emphasis on the strength and vitality of Israel in relation to the other nations. Yahweh would give Israel security in the land and would Himself protect their borders from all the nations that would seek to harm them. And when Israel engaged their enemies, their enemies would flee at the terror of Yahweh. Israel's military might and success lay in the presence of Yahweh, which came with Israel's obedience.

Thus, Yahweh would exalt Israel above all the other nations, and the nations would see that Israel uniquely belonged to Yahweh and would fear Israel. Moses mentions this three times in this section (Deut. 28:1, 9, 13-14) and in a negative way in the curses (Deut. 28:15, 45, 58, 62).

**28:15-68** This second section of curses is four times longer than the blessing. The emphasis on the curses was to stress the seriousness of violating the covenant and how dangerous the Canaanites would be. The curses here can be seen as a reversal of the blessings of Yahweh. There are five sections of curses here, which increase in severity the more and longer that Israel violated the Mosaic Covenant and fell away from Yahweh.

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<sup>73</sup> Patrick D. Miller. *Deuteronomy*, p. 195.

First, the land would be inflicted severely with disease, and the rain would cease (Deut. 28:20-24). The bronze sky and iron earth are symbolic of the stopping of rain and failure of crops in judgment. No longer would the land, their children, and their animals be healthy and numerous.

Second, Israel would be attacked and plundered by its enemies and lose its freedom and security (Deut. 28:25-37). Disobedience to the Law of Yahweh, however, would mean that Yahweh would no longer be a force in the army of Israel. Everything that the land produced would be taken by their enemies. And whereas Yahweh had afflicted Egypt with plagues in order to bring His blessing upon Israel, the plagues would afflict Israel.

Third, Israel would lose their covenant relationship with Yahweh and would no longer be able to produce life in their home and fields (Deut. 28:38-46). Whereas the blessing of Yahweh had grown Israel into great numbers in Egypt, the curse of Yahweh would shrink their numbers.

Fourth, Israel would be invaded, conquered, and oppressed by its enemies (Deut. 28:47-57). This judgement is divided into three parts. The first part is that the covenant with Yahweh is exchanged for a yoke of iron (Deut. 28:47-48). The second part is that Yahweh would raise up a foreign power to besiege Israel (Deut. 28:49-52). The third part is that during the siege Israel would descend into depravity in practicing cannibalism (Deut. 28:53-57).

Fifth, Israel's curses would be increased, and they would be taken into exile, removed from the land Yahweh had given them (Deut. 58-68). Israel's deliverance from Egypt and their dwelling in the Promised Land was the greatest blessings of Yahweh where they could physically and spiritually experience fullness of life and dwell with Yahweh. If they completely disregarded Him, then they would be removed from His presence and His blessing of the land. Whereas Israel had been delivered from their bondage in Egypt into the Promised Land, they would instead return to "Egypt" once again.

This curse was fulfilled very literally when Yahweh sent the Assyrians (722 BC) and Babylonians (586 BC) to take Israel into exile (2 Kgs. 17:7-41; 24-25). Later He sent the Romans to destroy the temple (70 AD) and drive Israel out of the land (135 AD).

Yahweh shows here that He does not play favorites: If they began to think and live the same way as the pagan nations around them, then He would judge them for their sins in the same way as He did the pagan nations. Though He is a loving and gracious God, He is also a holy and just God. Though Yahweh demonstrates His sovereignty very clearly here, He also gave Israel a choice of which path they would take.

"When the substance of Deut. 28: 15-68 is read with a knowledge of the subsequent history of Israel as a nation, the curses seem to assume an awful inevitability. And when it is recalled further that the Israelites were not an exceptional people, but reflected in their perversity the nature of sinful man, then the inevitability of the curse weighs equally on the modern reader. It is at this point that the gospel message of the New Testament casts light into the darkness evoked by the curse... The inevitability of the curse can be removed only by Jesus, and that is possible only because 'he redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us' (Gal. 3:13)."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 341.



## B. The Covenant Renewal (29:1–30:20)

Now that the curses and blessings were fully understood, Moses renewed the Mosaic Covenant with this new generation of Israel. Following the disobedience and curses mentioned in Deut. 29:20-28, Moses now told them about Yahweh's promise to bring Israel to a future repentance and restoration (Deut. 29:29-30:14). The covenantal renewal ends with the choice (Deut. 30:15-18) and the call for them to make a decision to follow Yahweh. (Deut. 30:19-20).

