

THE DAILY QUIET TIME REFLECTIONS SERIES

REMEMBER

Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy

EXPANDED EDITION

Eugene Han

*Drawn from more than a decade of shared Quiet Time reflections at
dailyqt.org, and from Sunday School classes at First Baptist Church in
Dallas*

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The introduction draws on the introductory notes of Dr. Thomas L. Constable, used with gratitude for his lay-accessible scholarship on the text of Scripture.

This Expanded Edition draws on reflections shared over many years by the community of readers at dailyqt.org. The author is grateful to every member of that community whose questions, insights, and encouragement helped shape these pages.

This book reflects the personal study, reflection, and interpretation of its author and is offered for devotional and educational purposes. It is not a substitute for pastoral counsel or formal theological instruction. Where matters of biblical interpretation remain disputed among careful readers of Scripture, the author has noted this and presented his own considered view alongside other views held by faithful Christians, rather than claiming final or exclusive authority on the question.

An earlier edition of this study was published as *Remember: Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy*. This Expanded Edition has been fully rewritten. It follows the previous volume in this series, *Wanderings: Reflections on the Book of Numbers*.

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*To the faithful members of my Sunday School
classes at First Baptist Church in Dallas and the
dailyqt.org Quiet Time community —*

*your questions sharpened these pages, your
patience carried us through the wilderness a year
at a time, and your hunger for God's Word is the
reason any of this was written down at all.*

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Preface to the Expanded Edition

A Fuller Conversation

The first edition of this book grew out of a daily practice: reading a few chapters of Scripture each morning, writing down what we noticed, and sharing it with a community of readers at dailyqt.org. Over more than a decade, that community has left thousands of reflections on these same passages: questions, objections, stories, corrections, and moments of genuine discovery. The first edition drew on only a small part of that conversation. This Expanded Edition draws on all of it.

The result is a longer book, and we hope a better one. Every chapter has been rewritten to take in reflections from the wider community, along with further study of the passages they raised. Where the first edition moved quickly past a difficult text, this edition slows down. Where it stated one view on a disputed question, this edition still states the view we hold, but it also presents the other views faithful Christians hold, as fairly as we can. Each chapter now closes with six discussion questions rather than three or four.

Deuteronomy raises more than its share of hard questions, and many of them came up again and again in the conversation behind this book. Is God fair, or is He just? Does the Law of Moses, even the Ten Commandments, bind Christians today? Do the blessings of Deuteronomy 28 promise prosperity to believers? How should we read the laws of warfare, or the law

of the rebellious son? Was it possible for Israel to "choose life," and what does it mean that God would circumcise their hearts? How should we judge people who say, "The Lord told me"? We have not tried to make these questions disappear. We have tried to take them seriously, to say plainly what we believe the text teaches, and to be honest where the text leaves us with difficulty.

Personal stories from the original reflections have been kept where they serve the text, but names and identifying details have been removed. Commentary on current events that would quickly go out of date has been left out. Throughout, the book speaks in a single voice, but that voice owes a great deal to many readers.

One thing has not changed. This book is still meant to be read alongside an open Bible, one day at a time, and not in place of one. If these pages send you back to Deuteronomy with fresh eyes, and from there to the Savior this book anticipates at every turn, they will have done what they were written to do.

How to Use This Book

Reading, Reflecting, Together

This book was not written to be read in a single sitting. It was written to be read one day at a time, the way it was first written, a chapter at a time over the course of several weeks, alongside an open Bible rather than in place of one. The believers in Berea were commended not simply for their eagerness to hear the Word but for their habit of examining "the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11). That daily habit, sustained over years rather than compressed into a season, is the aim of this book and of the Quiet Time practice that produced it.

To help establish that rhythm, we have included, as an appendix at the back of this book, the same daily Bible reading plan we have used at dailyqt.org for well over a decade. It walks through the whole of Scripture in a year, a few chapters at a time, and it does not need to be started in January; you are free to begin on whatever date suits you and simply follow the sequence from there. Each of the twelve chapters in this book lines up with exactly one day on that plan, from Deuteronomy 1–2 on the first day to Deuteronomy 32–34 on the twelfth, so that this book and your own Bible can move through Deuteronomy together, one day at a time.

Whether you are reading on your own or working through this book with a group, such as one of our Sunday School classes at First Baptist Church in Dallas, we would suggest the following simple rhythm for each day, or for each session if you are meeting weekly:

1. Begin and end in prayer. Ask God, before you open either Bible or book, to teach you something true about Himself that day, and thank Him, when you close both, for whatever He has shown you, even if it is smaller or slower than you expected.

2. Read the assigned Scripture. Using the reading plan in the appendix, read the day's passage directly from your own Bible before turning to our reflections on it. There is no substitute for reading the text itself first, in whatever translation you trust, and letting it raise its own questions before we offer ours.

3. Read the corresponding chapter in this book. Each chapter walks through that day's passage in the order Scripture presents it, drawing out its major movements and, where it seemed useful, the historical background behind them. Treat it as a conversation about the text you just read, not a replacement for it.

4. Answer the discussion questions. Every chapter closes with six questions, enough to fill a forty-five- to sixty-minute group discussion, though they work just as well as slower journaling prompts for a reader working through the book alone. Some ask you to notice something in the text; most ask you to notice something in yourself. A group short on time may simply choose two or three.

If you are part of a group, we would encourage you to read both the day's Scripture and the corresponding chapter individually during the week, and then use your time together for the fourth step: praying together and working through the discussion questions. That is, after all, how the material in this book first took shape, not in a study or a library, but among ordinary readers asking each other what a passage meant and

why it mattered, week after week, for years. We hope it will do the same for you.

Introduction

Remember

Numbers ended with Israel camped on the plains of Moab, across the Jordan from the land, a new generation standing at the same threshold their parents had refused to cross forty years earlier. Deuteronomy is what happens next. It is not a march into the land, not yet, but a man standing before that new generation for one final month, determined that they would not repeat their parents' mistake simply because they did not know what God had already said and done. This is the fifth and final book of the Torah, the last of the five books of Moses, and it contains Moses' last recorded words to the people he had led, rebuked, interceded for, and buried by the thousands across four decades in the wilderness.

The Hebrew title of the book comes from its opening words, *elleh haddebarim*, "These are the words." The English title comes from the Greek *Deuteronomion*, meaning "second law," a translation of a phrase in Deuteronomy 17:18 that more precisely means "a copy of this law," the king's own personal copy, which he was to write out for himself and read every day of his life. Even so, the Greek title is not entirely misleading. Deuteronomy really is something like a second giving of the Law, not because it changes what God commanded at Sinai, but because an entire generation had died in the wilderness, and the people now listening were mostly too young to remember Sinai, if they had been born at all. Moses' task was not to invent new commandments, but to make sure that a generation who had not been there would still carry forward everything their parents had nearly let slip away.

The book divides into three speeches, and knowing this structure makes the whole book easier to follow. The first (1:1–4:43) is historical: a review of everything God had done from Sinai to the plains of Moab, and of how an eleven-day journey became forty years of wandering. The second and by far the longest (4:44–26:19) is legal: a repetition and expansion of the Ten Commandments and the Law given at Sinai, covering the religious, civil, and social life of a nation about to possess the land. The third (27:1–34:12) looks ahead: it lays out the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience, and predicts with startling directness both Israel's coming unfaithfulness and a gracious restoration beyond it.

Scholars have long noticed that the book's overall shape resembles the treaties that ancient kings made with the smaller nations under their rule: a review of the relationship so far, followed by the terms of the covenant, followed by blessings for keeping it and curses for breaking it, followed by provision for what would happen when the current generation was gone. Deuteronomy uses that familiar political form, but it fills it with something those ancient treaties never had: not the self-interest of a distant ruler protecting his own power, but the covenant love of a God who keeps insisting that His people's welfare is the very point of everything He commands.

Few books of the Old Testament carry more weight in the New. Deuteronomy is quoted or clearly echoed in the New Testament dozens of times, by some counts nearly a hundred, more than almost any other Old Testament book. It was evidently one of the favorite books of Jesus and His apostles. Where Leviticus is law revealed, laid out with the precision of priestly instruction, Deuteronomy is law preached: the same

commands, delivered now as urgent, personal appeal. When a teacher of the law asked Jesus to name the greatest commandment, He answered by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4–5, the Shema itself (Mark 12:29–30). And when Satan tempted Jesus three times in the wilderness, Jesus answered every temptation from a short stretch of this book, Deuteronomy 6 and 8 (Matthew 4:1–10). It is worth pausing over that detail. Facing the adversary directly, the eternal Son of God chose to fight not with a display of power, but with Scripture already committed to memory, and not scattered Scripture, but this particular book, the one so concerned with remembering.

One reason this book meant so much to Jesus and the apostles may be its most distinctive contribution to the whole Pentateuch: love. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers all show God's love for Israel in action. He rescues them, provides for them, disciplines them, and refuses to abandon them even at their worst. But Deuteronomy is where God's love is most plainly named as the reason behind it all. He chose Israel "because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors" (Deuteronomy 7:8), and everything else in the book flows from that declared motive. The detailed laws of chapters 5 through 26 are not a king's arbitrary demands on his subjects; the text presents them as given "for your own good" (Deuteronomy 10:13). And the command running through the entire book, to love the Lord "with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5), cannot be separated from the command to remember. Israel could not sustain love for a God they had stopped remembering, and remembering rightly meant loving in response.

"Remember" and "love" are not competing themes in this book. They are the same movement of the heart, seen from two angles.

Deuteronomy is not only history, law, and prophecy. It is also deeply personal. Moses' fatigue and frustration are never far from the surface: a leader near the end of a long and largely thankless assignment, still carrying the disappointment of a land he would see but never enter. He does not merely recite the Law. He explains it, more personally than in any of the previous four books, telling this new generation not only what God commanded but why: why they had suffered hunger and thirst in the wilderness, why God had chosen Israel in the first place, why the land was being given to them as a gift rather than a reward. He is equally honest about their failures: their impatience, their stubbornness, their long habit of grumbling. That blend of law and testimony, correction and tenderness, makes Deuteronomy read less like a legal code and more like a father's last conversation with children he loves but will not live to see grow up.

The final section of the book contains a promise worth marking before we begin, since we will return to it in Chapter Eleven. Moses tells this generation plainly, "But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear" (Deuteronomy 29:4). It is an honest admission that something essential was still missing. And yet one chapter later Moses promises that it would not always be so: "The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live" (Deuteronomy 30:6). Read alongside Jeremiah's later promise of a new covenant written on the heart rather than on stone (Jeremiah 31:33), this

is unmistakably a preview of the New Covenant: not yet given to the generation Moses addressed, but already named and promised centuries before the Spirit would come to accomplish it.

This makes Deuteronomy, more than any book so far, a book about memory, which is why we have called this volume *Remember*. The word, together with its companion warning, "do not forget," appears roughly two dozen times in these thirty-four chapters. Moses does not simply repeat the Law; he keeps interrupting himself to insist that Israel remember specific things: remember that you were slaves in Egypt, remember the forty years in the wilderness, remember the day you stood before the Lord at Horeb. Forgetting, in Deuteronomy, is never treated as an innocent accident. It is treated as a moral failure serious enough to bring judgment, because remembering was always meant to be the engine of obedience. A people who truly remembered what God had done for them would have no good reason left to disobey Him. A people who forgot would drift, generation by generation, into exactly the unfaithfulness Moses spends this entire book trying to prevent.

Three things stand out across these chapters, and it may help to know what to watch for. The first is the sheer comprehensiveness of the command to remember and to teach. The Shema, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4), is followed immediately by instructions that cover every posture and place of daily life: sitting at home and walking along the road, lying down and getting up, on the hand, on the forehead, on the doorframes and gates. Nothing in daily life was meant to fall outside the reach of God's Word. The second is the book's unflinching honesty about what lay ahead.

Moses does not merely warn that Israel might break the covenant; he predicts that they will, not as a worst-case scenario but as a near certainty. The third is the promise already mentioned: in the middle of Moses' most severe warnings lies the quiet assurance that God Himself would one day accomplish, by His own grace, the very obedience the Law could command but never produce.

This Expanded Edition follows the same pattern as the first: twelve chapters, one for each daily reading through the book, drawing on more than a decade of Quiet Time reflections shared by the dailyqt.org community and on Sunday School classes at First Baptist Church in Dallas, where much of this material was first taught and discussed aloud. It follows our earlier studies of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, and it brings the five books of Moses to a close. But Deuteronomy does not close the story. At the very end of the book, Moses looks out over a land he will never enter and hands the story on to someone else to finish. We offer this study in the same spirit: not as a final word, but as a summons to remember, so that what God has already done is never quietly lost to the generation that comes next.

Chapter One

Deuteronomy 1-2

"These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the wilderness east of the Jordan" (Deuteronomy 1:1). The book of Deuteronomy begins simply, and its Hebrew title comes from those opening words: "These are the words." What follows is not a new law or a new journey, but a series of speeches, the last words of an old man to a young nation. Moses is about to die. The people in front of him are about to cross the Jordan without him. And before they go, he wants them to remember.

Then comes a detail that is easy to read past, tucked into the text almost like a footnote: "(It takes eleven days to go from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea by the Mount Seir road.)" (Deuteronomy 1:2). And the very next verse tells us when Moses was speaking: "In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month" (Deuteronomy 1:3).

Eleven days. That was the distance from the mountain where Israel received the Law to the southern doorway of the Promised Land. Forty days was how long the spies spent exploring the land God was giving them. And forty years was how long it actually took Israel to receive it, because an entire generation refused, at the last moment, to trust God for the final stretch. Eleven days became forty years. The journey was not hard; the people's hearts were.

That is a sobering way to measure unbelief. We usually measure disobedience by the size of the initial act. Deuteronomy invites us to measure it by what it costs afterward. The refusal at Kadesh took a single night. Its consequences took a generation. It is worth asking ourselves how much time we

waste when we do not listen and obey. The delay that obedience saves us from is usually far larger than the discomfort obedience costs us up front.

There is another small detail in these opening verses worth noticing. Moses spoke "east of the Jordan in the territory of Moab" (Deuteronomy 1:5). He never crossed the river. Yet he spoke as a man preparing a people who would soon be on the other side, reading these words in the land he would only see from a mountaintop. The whole book is framed as instruction for people about to enter the land. It is Moses' farewell gift to a generation that would carry his words where he could not go.

Moses begins his first speech by recalling God's first words to Israel after Sinai: "The LORD our God said to us at Horeb, 'You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Break camp and advance into the hill country of the Amorites.... See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land the LORD swore he would give to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—and to their descendants after them'" (Deuteronomy 1:6–8).

"You have stayed long enough at this mountain." Israel had spent nearly a year at Sinai. It was a place of extraordinary encounter with God, where they had received the Law and built the tabernacle and seen the glory of the Lord. But God did not intend them to stay there. Sinai was a stage on the way, not the destination.

We tend to become deeply attached to our circumstances and resistant to change. Even small disruptions to our routines can frustrate us. And so it is easy to settle where we are, simply because we are comfortable, or because we are afraid of what change might bring. We settle for less out of fear rather than

trusting the Lord. Isn't that exactly why Israel refused to enter Canaan in the first place? We are not yet at our final resting place either. Whether our next step is a physical move or a step of spiritual growth, we should be asking the Lord what that next step of faith should be, and expecting Him to show us through His Word. "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Psalm 119:105).

We should be careful here. Not every restlessness is a call from God, and not every change is progress. Sometimes faithfulness means staying where God has placed us. But the specific danger this passage names is the refusal to move when God has clearly spoken, because the familiar feels safer than the promise. And that same instinct can show up in opposite directions. The first generation resisted leaving the safety of the mountain for the uncertainty of conquest. The generations after them, once settled and prosperous in the land, would resist leaving comfortable prosperity for renewed obedience. The circumstances change, but the heart that prefers the familiar over trusting God's next step remains remarkably the same.

Moses then recalls how he shared the burden of leadership. The people had multiplied until "today you are as numerous as the stars in the sky" (Deuteronomy 1:10), and he could not carry them alone: "But how can I bear your problems and your burdens and your disputes all by myself?" (Deuteronomy 1:12). So he appointed wise, understanding, and respected leaders from each tribe as commanders and judges.

His charge to those judges is worth reading carefully: "Hear the disputes between your people and judge fairly, whether the case is between two Israelites or between an Israelite and a foreigner residing among you. Do not show partiality in judging;

hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of anyone, for judgment belongs to God" (Deuteronomy 1:16–17).

"Judgment belongs to God." That short phrase explains why partiality was so serious. A judge who favored the powerful, or feared them, was substituting his own preferences for a verdict that was never his to decide. He was only meant to deliver it. In that sense, partiality was a kind of theft, taking something that belonged to God.

This helps with a tension many Christians feel. Jesus said, "Do not judge" (Matthew 7:1), and yet Scripture also calls us to discern right from wrong and even to correct one another. How do we hold those together? One way is to recognize that when we judge rightly, we are not determining anything ourselves. We are stating what God has already determined. If something is wrong according to His Word, it is wrong, and we should not be partial about it, whether the person involved is powerful or weak, close to us or a stranger.

But the purpose of correction among God's people is not to destroy. It is to restore. "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently" (Galatians 6:1). "Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death" (James 5:20). Even the Mosaic Law, with its penalties, aimed at setting things right: restitution was made, a penalty paid, and the matter was closed. Love seeks the good of others, and there is no greater good than being reconciled to God. And Jesus' warning in the same passage remains: before we address the speck in someone else's eye, we must deal with the plank in our own (Matthew 7:3–5).

Then Moses turns to the painful heart of his history lesson, the refusal at Kadesh Barnea. He tells it to a generation who were children at the time, or not yet born, and he does not soften it.

He reminds them that when they reached the edge of the land, he had told them, "See, the LORD your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (Deuteronomy 1:21). The people asked to send spies first, and Moses agreed. The spies came back with fruit from the land and a good report. "But you were unwilling to go up; you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God. You grumbled in your tents and said, 'The LORD hates us; so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us'" (Deuteronomy 1:26–27).

"The LORD hates us." Of all the things Israel said in the wilderness, that may be the most heartbreaking. God had just brought them out of slavery with signs and wonders, fed them every morning, given them water from a rock, and guided them with His own presence in fire and cloud. And they concluded that He hated them.

Moses answered with one of the tenderest images in the book: "The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the wilderness. There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place" (Deuteronomy 1:30–31). A father carrying his son. That is what the wilderness years had actually been. "In spite of this, you did not trust in the LORD your God, who went ahead of you on your journey, in fire by night and in a cloud by

day, to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go" (Deuteronomy 1:32–33).

Fear distorts how we see God. When we are afraid, we tend to reinterpret everything God has done in the darkest possible light. Every blessing becomes a setup; every delay becomes a sign of His displeasure. That is why remembering matters so much in this book. A people who remembered how God had carried them would not easily believe He hated them.

God's response was severe. None of that generation would see the good land, except Caleb and Joshua. "And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad—they will enter the land" (Deuteronomy 1:39). Moses was speaking to those little ones now, grown up. The children their parents had used as an excuse for unbelief were standing, forty years later, at the edge of the promise.

Then comes a part of the story that is easy to overlook. After hearing the sentence, the people changed their minds. They confessed their sin and decided to go up and fight after all. But God said, "Do not go up and fight, because I will not be with you. You will be defeated by your enemies." Moses continues: "So I told you, but you would not listen. You rebelled against the LORD's command and in your arrogance you marched up into the hill country. The Amorites who lived in those hills came out against you; they chased you like a swarm of bees and beat you down from Seir all the way to Hormah. You came back and wept before the LORD, but he paid no attention to your weeping and turned a deaf ear to you" (Deuteronomy 1:42–45).

Israel committed two apparently opposite sins at Kadesh. First they refused to go forward when God commanded it. Then

they insisted on going forward when God forbade it. Their first sin was not doing what God had commanded; their second, committed in the very act of trying to correct the first, was doing what God had not commanded. The decisive issue was never boldness or caution in themselves. It was whether either response submitted to God's actual word. Obedience was never simply about doing something. It was about doing what God had said, when He had said it, neither delaying out of fear nor rushing ahead out of guilt.

That makes presumption especially dangerous, because it can look like courage. A confident religious undertaking can be sincerely described, emotionally compelling, and full of spiritual language, while still being an attempt to set the terms of obedience for ourselves. Israel's second march had all the outward marks of repentance and zeal. But it was driven by their own imagination, not by God's Word.

The same danger exists in the church. Churches and believers can embrace teachings and practices that have no basis in Scripture, or that contradict it, because those practices make them feel nearer to God. When that happens, they are doing what Israel did: acting on their own sense of what should please God rather than on what He has actually said. And those who raise concerns are sometimes told that they have no right to question an experience they have not had themselves. But a person need not reproduce an experience before asking what is being claimed about it, how it is being interpreted, and whether its claimed authority is warranted. Scripture directs believers to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1), and joins openness to the Spirit with careful examination: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt

but test them all; hold on to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:19–21). Intense feeling is not by itself a credential.

Careful examination also binds the critic. Accusations about a teacher or a movement need specific evidence, not merely resemblance or rumor. It is fair to ask what a teacher actually says, what biblical argument supports or contradicts it, whether predictions are presented as God's authoritative word and what happens when they fail, and whether participants can raise concerns without being punished. Those questions move us beyond both "it felt close to God" and "it looked strange to me." Strong conviction does not require contemptuous speech, and charity does not require ignoring error. We can read carefully, document concerns accurately, hear replies fairly, and decline to participate where Scripture and conscience warrant it.

In the middle of this history, Moses says something about himself that is worth pausing over: "Because of you the LORD became angry with me also and said, 'You shall not enter it, either'" (Deuteronomy 1:37). He says something similar twice more in the book (Deuteronomy 3:26; 4:21). Moses seems to place the blame for his own exclusion on the people.

In one sense, he was right. It was the people's endless grumbling that provoked him at Meribah. That story may remind us of the garden of Eden, where Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. Human beings have always been quick to point elsewhere when confronted with their own failure. Yet the choice to obey or disobey still rested in Moses' own hands, just as Adam and Eve had a real choice not to eat, whatever the circumstances around them. Circumstances can provoke us, but they do not make our choices for us.

