



LESSONS FROM HISTORY

Deuteronomy 1–4

History is a wonderful teacher but one that is often ignored. The book of Deuteronomy begins with a brief and selective review of Israel's history. Israel's history—and our own—should remind us of God's amazing mercy and grace and spur us on to more faithful obedience to Him.

Today in our Wisdom Journey, we arrive at the book of Deuteronomy—the last of the five books written by Moses. *Deuteronomy* means “second law.” And it's true the book repeats much of the law already presented in previous books. But the Hebrew title of this book is “These Are the Words.” That's an interesting title, isn't it? “These are the words.” But should we listen to these words? *Whose words are they?*

Yes, you and I should listen, because God is the one speaking. Now if you think the God of the Old Testament is only about unbending holiness and heart-stopping judgment, you need to know that in Deuteronomy the word *love* is mentioned more than twenty times.

The idea of *rejoicing* because God is *gracious* also occurs several times in this book. So, while Deuteronomy speaks of God's judgment, His motivation is love and His desire is to *bless* His people.

As we begin our journey through this fascinating book, Israel is camped out in the wilderness east of the Jordan River. They have not yet crossed over the Jordan into the promised land.

The purpose of Deuteronomy is clearly stated here in verse 5: “Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab,

Moses undertook to explain this law.” Moses is going to teach God's people about the true and living God who gave this book of the law and how they are to walk with Him.

Down in verse 8, the Lord delivers to Israel their mission:

“See, I have set the land before you. Go in and take possession of the land that the LORD swore to your fathers . . . and to their offspring after them.”

This mission has been on God's heart since all the way back in Genesis chapter 12 when He called



Ashtaroth being captured by Tiglath-pileser III



Abraham. Six hundred years later, here is Israel standing on the threshold of that promised land. And God is now urging them to complete the mission.

Beginning here in verse 9, Moses gives Israel three history lessons from the past forty years—three lessons they are going to need to recalibrate their hearts to pursue their mission from God.

The first history lesson is recorded in chapter 1, in verses 9 through 18. Moses reminds Israel that when they were still at Mount Sinai, forty years earlier, he had followed his father-in-law Jethro's advice to choose wise men from among them to act as judges over the people. Moses would handle the more difficult cases. Moses then repeats here in Deuteronomy chapter 1 and verse 14, that the people answered, “The thing that you have spoken is good for us to do.”

The second history lesson from Moses, here in verses 19 through 36, is the account of the twelve spies who went in to spy out the promised land. Of course the people of Israel refused to enter the land, and as a result, the Lord caused them to wander in the wilderness for forty years. This history lesson is intended to encourage this new generation of Israelites not to repeat the faithless rebellion of the former generation.

Next, we have the third history lesson—here in verse 37—where Moses talks about his own rebellion in striking the rock, rather than speaking to the rock as God commanded. We read here, “Even with me the LORD was angry . . . and said, ‘You also shall not go in there [the promised land].’”

These history lessons point out the obvious fact that even though the judges, and the nation, and even Moses himself fell short of full obedience to God, the grace of God has still brought the nation of Israel to the front porch of the promised land. God always keeps His promises.

In chapters 2 and 3, the history lesson continues as Moses recalls more recent events—their detour around Edom and their victories east of the Jordan. This history lesson is peppered with encouraging words. Note, for example, these words in Deuteronomy 2:

“These forty years the LORD your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing.” (verse 7)

“This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you on the peoples . . . who shall . . . tremble and be in anguish because of you.” (verse 25)

Chapter 3 offers more encouragement.

“Og the king of Bashan came out against us . . . But the LORD said to me, ‘Do not fear him, for I have given him and all his people and his land into your hand.’” (verses 1-2)

“Your eyes have seen all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings. So will the LORD do to all the kingdoms into which you are crossing. You shall not fear them, for it is the LORD your God who fights for you.” (verses 21-22)

As chapter 3 wraps up, Moses tells the nation his own personal testimony of when he pleaded with the Lord to let him lead the nation into the promised land. The Lord's answer was a clear “no,” followed by instructions to begin preparing Joshua to take his place.

I love the fact that Moses is transparent here. He doesn't hide his failure; he doesn't offer excuses; he's not angry with God. Even though he shares with the people the most disappointing moment in his life,



He highlights the fact that even though he failed the Lord, the Lord did not fail him.

he highlights the fact that even though he failed the Lord, the Lord did not fail him; in fact, the Lord will not fail to keep His promise to Israel—they will enter the promised land.

Moses highlights that truth throughout chapter 4—that God can be trusted! First, *He can be trusted to be consistent in discipline*. Moses begins in verse 1, calling on the people to obey God: “Listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them.” And in verse 9, he makes the point that God can be trusted to discipline them for disobedience: “Take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen.”

“Watch yourselves very carefully” is the warning of verse 15. “Beware,” he says in verses 16 and 19. Take care, watch, beware—of what? These are all warnings against idolatry and turning their back on God.

You can count on the Lord being consistent in disciplining His children—just as He does with you and me.

Second, *the Lord can be trusted to forgive and show mercy*—your failure, beloved, is never fatal. Repent, and fellowship is restored, just as Moses promised the people here in verse 31: “The LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.”

Let me make one more observation here, and it's this: *the Lord can be trusted to be motivated by love*. Everything, including His discipline, is motivated by love. It's who He is. First John 4:8 declares, “God is love.” He is love in essence; and He is love in action. John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Even here as we begin our journey through Deuteronomy, the loving heart of God can be traced all the way to the Savior of the world, who “loved [you] and gave himself for [you]” (Galatians 2:20).

What is the short and long-term value to you personally of regularly reviewing your own spiritual history with God? How might such a review be helpful as you minister to your yet to be saved family and friends? Who in your life might benefit from your history with God?

Re-read verse 31. Apply its spiritual principle to your worst sin or most difficult struggle, disappointment or loss. How does it feel? What yet to be saved family member or friend might you share your encouragement with?

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TESTIFYING TO THE NEXT GENERATION

Deuteronomy 5–8

Neither God nor His Word change over time. But memories fade. New generations arise, and people forget the lessons of history. God’s revelation of Himself and His standards must be repeated, remembered, and taken to heart. This is what Israel needed, and we are no different.

Back in 2009 Continental Flight 3407 and Air France Flight 447 both ended in fatal crashes; one near Buffalo, New York, and the other one somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean. Some have argued that in each case the ultimate cause of the disaster was what they called, “skill fade.” In other words, over time, the pilots had begun to rely too heavily on flying by autopilot.¹

Well, Moses is determined not to let Israel fly by autopilot as they enter the promised land. He wants them alert, focused, and relying on the Lord.

Deuteronomy chapter 5 begins with Moses speaking to the nation:



Procession of Hittite gods mounted on their emblem animals

“Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us . . . Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today.” (verses 1-3)

This new generation needs to understand that the covenant is theirs to cherish and protect. Beginning in verse 6, Moses then restates the heart of that covenant, the Ten Commandments.