The emphasis of Deut. 29 is upon the present (the word "today" is used five times), not in the sense that a new covenant was being made, but in the sense that the renewing of the covenant was a revitalizing of Israel's relationship with Yahweh at this moment in the plains of Moab (Deut. 29:12). Yahweh would be willing to take upon Himself certain obligations toward His chosen people, and in response the people were to bind themselves to Him as their God.<sup>75</sup> Yahweh would raise up the Israelites to be a people for Himself in order to bless them and bless the world through them (Gen. 12:3-4) as they expanded the kingdom of Yahweh.

**29:1-15** These verses reemphasize Yahweh's faithfulness to and provision for Israel by bringing them out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and to the Promised Land. Therefore, Israel should respond in corresponding faithfulness to keep the covenant so they might prosper in the future.

**29:16-29** Yahweh's blessing to Israel was that they would receive the benefit of both ownership and use of the land that He was giving them. The emphasis here is that the whole community was bound to Yahweh in the covenant and received Yahweh's blessing in the Promised Land. Yahweh was not executing the blessings and curses on an individual basis of obedience. Rather, the nation as a whole would experience the blessings and curses. Individual disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant would result in physical death, and corporate disobedience would result in being driven out of the Promised Land. The call was that every individual should be obedient to Yahweh to maintain the life of the community. The health and vitality of the whole community depended on the health and vitality of the religious commitment of every individual within it. Because of the evil acts of one man, the whole community was in immediate danger of Yahweh's judgment (Josh. 7).

"The stark portrayal of the possible future, however, was not designed to cause apathy and despair among the people. If such a future was inevitable, the people might ask, then what was the point of obedience? Rather, the dark picture of the future was intended to have the opposite effect: *the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, so that we might do all the words of this law.* That is to say, one thing was certain and *revealed*, namely, *the words of this law.*"<sup>76</sup>

In Deut. 29:29, the "secret things" refers to the things that only Yahweh knows (Isa. 55:8-9). "Things revealed" refers to all the things that Yahweh revealed that are necessary for Israel's experiencing Yahweh's blessing. Israel would not know all things in creation, but they would know Yahweh. Thus, the emphasis here is not on ethics and behavioral obedience to the law but the means by which a living relationship with Yahweh might be maintained.<sup>77</sup>

**30:1-10** Knowing that Israel would disobey Yahweh's covenant and that Israel would go into exile, Yahweh made an incredible and gracious promise to bring Israel to repentance and restore

<sup>75</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 257

<sup>76</sup> Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 360.

<sup>77</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p.361.

them to the land. Here, Yahweh is making a new covenant (the fifth covenant in the Bible) with Israel called the Restoration Covenant. Some people refer to this as the Palestinian Covenant or Land Covenant. But neither of these is appropriate. The name Palestine was given to the land of Israel by the Romans, who were naming it after the Philistines as an insult to the Jewish people whose land they occupied. Yahweh was not making this covenant with the Philistines. The Land Covenant is not an appropriate title either, for land was just one aspect of the covenant. The main emphasis is on the restoration and regeneration of Israel as a new people.

The Restoration Covenant has many similarities to the Mosaic Covenant (and is often seen as a part of the Mosaic Covenant), but it seems to be a separate and distinct covenant according to Deut. 29:1. Whereas the Mosaic Covenant focused on Israel's obedience to Yahweh in order to maintain the covenant, the Restoration Covenant focuses on Yahweh's restoring, regenerating, and bringing Israel back to the Promised Land out of His own love and grace regardless of Israel's meeting the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant. It is Yahweh who would give Israel the desire and ability to obey when He regenerated their hearts (Deut. 30:6). Israel's dwelling in the land was dependent upon them maintaining the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant was a conditional covenant (Ex. 19:3-6), whereas this covenant was an unconditional covenant and anticipated that Israel would violate the Mosaic Covenant; therefore, the Restoration Covenant promised to restore Israel after their exile—their judgment for violating the Mosaic Covenant. The First Testament makes it clear that the Mosaic Covenant was a temporary covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Joel 2: 28-32; Heb. 9-10), whereas the Restoration Covenant was an eternal covenant, as seen below.