At the same time, we should be fair to Moses. Unlike Adam, he never denied his own responsibility. At the end of the book, God states plainly that Moses and Aaron "broke faith with me in the presence of the Israelites" (Deuteronomy 32:51), and Moses records it without protest. His comments about the people provoking God's anger were not offered instead of accepting blame; they were honest observations made alongside it. Acknowledging the circumstances that contributed to our failure is not the same as refusing to own it. That may be part of why Moses, despite his real failure, is remembered so differently than the first couple's fall.

Some readers find this part of Moses' story troubling in a different way. It can seem unfair. God grew angry with Israel again and again, and destroyed many of them. Yet when Moses, a mere man, lost his temper after forty years of provocation and struck a rock, he lost the right to enter the Promised Land. One reader confessed that as a young person, he had read these stories and concluded, "God isn't fair." Only later did he come to see that God is not fair in the way we usually use the word, but He is just.

That distinction is worth thinking through. Scripture never apologizes for the fact that God's justice operates on a different plane from ours. "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:8–9). God is the Creator and the Judge of all the earth. When David was angry that God struck down Uzzah for touching the ark, the problem was not that God had been unjust, but that David had

not fully reckoned with God's holiness, or with his own responsibility for moving the ark carelessly (2 Samuel 6:6–8).

Jesus told a parable that speaks directly to our sense of fairness. A landowner hired workers at different times of the day, and at the end he paid them all the same wage. Those who had worked all day complained. The landowner answered, "I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" (Matthew 20:13–15). The workers who complained received exactly what they had agreed to. Their problem was not injustice. It was envy at someone else's good fortune. If they had seen rightly, they would have been impressed by the landowner's fairness to them and his generosity to others.

The uncomfortable half of this truth and the comforting half rest on the same foundation. God owes nothing to anyone. That is why He can be severe in judgment without being unjust, and why He can be lavish in mercy without being unfair. Deuteronomy itself makes the point. Moses will tell Israel that God did not choose them because they were numerous or impressive: "But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors" (Deuteronomy 7:8). And he will tell them plainly that the land was not a reward for their righteousness, since they were "a stiff-necked people" (Deuteronomy 9:6). Every reason for God's blessing lay outside of Israel. If God had dealt with them as they deserved, He would have wiped them out.

The same is true of us. "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4–5). Those who receive Christ are "children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:13). Our own conviction is that the new birth comes first and enables faith, so that our very coming to Christ is a gift of God's sovereign love. Other Christians understand the relationship between God's grace and human response differently, and they too insist that salvation is by grace alone and gives no ground for boasting. But all of us can agree on the conclusion Jesus drew when people asked Him about a tragedy in which innocent people died. He did not tell them the victims were worse sinners. He said, "But unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13:3). What should surprise us is not that God judges, but that any of us is still standing. Praise God for His grace toward us!

Chapter 2 continues the history, moving from Kadesh through the long years of wandering to the edge of the land. And it contains a surprise. As Israel traveled north, God repeatedly told them not to fight certain nations.

About Edom, the descendants of Esau: "Do not provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land, not even enough to put your foot on. I have given Esau the hill country of Seir as his own" (Deuteronomy 2:5). About Moab: "Do not harass the Moabites or provoke them to war, for I will not give you any part of their land. I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as a possession" (Deuteronomy 2:9). And the same about Ammon (Deuteronomy 2:19).

God had given land to other nations, too. The chapter even includes brief historical notes about earlier peoples, the Emmites, the Horites, and others, whom God had displaced to give their land to Edom, Moab, and Ammon (Deuteronomy 2:10–12, 20–23). "The LORD destroyed them from before the Ammonites, who drove them out and settled in their place" (Deuteronomy 2:21). Israel was not the only people whose borders God had drawn. He is the Lord of all the nations, and He directs their histories as surely as He directed Israel's. Israel's conquest of Canaan was not a license to take whatever land they wanted. It was the fulfillment of a specific promise, and it came with specific limits.

In the middle of this chapter, Moses pauses to remind the people of something they might easily have overlooked: "The LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything" (Deuteronomy 2:7). Even the years of discipline were years of provision. The wilderness was a sentence, but it was never an abandonment. God was with them the whole way.

Then comes a sobering summary: "Thirty-eight years passed from the time we left Kadesh Barnea until we crossed the Zered Valley. By then, that entire generation of fighting men had perished from the camp, as the LORD had sworn to them. The LORD's hand was against them until he had completely eliminated them from the camp" (Deuteronomy 2:14–15). Every word God spoke at Kadesh came to pass, the promise and the judgment alike.

Forty years is roughly half a lifetime. And yet growing in our relationship with God is the work of an entire lifetime. It would be interesting if we could objectively compare ourselves in the days before we came to Christ with the day we finally stand before Him. We should hope that the difference is great, that each of us is significantly closer to Him at the end than at the beginning.

But we do not know when that day will come. Will it be fifty years from now, or tomorrow? Living with a sense of urgency helps us take God's will seriously today rather than postponing obedience. Every delay in turning to God is, in a sense, another lap around the wilderness. And seeking Him, even when it goes against every proud and self-centered instinct we have, is the effort that bears fruit for eternity.

Some readers notice that even Moses seemed to decline in his later years, that his patience wore thin and his frustration showed. It is a sobering thought: many of us pray that we will end better than we began, and yet the natural slide of the human heart is toward spiritual regression, not progress. May we be vigilant about our spiritual lives, and honest about where we stand. But Paul offers a hopeful counterweight. Writing as an older man worn down by real hardship, he admits the outward decline, yet insists something else is happening at the same time: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16). Moses' final season, whatever it cost him outwardly, was also the season in which he gave Israel the book we are now reading, one of the richest theological legacies in all of Scripture. Declining strength and deepening wisdom need not move in the same direction.

The chapter ends with Israel's first victory on the way into the land. Moses sent messengers to Sihon, king of Heshbon, "offering peace" (Deuteronomy 2:26). He asked only for permission to pass through on the main road, promising not to turn aside into any field and to pay for any food and water. "But Sihon king of Heshbon refused to let us pass through. For the LORD your God had made his spirit stubborn and his heart obstinate in order to give him into your hands, as he has now done" (Deuteronomy 2:30).

This is the same kind of language Exodus uses of Pharaoh, and it deserves the same honest treatment. Scripture does not hesitate to say that God hardened Sihon's heart. It does not say that Sihon was an innocent victim, either. He was offered peace and refused it, and like Pharaoh, he acted according to his own will. Scripture holds together God's sovereignty over even hardened hearts and the real responsibility of those who resist Him, without explaining exactly how the two fit together. We should resist the temptation to soften either one.

Why does God do this, and how can it be just? The answer lies in who God is. God is not subject to some higher law that stands above Him, against which even He must be measured. His commands are right because they come from Him, and they come from Him because they flow from His own perfectly good character. That does not make God arbitrary. Moses will later sing of Him, "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he" (Deuteronomy 32:4). Abraham asked long before, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25), and the whole Bible answers yes. Israel did not follow God because His commands happened to line up with some

independent standard of goodness. They followed the Law because they followed God, and the Law was good because it came from Him.

"The LORD our God gave us all of them" (Deuteronomy 2:36). The victory over Sihon was the first sign to the new generation that the God who had carried them through the wilderness would now go before them into the land. It was not their strength or strategy that won the battle. It was the Lord.

Moses' opening history, then, is really a call to trust. The eleven days that became forty years did not mean God's promise had failed. It meant the promise had been deferred to a generation better prepared to receive it. "Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain.... In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves" (Psalm 127:1–2). The psalm does not forbid building or working; it assumes both. But it places them under God's hand.

When will we understand that the Lord is in charge of our lives, both the good and the bad? If we truly grasp this, our anxieties lose their grip on us. We will be neither desperate nor hasty, neither listless nor lazy. Instead we will live day by day simply trusting and obeying Him, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who sees the end from the beginning, who has numbered our days, and who has written our names in the Lamb's book of life. These things are not automatic for everyone. But they belong to the child of God, whose inheritance is secure, whose house the Lord has built, and whose salvation He guards.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Eleven days became forty years because Israel would not trust God for the final short stretch of the journey. Is there an area of your life where fear or impatience has turned a short delay into a much longer one?
2. God told Israel, "You have stayed long enough at this mountain." Where might you be settling in a familiar place out of comfort or fear, when God may be calling you to take a next step of faith?
3. The people concluded, "The LORD hates us," while Moses described God carrying them "as a father carries his son." How does fear distort the way you interpret what God is doing in your life? What helps you remember how He has carried you?
4. At Kadesh, Israel first refused to go when God said go, then insisted on going when God said stay. Have you ever tried to "fix" a past failure by doing something God was no longer asking of you? How can you tell the difference between courageous faith and presumption?
5. Moses said the people provoked God's anger against him, yet he never denied his own guilt. How do you respond when others have contributed to your failures? What does it look like to acknowledge circumstances honestly without refusing responsibility?
6. God is not "fair" in the way we often use the word, but He is just, and every reason for His blessing lay outside of Israel. How does the parable of the workers in the vineyard challenge your sense of what you deserve from God?

Chapter Two

Deuteronomy 3–4

Moses' history lesson continues in chapter 3 with the second great victory east of the Jordan. After Sihon, king of Heshbon, came Og, king of Bashan, who marched out with his whole army to meet Israel. "The LORD said to me, 'Do not be afraid of him, for I have delivered him into your hands, along with his whole army and his land'" (Deuteronomy 3:2). Israel took sixty fortified cities, "with high walls and with gates and bars" (Deuteronomy 3:5), along with many unwallled villages. Og himself was the last of the Rephaites, a race of giants, and Moses notes that his bed was more than thirteen feet long (Deuteronomy 3:11). These were exactly the kind of fortified cities and giants that had terrified the previous generation at Kadesh. Now the new generation had seen that God could deliver them.

As we read how God handed Bashan over to Israel, it is natural to think about how He has worked in our own lives. When God's will lines up with ours, everything seems to fall into place. But there is another side to the story. How many times has God said, in effect, "Go and do this, for I have given it to you," and we did not fully trust Him, or did not see why it mattered? His direction may not have seemed obvious at the time. We might wonder what would be different today if we had taken those steps of faith and trusted God to provide, even when we could not understand His reasons.

But dwelling on "what if" rarely helps. The more important question is "now what?" What does God want me to do today? That simple change in our daily thinking may be the difference

between walking in God's will and struggling outside it. Paul writes, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25), neither lagging behind nor running ahead. Abraham, told to leave everything he knew for a destination God had not yet named, simply went: "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8). Faith in Scripture is rarely pictured as certainty about the reasons. It is pictured as obedience in spite of not having them. And even when we miss what God is trying to tell us, He is able to bring good out of our mistakes and lead us back to the path He has for us (Romans 8:28).

Chapters 2 and 3 also raise a hard question, and some readers ask it honestly. Moses says that Israel took all of Sihon's towns "and completely destroyed them—men, women and children. We left no survivors" (Deuteronomy 2:34), and did the same to the cities of Og (Deuteronomy 3:6). How can this be reconciled with the commandments God had just given at Sinai, "You shall not murder" and "You shall not steal"? Doesn't it look like a double standard?

In one sense, it is a distinction between God and us, and Scripture does not hide it. God can take life because He gave it. We cannot. God owns all things, and so He can do with them what He wills; we are only stewards, responsible for handling what belongs to Him as He directs. "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). That is also why the Law gave no Israelite permanent ownership of land. The Year of Jubilee reset property every fifty years, as a built-in reminder that nothing anyone held had ever really

belonged to them. God determines who is given stewardship over what, and for how long. And if the land was always God's to allocate and reclaim, then giving it to Israel and taking it from Canaan were the same kind of act: the Owner exercising rights that had been His all along.

But it is also important to see that God was not applying one standard to Canaan and another to Israel. The text repeatedly ties the judgment of these nations to their own specific sins. Moses will tell Israel, "It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations" (Deuteronomy 9:5). The same standard that condemned Canaan would later condemn Israel, when Israel committed the same sins and was driven from the land (2 Kings 17:7–8). It was a single standard applied consistently to whoever was guilty.

We do not want to pretend these passages are easy. Christians have understood them in several ways, and we will return to the question when we come to the laws of warfare in chapter 20. But we can say clearly that these were specific acts of judgment commanded by God at a specific moment in history, and that the New Testament gives no one a license to repeat them. The followers of Christ are commanded to love their enemies and to leave vengeance to God.

The rest of chapter 3 records how the land east of the Jordan was given to Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, on the condition that their fighting men would cross over and help their brothers take the rest of the land (Deuteronomy 3:12–20). Then Moses turned to Joshua: "You have seen with your own eyes all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings. The LORD will do the same to all the kingdoms over there where you

are going. Do not be afraid of them; the LORD your God himself will fight for you" (Deuteronomy 3:21–22).

And then Moses tells a story about himself. He pleaded with God: "Sovereign LORD, you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works you do? Let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan—that fine hill country and Lebanon." Then he adds, "But because of you the LORD was angry with me and would not listen to me. 'That is enough,' the LORD said. 'Do not speak to me anymore about this matter'" (Deuteronomy 3:24–26).

We noticed in the last chapter that Moses more than once says the people were responsible for his exclusion. Some readers find it troubling to hear the humblest man on earth sound as though he were passing the buck. And in a sense it does reveal that even the best and greatest leaders have chinks in their armor. But it is also a reminder that Moses was just a man, prone to mistakes like his people. Scripture never presents its heroes as infallible. We see their failures as clearly as their faith.

And we should notice what Moses did not say in his prayer. He did not appeal to fairness, or to his decades of faithful service. He did not argue that he had earned an exception. He simply asked, appealing to God's own greatness. God's answer was a gentle but firm no, and an instruction to stop bringing it up. Even Moses, arguably the most faithful leader in the Old Testament, discovered that decades of faithful service do not purchase an exception to the consequences of sin. If works could not buy Moses his way in, then grace was always going to have to be the real basis of anyone else's hope. We can be glad that under the

new covenant, repentance through Christ brings us God's blessing, not because of our works, but because of His grace.

There is another lesson here for anyone in a position of leadership. Moses bore consequences that were bound up with the sins of those he led. Parents, teachers, coaches, and instructors know something of this. The actions of those under our care are in some sense a reflection of us, and we cannot entirely separate our own accountability from theirs. That is part of why James warns that "we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1).

Many parents have also found that becoming a parent made it easier to understand God as a Father. Parents often make decisions their children think are unfair, because the children cannot see the whole picture. In the same way, it is impossible for us to see the whole picture God sees, and so we often conclude that He is being unfair. Hebrews makes the same comparison: "God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:10–11). When we think of ourselves as children, and of the Israelites as children, we gain a much greater appreciation for God's love and patience.

Moses' final years were not the greatest of his life. After so many years of leading a rebellious people, he seems at times to be weary and on edge, ready to hand his ministry to another, much as Elijah would be after him. And as God closed Elijah's ministry and commissioned Elisha, He closed Moses' ministry and commissioned Joshua: "Go up to the top of Pisgah and look west and north and south and east. Look at the land with your

own eyes, since you are not going to cross this Jordan. But commission Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him, for he will lead this people across and will cause them to inherit the land that you will see" (Deuteronomy 3:27-28).

In God's eyes, how we end matters greatly. Near the end of his life, Paul could say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). But in the same letter he mentions Demas, once his co-worker, who deserted him "because he loved this world" (2 Timothy 4:10). Two men, both close to the apostle, both with real ministry behind them. One finished the race; the other walked away near the finish line. Moses' frustrated final years fit somewhere between those two. There was real failure and real consequence, but it was not the same thing as abandoning the faith. A hard ending is not necessarily a lost one. And Moses' last season was also the season in which he gave Israel this book.

Chapter 4 marks a turning point. Having reviewed the history, Moses now calls Israel to obedience: "Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you" (Deuteronomy 4:1).

There is a recurring pattern in Deuteronomy: remember, know, and obey. The opening chapters are devoted largely to remembering the journey so far. The long middle section, chapters 5 through 26, is devoted to knowing the Law in detail. And the closing chapters are devoted to the call to obey and the consequences of obedience and disobedience. Obedience can only come from knowing God's Word, which is why Moses is about to review the Law given at Sinai for a generation that had

not heard it firsthand. And knowing is rooted in remembering: remembering the destructive path we were on before God rescued us, remembering who He is and what He has done.

Then comes a command that shapes the whole book: "Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you" (Deuteronomy 4:2).

This emphasis on doing exactly what God said runs throughout Scripture. When God gave instructions for the tabernacle, He told Moses to make it "exactly like the pattern I will show you" (Exodus 25:9). When He told Saul to destroy the Amalekites completely, Saul spared the best of the livestock for sacrifice, and God rejected him as king. Samuel's words have echoed through the centuries: "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22). As far as God was concerned, ninety percent obedience was disobedience. Jesus asks no less: "In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples" (Luke 14:33).

Many of us surrender our lives to God in pieces: our time, our finances, our families, our work, one area at a time. But true intimacy with Christ requires that nothing stand between us and God. That is the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

The command not to add or subtract also helps us understand the Pharisees. They are often described as people who paid too much attention to the letter of the Law and neglected its spirit. But Deuteronomy calls for exacting attention to every letter of the Law, and Jesus Himself said that "not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is

accomplished" (Matthew 5:18). A large part of the Pharisees' problem was that they added to and subtracted from God's Word through their own traditions. Jesus told them, "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.... Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition" (Mark 7:8, 13). Their traditions eventually took on an authority equal to or greater than Scripture itself.

To be complete, we should add that Jesus also rebuked them for neglecting "the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness" (Matthew 23:23). In God's Law, the letter and the spirit were never meant to be separated. The heart of the Law and its specific commands belong together.

For Christians, there is a further distinction to keep in mind. We are not under the Law of Moses, the old covenant, but under the law of Christ. Paul writes that God "has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). Some use that verse to teach that we should follow the spirit of God's commands rather than their letter. But in context, Paul is contrasting the old covenant written on stone with the new covenant of the Spirit (Romans 8:1–4). He is not giving us permission to treat God's words loosely.

The principle of Deuteronomy 4:2 runs through the whole Bible. Paul told the Corinthians, "Do not go beyond what is written" (1 Corinthians 4:6). And the Bible closes with a nearly identical warning: "If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City" (Revelation 22:18–19). Whatever separates

Deuteronomy from Revelation, more than a thousand years and a new covenant, Scripture's view of itself stays consistent. God's revealed word is complete as given, not raw material for later editing in either direction.

Many controversies in the history of the church have arisen from violating this principle. The Reformers summarized it in the phrase "Scripture alone." As if the Bible were not sufficient, people go looking for new revelations, new experiences, and new doctrines. Leaders who struggle to hold their followers' attention with Scripture's plain teaching are tempted to introduce ideas foreign to the text.

The same temptation can show up in worship. It is possible to rely on dimmed lights, carefully timed music, and endless repetition to produce a feeling that we then call a spiritual breakthrough, while the plain command to love the Lord our God stirs us very little. Devotion produced that way rarely survives ordinary daily life, and then we wonder why there is such a gap between what people profess and how they live. We should be careful not to overcorrect: emotion in worship is not wrong, and Scripture is full of exuberant praise and heartfelt lament. But true spiritual growth does not come from a well-produced experience. People do not need something beyond the Word. They need the Word. They do not need a manufactured experience of God. They need God.

There is nothing new about this temptation. Israel demanded a golden calf precisely because Moses had been delayed on the mountain, and the people wanted something immediate and tangible rather than the slower discipline of simply trusting God's word. The remedy is the same now as it was then: to return to God's Word itself, to weep over our sin

not because the music has moved us but because we have neglected His truth, and to make daily reading of the Bible not merely something we want to do, but something we must do. Israel, in every generation, fell precisely because it forgot God's Word, added to it, or took something away from it.

Moses then points to a recent example. At Baal Peor, the Lord destroyed those who followed Baal, "but all of you who held fast to the LORD your God are still alive today" (Deuteronomy 4:4). Obedience was not an abstract matter. It was the difference between life and death.

Then Moses gives a remarkable reason for obedience: "Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?" (Deuteronomy 4:6-7).

Israel's obedience was meant to be a testimony. God did not choose Israel because they were better than other nations. As Moses will say later, they were the fewest of all peoples. He chose them so that His own greatness would be displayed to everyone else. They were to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6), and a priest stands between God and others, representing God to them. Choosing Israel never meant that God did not care about the other nations. Israel was meant to be a priestly nation drawing other peoples to Him.

Sadly, Israel's later history shows how easily that purpose was forgotten. By the time of the prophets, Israel had largely come to treat its chosen status as a private privilege. The prophet Jonah was actually angry when God showed mercy to

the repentant city of Nineveh (Jonah 4:1–2), exactly the opposite of the purpose for which Israel had been chosen.

The same is true for us. Our election should never be an excuse for arrogance or complacency. It should be our motivation for bringing others to the Lord. Jesus said, "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Peter adds, "Live such good lives among the pagans that... they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Peter 2:12). Let us obey His Word so that our lives become a compelling reason for others to come to Him.

Then comes the verse at the very heart of this book: "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them" (Deuteronomy 4:9). Remember, and teach others to remember. Forgetting is not an innocent accident here. It is a danger to be guarded against, deliberately and daily.

What was Israel to remember? Above all, the day they stood before the Lord at Horeb, when the mountain blazed with fire. "Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice" (Deuteronomy 4:12). And Moses draws a direct conclusion: "You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol" (Deuteronomy 4:15–16). God revealed Himself through words, not through an image. To make an image of Him was to reduce the living, speaking God to something human beings could manufacture and control. The same was true of

worshiping the sun, moon, and stars (Deuteronomy 4:19). God's people were to worship the Creator, not anything He had made.

Only one has ever truly revealed the invisible God in visible form. "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (John 1:18). "The Son is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). The prohibition of images at Sinai was not because God would never be seen, but because no human craftsman could ever depict Him. God Himself would provide His own image, in His Son.