We have already studied the Ten Commandments back in the book of Exodus. But Moses is reminding the nation of these commandments because they are central to how the people are to relate to God and to one another. They are about to enter the promised land, and they need to remember that the Lord who brought them out of Egypt is the only true God. They also need to remember what God requires of them in relation to one another—honoring their par-



ents, avoiding murder, adultery, theft, false witness, and covetousness.

Moses also reminds his people that when their fathers first heard God speak these words at Mount Sinai, they were overcome with fear. They became intensely aware of God's holiness and their sinfulness. Here in verse 25 Moses recalls their words: "If we hear the voice of the LORD our God anymore, we shall die." And with that, they asked Moses to be their mediator and relay God's words to them. This request for a mediator between God and sinners, of course, sets the stage for the coming of the perfect Mediator, Jesus Himself.

Listen to the Lord's heart in verse 29, as He responds to Israel's promise to obey:

"Oh that they had such a mind as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever!"

You can almost hear the heartbreak in the Lord's voice, knowing that ultimately, they will fail to obey Him.

The Mosaic covenant established at Mount Sinai made it clear that Israel's blessing in the promised land was conditioned on their obedience to the law. Moses says here in verse 32, "Be careful therefore to do as the LORD your God has commanded you." And he's quick to add the reason why in verse 33: "that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land."

And now, beginning in verse 4 of chapter 6, we have one of the most important passages to the Jewish people:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

"The LORD is one" means the Lord is *only* one. He is the only true and living God.

Moses tells Israel to pass down the truths of this unique, one-and-only God to each new generation.

"You shall teach them diligently to your children," he says in Deuteronomy 6:7. Israel's well-being and future depend on every generation being taught to live by the truths of the covenant.

In the rest of chapter 6, as well as chapters 7 and 8, Moses lays out for Israel a list of primary laws every Israelite generation must embrace. These are representative laws that are set forth in four sections or groups.

The first group of laws is found in verses 10-19 of chapter 6, where we read, "When the LORD your God brings you into the land . . . then take care lest you forget the LORD" (verses 10, 12). Verse 14 goes on to say, "You shall not go after other gods." To put it another way, "When you get into the promised land and you're surrounded by pagan cultures, don't follow them at all. Serve and worship only the God who brought you into the land."

The second section, here in verses 20 to 25, has to do with how to respond to the younger generation when they ask, "What is the meaning of the testimonies, and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?" (verse 20). Simply put, "Why are we following these laws, and why are they so important?"

What's the answer? Verses 24-25 spell it out:

"The LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment."

In other words, "This is how you get right with God and stay right with God: you follow the word of God."

The third group of laws covers all of Deuteronomy chapter 7. Here we read in the first two verses: "When the LORD your God brings you into the land . . . and clears away many nations before you . . . then you must devote them to complete destruction." Why? Verse 6 tells us: "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God."



“This is how you get right with God and stay right with God: you follow the word of God.”

We will deal with this in more detail when we get to the book of Joshua. But for now, let me just say that individuals among these nations *could* repent—and some *did*. But the nations on the whole stood in wicked defiance of God.

If they were allowed to remain in the land, they would corrupt Israel with their pagan religions, which were tantamount to demon worship and included child sacrifice and unspeakable immorality. Israel was acting as the judge and jury for a holy God who had warned these nations for centuries, and yet they chose to defy Him.

Now we come to the fourth section of laws here in chapter 8. Let's pick it up at verse 11:

“Take care . . . lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses . . . then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God . . . Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’”

(verses 11-12, 14, 17)

Here is a warning not to take the credit for blessings that come only from the Lord.

¹ See Nicholas Carr, “Automation Makes Us Dumb,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 21, 2014, wsj.com.

This is how you keep from putting your life on autopilot and end up crashing: (let's highlight these points in some way)

- First of all, when the Lord commands you to obey Him, make sure you don't drag your feet.
- Second, when you are asked if it's worth serving the Lord, make sure you respond with the news of God's gracious work in our life.
- Finally, when you experience the Lord's blessings, make sure you guard against taking the credit for them.

Let's stay alert, obeying Him, passing on the truth about Him, and giving Him praise for everything He does. And the younger generation will get it. They will hear it from us, and they will join us in bringing glory to God.

Is your life an example of or distraction from God and His gospel? Whether you're a parent or relative of a child, what are you doing to pass on the truths of God's Word to future generations? Have you thanked those who influenced your spiritual journey?

What life-styles or attitudes would lead anyone to take credit away from God? What resources has God already given you to protect yourself against the temptation to take credit for the Lord's blessings? How is giving God credit a useful way to evangelize your yet to be saved family and friends?

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A REMINDER OF GRACE

Deuteronomy 9–11

Israel could not take credit for God's gracious works on their behalf. He freely chose to love them and care for them. Their obligation was to love Him in return, and that meant obeying Him. For Israel—and for us—expressions of love for God are empty apart from obedience to Him.

As we begin our Wisdom Journey in Deuteronomy chapters 9–11, I want to tell you a story I heard about a substitute schoolteacher years ago in West Virginia. He was assigned to an unruly class for a number of days. Finally, one of the boys had crossed the line too many times, and out came the paddle.

The class held their breath as the teacher led this boy out into the hallway. But for whatever reason, the teacher decided to teach this boy a lesson in an unusual way. He knelt down beside this youngster and said, "Listen, I'm not going to spank you, but when I whack myself on the leg, I want you to holler as loud as you can!" The teacher limped back into the room and would win a great deal of respect from his students, and that boy who deserved the paddle learned that grace was undeserved.

That happens to be one of the two great lessons Moses teaches Israel now as they prepare to enter the promised land: *The grace of God is an undeserved gift.*

Deuteronomy chapter 9 opens with Moses speaking:

"Hear, O Israel: you are to cross over the Jordan today . . . Know therefore today that he who goes over before you as a consuming fire

is the LORD your God. He will destroy [the nations] and subdue them before you." (verses 1, 3)



Tablet containing a collection of legal sayings



Now what Moses says next makes me think there is a growing assumption in the camp that the people are *deserving* of the Lord's blessing. He says here in verse 4:

“Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, ‘It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land.’”

Again, in verse 6 he says, “The LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.” He adds in verse 7: “From the day you came out of the land of Egypt . . . you have been rebellious against the LORD.” In other words, he's saying, “You deserve to be taken out in the hallway and given a spanking you will never forget.”

In these next verses, Moses reminds the people of Israel of their rebellion against the word of God. Here in verse 23 Moses says, “You . . . did not believe [the Lord] or obey his voice.” And in verse 24, he says, “You have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you.” If you think Moses is giving them a verbal spanking here, you're absolutely right—and for good reason!

Moses goes on in chapter 10 to remind the people that he went back up the mountain so God could re-write the Ten Commandments on stone tablets since the original tablets had been destroyed. I love what Moses says here in verse 5:

“Then I turned and came down from the mountain and put the tablets in the ark that I had made. And there they are, as the LORD commanded me!”