Not only does Yahweh say that after Israel had turned away from Him and had been exiled that they *could* repent, but that they *would* repent. Yahweh promised that He would change their hearts and that they would turn back to Him and be brought back to their land (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 31:33-34). When Israel repented, Yahweh would do four things for them: First, Israel would be returned from exile and restored to the Promised Land (Deut. 30:3-5; Isa. 11:11-12; Jer. 23:3-8; Ezek. 16:53-63; 37:21-28; Amos 9:9-15; Zech. 12:10-12; Matt. 24:29-31; Acts 15:16-17). Second, Yahweh would regenerate Israel so that they would totally love Him (Deut. 30:6; Ezek. 20:33-44; Hos. 2:14-16; Zech. 13:8-9; Mal. 3:1-6;). Third, Yahweh would judge Israel's enemies (Deut. 30:7; Isa. 14:1-2; Joel 3:1-8; Matt. 25:31-46). Fourth, Israel would obey Yahweh, and He would prosper them in their obedience (Deut. 30:8-9; Rom. 8:1-4).

This covenant inspired much of the teaching of the prophets that would come in the following generations. Jeremiah anticipated the beginning of the fulfillment of the Restoration Covenant in the New Covenant that Jesus would initiate (Jer. 31:31-34). Jeremiah prophesied a day would come when Yahweh would write the law on Israel's hearts instead of on stone tablets so that all people would know Yahweh intimately. Ezekiel prophesied that this would lead to Israel's receiving a "new heart" (Ezek. 36:24-32) as anticipated by Moses (Deut. 10:16; 30:6). And Joel prophesied that this would happen when Yahweh poured out His indwelling Spirit on all kinds of people (Joel 2:28-32).

This was fulfilled when Jesus initiated the New Covenant with His death and resurrection (Luke 20:19-20), which allowed the Holy Spirit to come and indwell all those who placed their faith in Christ (Acts. 2). With the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, believers were given the desire and ability to obey Yahweh (Rom. 8:1-4) by being regenerated and transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 2:29; 12:1-2).

“...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 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).”<sup>78</sup>

**30:11-14** Moses made it clear that with all he had said, it was not too hard for them to understand what was required of them. The knowledge of Yahweh’s requirement was not up in heaven, in that they would have to somehow ascend through their own efforts to obtain the knowledge, or across the sea, that they would have to accomplish some great feat to know it. The covenantal relationship that Yahweh was offering was not a mystery to be discovered or a challenge to be obtained, like with the pagan gods. Rather, Yahweh has clearly and simply revealed who He is and what was expected of 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.”<sup>79</sup>

**30:15-20** Moses was laying out the simple choice before Israel. They could choose to join Yahweh, enter and pursue the covenant relationship He had offered them, and thus experience life and prosperity. Or they could choose to reject Him and walk away and experience disaster and death. Yahweh graciously revealed Himself to them and sovereignly told them what He

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<sup>78</sup> John H. Sailhamer. “Exegetical Notes: Genesis 1:1-2:4a,” *Trinity Journal* 5 NS (Spring 1984):81-82.

<sup>79</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. *Deuteronomy*, p. 391.

expected of them, but whether to experience life to the fullest or a life of disaster was their choice.

“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.”<sup>80</sup>

“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 statutes, and the ordinances. And therein lies the theological structure of Deuteronomy in a nutshell.”<sup>81</sup>

Even though obeying the Mosaic Covenant was impossible to do as sinners, it was not impossible to obey through faith and repentance. Yahweh gave the law to Israel to expose their sin and rebellion so that they would recognize their need for a savior. But because He knew Israel was sinful, He did not expect perfect obedience, rather a heart of obedience—a heart that pursued the things He desired (Deut. 6:5) and repented when it failed to obey.

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<sup>80</sup> R. Normand Whybray. *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, p. 96.

<sup>81</sup> Patrick D. Miller. *Deuteronomy*, p. 214.

## IV. Moses' Last Acts (31:1–34:12)

After giving Israel his final speeches, Moses now passes his leadership to Joshua and blesses the twelve tribes of Israel before his death. The approaching death of Moses, which has already been anticipated (Deut. 1:37-38; 3:23-29), now becomes the central focus for the rest of the book of Deuteronomy.

### A. Moses Gives Leadership to Joshua (31:1-29)

The transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua also brought a new kind of leader. Whereas Moses was a prophet who interceded on behalf of Israel, Joshua would be a warrior general who would deliver Israel from their enemies and conquer the land of Canaan.