Moses reminds the people what God had done for them: "But as for you, the LORD took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance" (Deuteronomy 4:20). And then comes a warning that should make us tremble: "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God" (Deuteronomy 4:24). God's jealousy is not petty envy. It is the passionate commitment of a husband who will not share his bride with another. Hebrews quotes these words to warn believers under the new covenant as well: "for our 'God is a consuming fire'" (Hebrews 12:29).

Then Moses looks ahead, and what he sees is sobering. He predicts that after Israel has lived in the land a long time, they will become corrupt and make idols, and God will scatter them among the nations, where only a few will survive (Deuteronomy 4:25–28). But that is not the end: "But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey him. For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or

forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath" (Deuteronomy 4:29–31).

Before Israel had even entered the land, God told them they would lose it, and then promised that even exile would not be the end. Centuries later, Jeremiah wrote to the exiles in Babylon with the same promise: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). God's discipline is severe, but His mercy is deeper still. He does not forget His covenant.

The chapter closes with one of the most beautiful passages in Deuteronomy. "Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of?" (Deuteronomy 4:32). Has any people heard God speaking out of fire and lived? Has any god ever taken a nation for himself out of another nation, by signs and wonders and a mighty hand? "You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other" (Deuteronomy 4:35).

And for the first time in the book, Moses names the reason behind it all: "Because he loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength" (Deuteronomy 4:37). Everything God had done for Israel flowed from His love.

"Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other. Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you" (Deuteronomy 4:39–40). That is the whole message of

Deuteronomy in a few sentences: remember who God is and what He has done, and obey Him, for your own good and the good of your children.

Moses' reminder of God's greatness also has a humbling effect. Any of us who have grown overconfident, thinking a task would be simple because of our own ability, only to discover how wrong we were, know how easily we raise ourselves too high. The God who created heaven and earth has no equal. As John the Baptist said, "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30).

The chapter ends by noting that Moses set aside three cities of refuge east of the Jordan (Deuteronomy 4:41–43), and then introduces the second and longest of his speeches: "This is the law Moses set before the Israelites" (Deuteronomy 4:44). The history is complete. Now Israel must hear the Law again.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. God told Moses, "Do not be afraid of him, for I have delivered him into your hands." Can you think of times when God was leading you to take a step of faith and you held back? Instead of asking "what if," what is your "now what" today?
2. Moses pleaded to enter the land, but did not appeal to his years of faithful service, and God still said no. What does this teach you about the difference between works and grace?
3. Paul finished the race, while Demas deserted near the end. What would it look like for you to finish well? What might tempt you to walk away before the finish line?

4. "Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it." In what ways are Christians today tempted to add to God's Word, or to take something away from it?
5. Israel's obedience was meant to show the nations "a wise and understanding people," with a God who is near whenever they pray. How does your obedience, or disobedience, affect how others see God?
6. "Only be careful... so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen." What has God done in your life that you are in danger of forgetting? How can you remember it and pass it on to the next generation?

Chapter Three

Deuteronomy 5-7

With chapter 5, Moses begins his second and longest speech, and he begins it where the covenant itself began: with the Ten Commandments. "Hear, Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them" (Deuteronomy 5:1). Then he says something surprising: "It was not with our ancestors that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today" (Deuteronomy 5:3).

Strictly speaking, the covenant at Sinai had been made with the previous generation, and most of them were now dead. Many of those listening to Moses had been children at Sinai, or had not yet been born. But Moses insists that the covenant was theirs, as though they had been standing at the foot of the mountain themselves. Every generation must own the covenant personally. Faith cannot be inherited like a piece of land. It must be received anew. The same is true for us. It is not enough that our parents believed, or that our church has a long history. The call of God comes to each generation as though it were being spoken for the first time.

Then Moses repeats the Ten Commandments. The wording is almost identical to Exodus 20, with one striking difference. In Exodus, the reason given for the Sabbath was creation: God rested on the seventh day. In Deuteronomy, the reason is redemption: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day" (Deuteronomy

5:15). A people who had once worked without rest under a cruel master were now commanded to rest, and to give rest to their servants and animals. Even in the heart of the Law, Moses calls Israel to remember.

The first commandment sets the foundation for all the others: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Deuteronomy 5:7). A "god" is whatever we put first in our lives. It may be a statue of wood or stone, but it may just as easily be money, success, a relationship, comfort, or our own reputation. Our lives should be built around the one true God. Love for Him should be the motive behind everything we do. It is worth examining ourselves daily to see whether we are truly giving Him first place.

The second commandment forbids making and worshipping idols, and it gives a reason that troubles some readers: "for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Deuteronomy 5:9–10).

How can God be jealous, when jealousy is usually considered a sin? The answer lies in the difference between two kinds of jealousy. When we are jealous over something that is not ours, like resenting someone else's success or possessions, that jealousy is sinful. But when we are jealous over something that rightfully belongs to us, like a husband's jealousy for his wife's faithfulness, that jealousy is legitimate and even good. The Hebrew word carries the sense of zeal, a protective and passionate commitment to what is rightfully one's own. Paul used the same language when he wrote to the church in Corinth,

"I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). God's jealousy is not insecurity. It is the rightful jealousy of a husband over his bride. That is why Scripture so often describes idolatry as adultery.

And what about punishing children for the sin of their parents? Notice first that the verse speaks of "those who hate me," children who continue in their parents' rebellion. Later, the prophet Ezekiel makes it clear that God does not hold children guilty for sins they did not commit: "The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child" (Ezekiel 18:20). The consequences of a parent's sin, though, often reach into the lives of children and grandchildren. We see that in every generation. And notice the contrast: judgment to the third and fourth generation, but love to a thousand generations. God's mercy vastly outweighs His judgment.

A word of caution is in order as we read the Ten Commandments. Our own conviction, as we have noted before, is that Christians are not under the Law of Moses as a covenant, not even the Ten Commandments. Those commandments tell us about the holiness of God and the sinfulness of human beings, and nine of them are restated in some form in the New Testament. But our rule of life is the law of Christ, "the new way of the Spirit" (Romans 7:6), as taught by Jesus and His apostles. Many Christians understand the Ten Commandments as a summary of God's moral law that continues to bind believers, and they are careful to say that Christians keep them not to be saved but because they are saved. That difference in framework matters less than it might seem. Whether we speak of the moral

law or the law of Christ, believers are called to worship God alone, reject idols, honor parents, and refrain from murder, adultery, theft, lying, and covetousness.

After the Ten Commandments, Moses reminds Israel of how they responded at Sinai. When they heard God's voice speaking out of the fire, they were terrified. They said, "We have seen today that a person can live even if God speaks with them," but they feared they would not survive if it happened again. So they asked Moses to go near and listen for them: "Then tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey" (Deuteronomy 5:24, 27).

God's response is one of the most poignant verses in the Law: "The LORD heard you when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me, 'I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good. Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!'" (Deuteronomy 5:28–29).

What was the heart God longed for? It was a heart that truly recognized His holiness, a reverent fear that understood the danger of approaching Him carelessly, and a willingness to listen and obey what He spoke through His messenger. God has spoken through His messengers from Genesis to Revelation, and "in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:2). He has given us His complete revelation. What is often missing among God's people is not more revelation, but more reverent fear, and more obedience to what He has already said. As Paul wrote, "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Philippians 2:12–13).

Notice, too, the longing in God's words: "Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me." God knew, even as He spoke, that Israel would fail. And yet His full knowledge of the future did not keep Him from expressing something like yearning over what could have been. Foreknowledge and genuine love are not in tension. God can know exactly how the story will unfold and still voice real longing for a better outcome. That should give us confidence that He is sovereign over all things, and also that He truly cares.

Why didn't Israel obey, given the enormous blessings promised for obedience? They knew the Law. Moses had given it to them in speech and in writing. Knowledge was not their problem. Their problem was their hearts. It was the same problem that led God to bring the flood in Noah's day, when "every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5). Moses will later command Israel, "Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer" (Deuteronomy 10:16). But could they? If our hearts are naturally inclined toward evil, are we capable of circumcising them ourselves?

Both Testaments answer that this is God's own work. Moses will promise that "The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live" (Deuteronomy 30:6). Ezekiel will promise, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you" (Ezekiel 36:26). And Paul explains that "circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code" (Romans 2:29). The New Covenant is God's answer to His own longing in Deuteronomy 5:29. The same image of an inward circumcision runs from the

Law through the prophets to Paul, over roughly a thousand years, as though the Old Testament itself were reaching for a transformation that only the Spirit could finally accomplish.

We may say, and even believe, that we love the Lord with all our heart. But God does not look at outward appearance. "The LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). We can be grateful that Christ's righteousness covers us, and that His Spirit is at work within us, transforming us into His likeness day by day. Let us come before Him with a broken and contrite heart, knowing that it is the Lord alone who can change our hearts so that we can truly love Him.

Chapter 6 contains the most important passage in the book, and one of the most important in all of Scripture: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4–5).

Jewish tradition calls this passage the Shema, from its first Hebrew word, which means "Hear!" Observant Jews recite it twice a day, morning and evening. When a teacher of the law asked Jesus which commandment was the most important, Jesus did not introduce anything new. He pointed straight back to this passage: "The most important one is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength'" (Mark 12:29–30).

The Shema sets out two great pillars of Israel's faith. The first is the oneness of God. In a world filled with many gods, Israel confessed that there is only one. Christians hold that confession just as firmly. The New Testament reveals that this one God exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. John writes, "In

the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1), holding together distinction and unity in a single sentence. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God, yet the Son is not the Father, nor the Spirit. There is unity, and there is distinction. The church would spend centuries learning how to express that truth carefully, but its seed is already here, in the confession that the Lord is one.

The second pillar is love, total and undivided. Heart, soul, and strength together describe the whole person, with nothing held back. It is significant that Deuteronomy, the book most concerned with remembering, is also the book that first names love as the heart of the relationship between God and His people. Remembering and loving turn out to be the same movement of the heart described from two angles. We cannot sustain love for a God we have stopped remembering.

Some honest believers find that their hearts and their strength seem to pull in different directions. They love God, and yet doubt and weariness fight against that love. That is not a reason for despair. It is a reason to keep coming back to God's Word, day after day, and to ask Him to do what only He can do in our hearts.

Then comes a remarkably concrete command: "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:6–9).

Look at how complete this is. Every posture is covered: sitting, walking, lying down, and rising. Every field of vision is

covered: at a distance on the gates and doorposts, close at hand, and right before the eyes. Every mode of expression is covered: talking, seeing, hearing, and writing. If we might sum it up, Moses is telling Israel to always, everywhere, and in every way know and make known the Word of the Lord. How else could they love Him with all their heart, soul, and strength?

Some teachers have generalized these verses to mean simply that faith should be integrated into ordinary life. That is true, but it can water down what God intended to strengthen. It is one thing for Scripture to state a general principle, and another for us to generalize what Scripture describes in such specific detail. Jewish practice took this command very literally, with small boxes containing these very words bound to the arm and forehead, and small cases fixed to the doorposts of their homes, practices that continue to this day. Jesus did not criticize the practices themselves, but He did criticize those who made "their phylacteries wide" for show (Matthew 23:5), keeping the outward form long after the inward love had faded.

Notice what comes before the instruction about children: "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts." Parents cannot impress on their children what is not already in themselves. The teaching must flow from the parents' own love for God.

The Law of Moses is not binding on Christians as a covenant, but the command to love the Lord with all our heart is also a command of the New Covenant, and the means of cultivating that love in the Old Testament are relevant for us today. How exposed are we to the Word of God? How exposed are our children? Paul reminded Timothy that "from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for

salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). That knowledge had been passed down from his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). Paul told fathers to "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

There is no weightier responsibility for us as Christians than passing our faith on to the generations after us. Are we diligently teaching our children the Word of God? Is Scripture part of our daily conversation? Is our children's education pointing them to God as the source of all knowledge and wisdom, and to the glory of Christ as the goal of all their learning and ambition? We cannot guarantee our children's faith; only God can give them new hearts. But we can make sure they have heard.

Then Moses gives a warning that is easy to overlook: "When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers... a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Deuteronomy 6:10–12).

The danger Moses warns against is complacency. When we are comfortable, we can become self-sufficient and forget our need for God, especially in good times. Prosperity is a more effective way of forgetting God than hardship ever was. James reminds us that "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights" (James 1:17). The very comfort that makes forgetting God feel natural is itself something God gave. That is the trap of complacency: the blessing becomes the cover for forgetting the One who gave it.

How do we avoid it? By continually giving thanks and praise to God for His blessings, and by keeping our focus on Him rather than on what He has given us. Complacency comes when our attention shifts from the Giver to the gifts. Remembering that it is only by God's grace that our sin has been washed away, and only by His Spirit that we can glorify Him at all, keeps us humble and grateful.

The next verses have a special significance. "Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name.... Do not put the LORD your God to the test as you did at Massah" (Deuteronomy 6:13, 16). When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus answered all three temptations with quotations from this part of Deuteronomy. "It is written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'" (Matthew 4:7). "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'" (Matthew 4:10). And His first answer, "Man shall not live on bread alone," comes from Deuteronomy 8:3, which we will read in the next chapter. Facing the adversary directly, the Son of God fought not with a display of power, but with Scripture already stored in His heart, from this very book about remembering. What a lesson for us!

Chapter 6 ends with a scene that brings the command to teach children to life: "In the future, when your son asks you, 'What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?' tell him: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand'" (Deuteronomy 6:20–21). Notice that the answer to a question about the Law is a story of rescue. The child was to learn not only rules, but who God is and what He has done. For

Christians, that story centers on Christ, "who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness" (Titus 2:14).

And the chapter closes with a verse that should not be missed: "And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness" (Deuteronomy 6:25). Notice the word "all." Israel would be counted righteous only by obeying all the commands, not some of them. As James writes, "whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10). Paul makes the same argument: "For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law'" (Galatians 3:10).

Even if the people could keep some of the Law, they could not keep all of it. Even if they could keep all of it some of the time, they could not keep all of it all of the time. God, who is perfect, requires perfect obedience. Israel was meant to learn from the Law that they could not keep God's commands and had to rest wholly on His grace. "So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian" (Galatians 3:24–25). The Law's inability to justify was not a design flaw. It was a completed function. And Paul, who wrote those words, also insisted that "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (Romans 7:12). The Law did exactly what it was given to do. It revealed God's holiness and our need for a Savior.

Chapter 7 turns to the nations of Canaan. God would drive out seven nations "larger and stronger than you," and Israel was to "make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy"

(Deuteronomy 7:1–2). They were not to intermarry with them, "for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods" (Deuteronomy 7:4). They were to break down their altars and burn their idols. "Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 7:25).

These commands are among the hardest in Scripture for modern readers, and we will consider the question of warfare more fully in chapter 20. But several things should be held together now. God describes His judgment on these nations as the result of long-accumulated sin, including the sacrifice of their own children (Deuteronomy 12:31). The prohibition of intermarriage was religious, not ethnic. Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabite were welcomed into Israel and even into the line of the Messiah (Matthew 1:5). And Christians have consistently understood that these commands applied to a specific moment in Israel's history and give no authority for violence by God's people today.

Israel would be tempted emotionally, sexually, and materially by the peoples and idols of Canaan. Their task was not merely to resist those influences, but to remove them completely, as one would remove a spreading infection rather than simply trying to contain it. Israel's failure to do so led eventually to its own downfall. The New Testament applies the principle to our own lives: "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature" (Colossians 3:5). Jesus spoke even more starkly about dealing decisively with sin (Matthew 5:29–30). We would do well not to treat sin lightly, or to place ourselves where we can easily be drawn into it.

In the middle of these hard commands comes one of the most tender passages in the Bible: "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery" (Deuteronomy 7:6–8).

Why did God choose Israel? Because He loved them. And why did He love them? Not because of anything in them. The circular answer is exactly the point. God's love has no cause outside Himself. It was not earned, and it cannot be lost by being unworthy of it.

Believers who grasp this for themselves are often moved to tears. One reader wrote that when she was reminded that God had chosen her, she almost wept over His mercy and fathomless love, which had nothing to do with who she was, or what she had done, was doing, or ever would do. Christians understand the doctrine of election in different ways, and we will not settle those debates here. But the response she describes is one every Christian tradition recognizes and affirms: overwhelmed gratitude for a love that clearly is not earned. That may be the most important lesson of this passage, however its harder questions are resolved.

"Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

Then come promises of remarkable blessing. If Israel paid attention to God's laws and kept them, "He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. He will bless the fruit of your womb, the crops of your land.... The LORD will keep you free from every disease" (Deuteronomy 7:13, 15). They would be blessed more than any other people.

This passage is exactly the kind that some teachers use to argue that obedience guarantees health and wealth for believers today. And it is true that the passage promised Israel prosperity, fertility, and health. But the same covenant also promised curses for disobedience, and in Deuteronomy 28 the curses take up far more space than the blessings. We rarely hear prosperity teachers dwell on those. If we apply the blessings to ourselves, should we not also apply the curses? And Paul reminds us that anyone who relies on the Law places himself under its curse, because the Law requires perfect obedience (Galatians 3:10). We cannot claim the blessing side of the covenant's terms while quietly assuming that the perfect obedience clause does not apply to us.

The truth is that the old covenant, with its conditional material blessings and curses tied to life in the land, has been made obsolete (Hebrews 8:13), replaced by a better covenant. We do not claim its blessings or its curses directly for ourselves. We learn from them about God's character and our need for grace, and we follow the law of Christ.

One reader, who grew up in churches during a season when prosperity teaching was heavily emphasized, described how it shaped his generation. Believers were taught to repent, receive the Spirit, and become "victorious." But victorious for whom? Worldly success became the measure of spirituality. The

purpose of repentance was no longer God's glory but our own success, and the blessing became the goal, while the One who blesses was left out of the picture. He confessed that he still struggles to stay on the right track. That honest testimony is a sobering confirmation that Moses' warning about prosperity was not overcautious.

In this age of grace, God's blessing is often more spiritual than material. We can certainly look to God to provide for our needs, and He often does so generously. But the ultimate blessing is knowing God Himself, whether or not other things follow. Many Christians feel they are "losing out" because they do not see visible, material blessing. But our God deserves to be trusted for far more than prosperity. The three young men in the book of Daniel, facing execution for refusing to worship an idol, told the king, "the God we serve is able to deliver us from it.... But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods" (Daniel 3:17-18). We should obey God not for the sake of His blessings, but because we love Him.

The chapter ends with a detail that encourages anyone who is discouraged by slow progress: "The LORD your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you" (Deuteronomy 7:22). Victory would come, but not all at once, and God had good reasons for the pace. The same is often true of the victories God gives us over sin. Sanctification is usually a matter of "little by little." We should not be discouraged that the work is not finished overnight. The God who promised victory is working at exactly the pace He knows is best.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Moses told a new generation that the covenant was made "with us, with all of us who are alive here today." In what ways have you made your faith truly your own, rather than something inherited from your family or church?
2. God is "a jealous God," with the rightful jealousy of a husband over his bride. What in your life competes for the love and loyalty that belong to God alone?
3. "Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me." What does it mean to have a heart of reverent fear toward God? Why can only God give us such a heart?
4. Moses told parents to impress God's Word on their children at home, on the road, when lying down and when getting up. What would it look like for God's Word to be more present in your home and conversations?
5. Moses warned that when Israel was comfortable and satisfied, they would be tempted to forget God. Where has comfort or success made you less aware of your need for Him?
6. God chose Israel not because they were many or impressive, but because He loved them. How does knowing that God's love for you is unearned change the way you think about obedience and blessing?

Chapter Four

Deuteronomy 8–10

If Deuteronomy is a book about remembering, chapter 8 may be its clearest statement of why remembering matters. Moses looks back over forty years in the wilderness and explains what God had been doing. Then he looks ahead to the land of plenty and warns that prosperity would be a greater danger than the desert had ever been. Chapters 9 and 10 continue the theme: Israel must remember that they did not earn the land, remember how often they had rebelled, and remember what God actually asks of them.

"Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 8:2–3).

The wilderness was not an accident. God led them there, on purpose, to humble them, to test them, and to reveal what was in their hearts. He deliberately let them go hungry, and then fed them with food they had never seen before, one day at a time. Hunger exposed their dependence; manna taught them where life ultimately comes from. And through it all, God cared for them in ways they could easily have overlooked: "Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years" (Deuteronomy 8:4).

Then Moses explains the relationship behind it all: "Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you" (Deuteronomy 8:5). The wilderness was a Father's training of His children. Hebrews says the same thing to believers under the new covenant: "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?" (Hebrews 12:7).

God was preparing a people not merely to endure deprivation, but to live faithfully in abundance. As Moses would say a few verses later, He fed them with manna "to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you" (Deuteronomy 8:16). Hardship was never the goal. It was the training ground.

Is your life feeling like one long wilderness experience, filled with trials and hardships? Scripture suggests that God often leads His people through suffering. Even Jesus "learned obedience from what he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). Hardship humbles us, reminding us that we are dust. Moses himself prayed, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). How have we responded to the trials God has allowed in our lives? Have we bitterly complained and forgotten His Word, or have we embraced the spirit of Christ, who prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42)?

We should be careful, though, in how we apply this passage. Israel received an inspired explanation of this particular wilderness history. We usually do not know all of God's purposes in an illness, a loss, or another person's wrongdoing. Trusting God does not require pretending we know why each event happened. And notice that Jesus, in Gethsemane,

expressed deep distress and asked for the cup to pass before He affirmed His submission. Faith and tears are not opposites. Lament is a way of bringing grief to God rather than turning away from Him.

Nor does Hebrews 5:8 mean that Jesus needed correction for past disobedience. He never sinned. He experienced the cost of obedience through suffering, and so became a High Priest who understands our weakness: "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). The call to endure is joined to the assurance that help may be sought. We are not commanded to put on a heroic show of self-sufficiency in religious language.

The practical response to our own wilderness seasons may include receiving help, changing an unwise course, resisting wrongdoing, or finding rest. None of these contradicts submission to God, as long as they are pursued truthfully and within obedience. And a church should never explain away another person's distress with a lesson about discipline while withholding the help it could give. Seeking God's kingdom first means letting His priorities shape our response to difficulty. Wilderness faith grows as honest dependence replaces both resentful control and the appearance of strength.