God did not give up on His people. He didn't get rid of them. But Moses wants them to learn the lesson that the grace of God toward them was undeserved.

And that's true to this very day. The apostle Paul writes to New Testament believers in Titus chapter 3:

We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient . . . But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy . . . so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (verses 3-5, 7)

Beloved, your history and mine prove over and over again that grace is not earned; it is given as a gift to those who by faith trust in Jesus Christ. Have you received the gift of His forgiveness by grace alone?

Now don't misunderstand; if you've received the grace of God, you *are* going to want to obey the Word of God. In fact, this is the second great lesson emphasized through the rest of chapter 10 and chapter 11: *A life of obedience is our gift back to God.*

Listen to Moses here in Deuteronomy 10:12-13:

“What does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD?”

You can't make it any clearer than this: we demonstrate our love for God by obedience to Him.

*We demonstrate
our love for God by
obedience to Him.*



Moses repeats this lesson a number of different ways throughout chapter 11. He says in verse 1: “You shall therefore love the LORD your God and keep . . . his commandments always.” Moses then reminds the nation of their rescue from Egypt and God’s loving care for them. Down in verse 8, Moses connects the dots by reminding the people that obeying God should be their response: “You shall therefore keep the whole commandment that I command you today.”

Now, how can Israel know they are obeying the Lord? And is there any kind of warning signal that they are about to be taken out in the hallway for a paddling? Yes. Look at verses 13-14:

“If you will indeed obey my commandments . . . to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season.”

The promised land will be blessed with rainfall if the people obey the Lord.

What happens if they turn away from the Lord? Verse 17 gives the answer: “The anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain.”

Here’s this early warning system from God—and we will see this played out as we journey through the Old Testament. When it doesn’t rain, we are going to know that Israel has not been demonstrating love for the Lord through obedience, and God is inviting them to repent.

Now in verses 18-25, Moses repeats the instruction from Deuteronomy 6 to diligently keep all God’s commands. Obedience gives them rainfall for their crops, as well as victory over enemy nations.

Then in verses 26-32 the Lord commands Israel to review and renew their covenant with Him with all its blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.

This renewal is to take place at a designated site once they enter the land; we will see this happen when we arrive at Joshua chapter 8.

But does this have any bearing on the New Testament believer today? Absolutely. The New Testament makes it clear that God’s grace is a gift—you can’t earn it, and you don’t deserve it. That’s why it’s called grace. The New Testament also teaches that our obedience to the Lord is the evidence that we truly do love Him and belong to Him.

Just hours before going to the cross, Jesus told His disciples in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” We’re not going to love and obey Him perfectly, but that will be our priority.

Beloved, that schoolteacher taught an important life lesson. Jesus has taken our punishment, and all we can do is respond with respect, adoration, and love.

Let’s love Him and obey Him today.

Since no unbeliever can argue that God’s grace in your life hasn’t been real, why do we sometimes feel reluctant to share our grace story with unbelievers? What can God do with a grace story that isn’t told perfectly? Ask God who He’s preparing to hear your grace story.

Re-read John 14:15. Think about the practical and eternal implications of Jesus’ observation. Perfection isn’t possible but what spiritual resources do believers have to increase consistency? What role does God’s grace play in living out Jesus’ calling on your life?

¹ Evangelist Glenn Matthews was the teacher. Story told at Bethel Baptist Church, Cary, North Carolina, circa 1984.

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FIVE QUALITIES OF TRUE WORSHIP

Deuteronomy 12:1–16:17

Worship today in our churches differs in many ways from worship in Old Testament Israel, but the guiding principles of Israel's worship are a helpful guide for the modern-day church. Some essential qualities of true worship are outlined for us in Deuteronomy 12–16.

This Wisdom Journey focuses on the theme of worship, and we're going to discover five important qualities of true worship.

First, in Deuteronomy chapter 12, Moses teaches Israel that *true worship is focused only on the God of Israel*. As they look forward to the conquest of the promised land, Moses reminds the people here in verse 2, "Destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods." Then in verse 5 he adds, "You shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose."

Throughout this chapter you will notice the repetition of God's name. Back at the burning bush more than forty years earlier, God introduced Himself to Moses as "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). The name Yahweh is derived from the verb for "I am," and it indicates He is ever-present. And here in Deuteronomy 12, Moses uses the name Yahweh twenty-two times.

And seventeen times Moses tells the people to worship only in the "place" where the Lord puts His altar. For example, we read in verse 14:

"At the place that the LORD will choose in one of your tribes,



Remains of an altar structure on Mount Ebal

there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you."

More than fifty times Moses points at the people and says, "You." He's talking to every person in the nation of Israel!

Why all these specifics? Moses wants Israel and the watching world to understand that true worship involves the right people, in the right place, worshipping the right God—the God of Israel.

I meet people all the time who want to tell me about their worship experience—how spiritual they are.



The trouble is, their experiences have nothing to do with the God of Israel. My friend, any worship of any god other than the God of the Bible is just playing games without any true meaning—and certainly without any true worship.

And that leads me to this second quality of true worship: *true worship will not tolerate imposters*. The Lord delivers a warning beginning here in chapter 12, verse 29, and continuing clear through chapter 13.

Moses brings up three different dangers. In verses 1-2 of Deuteronomy 13, he warns of a “prophet or a dreamer of dreams” who appears with “a sign or a wonder” and tries to persuade Israel to worship other gods. Such people may be charismatic and eloquent, but Israel must not be fooled by their signs and wonders and dreams.

Then in verses 6 and 7 Moses warns against a family member or close friend who “entices you secretly, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods.’” Israel must be very cautious—as we should be—because even friends and family members can lead you away from the Lord.

Then finally, in verses 12-13, Moses warns of “worthless fellows” who have “drawn away the inhabitants of their city” into idolatry.

Are these serious dangers? You better believe it. In fact, here in this chapter, Moses assigns the death penalty for anyone attempting to lead someone away from God. Let me tell you, the severity of God’s judgment shows us how important it is to worship God alone.

Let me tell you, the severity of God’s judgment shows us how important it is to worship God alone.

The third quality of true worship is this: *true worship begins with holiness*. Chapter 14 begins with Moses telling Israel, “You are the sons of the LORD your God.” Then in verse 2 he says: “You are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be . . . his treasured possession.”

Israel is viewed here as the children of God. And like moms and dads today, God wants His children to behave—not so that they can *become* His children, but because they *are* His children. Holiness is nothing more than acting like God your Father, demonstrating that you’re different *from* the world and devoted *to* Him.

Moses mentions here staying away from cutting themselves or shaving their heads to mourn the dead. These are practices associated with the false gods of the Canaanites.

Moses then reminds Israel of the kinds of food that will cause them to become ceremonially unclean and unable to worship in the tabernacle. He says in verse 3, “You shall not eat any abomination,” and down in verse 21, “You shall not eat anything that has died naturally.”