“Israel was not to be a nation of anarchists or even of strong human leaders. It was a theocratic community with the Lord as King and with his covenant revelation as fundamental constitution and law. The theme of this section is the enshrinement of that law, the proper role of Mosaic succession, and the ultimate authority of covenant mandate over human institutions.”<sup>82</sup>

**31:1-8** Moses now made the necessary preparations to make Joshua the leader of Israel since Yahweh had told him that he would not cross over the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Moses reminded that Yahweh had already crossed over the Jordan River before them and would destroy the nations before them as He had with Sihon and Og. The main point here is that it did not matter whether Moses went with them; it only mattered that Yahweh was with them. Therefore, they could be strong, courageous, and confident because Yahweh would be with them and give them victory.

**31:9-13** Before Moses died, he left the leaders of Israel a written document of the Law, which they considered Yahweh's Law (Josh. 1:8). It is not clear if this is only the Law or the whole Torah. Israel's leaders were to read this law to the whole nation every seventh Sabbatical year at the Feast of Tabernacles. This reading was supposed to remind and instruct Israel concerning Yahweh's faithful love for them.

**31:14-29** Now Joshua was officially commissioned and anointed by Yahweh to be the leader of Israel. Yahweh told Moses that Israel would forsake Him and turn to other gods and that He would punish them and hide His face from them. To discourage this forsaking, Yahweh gave Moses a song to give the people to help them remember who He is and what He had done for them.

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<sup>82</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. *Deuteronomy*, p. 395.

## B. The Song of Moses (31:30–32:47)

Many scholars have considered this one of the greatest songs in the First Testament, as it tells of the true nature of Yahweh's relationship with Israel as a God of love, discipline, and restoration. This song was being taught to the people. Thus, the people were committing themselves vocally to the covenant, invoking the unchanging elements of the physical, created world to witness to their commitment.

“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 the Lord upon His people; and on the other hand, of the ingratitude with which Israel repaid its God for them all.”<sup>83</sup>

**31:30–32:4** Moses called upon the sky and earth as a witness (Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28) to hear how great Yahweh is and of His unfailing love in the midst of His people's rebellion. Moses' words were life to the people, like the rain and dew were life to the soil. This is the reason they were to praise Yahweh.

Moses described Yahweh as the “Rock” (Gen. 49:24; Deut. 32:4, 18, 30-31; 2 Sam. 2:2; 22:32, 47; 23:3; Ps. 18:2, 31, 46; 19:14; 27:5; 28:1; 31:2, 3; 40:2, 9; 62:2, 6, 7; 71:3; 78:35; 89:26; 92:15; 94:22; 95:1; 144:1; Isa. 17:10; 26:4; 30:29; 44:8; Hab. 1:12). The word “Rock” is placed at the very beginning of Deut. 31:4 for emphasis and is followed by a series of lines in poetic parallelism, which elaborates the attributes of Yahweh as the Rock of Israel.<sup>84</sup>

**32:5-7** Moses called Israel to remember their unfaithfulness to Yahweh so that they might learn from their past. Yahweh is portrayed as a father figure who not only created them and gave them life but also cares for them. Therefore, they were to love and obey Him in fear.

**32:8-9** Moses then revealed that Yahweh had divided up the nations under the rule of the divine beings of Yahweh's heavenly court. Some translations have “sons of Israel” (NIV, NASB), instead of “sons of God” or “heavenly beings.” But this is not a good translation. According to the Hebrew Masoretic, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Septuagint, it should read the “sons of God” (NET, ESV, RSV). The “sons of Israel” reading does not make sense, for it is not likely that Yahweh divided up the nations of the world (Gen. 10-11) according to the number of Israelites, especially when the nations came about before the calling of Abraham.

In the First Testament, the phrase “sons of *x*” is a way of classifying something as whatever category *x* is. To say that something is the “son of *x*” is to say that it is the same as *x*. Thus, when Yahweh calls Ezekiel the “son of man,” he is saying that Ezekiel is a man. When the First Testament uses the title “sons of God,” it means that those beings are gods or divine beings. These could be heavenly angels, cherubim, seraphim, or other divine beings in Yahweh's heavenly court (see similar language in Ps. 29:1; 82:1, 6; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). Yahweh gave jurisdiction over the nations to members of the angelic host (Dan. 10:13-21).<sup>85</sup>

In contrast, Yahweh chose to lead Israel Himself. The point is that Israel is a unique and special nation that is not ruled by some heavenly being, but Yahweh Himself guides and protects Israel. This is another reason “sons of Israel” does not make sense.