The words of Deuteronomy 8:3 are familiar for another reason. When Jesus was fasting in the wilderness and Satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread, He answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). That was not a random verse. Jesus was being tested in the wilderness, in hunger, just as Israel had been. Where Israel grumbled for bread

and forgot the God who fed them, Jesus refused the shortcut and held fast to the very words He quoted. Many have seen in this more than coincidence. Jesus was reliving Israel's wilderness test, and this time, passing it.

Notice also what Jesus did not do. He did not deny that He was hungry. He insisted that even real physical need does not override our dependence on God's Word. That is a good model for us. Reading and meditating on Scripture does not compete with our legitimate needs; it is the deeper dependence beneath them. Many of us find ourselves lazy about this discipline, drifting with the world to satisfy our own desires rather than feeding on God's Word. Jeremiah described Scripture as food: "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight" (Jeremiah 15:16). Let us not grow weary of eating this healthy spiritual food every day.

Then Moses describes the land they were about to enter: "For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing" (Deuteronomy 8:7–9). After forty years of manna, what a contrast!

And then comes a simple command: "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you" (Deuteronomy 8:10). This verse is one of the roots of the Jewish and Christian practice of giving thanks at meals. Its purpose was not merely to create a moment for prayer, but to protect Israel from forgetting God at the very moment their needs and wants were satisfied. There is an irony here: a habit designed to interrupt complacency can itself

become a routine, said quickly and without much thought precisely because it is repeated so often. Let our table prayers be genuine reminders of the Lord's goodness to us.

Then comes the warning at the heart of the chapter: "Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Deuteronomy 8:11–14).

And the specific form that pride would take: "You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:17–18).

It is so easy to become complacent when life is going well, to grow proud and forget that it was the Lord who provided everything we have. Our skill, our education, our hard work, our opportunities, and our health are all gifts from Him. That does not mean our work is unimportant. God usually provides through ordinary effort. But it means that we should never mistake the tools God has given us for the source of what we have. God is the reason we exist, and the reason we have anything at all. We need to look back regularly and remember what the Lord has done in our lives, so that when we are doing well, we give praise where it is due.

Moses ends the chapter with a sobering warning: "If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and

worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed" (Deuteronomy 8:19). The words "remember" and "do not forget" appear roughly two dozen times in Deuteronomy. It is striking that we usually excuse our forgetfulness as something incidental, outside our control. But in Deuteronomy, forgetting God is not treated as an innocent lapse of memory. It is treated as a moral failure, serious enough to bring judgment, because remembering was always meant to be the engine of obedience.

The many reminders in this book are not a sign that Israel was uniquely forgetful. They are an accurate picture of how memory works for all of us. Peter felt the same responsibility toward his readers: "So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body" (2 Peter 1:12–13). Neither Moses nor Peter treated reminders as an insult to anyone's intelligence. Both treated them as basic spiritual maintenance. And Deuteronomy 6 had already given Israel the practical way to remember: keeping God's words on their hearts, talking about them all day long, and teaching them to their children.

Chapter 9 turns to a different kind of forgetting: forgetting where their blessings came from. "After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, 'The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness.' No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you" (Deuteronomy 9:4). And again: "Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is

giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people" (Deuteronomy 9:6).

Moses has now said it twice in three chapters. Israel was not chosen because they were great; they were the fewest of all peoples (Deuteronomy 7:7). And they were not given the land because they were righteous; they were stubborn and rebellious. Nothing in them obligated God to love them.

The same is true of us. None of us should think there was anything in ourselves that compelled God to choose us for salvation. Paul describes our condition before we were saved: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world.... Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath" (Ephesians 2:1–3). And then comes one of the most profound verses in the Bible: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4–5).

God made us alive while we were still dead. Our own conviction is that God did not wait for us to understand and believe the gospel first, since dead people cannot do anything. He gave us new life by His Spirit, and then we believed. It was not that we chose God, but that He chose us. And why did He make us alive in Christ? Just as with Israel, there was nothing in us to motivate Him. It was simply "because of his great love for us."

We recognize that thoughtful Christians in other traditions read Ephesians 2:5 differently, understanding God's grace as enabling a real human response rather than producing it unilaterally. Both views affirm that salvation is entirely a matter

of grace, and they differ on how grace and human choice relate at the moment of conversion. What both share is the conclusion this passage drives home: whatever the precise mechanism, the entire reason for anyone's salvation lies in God's character and initiative, not in anything the person being saved contributed or deserved. To God alone be all the glory!

Then Moses gives Israel a painful history lesson, to make sure they would not forget how undeserving they were. "Remember this and never forget how you aroused the anger of the LORD your God in the wilderness. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the LORD" (Deuteronomy 9:7).

He recounts the golden calf. While he was on the mountain receiving the stone tablets written by the finger of God, the people made an idol. When he came down and saw it, he threw the tablets to the ground and broke them before their eyes. Then he fell before the Lord for another forty days and nights: "I ate no bread and drank no water, because of all the sin you had committed" (Deuteronomy 9:18). He adds a detail that Exodus does not mention: "And the LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him, but at that time I prayed for Aaron too" (Deuteronomy 9:20). Aaron, the high priest, owed his life to his brother's intercession.

Then Moses lists other places of rebellion: "You also made the LORD angry at Taberah, at Massah and at Kibroth Hattaavah" (Deuteronomy 9:22), and at Kadesh Barnea, where they refused to enter the land. And he sums it up with a sentence no leader would want to say to his people: "You have been rebellious against the LORD ever since I have known you" (Deuteronomy 9:24).

Moses' prayer during those forty days is worth noticing. He did not appeal to Israel's goodness, because there was none. He appealed to God's own covenant and reputation: "Sovereign LORD, do not destroy your people, your own inheritance that you redeemed by your great power.... Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Overlook the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin" (Deuteronomy 9:26–27). In a book full of commands for Israel to remember, here Moses asks God to remember. That is the ground of every intercessory prayer: not our worthiness, but God's faithfulness to His own promises.

Moses' anger at the golden calf was righteous. But it is worth pausing to note how easily our own anger clouds our judgment. When we are overcome by anger toward someone else, what is clearly wrong can start to feel justified. Feuding with one another is a serious sin, and it rarely comes alone. James warns that "human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires" (James 1:20). The feeling of moral clarity that often comes with anger is frequently the least trustworthy moment for making moral decisions. Let us get our bearings, and hold no grudges.

Chapter 10 describes how God graciously renewed the covenant after the golden calf. He told Moses to cut two new stone tablets, and He wrote the Ten Commandments on them again, and Moses placed them in the ark (Deuteronomy 10:1–5). The broken covenant was restored, not because Israel deserved it, but because God is merciful. God also set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark and to minister before Him, and "the LORD is their inheritance" (Deuteronomy 10:9).

Then comes one of the great summary statements of the Old Testament: "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?" (Deuteronomy 10:12-13).

Notice that this is not one requirement but several, stacked together: fear, walk, love, serve, observe. And notice the last phrase: "for your own good." God's commands are not arbitrary burdens. They are given out of love, for the good of those who receive them. Centuries later, the prophet Micah distilled the same question into three memorable phrases: "And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Generation after generation, Israel's prophets kept returning to this question and landing in the same place: not ritual, but the heart.

The list begins with fear. It all starts with a reverent fear of the Lord. That fear produces obedience, obedience shows love, and love leads to service. But as we grow familiar with God, we can grow too comfortable and lose that holy fear. And as we lose the fear, we stop obeying, loving, and serving.

The word "fear" sounds negative to many people today. But even a quick survey of Proverbs shows the fear of the Lord in an overwhelmingly positive light. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7) and "the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). "Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress" (Proverbs 14:26). "The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life" (Proverbs 14:27). "Better a little with the fear of the LORD than great wealth with turmoil" (Proverbs 15:16).

"The fear of the LORD leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble" (Proverbs 19:23). The fear of the Lord even leads to a good night's sleep! Perhaps the old hymn says it best: "'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved." The fear that sounds at first like something to avoid turns out to be the very thing that produces security, peace, and life.

Then Moses says something astonishing: "To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the LORD set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations—as it is today" (Deuteronomy 10:14–15).

Think about that. The God who owns the highest heavens chose to love a small, stubborn people. And He has chosen to love us, even though we are often too busy with our own lives to try to understand who He is. How can you love someone who barely acknowledges your presence? Yet that does not stop God from loving us. Paul traces that love back even further: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). Deuteronomy describes God's love reaching back to Israel's ancestors; Ephesians describes it reaching back before there were any ancestors to choose.

If we stop for a moment and let this sink in, how can we not fear the Lord? How can we not want to walk in His ways, love Him, and serve Him with all our heart and soul? When we take time, even in the middle of our biggest problems, to meditate on who God is, everything else falls into second place. That is why God puts the fear of the Lord first. When we understand who He is, walking with Him, loving Him, and serving Him follow

naturally. Spending time at His feet is not just a matter of getting our orders for the day. It is getting to know God.

Moses then calls Israel to "Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer" (Deuteronomy 10:16). And he grounds that call in God's character: "For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:17–19).

Notice how the great and awesome God is described. He is not only mighty; He is the defender of the most vulnerable, the fatherless, the widow, and the foreigner. The One who rules over all gods cares for those who have no one else to care for them. And His people are to be like Him. Israel's own memory of being foreigners in Egypt was meant to shape how they treated foreigners in their own land. James echoes this when he writes that "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress" (James 1:27). The fear of the Lord and love for the vulnerable belong together.

The chapter ends with a reminder of God's faithfulness: "Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky" (Deuteronomy 10:22). Seventy people had become a nation, exactly as God had promised Abraham. Remembering that would help them trust Him for everything that lay ahead.

So these chapters call us to remember in three ways. We remember God's discipline in the wilderness, and trust that He is a Father who trains His children for their good. We remember that every blessing comes from His hand, and not from our own strength. And we remember our own stubbornness, so that we never imagine that we deserved His love. In every hardship, we are called to trust Him. In every success, we are called to praise Him. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. God led Israel through the wilderness "to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart." How have hardships revealed what is in your heart? How can you bring your honest struggles to God without losing faith?
2. Jesus answered Satan's temptation with Deuteronomy 8:3, "Man shall not live on bread alone." How much do you rely on God's Word as daily food? What could help you feed on it more consistently?
3. "You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.'" In what areas of your life are you tempted to take credit for what God has given you?
4. Moses reminded Israel twice that they did not receive the land because of their righteousness. How does remembering your own undeservedness shape the way you view others?
5. "What does the LORD your God ask of you?" Moses answered: fear, walk, love, serve, and observe. Which of these is most lacking in your life right now?

6. The great and awesome God "defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner." Who are the vulnerable people around you, and how could you reflect God's care for them this week?

Chapter Five

Deuteronomy 11-13

Chapter 11 brings Moses' introduction to the Law to a close with one more great appeal, and one phrase dominates it: "love the LORD your God." It appears at the very beginning of the chapter: "Love the LORD your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always" (Deuteronomy 11:1). It appears again in verse 13 and again in verse 22. It is as if Moses were boiling the whole Law down to a single command. Do this, and everything else will follow.

So is that all there is to it? Not quite. Notice that in every one of those verses, love for God is tied to keeping His commands. Moses piles up the terms, "his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands," to make the point that love for God is not selective enthusiasm. Israel was not invited to cherish a warm feeling about God while ignoring what He said.

We often separate loving the Lord from obeying the Lord, but the Bible consistently teaches that loving God means obeying Him. Jesus said it plainly: "If you love me, keep my commands" (John 14:15). And again: "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (John 14:23). Obedience flows from love, and it opens the way to a deeper communion with God. It is not mere compliance with an impersonal rule. It is the response of people welcomed into God's own presence.

How then do we love God? Scripture answers that one of the clearest ways is by loving our neighbor. "For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14). And how do we love our neighbor?

By serving them, putting their good before our own. John makes the connection even tighter: "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar" (1 John 4:20). Love for others is not simply something we add to our love for God. It is the evidence that our love for God is real. Until serving others becomes a way of life rather than an occasional act, we may be doing good things for reasons that do not truly glorify God. Most of us need to serve ourselves less and serve others more.

Moses then reminds his audience of what made them different from their children: "Remember today that your children were not the ones who saw and experienced the discipline of the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 11:2). This generation had seen God's mighty acts with their own eyes, some as children in Egypt, all of them in the wilderness. They were eyewitnesses. Their children would not be. That was exactly why they had to remember and pass on what they had seen.

Then Moses describes a feature of the Promised Land that is easy to overlook: "The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end" (Deuteronomy 11:10–12).

Egypt's agriculture depended on the Nile, a river that flooded dependably every year. Farmers could channel its water to their fields by hand, digging ditches and opening them with their feet. Canaan had no such river. Its crops depended on rain,

which fell in its seasons, the autumn and spring rains, or did not fall at all. In Egypt, a farmer might think his harvest came from his own labor and a reliable river. In Canaan, he would have to look up.

And God tied that rain directly to Israel's faithfulness: "So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul—then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains.... Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut up the heavens so that it will not rain" (Deuteronomy 11:13–14, 16–17).

That dependence on rain was not simply an agricultural fact. It was a built-in, recurring test of trust. A land that depends on rainfall rather than a river has no backup when God withholds His provision. And that is exactly what happened in Israel's later history. When Solomon dedicated the temple, he prayed about times "when the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you" (1 Kings 8:35). In the days of King Ahab, when Israel had turned to Baal, Elijah announced, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word" (1 Kings 17:1). It is fitting that Baal was the Canaanite storm god, believed to control the rain. The very thing Israel most needed to survive was deliberately tied to the relationship they kept struggling to maintain, and the drought exposed the powerlessness of the god they had turned to.

In modern Israel, much of the country's water now depends on engineering: pipelines, desalination, and careful

management of scarce resources. There is nothing wrong with that; wise stewardship of resources is a good gift. But it is a reminder of how easily any of us can come to rely on our own ingenuity more than on God's provision, even in a land He once promised to water directly from heaven.

And yet God's desire has always been to bless. The prophet Isaiah, after describing Israel's stubbornness, wrote, "Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion" (Isaiah 30:18), and promised a day when God would send rain for the seed and streams on every high hill (Isaiah 30:23–25). It is not God's reluctance that stands in the way of His blessings, but His people's stubbornness. Lord, we thank You that even though we are undeserving and unfaithful, You still long to be gracious to us.

The chapter ends by setting two options before Israel: "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known" (Deuteronomy 11:26–28). When they entered the land, they were to proclaim the blessings from Mount Gerizim and the curses from Mount Ebal, two mountains facing each other across the valley at Shechem (Deuteronomy 11:29). We will see that ceremony described in chapter 27.

With chapter 12, Moses begins the detailed laws that make up the heart of the book. And the first law concerns worship. Israel was to destroy every place where the Canaanites had worshiped their gods: "on the high mountains, on the hills and under every spreading tree" (Deuteronomy 12:2). Instead, "you

are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling" (Deuteronomy 12:5). Sacrifices were to be offered only there.

Moses admits that in the wilderness, worship had been less regulated: "You are not to do as we do here today, everyone doing as they see fit" (Deuteronomy 12:8). Once they settled in the land, worship would follow specific instructions about when, where, and how. Sadly, the phrase "everyone doing as they see fit" would become the refrain of the book of Judges, describing the chaos that followed when Israel forgot God's Law: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit" (Judges 21:25).

Why one place? The Canaanites worshiped their many gods at countless local shrines, and those shrines were places of immorality and even child sacrifice. A single central sanctuary protected Israel from blending the worship of the Lord with pagan practices. It also expressed a theological truth: there is one God, and He decides how He is to be approached. "You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods" (Deuteronomy 12:31).

Moses even warned Israel against curiosity about how the Canaanites worshiped: "be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, 'How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same'" (Deuteronomy 12:30). The temptation was not merely to worship other gods, but to worship the true God in the manner of the nations, borrowing their methods because they seemed effective or appealing. That temptation has never gone away. The church in every

generation is tempted to adopt the methods of the surrounding culture without asking whether they fit the character of the God we worship.

And the chapter ends by repeating the principle we saw in chapter 4: "See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it" (Deuteronomy 12:32).

In the midst of these regulations, chapter 12 also emphasizes joy. When Israel came to the place God chose, they were to bring their offerings, "And there rejoice before the LORD your God—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns" (Deuteronomy 12:12). Worship was meant to be a family celebration that included servants and Levites, not a grim duty. And Moses adds, "Be careful not to neglect the Levites as long as you live in your land" (Deuteronomy 12:19). Those who served God and had no land of their own were to be cared for.

The chapter also makes a practical allowance. Israelites living far from the sanctuary could slaughter and eat meat at home, as long as it was not an offering and they did not eat the blood: "But be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life" (Deuteronomy 12:23). The centralization of sacrifice did not mean that ordinary meals required a trip to the tabernacle.

It is interesting to imagine what kind of mindset a faithful Israelite would have had under this Law. He would work hard not only to give God the best of his crops, but to make his crops the best they could be, for God. His work itself was meant to please God. And that applies to us, too. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord" (Colossians

3:23). Our work is also meant to be an offering to Him who is worthy of it all.

The regulations of chapter 12 point forward to a remarkable conversation in the Gospels. A Samaritan woman asked Jesus where worship should take place, on the mountain where her people worshiped, or in Jerusalem. Jesus answered, "a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.... a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:21, 23). The whole Bible moves from one specific place, carefully regulated, to worship that requires no specific place at all. That is not because worship became less serious, but because the reality the tabernacle and temple pointed to had arrived in person. Some believe that in the coming kingdom, worship will once again have a central place and specific ordinances, and it is worth noting that the freedom we enjoy now is not freedom from God's authority, but freedom in Christ to approach God anywhere, through Him.

Chapter 13 addresses one of the most serious dangers Israel would face: people within the community trying to lead them to other gods. It begins with a startling scenario: "If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder spoken of takes place, and the prophet says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 13:1–3).

Notice what this passage assumes: the sign might actually come true. A false prophet might perform what looks like a genuine wonder. And yet Israel was not to follow him, because the test of a prophet was not whether his signs worked, but whether his message led people to the Lord or away from Him. "It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him" (Deuteronomy 13:4).

Jesus warned of the same danger: "For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24). Paul went further: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!" (Galatians 1:8). The authority of God's Word stands above any experience, sign, or messenger, however impressive.

Some readers find this passage puzzling in light of James's statement that God does not tempt anyone. How can Moses say that God is testing Israel through a false prophet? James answers his own question in the very next verse: "each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed" (James 1:14). God does not put evil desires in us; those desires are already ours. What God sometimes allows is a test that reveals what we already love. The false prophet did not create Israel's attraction to other gods. He exposed it. And Paul adds the encouraging truth: "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). The desire may be ours, but so is the way of escape He provides.

This passage also teaches us to trust the Word of God above our own experiences. It is often said today that loving God means feeling close to Him, and that if an experience makes us feel closer to God, it must come from the Holy Spirit. But John tells us, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Notice that Scripture never tells us to test the Word of God against our experience. It tells us to test spirits and experiences by what God has revealed. Just as there is no loving God apart from obeying Him, there is no leading of the Holy Spirit apart from the truth of His Word.

At the same time, John's test is more specific than a general suspicion of anything unusual. It concerns what a spirit confesses about Jesus Christ, whether it receives the apostles' testimony, and whether it produces love among believers (1 John 4:2-7). Emotion and obedience are not natural enemies. Scripture commands rejoicing, records tears of repentance, and celebrates wholehearted praise. A worshiper may be deeply moved and also be seeking to obey; another may be outwardly restrained and yet resisting God's correction. The decisive question is not whether someone's emotional expression matches our own, but what an experience is claimed to prove and what kind of life follows from it.

A practical way to examine our love for God is to ask where His known commands are costing us something right now. Are we willing to tell the truth when it is inconvenient, to give up revenge, to care for a difficult neighbor, to repent when we are exposed? Are our children learning obedience from our conduct as well as our words? Those questions bring worship into daily

life without despising affection. The goal is a whole response in which the mind attends to God's Word, the heart loves Him, and the will obeys.

Chapter 13 goes on to address an even more painful case: "If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and worship other gods'" (Deuteronomy 13:6). The person who was enticed was not to yield, not to show pity, and not to conceal the matter. Under Israel's covenant law, such enticement to idolatry was a capital crime, and the one who had been approached was to take the lead as the witness in bringing it to judgment (Deuteronomy 13:8–10).

This is one of the hardest passages in the Law, and we must be clear about what it does and does not mean for us. It belongs to Israel's life as a theocratic nation under the old covenant, where turning to other gods was treason against the King who dwelt in their midst. The New Testament explicitly forecloses any application of such penalties by Christians. "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world" (2 Corinthians 10:4). Vengeance belongs to God. When James and John wanted to call down fire on a Samaritan village that rejected Jesus, He "turned and rebuked them" (Luke 9:55). No Christian is authorized by this passage to harm anyone for their beliefs.

What this passage does teach us is the depth of loyalty God requires. No human relationship, not even the closest, may come before our devotion to Him. Jesus said the same thing in the new covenant setting: "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37). That does not mean loving our families less. It means that when the people

closest to us would lead us away from Christ, our first loyalty must be to Him.

The passage also teaches something about courage. It is always harder to swim against the current than with it, and harder to stand against the crowd, or against those we love, than to go along. Yet God has always looked for people willing to stand out. He sent Jeremiah through the streets of Jerusalem to "search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city" (Jeremiah 5:1). Through Ezekiel He said, "I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one" (Ezekiel 22:30). Don't wait for someone else to take the lead in doing what is right. Those who wait for others often find themselves carried along instead.

The last section of chapter 13 addresses a report that a whole town had turned to other gods. And notice what God required before any action could be taken: "you must inquire, probe and investigate it thoroughly. And if it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done among you..." (Deuteronomy 13:14). Even in so serious a matter, rumors were not enough. The truth had to be established carefully. That is a principle we would do well to remember whenever we hear accusations against others. Zeal for God's honor never excuses carelessness with the truth.