The distinctions between clean and unclean food restate much of what we learned back in Leviticus chapter 11. Israel’s food laws certainly protected them physically, but more importantly, they reminded them of their relationship to the Lord.

The fourth quality of true worship shows up as Moses teaches the nation that *true worship includes loving others*.

Here in verses 22 through 29, Moses gives some instructions about tithing. A tithe is a percentage of a person’s income—which includes grain, wine, oil, and firstborn animals—that’s to be offered to the Lord in worship.

And we’re told in verse 29 that every three years the tithe was to be given to “the Levite . . . and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.” All these people were dependent on the generosity and compassion of people who desired to worship God by loving others.



And there's more here. In chapter 15, Moses spells out the Sabbatical Year. Imagine this: every seventh year, all debts are to be canceled. All loans are to be forgiven—the books wiped clean.

This was designed to keep the people from becoming indebted to one another. It also promoted an attitude of sharing. I mean, just imagine how you would feel if your neighbor wanted to borrow some money from you during the sixth year. You know if he cannot pay it back, on the seventh year you will have to forgive the loan. Would you loan him the money?

Well, this sabbatical principle reminded the people that God owns everything anyway. In effect, God is saying, “I want you to use what I have given you to bless the lives of others. So, don't hold back.” In fact, in verse 4 the Lord says, “And there will be no poor among you; for the LORD will bless you in the land.”

In chapter 16 Moses teaches Israel what we will call the fifth quality of true worship: *true worship involves corporate celebration*.

Moses reminds Israel of the three annual feasts that will bring the whole nation together. After reviewing the various instructions concerning these feasts, Moses says in verse 16:

“Three times a year all your males [with their families if possible] shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths.”

They are going to come together in celebration of God's goodness. This is like combining the state fair with the Fourth of July. The nation would sing and feast and worship God as they celebrated His grace and faithfulness to them as a nation. We can imagine how this corporate worship encouraged every one of them.

The church is not Israel. But these qualities of worship can certainly be applied to the church. And if these true worship qualities do not describe your church, don't complain. Don't start gossiping. Just start praying. And start bringing these qualities, like generosity and love, in your own heart to your worship with others.

God just might use you—a true worshiper—to change, not only your heart, but your family, your church, and maybe even the world around you.

What life-circumstances or heart attitudes can distract you from truly God-focused worship? How could distracted worship affect your ministry to fellow believers and unbelievers? How might John 4:23-24 help you overcome your distractions?

When can generous giving actually be sinful? When can withholding from others actually be a wise choice in giving? How does a healthy, daily relationship with the LORD help navigate our heart through opportunities to give to others?

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RIGHTEOUSNESS ON REVIEW

Deuteronomy 16:18–26:19

God's commands are not simply legal requirements; they reveal God's righteous character. So, even laws specifically for Old Testament Israel are of great value to us today. As we study His law, we grow in knowledge and appreciation of God, and our worship of Him is enhanced.

Let me tell you again to fasten your seatbelts as we pick up speed on our Wisdom Journey and move through chapter 16 and all the way through chapter 26 of the book of Deuteronomy. The theme throughout these chapters is the righteousness of God.

What does that mean? Well, God's righteousness is His eternal perfection on display. It means His words and actions are always right. Even when we can't understand it, we can trust the fact that whatever God does and says is always right. We are going to focus on God's righteousness and how it impacts everything in life.

First, I want to point out *the Lord's righteousness and Israel's leaders*. If Israel is going to be a nation that

represents their righteous God, they will need righteous leaders.

Beginning in Deuteronomy 16, Moses mentions the first category of leaders who need to do what's right. God says through Moses:

"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns . . . they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert justice . . . show partiality [or] accept a bribe . . . Justice, and only justice, you shall follow." (verses 18-20)



Iron Age gate at Bethsaida

I was invited to deliver a charge to the newly elected chief justice of the supreme court here in my home state. He chose as his theme verse a text regarding Israel's judges being required to render just verdicts and to refuse to be bought with bribes. Frankly, I don't think any nation can pursue righteousness if the judges are corrupt.



A second category of leaders is mentioned here in chapter 17 as Moses peers into the future. He says in verses 14-15:

“When you come to the land that the LORD your God is giving you ... and then say, ‘I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,’ you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose.”

The Lord wants Israel to anticipate and desire a king who will be righteous and stand for justice, one chosen by the Lord.

Now in chapter 18, Moses points to the third category of leaders who need to do what’s right—or righteous. Verse 1 makes special mention of “the Levitical priests [and] all the tribe of Levi.” Verse 5 reminds Israel that the Lord chose these men “to stand and minister in the name of the LORD.”

If anybody needs to do what’s right, it’s the spiritual leaders. That was true then, and it’s certainly true today.

And the Lord reminds Israel here to help these godly leaders by supporting them faithfully with their offerings. In other words, He’s saying, “Take care of them, as they spiritually care for you.”

Before introducing the next category of leaders, Moses delivers a strong warning against the wicked practices of the people living in the land Israel will inherit. Here in chapter 18 these pagan nations are condemned for their occultic practices—contacting the dead, fortune-telling, and worshiping false gods.

Part of God’s solution, we see here in verse 15 and through the rest of chapter 18, is the ministry of true prophets. And a true prophet, verse 18 tells us, speaks the word of God.

And by the way, Moses gives the nation a sure-fire test to discover the false prophet. He says in verse 22

that one who predicts things that do *not* come to pass is not speaking for the Lord; he is a false prophet.

All of this points ahead to a Prophet who will arise in Israel, and He will speak the word of God, for He is the Logos, the Word of God incarnate. Moses himself is prophesying here in chapter 18 of the coming Messiah and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God come down from heaven.

Now in chapter 19, we turn to *the Lord’s righteousness and Israel’s laws*. While Israel’s leaders are to model God’s righteousness in their lives, the Lord also communicates His righteousness through clearly written laws.

In chapters 19 through 25, Moses repeats many of the laws we’ve already seen recorded in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. He repeats the law regarding the cities of refuge in chapter 19; and in chapter 20 he gives instructions to the nation that relate to conquest.

Various laws are laid out in the following chapters governing such things as inheritance rights, sexual boundaries, divorce, ritual purity, and a host of interpersonal relationships. It’s obvious that this new generation of Israelites need to be reacquainted with the law and committed to it if they are to prosper and enjoy peace in the promised land.

All of these laws defined the boundaries of God’s righteousness, much like a fence around your backyard defines where your kids can play. It protects them, shields them, and provides guidance for where they can run and where they can’t. Likewise, the love of God produces the law of God in order to protect and guide His people.

So far, in this rapid review, we have seen the Lord’s righteousness in relation to Israel’s leaders: their judges and priests. We have also noted the Lord’s righteousness in relation to God’s laws for His people. These laws revealed God’s righteous standards—how a person who was righteous, or right with God, was to live.

Now finally, let me show you *the Lord’s righteousness and Israel’s worship*. That’s the subject of chapter 26.