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<sup>83</sup> C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch*, 3:464.

<sup>84</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 378.

<sup>85</sup> For a defense of the view, see M. S. Heiser, “Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God,” *BSac* 158 (2001): 52-74.

**32:10-14** Moses then told of how Yahweh found Israel abandoned in the desolate wilderness and rescued and adopted Israel. And like an eagle with its young, Yahweh protects, cares for, and trains up Israel into maturity. When a mother eagle is teaching its young to fly, she will put them on her wings and then drop them so they can begin to fly. If they do not fly, she will swoop down and catch them and then do it again until they fly on their own. The poetry here illustrates vividly Yahweh's dealings with His people, casting them from security to the fierce wilderness, but remaining beneath them to give them strength for the fearful experience, and gradually teaching them to fly on their own.<sup>86</sup>

**32:15-18** The name *Jeshurun* means “righteous nation” (Deut. 33:5, 26; Isa. 44:2) This is a term of affection that is meant to remind Israel of its holy calling and to call them to rise to their potential. Here, Moses stated that Jeshurun kicked and screamed against Yahweh like a rebellious little child. The use of the name Jeshurun in this context emphasizes more sharply Israel's ingratitude to Yahweh. But unlike little children, Israel's rebellion was in sacrificing to and worshiping demons. Here, Moses makes it clear that the demons are the power and influence behind the pagan gods. This is what makes their idolatry even more horrific and rebellious. They had forgotten the Rock who fathered them.

**32:19-25** So Yahweh disciplined them like a loving father would do. Yahweh declared that He would make them jealous by rejecting them and choosing a people who previously did not belong to Him. This is the Gentiles, who would become His people someday (Hos 1:9; 2:23). After Yahweh rejected Israel, then he would bring His fire of judgment upon them to punish them for their idolatry and unfaithfulness.

**32:26-38** Moses continued to describe Israel's abhorrent and evil heart and how much it offended Yahweh. Moses declared Yahweh's sovereignty over the creation, that He could use anything in creation to punish them—even the pagan nations—to judge Israel for their sins. However, He would punish the pagan nations as well for their sins.

**32:39-43** Moses then portrayed Yahweh as the only unique and sovereign God of creation. Moses portrayed Yahweh as a divine warrior who battles uncontested against all those who rebel against Him (Ps. 7:13). Moses called the nations to cry out to Yahweh in repentance, for as a covenantal God, Yahweh would avenge His people and make atonement for the land that had been defiled by the rebellious sins of the nations. Their deaths and blood would make atonement and purify His creation.

Before Israel could experience once again the compassion of Yahweh, they had to be totally drained of self-assurance and be freed from their alliances with foreign gods.<sup>87</sup>

**32:43-47** Moses' farewell to the people before his death was to remind them to never forget who Yahweh is compared to the other gods and what He had done (and would do) for them. Israel was to teach Yahweh's words and this song to their children throughout the generations so that they would never forget their heavenly Father and fall away from Him into idolatry.

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<sup>86</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 381.

<sup>87</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 387.

### **C. Moses' Blessing of the Tribes and His Death (32:48–34:12)**

In the same way Jacob ended his life by blessing his sons (Gen. 48-49), so Moses ended his life by acting as a father figure and blessing the twelve tribes of Israel. In addition, Moses passed the mantle of leadership to Joshua. What is interesting is that these two men are a typology of the first and second comings of Jesus Christ. Just as Moses was a prophet who gave Israel the Law and interceded on their behalf, so also Jesus in His first coming was a teacher who gave Israel a new Law (Matt. 5-8) and a prophet who interceded on their behalf on the cross. And just as Joshua was a warrior who conquered the land of Canaan to establish the kingdom of Yahweh on earth, so also Jesus in His second coming will be a warrior king who will conquer the earth and bring the kingdom of Yahweh.

**32:48-52** After Moses gave his final speech and recited his song, Yahweh told him that it was time to die for his rebellion, just as his brother Aaron had died (Num. 27:12-14). Mount Nebo is one of the peaks in the Abarim range on the east side of the Jordan River, northeast of the Dead Sea. In the ancient Near East, mountains were seen as holy places because they were closer to the gods. Moses and Aaron both died and were buried on mountains to symbolize their nearness to Yahweh. Yahweh allowed Moses to see the whole land of Canaan even though his sin at Kadesh prevented him from entering it.