These chapters, then, call us to a love for God that shows itself in obedience, depends on Him for every good gift, worships Him in the way He has revealed, tests every claim and experience by His Word, and places Him above every other

loyalty. That is what it means to "hold fast to him" (Deuteronomy 13:4).

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Moses repeated "love the LORD your God" three times in chapter 11, and each time tied it to keeping God's commands. How does your love for God show itself in obedience? Where does obeying Him currently cost you something?
2. John says that anyone who claims to love God but hates a brother or sister is a liar. Is there someone you find hard to love? What would serving them look like this week?
3. Canaan depended on rain from heaven, not a river, so Israel had to look up. In what areas of your life do you rely on your own resources rather than on God's provision?
4. Moses warned Israel against asking, "How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same." In what ways might the church today be tempted to borrow the world's methods in worship or ministry without asking whether they honor God?
5. A false prophet's sign might actually come true, yet Israel was not to follow him. How do you test your spiritual experiences, and the claims of others, by God's Word? How can you do this without despising genuine emotion in worship?
6. God required a thorough investigation before acting on an accusation. How careful are you with rumors and

accusations about others? What would it look like to be both zealous for God's honor and careful with the truth?

Chapter Six

Deuteronomy 14–16

Chapters 14 through 16 move from the question of how Israel was to worship to the question of how they were to live together as God's people in the land. They cover food, tithes, debts, servants, festivals, and justice. It might seem like an odd collection. But running through all of it is a single concern: a people who had been redeemed from slavery were to remember that redemption in how they treated one another, especially the poor, the vulnerable, and those who had no one else to care for them.

Chapter 14 opens with a reminder of Israel's identity: "You are the children of the LORD your God. Do not cut yourselves or shave the front of your heads for the dead, for you are a people holy to the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 14:1–2). The mourning practices of the surrounding nations, which often involved gashing the body, did not fit a people who belonged to the living God. Their grief was real, but it was to be expressed as children of God, not as the nations who had no hope.

The chapter then repeats the laws of clean and unclean food that we studied in Leviticus 11, and ends with a command that appears three times in the Law: "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk" (Deuteronomy 14:21). Its original purpose is uncertain; it may have been aimed at a pagan practice, or it may simply have expressed a sense of what was fitting. We considered these laws in *Holiness*, and we will not repeat that discussion here, except to say again that their primary purpose was to mark Israel as a people set apart for God.

The second half of the chapter turns to the tithe, and it contains details that surprise many readers. "Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always" (Deuteronomy 14:22–23).

This tithe was to be eaten by the worshiper and his household, in God's presence, at the central sanctuary. It was a feast. And if the journey was too long to carry the produce, it could be exchanged for silver, and then: "Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice" (Deuteronomy 14:26). The purpose was not merely to give God His due, but "so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always." Israel learned the fear of the Lord at a table spread with His provision, rejoicing in His presence. Reverence and joy were not opposites.

Then comes a different arrangement: "At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands" (Deuteronomy 14:28–29).

Many interpreters, following long Jewish tradition, understand the Law to describe three distinct tithes. The first was given to the Levites for their service, as Numbers 18

describes. The second was the festival tithe of Deuteronomy 14, eaten at the sanctuary. And the third was the tithe of every third year, stored locally for the Levites and the poor. If that reading is correct, Israel's required giving was considerably more than ten percent, perhaps around twenty percent in most years and more in the third. Other interpreters believe these passages describe fewer tithes used in different ways. Either way, the common assumption that the Law required a simple ten percent is too simple.

Are Christians obligated to tithe according to the Mosaic Law? As we have said in earlier volumes, the question is really whether Christians are under the Mosaic covenant at all. God promised through Jeremiah that He would make "a new covenant... It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt" (Jeremiah 31:31–32). Hebrews quotes that promise and concludes, "By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete" (Hebrews 8:13). Our own conviction is that Christians are therefore not bound by the tithe as a legal requirement. Many faithful believers disagree and regard the tithe as a continuing standard, and they give joyfully on that basis.

But freedom from a fixed percentage is not freedom from generosity. The New Testament calls believers to give regularly, "in keeping with your income" (1 Corinthians 16:2), and cheerfully: "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). Once we understand that, questions like whether to calculate a tithe before or after taxes lose much of their urgency. And we should notice the

example Paul held up: the churches of Macedonia, who "in the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability" (2 Corinthians 8:2–3). The new covenant does not set a minimum, but neither does it suggest that grace-driven generosity should be less than what the Law once required. Love has no ceiling.

The third-year tithe also reveals God's heart for the poor. The Levites, foreigners, fatherless, and widows were those without land or family to support them. God built their care into the rhythm of Israel's economic life. In ancient Israel, caring for the needy was the responsibility of families and communities, not distant institutions. Today, public and private assistance programs do real good, and Christians can be grateful for them. But they can also make it easier for us to feel that someone else is taking care of the problem. There is something powerful about ordinary believers taking personal steps to help someone in need. God's power seems to be especially at work when we allow ourselves to be used. James names the same two groups Deuteronomy does and makes caring for them the mark of genuine faith: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress" (James 1:27). Fourteen centuries apart, Deuteronomy and James apply the same test.

Chapter 15 continues this concern with a remarkable law: "At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts. This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel any loan they have made to a fellow Israelite. They shall not require payment from anyone among their own people, because the LORD's time

for canceling debts has been proclaimed" (Deuteronomy 15:1–2).

Then comes a pair of statements that seem, at first, to contradict each other. "However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 15:4–5). And a few verses later: "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land" (Deuteronomy 15:11).

The tension resolves when we take the condition seriously. Poverty could have been eliminated, if Israel had fully obeyed. But Moses already knew they would not. The sabbatical year was God's practical way of breaking the cycle of generational poverty, resetting everything to a level starting point. But the law, holy and perfectly designed for Israel's good, depended on Israel's obedience, and Israel failed, driven by the desire to accumulate things for themselves as though they would live forever. Jesus later echoed the realistic half of this passage: "The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want" (Mark 14:7). Both statements were true at the same time. Poverty's elimination was possible under perfect obedience, and its persistence was certain given the obedience that would actually follow.

And yet, in the early church, for a brief moment, something like the first promise came true. Luke tells us that the believers in Jerusalem shared their possessions so freely "that there were no needy persons among them" (Acts 4:34), using language that seems to echo Deuteronomy 15:4. When God's people truly

regard their possessions as His, the poor among them are cared for.

We are no different from Israel when it comes to material possessions. Even knowing that everything comes from God, we instinctively claim ownership of whatever surrounds us. But if we truly believed that nothing really belongs to us, and that we are stewards of what He has entrusted to us, sharing His blessings with others would not seem like such a difficult task. "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" (1 John 3:17).

Moses anticipated a very human calculation. As the year of cancellation approached, a lender might think it foolish to lend money that would soon have to be forgiven. So God addressed that thought directly: "Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: 'The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near,' so that you do not show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing.... Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to" (Deuteronomy 15:9–10). The challenge of this chapter is not only whether debtors might take advantage of the system, but whether lenders would use the prospect of loss as an excuse to close their hands against a neighbor in need.

How should Christians think about loans and debts today? Jesus taught, "Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you" (Matthew 5:42). In context, Jesus was contrasting the principle of retaliation with overflowing kindness. Rather than repaying evil

for evil, His disciples were to win over even their enemies with unexpected generosity: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:20–21). A Christian lender should look beyond the question of being repaid and consider what kind of witness is given by generosity, and sometimes by forgiving a debt altogether.

At the same time, kindness does not require us to finance destructive behavior or pretend that deception is harmless. A gift, a clearly defined loan, practical help, or a refusal accompanied by another kind of assistance may each be right in different circumstances. Discernment should express love, not provide a respectable cover for indifference. And before money changes hands, it is wise to be clear about whether it is a gift or a loan. That clarity can prevent much confusion and hurt later.

Christians are not only lenders, though. We are often borrowers too, and Scripture is just as clear about the borrower's responsibility. "The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously" (Psalm 37:21). "The borrower is slave to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7). Paul writes, "Give to everyone what you owe them.... Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another" (Romans 13:7–8). There is nothing more honorable about being a debtor than a creditor. Both are accountable to God as stewards of His provision.

Many who have lent money to fellow believers know the pain of promises to repay that were never kept, even after the borrower's circumstances improved. Some borrowers even seem to feel that the lender had a Christian duty to give, and resent not receiving more. People in distress can justify many

things. A lender who does not demand repayment may still grieve, not over the money, but over what the broken promise reveals about the borrower's heart.

It is also possible to treat debts in ways the world might consider clever but Scripture would not commend. One man boasted that although he had the money to pay a debt, he had deliberately held off in order to negotiate a settlement for half of what he owed. He expected his friend to be impressed. Instead, his friend lovingly rebuked him. Even if the creditor had charged high interest and fees, the borrower had agreed to those terms, and the lender's conduct did not justify his own. We should be careful here, though. A negotiated settlement that is honestly disclosed and agreed to by a lender in genuinely difficult circumstances is not the same thing as concealing resources or boasting about manipulation. And inability to pay is not the same as unwillingness. We should judge conduct from known facts, not assume the worst about every unpaid balance.

The deeper point is this: when we think about money the way the world thinks, we lose our saltiness. Rather than being a conscience for the world, we end up taking our standards from a world system that is passing away. The gospel calls both lender and borrower to their own responsibilities, and neither may use the other's duty as an excuse to neglect his own.

Chapter 15 also addresses Hebrew servants, who were to be released in the seventh year. And when they were released, they were not to leave empty-handed: "Supply them liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to them as the LORD your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today" (Deuteronomy

15:14–15). Israel's memory of their own slavery was to shape their generosity toward others. They had been set free by God; they were to set others free generously.

Then comes a beautiful exception. "But if your servant says to you, 'I do not want to leave you,' because he loves you and your family and is well off with you, then take an awl and push it through his earlobe into the door, and he will become your servant for life" (Deuteronomy 15:16–17). A servant who loved his master could choose to serve him forever, and the pierced ear marked that choice. The New Testament writers delighted to call themselves servants of Christ. Paul opens his letter to the Romans, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus" (Romans 1:1). They had been set free, and they chose, out of love, to serve their Master for life.

Chapter 16 describes the three great pilgrimage festivals, each to be celebrated at the place God would choose. We studied their meaning, and their fulfillment in Christ, in *Holiness*. Deuteronomy's emphasis is somewhat different. It stresses memory, joy, and inclusion.

Passover was to be eaten with unleavened bread, "the bread of affliction, because you left Egypt in haste—so that all the days of your life you may remember the time of your departure from Egypt" (Deuteronomy 16:3). Once again, the purpose of the festival was remembering.

The Festival of Weeks was to be celebrated with a freewill offering in proportion to God's blessing, and with joy: "And rejoice before the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites in your towns, and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows living among you.

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and follow carefully these decrees" (Deuteronomy 16:11–12). Notice who is included in that list. The servants, the Levites, the foreigners, the fatherless, and the widows were all to share in the celebration. No one was to be left out of Israel's joy.

And the Festival of Tabernacles was to be the most joyful of all: "Be joyful at your festival—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites, the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns.... For the LORD your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete" (Deuteronomy 16:14–15). Joy was not optional. It was commanded. And it was to be shared.

Then comes a principle for giving: "Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose.... No one should appear before the LORD empty-handed: Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you" (Deuteronomy 16:16–17). The principle of proportional giving, which Paul would later apply to the church (1 Corinthians 16:2), was already here. God does not expect the same amount from everyone. He expects each person to give in proportion to how He has blessed them.

Remembering, rejoicing, and giving belong together throughout these chapters. Israel remembered that they had been slaves and that God had redeemed them. That memory produced joy in His presence. And that joy overflowed in generosity toward others, especially those who had nothing to give back. The same pattern should mark our lives. When we remember what Christ has done for us, joy and generosity follow. "You will be enriched in every way so that you can be

generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God" (2 Corinthians 9:11).

The chapter ends with the appointment of judges and officials in every town, and a charge that echoes Moses' words in chapter 1: "Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the innocent. Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Deuteronomy 16:19–20). The Hebrew literally says, "Justice, justice you shall pursue." The repetition emphasizes how seriously God takes it. A people who care for the poor at their festivals must also refuse to let the poor be cheated in their courts. Generosity and justice go together.

Thank You, Lord, that everything we have is Yours, and that our increase comes from You alone. Help us to be faithful stewards, generous and just, remembering that we too were once slaves, and that You have set us free.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. The festival tithe was eaten in God's presence "so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always." How can reverence for God and joy in His provision go together in your life?
2. Whether or not you believe the tithe applies to Christians, how would you describe your own giving? Is it regular, proportional to how God has blessed you, and cheerful?
3. God built care for the Levites, foreigners, fatherless, and widows into Israel's economic life. Who are the vulnerable

people in your community, and how could you personally help them rather than leaving their care to others?

4. Moses warned lenders not to refuse help because the year of cancellation was near. Where might you be tempted to close your hand to someone in need out of self-protection?
5. Scripture holds lenders to generosity and borrowers to honesty. Is there any debt, financial or otherwise, that you need to address honestly, or any debt you should consider forgiving?
6. The servant who loved his master could choose to serve him for life. What would it look like for you to serve Christ not out of obligation, but out of love, for the rest of your life?

Chapter Seven

Deuteronomy 17-20

These four chapters turn to the leadership and public life of the nation. Moses describes how disputes were to be judged, what kind of king Israel might one day have, how priests and prophets were to serve, how justice was to be carried out, and how Israel was to conduct itself in war. Running through all of it is a single conviction: every leader in Israel, whether judge, king, priest, or prophet, stood under the authority of God's Word, not above it.

Chapter 17 begins with laws about idolatry and justice. If someone was accused of worshiping other gods, the matter had to be investigated thoroughly, and "On the testimony of two or three witnesses a person is to be put to death, but no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness" (Deuteronomy 17:6). The witnesses themselves were to be the first to carry out the sentence (Deuteronomy 17:7). That requirement put a heavy burden on anyone who brought an accusation. A person who accused another falsely, or carelessly, would have to live with the consequences of his own testimony. Difficult cases that local judges could not decide were to be brought to the priests and the judge at the central sanctuary, and their decision was to be followed carefully (Deuteronomy 17:8-13).

Then comes one of the most remarkable passages in the Law, a set of instructions for a king Israel did not yet have. "When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, 'Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,' be sure to appoint over

you a king the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites" (Deuteronomy 17:14–15).

Israel was meant to be a nation ruled by God Himself. Yet God anticipated that one day they would ask for a king to be "like all the nations around us," and He made provision for it. Centuries later, that is exactly what happened. When the people demanded a king from Samuel, God told him, "it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king" (1 Samuel 8:7). And yet God granted the request, and chose Saul.

Saul's selection deserves a closer look. He came from the tribe of Benjamin, from the town of Gibeah. At the end of the book of Judges, the men of Gibeah committed a horrifying atrocity against a Levite's concubine, and the war that followed nearly wiped out the tribe of Benjamin entirely (Judges 19–21). When Samuel told Saul that he was Israel's chosen one, Saul replied, "But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin?" (1 Samuel 9:21). That may have been more than humility. Benjamin had truly been brought low. God's choice of a king from that tribe, and from that very town, was an act of remarkable grace toward a community still recovering from near-annihilation. God consistently seems to choose the younger or the weaker, so that His power might be made known. Sadly, although Saul began well, he disobeyed the Lord, and the kingdom was taken from him and given to David, from the tribe of Judah, as Jacob had foretold long before (Genesis 49:10).

What kind of king did God want? Deuteronomy 17 gives a series of restrictions. The king was to be chosen by God. He was to be an Israelite, not a foreigner. "The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people

return to Egypt to get more of them.... He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold" (Deuteronomy 17:16-17).

Horses, wives, and wealth were the standard marks of power for ancient kings. Horses meant military might; many wives meant political alliances with other nations; silver and gold meant security and prestige. God forbade all three. Israel's king was not to rely on military strength, foreign alliances, or riches, but on the Lord.

And then comes the most important command of all: "When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left" (Deuteronomy 17:18-20).

Notice three details. First, the king was to write the copy himself. He could not assign the task to a scribe. Second, he was to keep it with him, not locked away in the royal archives or the palace library, but in his presence. Third, he was to read it every day, all the days of his life. The king was presumably a very busy man, managing the affairs of a whole nation. Yet this is what God required.

The stated purpose is worth noticing, too. The king was to read the Law "so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God," and so that he would "not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites." A king who wrote out with his own hand a law he had not authored, and read it every day of his life, was being formed into someone who understood that he was under the same

instruction as everyone else. That was highly unusual in the ancient world, where kings typically issued laws rather than answering to them. Deuteronomy's king was a limited king, a ruler under God's law rather than its source.

This has a clear application for us. If the king of Israel, with all his responsibilities, was to read God's Word every day, what excuse do we have? None of us is busier than a king. Daily reading of Scripture is not a luxury for those with extra time. It is the means by which God keeps our hearts humble, teaches us to fear Him, and keeps us from turning aside to the right or to the left.

Sadly, Israel's kings rarely followed these instructions. The most striking failure came early, with Solomon, the son of David, who was blessed with more wisdom than anyone who had ever lived. It is almost as though Deuteronomy 17 had been written with Solomon in mind. He accumulated horses in enormous numbers, "imported from Egypt" (1 Kings 10:28). "King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth" (1 Kings 10:23). And "He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray" (1 Kings 11:3). Moses had warned that the king must not take many wives, "or his heart will be led astray." That is precisely what happened. Even the wisest of men could not keep these commands.

God had made an unconditional covenant with David, promising that his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16). Yet David's descendants failed again and again to be the kind of king Deuteronomy 17 described. It was not until Jesus that a son of David perfectly fulfilled the Law's requirements for a king. He owned no horses or chariots; He

entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. He had no wives, no palace, and no treasure; He had nowhere to lay His head. And He did not consider Himself better than His brothers, but "made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant" (Philippians 2:7). Jesus is the true King of Deuteronomy 17. Of Him the angel said, "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:32–33).

Chapter 18 turns to the priests and Levites, who were to receive a share of the people's offerings since they had no inheritance of land. "The LORD is their inheritance" (Deuteronomy 18:2). Then Moses addresses the spiritual practices of the nations Israel was about to displace: "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD" (Deuteronomy 18:10–12). What all these practices shared was an attempt to gain hidden knowledge or control the future apart from God. "You must be blameless before the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 18:13).

Instead of seeking such things, Israel was to listen to the prophets God would send. And then comes one of the most important promises in the Old Testament: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him" (Deuteronomy 18:15). God repeated the promise: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him" (Deuteronomy 18:18).

Who was this prophet like Moses? Israel waited for him for centuries. When Jesus fed the five thousand, the crowds said, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14). Peter quoted this very passage when he preached in the temple after Pentecost: "For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you'" (Acts 3:22). Stephen did the same (Acts 7:37). And on the Mount of Transfiguration, with Moses himself present, the Father's voice echoed Deuteronomy 18: "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him" (Luke 9:35). Jesus is the Prophet like Moses, and far greater than Moses. Moses spoke God's words; Jesus is God's Word made flesh.

Then Moses addresses false prophets: "But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death. You may say to yourselves, 'How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?' If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed" (Deuteronomy 18:20–22).

"The Lord told me." "The Lord is leading me to tell you." "The Lord gave me a vision." These are weighty statements. In ancient Israel, they would have been made only by a genuine prophet of the Lord, and they were tested seriously. If a prophet's word did not come true, he was to be put to death. Today, such statements are made casually by many people, often so vaguely that no one could prove them true or false. Even when someone is specific, and the prediction fails, there is often little consequence. Some

explain away the failure by saying that God changed His mind, or that He must have had something better in mind.

Some teach that prophets today can grow into their gift, becoming more accurate with time and maturity. Our own conviction is that genuine prophecy, by its very nature, is not a skill developed through practice, and that the revelatory gift of prophecy ceased with the completion of Scripture. If prophecy could fail, it would raise troubling questions about the reliability of the prophets who gave us Scripture itself.

We recognize that this is a real point of debate among Bible-believing scholars. Many who hold that the gift continues understand New Testament congregational prophecy differently from the authoritative prophecy of the Old Testament prophets and apostles. They point out that Paul told the Corinthians, "Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said" (1 Corinthians 14:29), and they understand such prophecy as something a believer thinks God has brought to mind, which must be tested and never carries authority equal to Scripture. Both sides agree on the most important point: Scripture alone is the infallible Word of God, and every claim to speak for God must be tested rigorously against it. And both sides should agree that the words "God told me" carry a weight that should never be spent carelessly.

How can ordinary believers protect themselves from false teaching? Many of us remember times when we were young in the faith and found ourselves persuaded by whatever we had read most recently. Every book seemed convincing, and we changed our minds with each new author. We were "tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind

of teaching" (Ephesians 4:14). When believers do not know God's Word well, they have to rely on the few who have made it their profession to teach it, and they are poorly equipped to judge anything a preacher or teacher tells them.

There is no better protection than to learn God's Word for ourselves. That takes time and effort, and there is no shortcut. Whatever else we choose to do in life, we must all become students of God's Word, each of us accountable for ourselves. If that seems daunting, remember that the king of Israel, with a nation to run, was commanded to read it every day of his life.

Chapter 19 returns to the cities of refuge, where someone who had killed another person accidentally could flee for protection from the avenger of blood (Deuteronomy 19:1–13). It also includes a brief command that says a great deal about God's concern for justice in ordinary life: "Do not move your neighbor's boundary stone set up by your predecessors in the inheritance you receive" (Deuteronomy 19:14). Moving a boundary stone quietly, a little at a time, was a way of stealing land without anyone noticing. God cared about honesty in property as much as in worship.

Then comes a principle that runs through the rest of Scripture: "One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (Deuteronomy 19:15). Jesus applied this principle to disputes among believers (Matthew 18:16), and Paul applied it to accusations against church leaders: "Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses" (1 Timothy 5:19). God's justice has always required evidence, not rumor.