Once again, Moses peers into the future to a point in time when Israel is finally able to harvest a bumper crop there in the promised land. Moses charges them to bring an offering of that bumper crop and present it to the priest and, according to verse 3, say, “I declare . . . that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.”

Each Israelite worshiper is to rehearse the Lord’s faithfulness to the nation and then conclude by saying, “And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me” (verse 10). This offering was nothing less than a declaration of God’s faithfulness. And the one who is faithful to Israel is the same one who is righteous and calls Israel to live righteously—that is, right with God.

Listen beloved, this principle is true to this very day; those who have hearts that are righteous—those who are right with God—are going to love Him and worship Him with joy.

What we see in these chapters is exactly what Moses wanted for Israel back in Deuteronomy chapter 4 and verse 6 when he said:

Those who have hearts that are righteous—those who are right with God—are going to love Him and worship Him with joy.

“Keep [God’s laws] and do them, for that will be your wisdom and

your understanding in the sight of the [nations], who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”

Frankly, every believer wants the same thing for his nation and certainly for his own family and his own personal life.

Can you hear the missionary emphasis in this lifestyle here? The pagan world around you is watching you. And when they see you walking in righteousness with God, they’re going to think to themselves, *That nation, that family, that man or woman or young person—look at them. They belong to a wise God, and they are like Him; they’re living their lives with wisdom and understanding.*

Oh, I hope they say that about you and me today.

What has God provided you with today to test those who claim to speak for the Lord? What does Acts 17:11 teach you about how to test the spiritual claims of others? What key role has God given to Church Elders according to Acts 20:28-31?

Why do we sometimes let the world define how much we can publicly express our love for God? How do the people most often connecting with your life know you are a committed believer? Why does God tie our obedience and the world’s knowledge of Him so tightly together (John 17:23)?

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BLESSINGS AND CONSEQUENCES

Deuteronomy 27–28

The highest motivation for obeying God is love for Him. But we also need rewards for obedience and consequences for disobedience to move us to faithfully follow Him. This is what stands behind the instructions for Israel's covenant renewal in Deuteronomy 27–28.

As we continue our Wisdom Journey in Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28, we need to remember that a new generation of Israelites are standing on the threshold of the promised land. They're up at the front door, ready to step in.

Few of them are old enough to remember the awesome glory of God back there on Mount Sinai forty years earlier. That's when God gave Israel His covenant and Israel promised to obey all He commanded.

Well, a lot has happened since then. This new generation must personally voice their own commitment to God's covenant. Moses will not witness this because he's going to die before the children of Israel enter the land, but he does describe the form this renewal ceremony should take. Let's look at Deuteronomy 27, and listen to Moses deliver what we will call *covenant renewal instructions*.

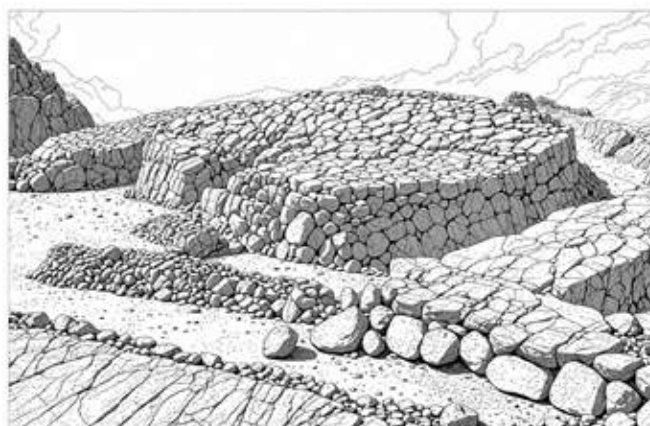
Moses has Israel's tribal elders stand with him as he begins in verse 2-3:

“On the day you cross over the Jordan to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones and

plaster them with plaster. And you shall write on them all the words of this law.”

They are to carry these engraved stones from the Jordan River to Shechem, more than thirty miles away. Shechem is where Abraham had first built an altar to the Lord nearly seven hundred years earlier.

Israel is to build an altar at Shechem between two round-top mountains, Mount Gerizim to the south and Mount Ebal to the north. And on this altar, Moses says here in verse 6:



Stone altar from Megiddo



“You shall offer burnt offerings . . . to the LORD your God, and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and shall eat there, and you shall rejoice before the LORD.”

The burnt offering communicated their commitment to the covenant, and the peace offering communicated their thanksgiving for the covenant.

Now in verse 9, Moses and the priests speak to the nation Israel:

“This day you have become the people of the LORD your God. You shall therefore obey the voice of the LORD your God, keeping his commandments.”

In other words, this is a rededication service, and the nation’s leaders are saying, “We want all of you to re-commit yourselves to obeying the Lord as His special people.”

Moses then appoints six tribes to stand on Mount Gerizim and the other six on Mount Ebal. The priests will stand between them at this altar in Shechem. The tribes standing on Mount Gerizim will represent the blessings of obeying God’s covenant, and those standing over on Mount Ebal will represent the consequences for disobeying it.

In verse 14, Moses tells the Levites that when all the tribes are in place, they are to speak “in a loud voice.” Here is what they are to say—verse 15:

“Cursed be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the LORD, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret.”

Then the people are to respond by saying “Amen,” which means, “let it be so.” The priests will then go on to deliver eleven more curses, and each time the people will shout, “Amen”—“you’re right; let it be so.”

These curses or consequences relate to everything from failing to worship God to dishonoring parents, perverting justice, and engaging in immorality. The last item in the list, here in verse 26, just sort of sums up the main issue: “Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.” And with that, Moses concludes the covenant renewal instructions.

In chapter 28, Moses delivers what we will call the *covenant renewal conditions*. Here we find a number of conditional statements: *If* they obey God’s commands, here is what will happen; and *if* they disobey, then this will happen.

Moses begins by encouraging the nation in verse 2, “All these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God.” His blessings are just going to overtake them—and who doesn’t want to be overtaken by the blessings of God? All Israel has to do is obey.

*Allow God’s
consistent discipline
to put a stop to any
thought of
disobedience.*

The specific blessings for obedience to the Lord listed in verses 3–6 are fertile families, fertile cattle, and fertile ground for bearing crops. Verses 7–12 promise the protection of God as He defeats their enemies, fills their barns, and even causes other nations to marvel at this remarkable God and His chosen people. No



one will be able to ignore the fact that Israel's families are growing, their herds and flocks are multiplying, and the heavens just seem to be sending them rain for the crops at just the right time.

What is evident here is that God is eager to bless His people. He loves them, and He tells them how they can live so that their lives are blessed and overflowing with joy!

At the same time, God tells His people what they can expect if they refuse to live by His word. Here is the warning for disobedience and rebellion—verse 15: “But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God . . . then all these curses shall come upon you.”

If they decide to forsake God's covenant after rededicating themselves to it, they will suffer the consequences—and that principle remains true to this day for anyone. Solomon wrote that the way of the sinner is filled with thorns and snares (Proverbs 22:5). It's a miserable path, no matter how much you have—if you don't have the Lord.