**33:1-5** Moses begins the blessing of the twelve tribes by recalling the glory of Yahweh coming down on Mount Sinai when He gave Israel the covenant law. Just as a king comes with an entourage, so Yahweh, the divine King of creation, came with his own entourage of holy ones. The “holy ones” are the divine beings in the heavenly council of Yahweh. Though Exodus does not mention the angels on the mountain with Yahweh and Moses, Deuteronomy mentions that thousands of angels were present when Moses received the Law (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19).

Moses stated that the law of Yahweh was the inheritance of Israel. Obedience to the law, which was a gift from Yahweh, is what would allow Israel to stay in the Promised Land, which was their inheritance. The law received at Mount Sinai was to be the constitution of the new state of Israel, which was to come into existence when they entered the Promised Land.

The one who gave Israel their inheritance is the King of Jeshurun. Thus, the people proclaim Yahweh as their God and king. The kingship of Yahweh in early Israel rests on three basic premises. First was the deliverance of Israel from Egypt in the Exodus. Second was the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. Third was the future entrance into the Promised Land and the victory that Yahweh would give them there.<sup>88</sup>

Whereas Jacob blessed the twelve tribes in who they would be, Moses blessed the twelve tribes in relation to the land allotment they would receive from their King. Yahweh as the king over all creation owned all the land in creation and therefore had the right to give it to whomever He wanted. Jeshurun as Yahweh's adopted firstborn son (Ex. 13; 19:1-6) was now receiving their inheritance. Although Moses would pronounce the blessing over Israel, the fulfillment would be executed by Yahweh, provided the people continued to acknowledge and serve Him as their king.

The arrangement of the tribes in this blessing is not based on birth order but seems to be based on the events of their past and in order of importance. Simeon is not mentioned in this blessing because Jacob had prophesied that Yahweh would scatter the Simeonites in Israel, along with

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<sup>88</sup> See Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 394.



Levi, because of their killing of the Shechemites (Gen. 49:7). However, whereas Levi turned back to Yahweh (Gen. 32), Simeon did not and received only a few cities in Judah.

**33:6** Reuben was the firstborn but did not enjoy greatness because of his sin of trying to seize the birthright by sleeping with his father's concubine (Gen. 35:22). The Reubenites would find their blessing in the promise of continuity, even though they would never be strong in numbers. Very little is mentioned about Reuben throughout the Bible.

**33:7** Judah received the firstborn headship title and became the leader among the tribes when his older brothers became ineligible. Judah would lead the tribes into the Promised Land and in all of their conquest.

**33:8-11** Levi had, in Genesis, lost the firstborn title and the right to an inheritance because of his slaughter of the Shechemites (Gen. 34:25-31; 49:5-7). Now, however, Levi received the blessing of becoming the priests of Israel, an acknowledgement and reward for being faithful to Yahweh at Massah after the golden calf incident (Gen. 32) and at Meribah when the people complained because of lack of water. This is seen in that there is more priestly language here in contrast to the negative blessing in Gen. 49:5-7.

Levi's blessing indicates three principal duties. First, they were responsible for the Urim and Thummim by which Yahweh would make His will known to Israel. Second, they were to teach the Israelites the law of Yahweh. Third, they were responsible for Israel's formal and corporate worship.

**33:12** Benjamin was to receive Yahweh's protection continually: Yahweh would carry him on His chest.

**33:13-17** Joseph represented the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh and received the firstborn double inheritance title. The "firstborn of his ox" probably refers to Joseph as the firstborn son of Jacob (ox/servant) by Rachel. Ephraim was the stronger of the two sons and ended up leading the northern kingdom of Israel after the split of Israel following Solomon's death.

**33:18-19** Zebulun and Issachar would become a blessing to the other nations through their commercial wealth since they were located in the Jezreel Valley that controlled one of the ancient Near East's major trade routes. Their prosperity would be so great they would hold large festivals. The source of their prosperity would be found in fishing in the seas.

**33:20-21** Gad was a warring tribe that was very aggressive in conquering and subduing the Promised Land (Num. 32:34-36).

**33:22** Dan settled in an area inhabited by lions (Judg. 14:5) and moved to northern Israel, to an area that also had a lot of lions (Judg. 18). The Danites were also aggressive and strong like lions.