And a false witness was to receive a severe penalty: "The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against a fellow Israelite, then do to the false witness as that witness intended to do to the other party. You must purge the evil from among you" (Deuteronomy 19:18–19). The chapter concludes, "Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deuteronomy 19:21).

That sounds harsh to us. But as we have seen before, the principle of "eye for eye" was a principle of proportional justice to be applied by judges, not a license for personal revenge. The punishment was to fit the crime, no more and no less. And the false witness who tried to use the courts to destroy an innocent neighbor would face exactly the harm he had intended. Jesus did not overturn the principle of just courts. He addressed those who were using it to justify personal retaliation, calling His followers to respond to personal wrongs with an unexpected blessing (Matthew 5:38–42).

These verses carry an unmistakably Old Testament tone. With the coming of Christ, our relationship with God has changed. We no longer need priests to stand between us and God, or animal sacrifices; Christ has given us direct access to the Father. But one truth from this passage remains. We should not treat God's grace carelessly. Of course we will sin and fall short. But we should never think, "It's all right to do this just once, because I will be forgiven." Paul faced that attitude directly: "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!" (Romans 6:15). He went on to say that we have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness (Romans 6:18). Grace is not a loophole that

makes sin safe. Grace itself "teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:12).

The Christian who struggles with sin has a very different attitude from the one who abuses grace. He cries out with Paul, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24–25). Christians wrestle with sin every day, working out their salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that it is God who works in them. We aim at holiness, and we rest in grace when we fall short, but we never use grace as an excuse.

Chapter 20 turns to warfare. "When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you" (Deuteronomy 20:1). Before a battle, the priest was to address the army: "Hear, Israel: Today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not panic or be terrified by them. For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory" (Deuteronomy 20:3–4). Israel was not to measure its chances by counting horses and chariots, the very things their king was forbidden to accumulate. Their confidence was to rest in God.

Then the officers were to announce several exemptions. Anyone who had built a new house and not yet dedicated it, anyone who had planted a vineyard and not yet enjoyed it, and anyone who was engaged but not yet married was to go home (Deuteronomy 20:5–7). And finally: "Is anyone afraid or

fainthearted? Let him go home so that his fellow soldiers will not become disheartened too" (Deuteronomy 20:8).

These exemptions are surprisingly humane. Israel's army was not to be built by pressing every possible man into service. Life's ordinary blessings, a home, a harvest, a marriage, mattered to God. And a fearful soldier was more dangerous than useful, since fear spreads. God did not need large numbers to win His battles. We will see this principle dramatically in the story of Gideon, whose army God deliberately reduced from thirty-two thousand to three hundred.

Then Moses distinguished between two kinds of cities. For distant cities outside the Promised Land, Israel was to begin by offering peace: "When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace" (Deuteronomy 20:10). If the city accepted, its people would serve Israel; if it refused, Israel would besiege it, and only the men would be killed. But the cities of the nations within the land itself were to be treated differently: "However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them... Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 20:16-18).

We said earlier that we would return to this question, and we should not rush past it. These commands are among the hardest in all of Scripture, and many sincere readers have been troubled by them. How should we understand them?

Several things should be held together. First, Scripture presents this as God's judgment on nations whose sin had reached its full measure after centuries of patience (Genesis

15:16), including the burning of children in sacrifice (Deuteronomy 12:31). The reason given in this passage is not ethnic hatred but the danger of Israel being drawn into those same practices. Second, the judgment was not arbitrary. The same standard would later be applied to Israel when it committed the same sins. Third, even within the conquest, individuals who turned to the Lord in faith were spared. Rahab the Canaanite and her family were welcomed into Israel, and she became an ancestor of the Messiah. Fourth, many scholars point out that the language of total destruction resembles the conventional war rhetoric of the ancient world, and that the Bible itself goes on to describe Canaanites still living in the land after their "complete" destruction. Some Christians find that observation helpful; others emphasize instead that these were unique, unrepeatable acts of judgment by the Creator who gives and takes life. And some find no explanation fully satisfying, and hold the difficulty in tension with their trust in the God revealed in Christ.

Whatever explanation we find most persuasive, two things must be said clearly. These commands were given to one nation at one moment in God's plan, and the New Testament gives no one, whether a church, a nation, or an individual, any license to repeat them. And these passages should never be read without sorrow. The God who commanded judgment on Canaan is the same God who later wept through His prophets over the judgment of nations, and who took judgment on Himself at the cross.

The chapter ends with an unexpected command. When besieging a city for a long time, Israel was not to cut down the fruit trees around it: "Do not destroy its trees by putting an ax

to them, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down. Are the trees people, that you should besiege them?" (Deuteronomy 20:19). Even in war, God set limits. The trees were not the enemy. Scorched-earth destruction that left the land barren for years was forbidden. God's care for His creation did not stop when the fighting started. It is a small detail, but a telling one: even the harshest chapter in this section reminds us that God is the Creator who cares for what He has made.

Taken together, these chapters describe a nation in which judges, kings, priests, prophets, and soldiers were all bound by the same Word. No one was above it. The king was to read it every day. The prophet was to speak only what God commanded. The judge was to require evidence and show no partiality. And the army was to trust the Lord rather than its own strength. In every one of these offices, Israel's leaders fell short again and again. But in Jesus Christ, we have the perfect Prophet, the perfect Priest, and the perfect King, who fulfilled every requirement of the Law. It is to Him that we must listen.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. The king of Israel was to write out his own copy of God's law and read it every day of his life. If a king with a nation to run was required to do this, what keeps you from reading God's Word daily? What practical step could you take to make it a habit?
2. God forbade Israel's king to rely on horses, many wives, or great wealth. What are the "horses, wives, and wealth" that you are tempted to rely on for security and significance instead of God?

3. Jesus is the "prophet like Moses" and the true King of Deuteronomy 17. How do His life and character fulfill what these chapters require of a prophet and a king?
4. The Law treated the words "the LORD has spoken" with deadly seriousness. How carefully do you use language like "God told me" or "God is leading me"? Why does it matter?
5. Paul asked, "Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?" and answered, "By no means!" Are there areas in your life where you have treated God's grace as a license rather than as the power to live differently?
6. Before battle, the fearful were sent home "so that his fellow soldiers will not become disheartened too." How does your attitude, whether faith or fear, affect the people around you?

Chapter Eight

Deuteronomy 21-23

These three chapters can feel like a random collection of laws. One paragraph addresses an unsolved murder; the next, a captive woman; the next, a rebellious son. Then come lost animals, clothing, bird nests, roof railings, mixed fabrics, marriage disputes, the camp's sanitation, runaway slaves, interest on loans, and eating grapes in a neighbor's vineyard. Many readers find their eyes glazing over. But if we slow down, these laws show us something important. God's holiness reached into every corner of Israel's daily life, from the courtroom to the kitchen to the field. And again and again, these laws protect the vulnerable, restrain the powerful, and teach Israel to care for their neighbors.

Many readers also find these chapters convicting in a deeper way. As one reader put it, no matter how hard the Israelites or anyone else tried, the Law of Moses could not be kept. Thank God for the sacrificial blood of Christ! That is exactly what the Law was designed to show. Paul describes it as a "guardian" leading us to Christ (Galatians 3:24), since "through the law we become conscious of our sin" (Romans 3:20). When the Law convicts us, it is not failing. It is doing exactly what it was meant to do.

Chapter 21 opens with a case that must have troubled any community: a murdered body found in a field, with no one knowing who had done it. The elders of the nearest town were to take a heifer to a valley, break its neck, and wash their hands over it, declaring, "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. Accept this atonement for your people

Israel, whom you have redeemed, LORD, and do not hold your people guilty of the blood of an innocent person" (Deuteronomy 21:7-8).

Even an unsolved crime could not simply be ignored. Innocent blood defiled the land, and the whole community bore some responsibility for it. The nearest town could not shrug and say it was someone else's problem. The elders had to take public, formal responsibility before God. There is a principle here for us, too. When wrong is done in our communities, it is not enough to say, "It wasn't me." God calls His people to care about justice, even when we did not cause the harm.

The next law addresses a woman taken captive in war. An Israelite who wished to marry her had to allow her a full month to mourn her father and mother (Deuteronomy 21:13). And if he later chose not to keep her as his wife, "let her go wherever she wishes. You must not sell her or treat her as a slave, since you have dishonored her" (Deuteronomy 21:14). In the brutal world of ancient warfare, where captive women had no rights at all, this law gave her time to grieve, the status of a wife, and freedom if the marriage ended. She could not be treated as property.

Then comes a law about inheritance. If a man had two wives and loved one more than the other, he could not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loved. "He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has" (Deuteronomy 21:17). Anyone who remembers the story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel knows how much pain favoritism caused in Israel's founding family. God's law would not allow a father's personal preferences to override the rights of the son born first.

The next law is one of the hardest in the Bible for modern readers: "If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.' Then all the men of his town are to stone him to death" (Deuteronomy 21:18–21).

Our first reaction is likely to be that this is shockingly severe. What parent could bring their own child to such a punishment? Most families, one reader noted, would lose at least one child if this law were actually enforced.

A few observations help us understand it. The law describes not a young child who misbehaves, but a grown son who persistently refuses discipline and lives in open rebellion and dissipation, "a glutton and a drunkard." Both parents had to agree to bring the charge; a single angry father could not act alone. The case had to be brought before the elders of the town, not settled privately. And there is no record in Scripture of this law ever being carried out. Many scholars believe its severity functioned mainly as a strong deterrent and as a statement of how seriously God took the family's role in passing on covenant faithfulness from one generation to the next.

Still, the law is sobering. It shows how seriously God regards persistent rebellion. And it should make each of us thankful. David prayed, "Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, LORD, are good" (Psalm 25:7). How many of us were stubborn and rebellious at some point in our lives, and yet were spared?

And there is a remarkable contrast in the New Testament. Jesus told a story about another rebellious son, one who demanded his inheritance, left home, and squandered it all in wild living. When he finally came home in disgrace, his father did not bring him to the elders at the gate. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). That is how our heavenly Father receives rebellious sons and daughters who return to Him. The Law showed what rebellion deserves. The gospel shows what grace gives.

How could that be just? The final verses of chapter 21 give us a clue. If a man guilty of a capital offense was executed and his body hung on a pole, it was not to remain there overnight, "because anyone who is hung on a pole is under God's curse" (Deuteronomy 21:23). Paul quotes this very verse to explain the cross: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole'" (Galatians 3:13). The curse that the rebellious son deserved, the curse that we deserve, fell on Jesus. Even the detail about burial was fulfilled; the Gospels record that the bodies were taken down before the Sabbath began (John 19:31). The Law was perfect, but it could not give life. "For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering" (Romans 8:3). Blessed be the name of the Lord, the friend of sinners!

Chapter 22 begins with laws that show what loving one's neighbor looks like in practice. "If you see your fellow Israelite's ox or sheep straying, do not ignore it but be sure to take it back

to its owner.... Do the same if you find their donkey or cloak or anything else they have lost. Do not ignore it. If you see your fellow Israelite's donkey or ox fallen on the road, do not ignore it. Help the owner get it to its feet" (Deuteronomy 22:1–4).

"Do not ignore it." That phrase appears three times. It is always easier to look the other way. Holding a door for someone is easy. Clearing a neighbor's sidewalk after a snowstorm, or stopping to help push a stranger's car out of the snow, is harder. We may also feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of need around us. If I help one neighbor, do I have to help the whole street? And it can be discouraging when kindness goes unacknowledged.

But the principle of this passage is simple: when we see a need we can meet, we should not ignore it. We will not be able to meet every need, and we are not asked to. When a woman anointed Jesus with costly perfume, He said, "She did what she could" (Mark 14:8). Our operating principle can be the same: do what we can, while asking God for wisdom in each situation. "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity" (Ephesians 5:15–16). And our motive should never be the thanks we receive, but the love of Christ.

The next verse surprises many readers: "A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this" (Deuteronomy 22:5). Why is this law here? It helps to know that several of the laws in this section seem to be aimed at separating Israel from the religious practices of the Canaanites. Some scholars believe that ritual cross-dressing was part of certain fertility cults in the ancient world, and that this law drew a line against blending

Israel's worship with those practices. The law also affirms that God created human beings male and female, and that the distinction matters to Him.

How should Christians apply it? This command is part of the Law of Moses, and we do not believe it binds Christians directly as law. At the same time, the New Testament affirms the goodness of the distinction between men and women that God built into creation. Christians differ on how that distinction should be expressed in the church and the home. Some hold that passages like 1 Corinthians 11, which speaks of head coverings in worship, express a lasting principle of male leadership and female submission that should still be practiced visibly today. Others understand those passages as applying a creation principle within a particular cultural setting, and apply them differently now. These are serious disagreements among believers who share a high view of Scripture. Whatever our conclusions, Christian men and women are called to honor one another and to reflect Christ and His church in the way they relate.

Then come several short laws that show God's concern for life and safety. If someone found a bird's nest with the mother sitting on the young or the eggs, he could take the young, "but be sure to let the mother go, so that it may go well with you and you may have a long life" (Deuteronomy 22:7). Even in gathering food, Israel was to show restraint and care for God's creatures. "When you build a new house, make a parapet around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof" (Deuteronomy 22:8). Flat roofs were used as living space, and an unprotected edge was dangerous. A homeowner was responsible for the safety of

those who came into his house. Love for our neighbor includes taking reasonable care that our property, our work, and our decisions do not endanger others.

Then come three laws about mixing things: "Do not plant two kinds of seed in your vineyard.... Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together. Do not wear clothes of wool and linen woven together" (Deuteronomy 22:9–11).

These laws are a good test of how we read the Old Testament. Some readers conclude that Christians today must not wear clothing that mixes fabrics. Others quickly turn the command into a general spiritual lesson, such as keeping ourselves separate from worldly influences, and suggest that God never meant it literally. Both approaches have problems.

God meant these commands literally for Israel. An Israelite could not satisfy them by affirming holiness in general while ignoring what he actually wore. The command had a real, concrete form in Israel's covenant life. At the same time, Christians are not under the Law of Moses as a covenant. "But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code" (Romans 7:6). "By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete" (Hebrews 8:13). Notice that Romans 7:6 does not move from obligation to indifference. We are released from the Law in order to serve in a new way.

The precise purpose of these particular prohibitions is not explained in the text. Suggestions about Israel's distinctiveness, symbolic order, or materials reserved for sacred use are all reasonable, but they are interpretations, and it is better to admit that than to present an attractive explanation as though Moses

had given it. Christians also differ about how some Old Testament practices carry forward. Some believe the tithe or the Sabbath principle continues in some form for believers; others, ourselves among them, believe they belonged to the Mosaic covenant. A believer who does not treat the tithe as a binding percentage can still give generously and proportionately. A church can gather on Sunday to celebrate Christ's resurrection without assuming that every Sabbath regulation has transferred unchanged.

A helpful way to approach any Old Testament law is to ask three questions. What did the command require of those who first received it? How does the New Testament describe its place in God's plan and its fulfillment in Christ? And what response does it call for from people who belong to Christ? Asking those questions keeps us from both fanciful allegory and careless application. And it deepens our appreciation of grace. We learn from Israel's example how incapable any of us would be of keeping the Law perfectly. We learn about God's holiness and His call for His people to be distinct from the world, a principle the New Testament applies when it tells us not to be "yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14) or conformed "to the pattern of this world" (Romans 12:2). And we learn to give thanks for Christ, who frees us from both the regulations and the condemnation of the Law.

The rest of chapter 22 deals with marriage and sexual purity. If a husband falsely accused his new wife of not having been a virgin, and her parents could produce evidence of her virginity, the husband was fined, publicly disciplined, and forbidden ever to divorce her (Deuteronomy 22:13–19). This law protected a

vulnerable young woman from a husband who wanted to be rid of her by slandering her name.

Another law distinguished between two situations involving an engaged woman. If a man slept with her in a town, and she did not cry for help, both were held guilty. "But if out in the country a man happens to meet a young woman pledged to be married and rapes her, only the man who has done this shall die. Do nothing to the woman; she has committed no sin deserving death.... for the man found the young woman out in the country, and though the betrothed woman screamed, there was no one to rescue her" (Deuteronomy 22:25–27). Where there was no one to hear her, the law gave her the benefit of the doubt and placed the full guilt on the man.

These laws come from a society very different from ours, and some of their provisions are genuinely hard for modern readers. But they reflect God's concern that sexual sin not be treated lightly, that marriage be protected, and that women not be exploited or falsely accused.

One reader pointed out that these laws add real drama to the Christmas story. When Mary, engaged to Joseph, was found to be pregnant, the whole town would have assumed she had been unfaithful. Under this law, the consequences could have been severe. Matthew tells us exactly how Joseph responded: "Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly" (Matthew 1:19). Joseph was weighing the demands of the Law against his compassion for Mary, until an angel appeared to him in a dream and explained that the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The Savior came into the world

under the shadow of this very law, and His earthly father chose mercy.

Chapter 23 begins with laws about who could enter "the assembly of the LORD." Some of these exclusions seem harsh. A man who had been emasculated could not enter (Deuteronomy 23:1). "No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, not even in the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you" (Deuteronomy 23:3–4).

But notice the next verse: "However, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you" (Deuteronomy 23:5). And notice how Scripture's story unfolds. A Moabite woman named Ruth later clung to her Israelite mother-in-law and said, "Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). She was welcomed into Israel, married Boaz, and became the great-grandmother of King David, and an ancestor of Jesus. The exclusion of Deuteronomy 23 was real, but God's grace reached beyond it for those who came to Him in faith.

The same is true of the eunuch. Through Isaiah, God later promised, "And let no eunuch complain, 'I am only a dry tree.' For this is what the LORD says: 'To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters'" (Isaiah 56:3–5). And one of the first Gentiles to believe the gospel in the book of Acts was an Ethiopian eunuch, returning from worship in Jerusalem, who was baptized on the spot (Acts 8:26–39). The

one who could not enter the assembly under the old covenant was among the first welcomed into the new.

The chapter also shows a surprising kindness toward two of Israel's historic enemies: "Do not despise an Edomite, for the Edomites are related to you. Do not despise an Egyptian, because you resided as foreigners in their country" (Deuteronomy 23:7). The Egyptians had enslaved Israel, yet Israel was not to despise them. They were to remember that they had once been guests in Egypt, before they became slaves.

Then come laws about the holiness of the army camp, including instructions for sanitation, with a striking explanation: "For the LORD your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you. Your camp must be holy, so that he will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you" (Deuteronomy 23:14). Even the most practical matters of daily life were connected to God's presence. The God who walked among His people cared about the cleanliness of their camp.

Then comes one of the most remarkable laws in the ancient world: "If a slave has taken refuge with you, do not hand them over to their master. Let them live among you wherever they like and in whatever town they choose. Do not oppress them" (Deuteronomy 23:15–16). Other ancient law codes generally required that runaway slaves be returned. Israel's law gave refuge to the one who fled.

The chapter goes on to forbid shrine prostitution (Deuteronomy 23:17–18), to forbid charging interest to a fellow Israelite (Deuteronomy 23:19–20), and to urge Israel to keep their vows: "Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do" (Deuteronomy 23:23). And it ends with a small law that reveals

a great deal about God's heart: "If you enter your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat all the grapes you want, but do not put any in your basket. If you enter your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to their standing grain" (Deuteronomy 23:24–25).

A hungry traveler could eat from a neighbor's field without being a thief. But he could not harvest it for himself. This law balanced generosity and property rights beautifully. It was exactly this provision that Jesus' disciples were following when they walked through the grainfields and picked heads of grain to eat (Matthew 12:1). The Pharisees objected, not because they were stealing, but because it was the Sabbath.

As we read laws like these, we may think about how hard it would have been for any of us to live under them. One reader reflected that he would have needed to be either wealthy or deeply in debt to afford all the sacrifices required. The truth is even more sobering. The sacrificial system provided for unintentional sins and for certain wrongs that were confessed and made right with restitution. But for defiant, deliberate sin, the Law offered no sacrifice at all (Numbers 15:30–31). Under the Law's own terms, most of us would have had no way back. "By the grace of God" is not merely a pious phrase. Grace covers exactly what the old system could never reach. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. When a murder went unsolved, the elders of the nearest town still had to take responsibility before God. Where might God be calling you to care about wrongs in your community, even ones you did not cause?

2. Compare the law of the rebellious son (Deuteronomy 21:18–21) with the father in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:20). What does this contrast teach you about the difference between what we deserve and what God gives?
3. "Do not ignore it." What needs around you are you most tempted to ignore? What is one thing you could do this week, even if you cannot do everything?
4. How do you usually read Old Testament laws like the prohibition of mixed fabrics? How could the three questions in this chapter help you read such passages more faithfully?
5. Deuteronomy 23 excluded Moabites and eunuchs from the assembly, yet Ruth the Moabite and the Ethiopian eunuch were welcomed by God. What does this teach you about the reach of God's grace?
6. Joseph was "faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace." How can you hold together a commitment to God's standards and a heart of mercy toward others?

Chapter Nine

Deuteronomy 24-27

This reading brings Moses' long review of the Law to a close. Chapters 24 and 25 contain more laws for daily life, many of them focused on protecting the poor and vulnerable. Chapter 26 describes a beautiful ceremony of thanksgiving and remembrance. And chapter 27 looks ahead to the day when Israel, having crossed the Jordan, would renew the covenant in the land, pronouncing curses on those who broke it and answering each one with "Amen." If one word could sum up these chapters, it might be "obedience": from honest weights and measures, to the oaths at the crossing of the Jordan, to every command of God.

Chapter 24 begins with a law that has been discussed and debated for thousands of years: "If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house..." (Deuteronomy 24:1). If she then married another man, and that marriage also ended, "her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled" (Deuteronomy 24:4).

In the Hebrew text, verses 1 through 4 form a single long sentence, and its actual command comes at the very end: a man who divorced his wife could not remarry her after she had married another. The passage regulates divorce; it does not institute it or command it. The requirement of a written certificate also gave the woman legal protection and the freedom to remarry. The Bible never commands divorce for any

reason, though passages like this one show that it was permitted and regulated under the Law.