Now from verse 15 to verse 68, the consequences of disobedience are laid out for every generation of Israel to ponder. Several times throughout this lengthy list of curses, Israel is reminded of the reason for their suffering: “on account of the evil of your deeds” (verse 20); “because you did not obey the voice of the LORD” (verse 45); “because you did not serve the LORD” (verse 47).

Friend, don't avoid reading all these verses. I can see several lessons in this covenant renewal ceremony and the rehearsing of the blessings and curses that apply to believers today. Let me give you just two.

The first one is this: *God's goodness should motivate our obedience.* Israel has experienced the blessings of God in their past, and they have been promised God's blessing in the future. It's as if Moses is saying to them—and to us—“Listen, let God's goodness, in

the past *and* in the future, move you, motivate you, to obey Him in the present.”

The second lesson is this: *God's consistent discipline should discourage our disobedience.*

Moses has delivered in these fifty-four verses a series of consequences for disobeying the Lord. This is the kind of stuff that God disciplined Israel for in the past, and this new generation should know better.

Moses is effectively saying, “Don't go there; don't repeat history. Allow God's consistent discipline to put a stop to any thought of disobedience.”

The God of Israel has not changed. He's your God today, through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Obedience still matters. It will still bring freedom and joy to your life. And your disobedience will still bring discipline because God cares too much to let you wander away too far.

Name as many characteristics of God's nature as you can. How does this list encourage you to trust and obey God's word? What practical ways might you daily remind yourself of who God is so that your heart is eager to obey His word?

How does 1 John 4:8b encourage you to fully embrace the consequences of your sin? What spiritual life-lessons have you learned from embracing the consequences of sin? Why might it be a good idea to wisely share these life lessons with your yet to be saved family and friends?

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CHOOSING LIFE TODAY

Deuteronomy 29–30

The choices before us, like those before Israel in Deuteronomy 29–30, are pretty simple. Obey the Lord, and enjoy His blessing; or disobey Him, and experience His discipline. Thankfully, God is always faithful, accessible, and ready to forgive and restore us when we seek Him.

Moses is now standing on the plains of Moab. He will not enter the promised land himself, but the people he speaks to will, very soon. His message is recorded for us in Deuteronomy chapters 29 and 30. Here Moses reminds Israel of their failures, warns them of the consequences of sin, and encourages them to follow the Lord.

Consider how much wisdom Moses has accumulated over the past forty years. Think of the passion that wisdom—and all that experience—has created in Moses' heart.

Now I want you to imagine Moses here as he delivers that passion in a final message to a new generation of Israelites who are stubborn to the bone. He makes

three appeals—the same three appeals we need to hear today.

First, Moses makes this appeal: *Don't close your eyes to the dangers of sin.* Israel's track record is testimony enough that they haven't learned the lesson of sin's danger.

Beginning in verse 2 of chapter 29, Moses reminds the people of God's gracious miracles over these past forty years:

"You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes . . . the signs, and those great wonders . . . Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn off your feet."

(verses 2-3, 5)

Imagine wearing a shirt and a pair of shoes that last forty years!

The problem is that Israel doesn't connect the dots. Their sinful hearts close their eyes to the greatness of God. Moses says in verse 4 that they don't have "a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear."



Remains of a Vassal treaty of Esarhaddon



Only God can make them “see” and “hear” what He has been doing. By the way, remember those expressions “eyes to see” and “ears to hear.” You will hear similar words used in warnings from Isaiah the prophet and Jesus Christ, among others. The world lives in sunshine and beauty all around but refuses to hear the voice of God and see His handiwork in creation.

In verses 18 and 19, Moses warns Israel about false worship:

“Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you . . . one who . . . blesses himself in his heart, saying, ‘I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.’”

Oh, Moses understands the deceptive nature of sin—that one can defiantly disobey God while walking around saying to himself, “I’m safe.” My friend, there is no such thing as safe sin. Don’t be blind to the dangers of sin. Sin will overthrow your life and bring you to ruin, as Moses affirms here in verse 21.

Moses then moves on to make a passionate appeal: *Don’t ever forget that God’s grace is greater than sin.* Beloved, you can ruin your life with sin, but you can just as easily ruin your life by believing God will not forgive your sin because you have sinned too much or for too long.

Chapter 30 opens with Moses delivering some wonderful news. It’s true that the nation will sin against God, but note what Moses says here:

“Return to the LORD your God . . . and obey his voice . . . with

all your heart and with all your soul, then the LORD your God will . . . have compassion on you.” (verses 2-3)

Yes, sin is destructive, but God’s grace is constructive. Sin tears away, but God gives back; sin is strong, but God’s grace is stronger. That’s not only true for Israel—that’s also true for you and me today.

When you choose to love the Lord and obey His voice, you are actually choosing a life worth living.

I remember reading the true story that began in a poor village in Brazil. In a little hut with a dirt floor and a red tile roof lived Maria and her daughter, Christina. Maria’s husband had died when Christina was just an infant, and Maria had done her best to raise her daughter. Christina was now an older, attractive teenage girl with a streak of independence that worried her mother. Christina would often talk about fleeing this dusty little village and going to Rio de Janeiro, the city that seemed so full of life. Her mother would often remind her of the dangers in that city; she knew that if her daughter went there and could not support herself, there would be danger and even tragedy ahead.

One morning, Maria discovered her daughter was missing. She knew where Christina had gone, and it broke her heart. As soon as she could save up enough money for a bus ticket, Maria packed a small suitcase and headed for the bus depot. Before arriving, she stopped at a little drug store and stepped into one of those photograph booths and took all the pictures of herself that she could afford. And with that, Maria headed for Rio de Janeiro.



She began visiting places that had a reputation for prostitutes; she knew that when sinful rebellion meets hunger, a person might do anything to survive. So, Maria went to the bars and the hotels and the nightclubs; and wherever she went, she taped her picture to the wall—in hotel lobbies or near bathroom mirrors. And on the back of each photograph, she had written the same message. Finally, after several days, she ran out of money, and she ran out of photographs. She was weary and heartbroken as she boarded the bus alone for the long journey home.

Weeks turned into months. Then one day Christina was descending the steps from a hotel room when she looked across the lobby and saw the photograph of a familiar face taped to the wall. She ran over and took it down. Sure enough, it was a photograph of her mother. Her eyes filled with tears as she looked at the picture of her mother—the one who truly loved her. Then she turned the photograph over, and there on the back, she read this message: “Wherever you are, whatever you have become, it doesn’t matter. Come home.” (And Maria did just that)¹—she went back home.

Beloved, God already knows that Israel will stray from home. Even as Moses delivers these appeals, God knows Israel will pursue a life of sin. That is why, even here, centuries earlier, Moses reminds them that they are never beyond the reach of God’s grace.