**33:23** Naphtali enjoyed the benefits of having the Sea of Chinnereth, or Galilee. This is also where Jesus the Messiah spent most of His time in ministry.

**33:24-25** Asher benefited from the respect of his brothers and from prosperity. Though his territory on the Mediterranean Coast required fortifications, Yahweh would protect him.

**34:26-29** The phrase "Yahweh was King over Jeshurun" (Deut. 33:5) finds its complement in the conclusion "there is none like the God of Jeshurun." Yahweh as king rode through the sky on the clouds. The imagery of a cloud rider refers to deity since the gods were the only thing above the

clouds. Moses declares that there is no cloud rider like Yahweh, who is sovereign over all creation. Yahweh would be a refuge to Israel, would fight for them, drive out their enemies, and give them the grain of the land. The only criterion for Israel's victory and security was the presence of Yahweh. Trusting in themselves or in others would only lead to disaster. Israel's merit lay not in their own merit but in the fact there was no other God like the God of Jeshurun.

**34:1-8** Moses died and was buried in the land of Moab. The lack of knowledge of his burial place could be that people had forgotten where he was buried, which seems unlikely, or that Yahweh Himself buried Moses in an undisclosed location (Jude 9). The statement about his well-being in Deut. 34:7, "but his eye was not dull nor had his vitality departed," emphasizes that Moses' death was not due to old age but was a judgment for his sin of rebellion against Yahweh (Num. 20:1-13).

"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."<sup>89</sup>

**34:9-12** Joshua then succeeded Moses as leader with the support of the Israelites. Yahweh 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) 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]."<sup>90</sup>

Deut. 34:10-12 was written by someone other than Moses as a final summary of his life, and the Torah gives an evaluation of Moses' ministry. Moses was unique in that no other person enjoyed the same intimate relationship with Yahweh (Deut. 18:15-22; Num. 12:6-8), performed miracles, and led Israel as he did. What is emphasized here is not his knowledge of Yahweh but rather Yahweh's knowledge of him. His achievements were not found in his own character of skills but in his reliance on the strength of Yahweh.

"Hence, for the Christian reader, Deuteronomy ends with a pointer toward the future. The earthly kingdom of God in the founding of which Moses played so important a part, came to an end as an independent state early in the sixth century B.C. The prophets who followed Moses at a later date began to point forward to a New Covenant (see 18:15-22 and commentary). It was in the formation of the New Covenant that at last a prophet like Moses appeared again, but he was more than a prophet. Whereas Moses was a servant in the

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<sup>89</sup> John H. Sailhamer. *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 478.

<sup>90</sup> John H. Sailhamer. *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 478.

household of God, the coming prophet was a son, Jesus Christ (Heb. 3:1-6), who brought with him the liberation of a new exodus and established the relationship of the New Covenant.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Peter C. Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy*, pp. 406-407.

## Conclusion

Yahweh revealed His power and love by delivering and redeeming Israel, His chosen people, despite their idolatry in Egypt. He then adopted them as His people and showed them the way to Him through the Law, tabernacle, and sacrificial system. However, they continuously rebelled against Him. Yet in that rebellion Yahweh revealed His longsuffering mercy by His continual forgiveness of their sins and restoring them back to Himself. After the first generation failed to trust Yahweh and take the Promised Land, Yahweh brought the second generation to the Promised Land in fulfillment of His promises. Deuteronomy calls Israel to remember all of this so that they would follow Yahweh in the present and the future.

The greatest message of the Bible is that Yahweh is a covenantal God who wants to have a relationship with humans and bless them despite their sin and rebellion. This is most clearly communicated in the First Testament in the book of Deuteronomy. The main message is that Yahweh, motivated by His love, delivered Israel from bondage, blessed them, and was faithful to them even though they were unfaithful and rebelled against Him. Yahweh urged Israel to follow and obey Him because of their love for Him, as well as for who He is and what He had done and would do for them. If they followed and obeyed, then they could experience an intimate relationship with Him.

Deuteronomy ends with Israel in the Plains of Moab, ready to enter the Promised Land north of the Dead Sea. Deuteronomy is followed by the book of Joshua, which records Israel's entrance into the Promised Land and how they experienced more success because they applied Moses' teachings from Deuteronomy. This shows that, despite Israel's disobedience in the wilderness, they were not able to hinder the will of Yahweh, only postpone it. In the end, He brought them to the Promised Land, and they entered just as He said they would.

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