What did "something indecent" mean? In Jesus' day, rabbis argued fiercely about that phrase. One school limited it to serious sexual immorality. Another allowed divorce for almost any reason, even burning a meal. When the Pharisees asked Jesus, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" (Matthew 19:3), they were inviting Him into that debate. Jesus answered by going back to creation: "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:6). When they asked why Moses permitted divorce, He said, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning" (Matthew 19:8).

Some have suggested an additional possibility about Deuteronomy 24. Many commentators argue that "something indecent" must have been less than adultery, since adultery carried the death penalty. But perhaps a husband who discovered serious sexual sin could choose, rather than exposing his wife to public shame and death, to divorce her quietly. Nothing in the Law required him to expose her. Joseph considered exactly this when he learned that Mary was pregnant: "Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly" (Matthew 1:19). That is an intriguing suggestion, though the text does not settle the question.

What about Christians today? Malachi records God's strong condemnation of faithless divorce. Many older translations render it "I hate divorce"; the NIV reads it as a rebuke of "The

man who hates and divorces his wife" and so "does violence to the one he should protect" (Malachi 2:16). Either way, divorce is contrary to God's original design.

Our own conviction leans strongly toward the permanence of marriage for believers. Marriage pictures the relationship between Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:22–33), and Christ will never abandon His bride. To anyone contemplating divorce because a marriage has become difficult or disappointing, we would urge: put it out of your mind, and hold fast to the promise you made before God, "till death do us part."

Christians do hold several views on this question, and we should present them fairly. Some believe the New Testament permits no divorce for believers at all. Many others understand Jesus' words "except for sexual immorality" (Matthew 19:9) and Paul's words about an unbelieving spouse who leaves, "The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances" (1 Corinthians 7:15), as permitting divorce in limited circumstances. Many pastors and theologians across traditions also recognize abandonment and abuse as grounds for separation. All agree that marriage is a sacred covenant that God intends to last for life. And it must be said clearly that no one is required by Scripture to remain in danger. Those facing abuse should seek safety and help.

The next law shows God's tender concern for marriage: "If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married" (Deuteronomy 24:5). God cared enough about a new marriage to exempt the husband from military service for a year. Building a strong marriage was worth the time.

Then come several laws protecting the poor who had to borrow. "Do not take a pair of millstones—not even the upper one—as security for a debt, because that would be taking a person's livelihood as security" (Deuteronomy 24:6). Without a millstone, a family could not grind grain to make bread. A lender could not take the tools a family needed to survive. "When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into their house to get what is offered to you as a pledge. Stay outside and let the neighbor to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you" (Deuteronomy 24:10–11). Even a poor borrower's home and dignity were protected. And if the pledge was a poor man's cloak, the lender had to return it at sunset "so that your neighbor may sleep in it. Then they will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 24:13).

The Law also protected hired workers: "Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy.... Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin" (Deuteronomy 24:14–15). The cry of the unpaid worker reaches God's ears. James warns employers of the same thing centuries later (James 5:4).

Then comes an important principle of justice: "Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin" (Deuteronomy 24:16). In many ancient societies, an entire family might be punished for one member's crime. God's law forbade it. Centuries later, when King Amaziah executed the officials who had murdered his father, "he did not put the

children of the assassins to death, in accordance with what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses" (2 Kings 14:6).

The chapter ends with a series of commands to care for the vulnerable, each grounded in memory: "Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this" (Deuteronomy 24:17–18). Farmers were to leave forgotten sheaves in the field, and not to go over their olive trees or vineyards a second time, so that the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow could glean what remained. And again: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this" (Deuteronomy 24:22).

Israel's memory of their own slavery was meant to shape how they treated the poor and powerless among them. They knew what it was like to be vulnerable and exploited. Now they were to be the kind of people who remembered, and so showed mercy. The same should be true of us. We who were once slaves to sin, and have been redeemed by grace, should be the first to show mercy to those in need.

Chapter 25 continues with laws of justice and dignity. If a guilty person was sentenced to be flogged, "the judge must not impose more than forty lashes. If the guilty party is flogged more than that, your fellow Israelite will be degraded in your eyes" (Deuteronomy 25:3). Even in punishment, a person's dignity was to be preserved. Later Jewish practice limited the number to thirty-nine, to avoid accidentally exceeding forty. That is why Paul wrote, "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one" (2 Corinthians 11:24).

Then comes a short verse that Paul would later use in a surprising way: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain" (Deuteronomy 25:4). An ox working on the threshing floor was to be allowed to eat from the grain it was threshing. Paul applied this principle to those who preach the gospel: "Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn't he?" (1 Corinthians 9:9–10). And again: "the worker deserves his wages" (1 Timothy 5:18). Paul was not ignoring the literal meaning; he was drawing out the principle of fairness behind it. If God cared that an ox be treated fairly, how much more those who labor in His service?

Then comes the law of levirate marriage. If a man died without a son, his brother was to marry the widow, and the first son born would carry on the dead man's name, "so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel" (Deuteronomy 25:6). If the brother refused, the widow could publicly shame him (Deuteronomy 25:7–10). This law protected widows from destitution and preserved each family's inheritance in the land. It forms the background of the story of Ruth and Boaz, and of Tamar's story in Genesis 38. The Sadducees even used this law to try to trap Jesus with a question about the resurrection (Matthew 22:23–33).

Then Moses addressed honesty in business: "Do not have two differing weights in your bag—one heavy, one light. Do not have two differing measures in your house—one large, one small. You must have accurate and honest weights and measures, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. For the LORD your God detests anyone who does these things, anyone who deals dishonestly" (Deuteronomy 25:13–16). A merchant with two sets of weights

could buy with the heavy one and sell with the light one, cheating every customer. God called that detestable. "The LORD detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favor with him" (Proverbs 11:1). Honesty in our business dealings, our taxes, our time sheets, and our advertising is not a minor matter. It is part of our worship.

Then, in the middle of these civil and moral laws, Moses suddenly turns to the Amalekites: "Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God" (Deuteronomy 25:17–18).

Why would God tell Israel not to forget this? Exodus 17 records the battle at Rephidim, where Joshua fought the Amalekites while Aaron and Hur held up Moses' hands. But Exodus gives few details about how the attack began. Here we learn that the Amalekites deliberately attacked the stragglers, those who were weary and worn out and lagging behind the rest. That would likely have been the elderly, the sick, women, and young children. This happened only weeks after Israel left Egypt, when the people were exhausted, hungry, and thirsty.

Even in the ancient world, attacking the defenseless precisely because they were defenseless was considered beyond acceptable conduct. God treated it as a direct assault on Himself. After the battle, Moses said, "Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16). And now he told Israel, "you shall blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!" (Deuteronomy 25:19).

God cares deeply for the weary and worn out. An attack on the weakest members of His people was an attack on Him. Sadly, Israel did not carry out this judgment as commanded. Centuries later, King Saul was told to deal with the Amalekites, and he failed to obey fully, sparing the king and the best of the livestock. That disobedience cost him his kingdom (1 Samuel 15). And many centuries after that, a descendant of the Amalekite king, "Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite" (Esther 3:1), plotted to destroy the entire Jewish people. What Israel failed to finish came back to threaten them again.

Chapter 26 describes two ceremonies Israel was to observe once they settled in the land. The first was the offering of firstfruits. Each Israelite was to place the first of his harvest in a basket, bring it to the place God chose, and recite a remarkable confession: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labor. Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, LORD, have given me" (Deuteronomy 26:5–10).

What a beautiful act of remembrance! Every farmer, every year, was to tell the whole story of God's salvation in his own words, beginning with his own ancestor Jacob, the "wandering Aramean." And notice the pronouns. The confession moves from "my father" to "us" to "me." The worshiper did not tell the story

as distant history. He told it as his own story. He had not personally been a slave in Egypt, but he confessed, "the Egyptians mistreated us." Every generation was to see itself in the story of redemption.

That is what Christians do whenever we remember the gospel. We were not at the cross, yet we confess that Christ died for us. We were not at the empty tomb, yet we confess that we have been raised with Him. And like the Israelite with his basket of firstfruits, we respond with gratitude and offerings.

The ceremony ended in celebration: "Then you and the Levites and the foreigners residing among you shall rejoice in all the good things the LORD your God has given to you and your household" (Deuteronomy 26:11). Worship that remembers God's salvation is joyful worship, and it includes the Levite and the foreigner.

The second ceremony came every third year, when the tithe of the harvest was to be given "to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied" (Deuteronomy 26:12). The worshiper then declared before the Lord that he had obeyed, and asked God to bless Israel and the land. Once again, gratitude to God was expressed in generosity to the needy.

The chapter ends with a solemn exchange of covenant commitments: "You have declared this day that the LORD is your God and that you will walk in obedience to him.... And the LORD has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised" (Deuteronomy 26:17–18). Israel committed themselves to God, and God committed Himself to Israel.

Chapter 27 looks ahead to what Israel was to do once they crossed the Jordan. They were to set up large stones, coat them with plaster, and "Write on them all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 27:3). They were to build an altar of uncut stones on Mount Ebal and offer sacrifices there. God's Law was to be publicly displayed in the land, and Israel's life there was to begin with worship.

Then the Levites were to call the whole nation to attention: "Be silent, Israel, and listen! You have now become the people of the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 27:9). Six tribes were to stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, and six on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses. Then the Levites were to call out twelve curses, and after each one, all the people were to answer, "Amen!"

"Cursed is anyone who makes an idol.... Cursed is anyone who dishonors their father or mother.... Cursed is anyone who moves their neighbor's boundary stone.... Cursed is anyone who leads the blind astray on the road.... Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow.... Cursed is anyone who kills their neighbor secretly" (Deuteronomy 27:15–24). Many of these curses concern sins committed in secret, where no human judge might ever find out. God saw what others could not. And with every "Amen," the people agreed that these curses were just.

The final curse sums up all the others: "Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out" (Deuteronomy 27:26). And again the people were to say, "Amen!"

That last curse is sobering. Who could say "Amen" to it and escape? Paul quotes this very verse to show that no one can be

justified by the Law: "For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law'" (Galatians 3:10). Everyone who stood on those mountains and said "Amen" was pronouncing a curse on himself. And so do we, if we try to stand before God on the basis of our own obedience.

But Paul does not stop there. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). The curses the people affirmed on Mount Ebal fell on Jesus at Calvary. That is why the gospel is such good news.

Some readers find all of these laws and curses disturbing. They remind us of Solomon's observation: "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Some people claim that our generation is uniquely wicked, and that the world must be near its end because people have become so evil. But are we really worse than previous generations? The sins these laws address, idolatry, dishonoring parents, dishonesty, oppression of the poor, and sexual sin, are as old as humanity. We are neither better nor worse than those who came before us. Apart from God's merciful intervention, we are simply sinners.

And yet, in the midst of that unchanging human condition, something truly new has happened. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Both statements are true at the same time. Nothing about fallen human nature has changed across the centuries. But everything has changed for those who are in Christ. So we are called to live by the Spirit, with our minds set on Him. God's commands are no longer a crushing

burden, but a joy, because we know that our obedience pleases the One who took our curse upon Himself.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Jesus said that Moses permitted divorce "because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning." How does going back to God's original design shape the way you think about marriage, whether you are married or not?
2. Israel's laws protected borrowers' livelihoods, returned the poor man's cloak at sunset, and required that workers be paid the same day. What do these laws teach you about how God wants His people to handle money and power over others?
3. "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this." How should your memory of what God has saved you from shape the way you treat people who are vulnerable or in need?
4. God called dishonest weights "detestable." Where might you be tempted to be less than completely honest in your work, business, or finances?
5. The Amalekites attacked those who were "weary and worn out" and lagging behind. Who are the weary stragglers in your church or community, and how can you protect and care for them?
6. The Israelite bringing firstfruits told the story of redemption as his own story: "the Egyptians mistreated us." How would

you tell the story of what God has done for you in your own words?

Chapter Ten

Deuteronomy 28-29

Deuteronomy 28 is one of the most sobering chapters in the Bible. After nearly thirty chapters of history and law, Moses sets before Israel the consequences of the covenant: blessings if they obeyed, curses if they did not. Then, in chapter 29, he gathers the whole nation, down to the youngest child and the humblest foreign servant, to renew the covenant on the plains of Moab. These two chapters are not easy reading. But they tell us a great deal about God's holiness, His love, and our desperate need for His grace.

The chapter begins with a promise: "If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 28:1-2).

What follows is a picture of complete blessing. "You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.... You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out" (Deuteronomy 28:3, 6). Their children, crops, and livestock would flourish. Their enemies would flee before them. They would lend to many nations and borrow from none. "The LORD will make you the head, not the tail.... you will always be at the top, never at the bottom" (Deuteronomy 28:13). It is a description of perfect peace and prosperity; one could hardly imagine anything better.

Then the chapter turns: "However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on

you and overtake you" (Deuteronomy 28:15). What follows is one of the longest and most terrible passages in Scripture. The blessings take up about fourteen verses. The curses take up fifty-four.

Why is the list of curses so much longer? Readers have answered that question in different ways. Some see it as an expression of God's love: a God who did not care would not bother to spell out, in exhausting detail, exactly what unfaithfulness would cost. It is like a parent explaining consequences over and over precisely because he wants obedience badly enough to leave no room for misunderstanding. Others see it as an expression of God's holiness, the weight of His justice outweighing even His desire to bless. Still others see it as a revelation of our own wickedness. Even when we are given a list of blessings, and then an even longer list of punishments, we are still not capable, left to ourselves, of honoring God as He deserves.

All three readings are true, and they belong together. The length of the curses reflects God's holiness precisely because it also reflects His love, and both are necessary because of our sin. It is also worth knowing that ancient treaties between kings and their vassal states often followed this same pattern, with a much longer section of curses than blessings, since the purpose of that section was to deter rebellion. Deuteronomy uses a familiar form from its day, but fills it with something those treaties never had: a covenant Lord who loves His people more than the terms of any treaty required.

One reader summed it up memorably: "It takes God to please God." Hebrews says the same: "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). And Paul tells us that "it is God who

works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13). The curses reveal our sin. Our sin reveals that we cannot produce obedience on our own. And the only way out is not more effort, but God Himself supplying both the desire and the power to please Him.

The curses come in waves of increasing severity: disease, drought, defeat, madness, oppression, exile. One verse stands out because it explains the heart of the problem: "Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the LORD sends against you" (Deuteronomy 28:47–48). Israel's failure would not only be a matter of outward disobedience. It would be a failure to serve God with joy in the good times. Those who would not gladly serve the Lord in abundance would end up serving their enemies in want.

Some of the curses are almost unbearable to read. Moses warned that during a siege, starvation would become so severe that "you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the LORD your God has given you" (Deuteronomy 28:53). This was not exaggeration meant to frighten an ancient audience. It actually happened. During the siege of Samaria, two women made a horrifying agreement to eat their own sons (2 Kings 6:26–29). During the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, Lamentations records that "With their own hands compassionate women have cooked their own children" (Lamentations 4:10). And the Jewish historian Josephus describes similar scenes during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in AD 70. It is disturbing to see God's warnings fulfilled so exactly.

But it tells us that when God speaks, He means what He says, in judgment as well as in blessing.

The chapter ends with a prophecy of exile: "Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods—gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your ancestors have known" (Deuteronomy 28:64). And Moses describes the inner life of the exiled people in words that capture the misery of a life without God: "Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, 'If only it were evening!' and in the evening, 'If only it were morning!'" (Deuteronomy 28:65–67).

That description sounds strikingly modern. When people turn away from God, life does not become freer. It becomes restless, anxious, and empty. We see the fruit of that all around us: broken marriages, neglected children, and even advertisements openly promoting unfaithfulness. Without God, what is the point of anything? Everything becomes senseless. Thank the Lord that He cares, and that He does not leave us in that condition.

Some teachers use the blessings of Deuteronomy 28 to promise believers that God will make them "the head, not the tail" if they simply believe. But what does this passage actually say? It does not say, "If you believe, you will receive." It says, "If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands... All these blessings will come on you" (Deuteronomy 28:1–2). The requirement for these blessings

under the Mosaic covenant was full obedience. Partial obedience, even ninety-nine percent obedience, was never enough. Those who claim the blessings of this covenant without its terms are, as we will see in chapter 29, claiming exactly what Moses warned against.

The same is true of those who try to place Christians back under the Law of Moses, insisting on its Sabbath regulations or dietary rules as requirements for God's favor. If we place ourselves under the Mosaic covenant to receive its blessings, we place ourselves under its curses as well. But Christ has freed us from that covenant. "For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant" (Hebrews 9:15). The blessing of the new covenant is not temporary prosperity in a particular land. It is eternal life. Praise be to God, who takes away our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness through Christ's blood!

Chapter 29 opens with a covenant ceremony: "These are the terms of the covenant the LORD commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in Moab, in addition to the covenant he had made with them at Horeb" (Deuteronomy 29:1). This was not a new covenant replacing Sinai, but a renewal of it with the new generation.

Moses begins, as he so often does, by calling Israel to remember: "Your eyes have seen all that the LORD did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials and to all his land. With your own eyes you saw those great trials, those signs and great wonders." And then he says something surprising: "But to this day the

LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear" (Deuteronomy 29:2–4).

What a remarkable admission! Israel had seen more of God's power than any people in history. They had watched the plagues fall on Egypt, walked through the sea on dry ground, eaten bread from heaven every morning, and seen the glory of God on the mountain. And yet they still did not truly understand. Their eyes had seen, but their hearts had not grasped it. Miracles by themselves do not change hearts. Only God can open blind eyes and give understanding.

Paul quotes this very passage to explain why many in Israel in his own day did not believe in Jesus: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear, to this very day" (Romans 11:8). And in the very next chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses will promise that God Himself would one day circumcise their hearts so that they could love Him. The problem Moses names in chapter 29 is the problem only God's new covenant could solve.

Moses then reminds them of God's care during the wilderness years: "Yet the LORD says, 'During the forty years that I led you through the wilderness, your clothes did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet. You ate no bread and drank no wine or other fermented drink. I did this so that you might know that I am the LORD your God'" (Deuteronomy 29:5–6). For forty years they had lived without the ordinary means of life, and God had provided everything. The whole wilderness experience had been designed to teach them one thing: to know that He is the Lord.

Then Moses describes who was standing before God that day: "All of you are standing today in the presence of the LORD

your God—your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel, together with your children and your wives, and the foreigners living in your camps who chop your wood and carry your water" (Deuteronomy 29:10–11). Everyone was included, from the most important leaders to the humblest foreign laborers. The covenant was not only for the powerful or the religious elite. It was for all.

And then Moses says something even more remarkable: "I am making this covenant, with its oath, not only with you who are standing here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God but also with those who are not here today" (Deuteronomy 29:14–15).

That statement tells us much about God. It shows His love. How could He make a covenant with people who were not yet born? It shows His knowledge. He could make this covenant because He knew exactly who would come, and when. And it shows His mercy. He knew they could not keep His covenant perfectly, and yet He bound Himself to them anyway. On our side, we are sinful and selfish, and it is only through the Holy Spirit that we can respond to God's covenant at all.

This verse also shows how the covenant was to be carried forward: through teaching the next generation. Moses would soon command that the Law be read aloud to all Israel, so that "their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land" (Deuteronomy 31:13). The psalmist later described the same pattern: God "commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God" (Psalm 78:5–7).

That responsibility begins at home, with parents. Churches and Sunday school classes can help, but a piecemeal approach is not enough. It is possible to sit through years of church services and never hear the whole truth on which our faith rests. Parents must read the Word of God to their children, which means parents must read the Word of God themselves. If we do not, who will? That may seem like a daunting task, and many of us feel unprepared for it. But this is where faith comes in. If we trust God to provide and seek Him earnestly each day, He will give us what we need, just as He cared for Israel in the wilderness. Paul reminded Timothy of the faith "which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also" (2 Timothy 1:5). That is how faith travels from one generation to the next: through faithful homes.

Then Moses gives a warning about a particular kind of person: "Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison. When such a person hears the words of this oath and they invoke a blessing on themselves, thinking, 'I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way,' they will bring disaster on the watered land as well as the dry. The LORD will never be willing to forgive them" (Deuteronomy 29:18–20).

This is a person who has heard every blessing and every curse, and still tells himself, "I'll be fine." He is not ignorant of God's terms. He deliberately uses the language of blessing as a kind of insurance policy, while fully intending to keep living as

he pleases. That is even more dangerous than simply misunderstanding God's promises.

Some have called this attitude "cheap grace": living a deliberately disobedient life while assuming forgiveness is only a quick request away whenever it is finally needed. It is a slippery slope. Who can say that repentance will actually come? And what if judgment comes first? Paul addressed the same attitude directly: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Romans 6:1–2). Paul's point is not merely that such an attitude is risky. It is that it misunderstands what happened when we came to Christ. A believer has died to the old life. Returning to it is not only dangerous; it contradicts who we have become.

Hebrews picks up Moses' image of the bitter root: "See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many" (Hebrews 12:15). One person's hidden rebellion can spread and harm a whole community. We need to watch over our own hearts, and over one another.

How should we respond instead? By faith. When we hear God telling us to do something, we are called to do it without excuses or looking back. That is not easy. Sometimes being faithful in the smallest thing is the hardest thing of all. But knowing God, and having a genuine desire to glorify Him, is a powerful combination. Perhaps there is an area of your life where you have been holding back. What would it look like to bring God glory there today, simply because it pleases Him?

Moses then imagines a future day when foreigners and later generations would look at the devastated land of Israel and ask,

"Why has the LORD done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?" And the answer would be: "It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their ancestors" (Deuteronomy 29:24–25). Israel's history would become a lesson to the nations. God's judgment would not be secret or arbitrary. Everyone would understand why it came.

The chapter ends with one of the most important verses in all of Deuteronomy: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29).

After describing so much of the future, Moses reminds Israel that there are many things they will never know. Some of God's purposes remain hidden. We may never understand why certain things happen, why one person suffers and another is spared, how God's sovereignty and our responsibility fit together, or exactly how the future will unfold. Those secret things belong to God, and we can trust Him with them. But what God has revealed belongs to us and to our children, and it is given for a purpose: "that we may follow all the words of this law."