With that, Moses delivers one final appeal: *Don’t ever stop choosing each day to walk with God.*

Moses wraps up his powerful message in chapter 30 by delivering these unforgettable words:

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life

. . . loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days.” (verses 19-20)

Wow! Here’s the choice: life or death; sin or the Savior. What would it be for Israel back then? More importantly, what will it be for you today? And just as it was for Israel, when you choose to love the Lord and obey His voice, you are actually choosing a life worth living.

So, *today*, choose to love Him and follow Him and obey His Word. And when you make that choice today, it will make all the difference in your life—today and tomorrow.

What resources has God already provided His followers to help them develop “eyes to see” and “ears to hear”? What resources does Satan have to cause you spiritual blindness and deafness? How does 1 John 4:4 encourage you in this “eyes and ears” battle?

What aspects of God’s character do you see displayed in Moses’ appeals to Israel? How do they impact your life personally? Who in your life might be encouraged to know your God is gracious and willing to forgive sin through faith in Jesus’s sacrifice?

¹ This phrase deleted from video after recording - wrong name in original script. 10/21/21 SM
Audio version corrected to “Christina.”





THE SONG OF MOSES

Deuteronomy 31:1–32:47

God designed music to speak to both our minds and our emotions. The song of Moses demonstrates that truly God-honoring music will communicate the truths of God and call us to act upon them.

If you know something about music, you might recognize the opening measures we play during each broadcast of the Wisdom Journey. It's taken from the "Hallelujah Chorus," composed in 1741 by George Handel. The "Hallelujah Chorus" is recognized all around the world today, as it sings of the glorious kingdom of the coming Messiah, when He shall reign forever and forever, hallelujah!

George Handel was nearing the last chapter in his life when he composed the oratorio Messiah, of which the "Hallelujah Chorus" is a part. Handel faced a number of difficulties in life. In fact, at this point, he was struggling with insurmountable debt. Added to that, he had recently suffered a stroke that had paralyzed the left side of his face, causing bouts of intense pain.

Most days, Handel could barely afford rent and food. He was depressed and despondent. One night he went out and just walked around the lonely streets until dawn, when he returned to his shabby apartment. On his table was a thick envelope of Scripture verses his friend Charles Jennens had written out for him. Jennens encouraged Handel to use the verses to compose something new.

George tossed the pages aside and crawled into bed, but he couldn't sleep. Some of the words he had just read rolled over and over in his mind: "the people

that walked in darkness have seen a great light . . . it is the glory of God . . . Hallelujah!"

He got up and went to his piano and began to write. In fact, for days he hardly stopped to eat or sleep. He refused to see anyone. He completed the composition in little more than three weeks. A friend who managed to get inside the apartment found George Handel at his piano, sheets of music lying around everywhere. Having completed the "Hallelujah Cho-



Image of King Chephren with a falcon protecting the king



rus” and with tears streaming down his face, George said to his friend, “I did think I did see all heaven before me and the great God Himself seated on His throne.”

Handel’s *Messiah* is recognized throughout the world as one of the greatest pieces of music ever composed.

There’s something about music that inspires you in a way that you never forget. Even old saints who can’t remember their way home can remember the great hymns and songs of the faith.

We now arrive near the end of Deuteronomy. Moses is going to die in a matter of days. He has lived a difficult life, but more than anything, he wants the nation of Israel to give glory to God and anticipate the day when God reigns over all the nations of the world.

But it’s time now to hand the baton to Joshua, which he does here in the opening verses of chapter 31. He begins by delivering these encouraging words to the nation:

“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them [your enemies], for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” (verse 6)

Moses then addresses Joshua personally with much the same message here in verses 7-8:

“Be strong and courageous . . . It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”

Now with that, Moses does something absolutely surprising to me. I would expect Moses to preach one last sermon to the nation, delivered with power and conviction—a sermon they would never forget.

But instead, he writes a song. Maybe it’s because he knows something every preacher out there knows. People may not remember a sermon I have preached, but they remember songs of the faith. So, Moses writes a song for the nation to sing.

Why is this song so important? Well, the Lord knows, and informs Moses, that after Moses’ death, the people of Israel will turn to foreign gods and forsake the Lord. Indeed, apostasy will grip the nation at various times in the centuries that follow.

So, the Lord says to Moses beginning here in verse 19:

“Write this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel. . . . this song shall confront them as a witness (for it will live unforgotten in the mouths of their offspring).”

(verses 19, 21)

The Hebrew word here for “witness” means that this song will be an affirmation—a testimony of the truth. It will remind the people of the truth of God’s law; it will remind them of His greatness and His many blessings; and it will convict them of their sin against the Lord and call them to repentance.

Then Moses says in verse 28, “Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears.” “These words” refer to the words of the law, which is to be read every seven years to the assembled people, according to verses 10-13. But it also refers to the song of Moses, which follows. Both will confront Israel’s disobedience and encourage them to follow the Lord.

Verse 30 then tells us, “Moses spoke the words of this song until they were finished, in the ears of all the assembly of Israel.” Imagine this nationwide music lesson as several million Israelites are taught, as it were, the “Hallelujah Chorus.” Israel needs to become one gigantic choir, singing an unforgettable song that will



be a testimony to God's greatness, magnificence, and faithfulness.

Now what we have here in chapter 32 are the lyrics to this amazing hymn of praise. Let me touch on some of the highlights in this composition.

Note these words in the opening lines:

Give ear, O heavens . . . let the earth hear the words of my mouth. . . . For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! (verses 1, 3)

In other words, “I want the entire universe to bend an ear to listen to the music that sings of the greatness of my God.”

Five times in this song, Moses refers to God as “the Rock”—verses 4, 15, 18, 30 and 31. He’s reminding Israel that they may have wandered and been unstable, but God has been a rock of faithfulness, a rock of unchanging truth, their rock of salvation.

God has been a rock of faithfulness, a rock of unchanging truth, their rock of salvation.

Now this song has some pretty transparent lyrics as well, and the nation is going to be forced to sing about their sin against God, their disobedience, their failure to follow Him. There’s nothing wrong in that remembrance. We sing today of our sin that held our Savior on that cross.

But the song moves on to end in hope. Moses writes in verse 36, “For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants.” That sounds like the “Hallelujah Chorus” to me.

You see, God’s plan for Israel is like His plan for His followers today. He graciously reveals our sin to us but promises that repentance leads to forgiveness and restoration.

And with that, the song ends in verse 43 with a promise that God will one day judge the nations. It is saying, “Don’t worry about what’s going on around you; don’t be afraid that God has somehow lost control of history and of the future.”

God will one day sit upon His throne in judgment. And just as Handel wrote in 1741 and just as Moses composed several thousand years earlier, the Lord shall reign forever and ever—forever and ever—hallelujah!

Why is it important for you to have regular times and ways to rehearse “God’s greatness, magnificence, and faithfulness?” How does Satan work specifically against you to distract you from those rehearsals? What does Satan’s efforts tell you about the rehearsal’s importance?

How has the Wisdom Journey up to and through Deuteronomy expanded your understanding of God’s heart for His people then and now? What misconceptions about God did you begin with as you started the Wisdom Journey and how have they been changed?

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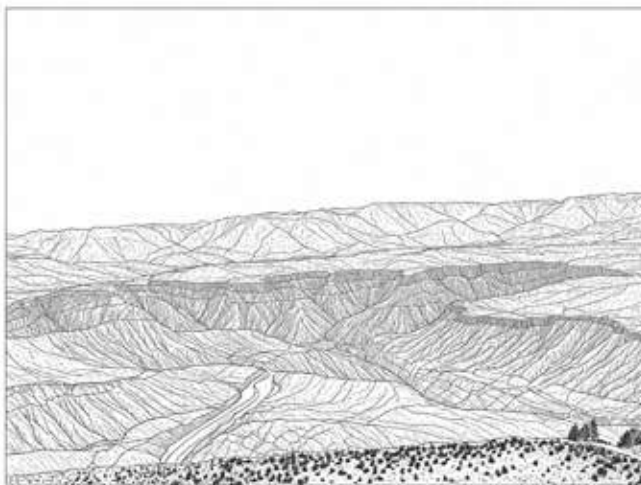
A FINAL BLESSING

Deuteronomy 32:48–34:12

The death of Moses, the author of the first five books of the Bible, marks the end of an era for Israel. Israel's disobedience and rebellion against God stand in stark contrast to their faithful leader, who leaves them with his example and his gracious blessing for the future.

As the book of Deuteronomy comes to an end, we also come to the end of Moses' life. These last chapters record Moses' final blessings and a final tribute to him from the nation.

In the closing verses of chapter 32, the Lord tells Moses to go up the mountain that stands opposite of Jericho in the land of Moab. He will be given the opportunity to view the promised land from the top of that mountain. Then the Lord will end the life of this old warrior and leader, and his spirit will be taken into paradise.



Area of Jericho viewed from the top of Mount Nebo

Now, before ascending that mountain, Moses pronounces blessings on the tribes of Israel here in chapter 33. These blessings are really more like prayer requests from Moses that God will continue to bless His people as they follow Him into the future.

Moses begins in verse 6 with the tribe of Reuben. His prayer for Reuben is that they will live and flourish. Evidently the tribe had not grown very large at all, although we are not told why.

In verse 7, Moses blesses the tribe of Judah. He prays that the Lord will “be a help against his adversaries.” Just because you’re following God doesn’t mean you won’t have any more enemies; in fact, you might end up having more.

Moses then prays in verse 11 that the priestly tribe of Levi will be blessed in “the work of his hands.” Their work, of course, is teaching the law and presenting offerings and sacrifices before the Lord on behalf of the people.

Concerning Benjamin, Moses says here in verse 12 that God “dwells between his shoulders.” This might actually be a prophetic reference to the fact that the temple will one day be located in Jerusalem, among the “shoulders”—that is, the hills—of Benjamin.



The most space is given to the blessing of Joseph, represented by his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. The prayer here is for God to make their land fruitful. Moses also prays that their military will be powerful, saying in verse 17, “His horns are the horns of a wild ox; with them he shall gore the peoples.”

*Just because you're
following God
doesn't mean you
won't have any more
enemies; in fact, you
might end up
having more.*

The tribes of Zebulun and Issachar are addressed together, just as they were back in Genesis 49. Moses says here in Deuteronomy 33:19, that they will “draw from the abundance of the seas.” These tribes are given land allotments that put them between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. They’re going to have a great fishing enterprise; these tribes will benefit tremendously from the produce of the sea.

In verse 20, the tribe of Gad is described as being “like a lion,” while down in verse 22 the tribe of Dan is called a “lion’s cub.” Both of these images refer to strength and military power.

Moses then blesses the tribe of Naphtali and their possession of “the lake,” here in verse 23. Naphtali’s territory will border the Sea of Galilee and include wonderfully fertile land. They are going to have a beautiful land to inherit and settle.

Finally, for the tribe of Asher, Moses says in verse 24, “Let him be the favorite of his brothers, and let him dip his foot in oil.” The oil refers here to olive oil; this can mean that Asher will become a very prosperous tribe, or more literally, that the tribe of Asher will become known for the production of olive oil. And

let me tell you, the finest chefs today still import and use the olive oil from the Middle East.

It’s interesting that the tribe of Simeon is not mentioned in these blessings. Back in Genesis 49, the Lord through Jacob promised that the tribe of Simeon would be scattered throughout Israel.

Finally, Moses delivers a blessing to the nation as a whole in verses 26 through 29. I love the promise of God here in verse 27: “The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

It doesn’t matter what your property is like. Whether you live by the sea or in the desert, whether your feet dip into the opulence of olive oil or you have only two shekels in your pocket, God is your portion, God is your inheritance, God is your protector. As you walk with Him today, even now, beloved, underneath you are His everlasting arms.

Now that Moses is finished with these final blessings, the final chapter of Deuteronomy begins. Deuteronomy chapter 34 apparently was added under divine inspiration by Joshua or someone else, since it records Moses’ death and private burial.

His trip up the mountain must be bittersweet for Moses. He’s reached the goal he’s had for the last forty years, but his feet will not touch the promised land because of his one great failure when he struck the rock in pride and disobedience.

Verse 7 tells us Moses died at the age of 120. The people mourned for him for a solid month. I think Moses would have been surprised the nation mourned and wept for him that long.

The last three verses of the book of Deuteronomy present a final tribute to Moses. In fact, they give us an inspired epitaph:

*There has not arisen a prophet
since in Israel like Moses, whom
the LORD knew face to face,
none like him for all the signs
and the wonders that the LORD*



sent him to do in the land of Egypt . . . and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel. (verses 10-12)

Moses was a prophet like no other. He communed with the Lord and worked through the Lord's miraculous power to deliver the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. He had spent his first forty years in the palaces of Egypt, the next forty years hidden away tending sheep in the land of Midian, and his last forty years leading the Israelites to the front door of the promised land.

Before we close the last page on the book of Deuteronomy, I want to add one note here, which highlights the grace of God. As great as Moses was, he was not allowed to enter the land because he failed to honor the Lord in that moment of pride and anger.

Some 1400 years later, during the earthly ministry of Jesus, there on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus revealed his brilliant deity to His disciples Peter, James, and John. But Jesus also had two visitors in bright, glorious apparel, having come from God the Father to encourage the Lord (Luke 9:28-36). Whether this took place on Mount Tabor or Mount Hermon or some other mountain, it was in the promised land.

And those two men who came to visit Jesus were Elijah and Moses. What do you know? Moses was allowed to visit the promised land after all.

Imagine the reality that “underneath you are His everlasting arms.” What thoughts and feelings about God flow from that truth? How does this truth affect your difficulties and disappointments? Who in your life might be encouraged to know they can have a personal relationship with this God too?

What do you see in Moses' character and actions that are worthy of your imitation? What has been the value to you to study the lives of the Old Testament believers? In what ways might the Old Testament stories make it easier for you to introduce yet to be saved people to God?



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