That verse is a gift to anyone who struggles with unanswered questions. We do not have to understand everything in order to obey what we do understand. Much of our anxiety comes from trying to grasp the secret things, while neglecting the revealed things. God has not told us everything, but He has told us enough. Our calling is to trust Him with what He has not revealed, and to obey Him in what He has.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. The curses of Deuteronomy 28 are nearly four times longer than the blessings. What do you think this reveals about God, and about us?
2. "Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity..." Do you serve God with joy in good times, or only turn to Him in hard times? What would joyful service look like for you right now?
3. Israel had seen countless miracles, yet Moses said, "to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands." Why don't miracles alone change hearts? What does this teach you about your need for God's grace?
4. God made His covenant "with those who are not here today," and commanded that it be taught to the next generation. What are you doing to pass on your faith to those who come after you?
5. Moses warned against the person who thinks, "I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way." Are there areas of your life where you have been treating God's grace as an insurance policy rather than a reason to obey?
6. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us." What unanswered questions are you struggling with? How can you trust God with them while obeying what He has clearly revealed?

Chapter Eleven

Deuteronomy 30–31

After the terrible curses of chapter 28 and the solemn warnings of chapter 29, we might expect Deuteronomy to end in gloom. Instead, chapter 30 opens a window of hope. Moses looks beyond Israel's coming failure and exile to a day of restoration, when God Himself would change His people's hearts. Then he sets before them the great choice between life and death. In chapter 31, the aging Moses prepares for his departure: he encourages the people and Joshua, commands that the Law be read regularly, and receives a sobering word from God about Israel's future.

Chapter 30 begins by assuming that the curses will come: "When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come on you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you" (Deuteronomy 30:1–3).

Notice the word "when." Moses does not say "if." He speaks of exile as something that will happen, and he speaks of return as something that will happen too. "Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back" (Deuteronomy 30:4). No matter how far Israel might be scattered, God's compassion would reach them. "The LORD will

again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your ancestors" (Deuteronomy 30:9).

Israel's history partly fulfilled this promise when a remnant returned from Babylon. But our own conviction is that the promise reaches further, to a future restoration of Israel that God has not abandoned. Paul wrote of a day when "all Israel will be saved. As it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins'" (Romans 11:26–27). Faithful Christians understand these promises in different ways; some see them fulfilled in the church, which includes believing Jews and Gentiles together. But all agree on the heart of the passage: God's discipline is never His final word to His people.

Then comes the promise at the very center of this chapter: "The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live" (Deuteronomy 30:6).

This verse should be read alongside the one we considered in the last chapter: "But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear" (Deuteronomy 29:4). The first verse names what was lacking; the second promises the remedy. And both attribute the change to God. Israel's deepest problem was not a lack of information, but a lack of new hearts. And that was something only God could give.

In Deuteronomy 30:6 we are given a preview of the New Covenant. It was not a promise for Moses' generation to experience immediately, but a future one, in which God would change hearts so that His people could and would obey Him.

Centuries later, God spoke through Jeremiah: "'This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people'" (Jeremiah 31:33). And through Ezekiel: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.... And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Moses promised a heart that God would circumcise. Jeremiah promised a law written on the heart. Ezekiel promised a new heart and God's own Spirit within. They are all describing the same work of grace, fulfilled in the New Covenant established by the blood of Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit. We have no claim on God. Salvation is His undeserved gift. When He gives us minds to understand, eyes to see, and ears to hear, and changes our hearts, then we can love Him with all our heart and soul. We will not practice that love perfectly in this life, because of our sinful nature, but we already enjoy its blessings by the Spirit.

Christians understand the scope of this heart-changing work in different ways. Some believe God changes the hearts of those He has chosen, effectively and without fail. Others believe God offers enabling grace to all, and point out that the same chapter goes on to call the people to choose life. Both readings agree that the change of heart is necessary and comes from God. They differ on how widely it is given and whether it can be resisted. We will return to that question in a moment.

Then Moses says something that may seem to contradict everything else he has said: "Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not

up in heaven, so that you have to ask, 'Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, 'Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it" (Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

How can this be? Throughout Deuteronomy, Moses has insisted that Israel would fail to keep the Law. In the very next chapter, God will tell him that they certainly will. How then can the command be "not too difficult"?

Part of the answer lies in understanding what kind of difficulty Moses meant. God's commands were not hidden, mysterious, or inaccessible. Israel did not need to send someone to the heavens or across the sea to find out what God required. He had revealed it plainly. Moses had written it down, and it would be taught to them regularly. The word had been brought near.

But knowing a command is one thing, and keeping it is another. A command may be perfectly clear while the heart resists it. And we should not reduce Moses' words to a statement about understanding alone, since he says the word is near "so you may obey it." God's word is available for a real response. That is exactly why the tension in this chapter is so powerful. The word is near. The call to obey is real. And yet the people need the God who circumcises hearts. Accessibility and inward renewal belong together.

Paul quotes this very passage in Romans 10, and applies it in a remarkable way: "But the righteousness that is by faith says: 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?"' (that is, to bring Christ down) 'or "Who will descend into the deep?"'

(that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:6–9).

Paul reads Moses' words in the light of Christ. No one needs to climb to heaven to bring Christ down, because He has already come. No one needs to descend into the grave to bring Him back, because He has already risen. The saving message is near, and it calls for faith and confession. What the Law could never accomplish, God has accomplished in Christ. The word that was "near" in Moses' day has now come nearer still, in the gospel.

Even during the time of the Law, grace was never absent. Paul traces faith all the way back to Abraham, whose faith "was credited to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:3). The way of faith was present in Moses' day, though partly veiled by the requirements of the Law. Deuteronomy 30 lifts that veil for a moment and lets us glimpse the grace that the New Covenant would reveal fully.

Some of the most careful discussions of this chapter have come from believers willing to wrestle with the text for themselves, rather than simply accepting what a respected commentator has said. That is a healthy instinct. We are each accountable before God for what we believe, and we will not be excused because we followed someone else's mistaken teaching. At the same time, independent study needs to be joined to careful attention to the original languages, openness to correction, and respect for other careful readers. We study neither to defend a scholar's reputation nor to prize novelty for

its own sake, but to hear God's Word faithfully and respond to the God who speaks it.

Then Moses brings the whole covenant to its climax: "See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.... This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life" (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19–20).

"Choose life." It is one of the most famous appeals in the Bible. And notice how Moses defines life: "For the LORD is your life." Life was not simply long years in the land, or prosperity, or safety. Life was God Himself. To choose life was to love Him, listen to Him, and hold fast to Him.

But this raises a question that some readers find troubling. Was it actually possible for Israel to choose life? Just one chapter earlier, Moses said that God had not given them minds that understand, eyes that see, or ears that hear. Unless God Himself opened their minds and eyes and ears, how could they grasp the truth in front of them?

We see the same tension at the end of Joshua's life. After the conquest, he gathered the people and said, "But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.... But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15). The people answered that they too would serve the Lord. But Joshua's reply is startling: "You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God" (Joshua 24:19). Right after calling them to choose, he told them they were not able to do it.

Our own conviction is that, whether Jew or Gentile, unless we are made alive by the Holy Spirit, we cannot truly choose God. "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God" (Romans 3:10–11). "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9). In our reading, faith itself is God's gift. Those in Israel who did follow the Lord, like Moses, Joshua, and Caleb, did so because of God's gracious choice.

We should acknowledge again that this is one serious position within a long-standing debate among faithful Christians. Others read passages like Joshua 24 and Deuteronomy 30 as showing that God genuinely calls all people to choose, and that His grace enables a real response that can be accepted or refused. Whatever our view, Joshua's words are a striking example of pastoral honesty. Rather than accepting the crowd's confident, easy promise, he refused to let a quick emotional commitment take the place of the far harder reality of lasting faithfulness. And all of us, whatever our theology, can pray the same prayer of thanks: Lord, thank You for opening our eyes, giving us faith to believe, and freeing us from a Law that could bring only death, not life.

Chapter 31 turns to the transition of leadership. Moses said to all Israel, "I am now a hundred and twenty years old and I am no longer able to lead you. The LORD has said to me, 'You shall not cross the Jordan'" (Deuteronomy 31:2). But he did not leave them without hope: "The LORD your God himself will cross over ahead of you" (Deuteronomy 31:3). The people would lose Moses, but they would not lose God.

Then Moses encouraged the whole nation: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6). And he called Joshua forward and gave him the same charge in front of everyone: "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (Deuteronomy 31:8).

This promise, "he will never leave you nor forsake you," echoes through the rest of Scripture. God would repeat it to Joshua himself (Joshua 1:5). And the writer of Hebrews applies it to every believer: "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5). Leaders come and go. Moses would die. But God would remain. The same is true for us. Whatever changes we face, and whatever losses, the Lord goes before us and will never leave us.

Then Moses wrote down the Law and gave it to the priests and elders, with a command: "At the end of every seven years, in the year for canceling debts, during the Festival of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 31:10–12).

Everyone was to hear it: men, women, children, and foreigners. And the purpose was specifically for the next generation: "Their children, who do not know this law, must

hear it and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land" (Deuteronomy 31:13). God's plan for keeping His people faithful was the public, regular reading of His Word. Centuries later, after the exile, Ezra read the Law aloud to the whole people at the Festival of Tabernacles, and they wept and rejoiced as they heard it (Nehemiah 8). There is still no substitute for the public reading and teaching of Scripture.

Then the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting in a pillar of cloud and spoke to Moses and Joshua. And what He said was sobering: "You are going to rest with your ancestors, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them" (Deuteronomy 31:16). God knew exactly what was coming. "When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their ancestors, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting me and breaking my covenant" (Deuteronomy 31:20).

Israel was about to enter the Promised Land, and what they heard from God was not a promise of success, but a prediction of failure. They had seen His signs and wonders, been reminded of His Word, and been disciplined for forty years. How could they not learn? And notice what would lead them astray: not hardship, but prosperity. "When they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods."

We should not judge them too quickly. Many of us were running toward destruction, whether we realized it or not, indifferent to God and absorbed in material blessings, just as Israel would be once they had eaten their fill. And even now, it is easy to love God's gifts more than God Himself. Since His Spirit

lives in us, let us be captivated by who our God is, not merely by what He gives or can give. This is why prosperity teaching is so dangerous. The New Testament does not promise believers material blessing as a reward for their performance. It promises something far greater: eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The most remarkable thing about God's words in this chapter is what He did not do. He said, "I know what they are disposed to do, even before I bring them into the land I promised them on oath" (Deuteronomy 31:21). And yet He brought them into the land anyway. God was not simply predicting an inevitable outcome from a distance. He was choosing to keep His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with full knowledge of how His people would respond. His blessing was never contingent on their future faithfulness turning out well. He moved forward with His promise before their unfaithfulness had even happened. That is grace.

God also told Moses to write down a song and teach it to the Israelites, "so that it may be a witness for me against them" (Deuteronomy 31:19). When disaster came, and the people asked, "Have not these disasters come on us because our God is not with us?" (Deuteronomy 31:17), the song would remind them why. We will read that song in the next chapter. And Moses gave one more instruction: "Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God. There it will remain as a witness against you" (Deuteronomy 31:26).

Then Moses spoke to the Levites with painful honesty: "For I know how rebellious and stiff-necked you are. If you have been rebellious against the LORD while I am still alive and with you, how much more will you rebel after I die!" (Deuteronomy 31:27). These were not the words of a bitter old man. They were

the words of a leader who had watched this people for forty years and loved them enough to tell them the truth.

So these chapters hold together two truths we must never separate. The first is the certainty of human failure. Moses knew it, Joshua knew it, and God declared it. The second is the certainty of divine grace. God would circumcise hearts. He would gather His scattered people. He would go before them and never forsake them. And He would keep His promise even to a people He knew would fail Him. Our hope, like Israel's, does not rest on our faithfulness, but on His.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Moses spoke of exile as certain, but he spoke of restoration as certain too. How does knowing that God's discipline is never His final word encourage you when you have failed?
2. God promised, "The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts... so that you may love him." Why could Israel not do this for themselves? What does it mean for you that God Himself changes hearts?
3. "The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart." How does Paul's use of this passage in Romans 10 help you understand the gospel? How near is God's Word to you in daily life?
4. "Now choose life... For the LORD is your life." What does it mean to you that life is not merely a set of blessings, but God Himself?
5. Joshua told the people who had just promised to serve the Lord, "You are not able to serve the LORD." Why do you think

he said that? How should it shape the way we make commitments to God?

6. God brought Israel into the land knowing they would turn away from Him. How does that picture of grace, faithful to people He knows will fail, affect the way you see His faithfulness to you?

Chapter Twelve

Deuteronomy 32–34

The book of Deuteronomy ends with a song, a blessing, and a death. Chapter 32 records the song God commanded Moses to teach Israel, a song that would remind future generations of God's faithfulness and their own unfaithfulness. Chapter 33 records Moses' final blessing on the tribes. And chapter 34 tells of his death on Mount Nebo, within sight of the land he would not enter. These chapters bring to a close not only Deuteronomy, but the five books of Moses, the foundation of the whole Bible.

The song opens with all creation summoned as witness: "Listen, you heavens, and I will speak; hear, you earth, the words of my mouth" (Deuteronomy 32:1). And then Moses declares its theme: "I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he" (Deuteronomy 32:3–4).

What a powerful statement! No matter our circumstances, God is perfect and His ways are just. Whether our road leads through blessing or suffering in this life, that truth is our comfort. And our chief purpose, as God's children, is to glorify Him.

Notice the title Moses gives to God: "the Rock." It appears again and again in this song, and it is not merely poetic decoration. It sets up the song's central accusation. God was the Rock: permanent, faithful, unshakable. And Israel would trade Him for gods that were not gods at all. "Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; filled with food, they became heavy and sleek. They

abandoned the God who made them and rejected the Rock their Savior" (Deuteronomy 32:15). "You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth" (Deuteronomy 32:18). "Jeshurun," meaning "upright one," was an affectionate name for Israel. The irony is painful: the upright one grew fat on God's blessings and kicked against the One who gave them. And the song ends its contrast with a line even Israel's enemies would have to admit: "For their rock is not like our Rock" (Deuteronomy 32:31).

The song is full of tender images of God's care. "Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?" (Deuteronomy 32:6). "In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them aloft" (Deuteronomy 32:10–11). An eagle stirs up its nest to teach its young to fly, and then swoops beneath them to catch them if they fall. That is a picture of God's discipline and care in the wilderness. And the song calls Israel to remember: "Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you" (Deuteronomy 32:7). This song itself was meant to be one of the ways they remembered.

The song says that Israel "sacrificed to false gods, which are not God" (Deuteronomy 32:17). The Hebrew word behind "false gods" refers to demons, and Paul echoes this when he writes that "the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God" (1 Corinthians 10:20). That helps answer a question some readers ask: does the Bible admit that other gods exist? The answer is no. There is only one God. When Scripture speaks of

the "gods" of the nations, it is speaking of what the nations believed and worshiped, not of beings equal to the Creator. At the same time, Scripture does not describe an empty spiritual universe. It acknowledges angels, hostile spiritual powers, and demonic involvement in idolatry. None of them is a rival to God. Biblical faith does not deny that spiritual beings exist; it denies that any of them is God.

Then the song describes God's judgment, and it contains a surprising detail. God says, "I said I would scatter them and erase their name from human memory, but I dreaded the taunt of the enemy, lest the adversary misunderstand and say, 'Our hand has triumphed; the LORD has not done all this'" (Deuteronomy 32:26–27). Israel had not yet entered the land, so this was a prophecy of their future. God would be so angry with them that He would consider wiping them out. What would stay His hand was not Israel's goodness, but His own glory. He would not let the watching world misunderstand and give credit to Israel's enemies for what He had done.

God's glory is the ultimate goal of all things, and Scripture never treats His holiness as a small matter. The judgments it records were real; the whole adult generation that came out of Egypt died in the wilderness. We tend to domesticate God and forget how holy He is.

And yet we must not set God's glory against His fatherly love, as though they were competing attributes. This same song calls God Israel's "Father" (Deuteronomy 32:6). Jesus taught His disciples to address God as "Our Father" (Matthew 6:9). Paul says that believers have received the Spirit by whom "we cry, 'Abba, Father'" (Romans 8:15). When Jesus wanted to show the Pharisees what God is like, He told of a father who ran to

embrace his returning son (Luke 15:20). God does not delight in judgment. "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live" (Ezekiel 33:11). "For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone" (Lamentations 3:33). Through Hosea, God cried out over His rebellious people, "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?... My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused" (Hosea 11:8). God's holiness and His fatherhood are not rivals. His fatherhood is the very relationship the gospel exists to restore.

Two verses from this song are quoted in the New Testament in ways that are worth noticing. "It is mine to avenge; I will repay" (Deuteronomy 32:35). Paul quotes it to tell believers not to take revenge (Romans 12:19), and Hebrews quotes it as a warning to those who reject Christ (Hebrews 10:30). And the song's final verse calls the nations to join in praise: "Rejoice, you nations, with his people" (Deuteronomy 32:43). Paul quotes those words to show that God always intended to bring Gentiles into His family: "Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people" (Romans 15:10).

The song ends with hope. "The LORD will vindicate his people and relent concerning his servants when he sees their strength is gone" (Deuteronomy 32:36). God would surely bring disaster on His children for their unfaithfulness. But in the end they would be vindicated, and the nations would rejoice with them. Their unfaithfulness could never cancel God's plan to bless them, and to bless the nations through them. Christ came through the line of Judah to bless Jews and Gentiles alike. Paul looked ahead to a day when "all Israel will be saved" (Romans

11:26). Christians understand the precise scope and timing of that promise in different ways, but the confidence behind it is the same: God's faithfulness works on a timeline long enough, and with a purpose large enough, that human unfaithfulness is never the final word. Isn't it a comfort that He is faithful?

Near the end of the song comes one of its most striking declarations: "See now that I myself am he! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand" (Deuteronomy 32:39).

What is God saying here? He is not merely saying that He is able to take life or give it, or to wound and to heal. He is declaring that life and death, wounding and healing, are under His authority. Nothing happens outside His knowledge or beyond His control. No human ruler, and no spiritual power, can act apart from what He allows. If anything could happen entirely outside His knowledge and control, He would not be God.

The book of Job illustrates this. Satan afflicted Job and his family. But God knew what Satan intended, and Satan could do nothing beyond the limits God set (Job 1:12; 2:6). Some try to defend God's goodness by suggesting that such events simply escape His notice. But that does not honor Him; it diminishes Him.

We need to say this carefully, though. To say that God permitted an evil event is not to say that He approved of it, or that the perpetrators were not responsible, or that the suffering of victims was insignificant. The book of Job itself names the adversary's destructive role and holds the human raiders responsible for their actions. Scripture keeps these distinctions while confessing that nothing lies outside God's knowledge and

providence. Nor do we usually know what good God will bring from a particular evil. When Paul writes that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28), he immediately defines that good as being "conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29), and the same chapter speaks honestly of groaning, suffering, and waiting for redemption. The promise is larger than any explanation that makes every tragedy seem immediately beneficial.

The comfort this verse offers is strong, but it is not glib. It means that God is able to sustain His people and complete His saving purpose even when we cannot make sense of our circumstances. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). That assurance does not forbid grief, resistance to injustice, or prayer for healing. It frees us from both panic and the pressure to supply explanations Scripture has not given. The Lord who holds life and death in His hand is the same God whose faithfulness has been revealed in Jesus Christ.

When Moses finished reciting the song, he gave the people one final charge: "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life" (Deuteronomy 32:46–47).

"They are your life." That sentence sums up the whole book of Deuteronomy. God's Word is not a set of abstract ideas or religious rules to be kept at a distance. It is life itself. That is why Moses spent his last days reminding, teaching, warning, and pleading. And that is why Jesus, when tempted in the wilderness, answered from this book: "Man shall not live on

bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

That same day, God told Moses to climb Mount Nebo and view the land, "Therefore, you will see the land only from a distance; you will not enter the land I am giving to the people of Israel" (Deuteronomy 32:52). The reason was given once more: at Meribah, Moses and Aaron had not upheld God's holiness among the Israelites (Deuteronomy 32:51).

Chapter 33 records Moses' final words to the tribes: "This is the blessing that Moses the man of God pronounced on the Israelites before his death" (Deuteronomy 33:1). Like Jacob before him, Moses blessed each tribe in turn. Of Levi he said, "He teaches your precepts to Jacob and your law to Israel" (Deuteronomy 33:10). Of Benjamin, "Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long" (Deuteronomy 33:12). Of Joseph, he spoke of land richly blessed with the best gifts of heaven and earth. Curiously, the tribe of Simeon is not mentioned at all, perhaps reflecting its later absorption into Judah.

The blessing ends with some of the most beloved words in the Old Testament: "There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides across the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:26–27). And finally: "Blessed are you, Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword" (Deuteronomy 33:29).

After all the warnings and curses of the previous chapters, Moses' last words to Israel were words of blessing. And the heart of the blessing was not the land or its crops, but God

Himself: "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Whatever lay ahead for Israel, and whatever lies ahead for us, those arms would never fail. Those words have comforted countless believers facing death, loss, and fear. They are as true for us as they were for Israel.

Chapter 34 tells the end of Moses' story. "Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the LORD showed him the whole land" (Deuteronomy 34:1). From the northern hills to the southern desert, from the Jordan valley to the western sea, God showed Moses the entire land of promise. "This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it" (Deuteronomy 34:4).

"And Moses the servant of the LORD died there in Moab, as the LORD had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is" (Deuteronomy 34:5–6).

It is remarkable that the text says God Himself buried Moses. Some translations note that the Hebrew could be read "they buried him," so we cannot be entirely certain. But if it was God, it says something about the relationship between Moses and the Lord. We usually think of Moses as a prophet and intermediary between God and the people. It is striking to consider that God may have personally cared for His servant's body, rather than leaving it to the people or the priests. Perhaps Moses and God spoke of many things that were never recorded. And the unknown grave may have been a mercy too, keeping Israel from turning it into a shrine.

"Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone" (Deuteronomy 34:7). He did not die of old age. He died because God's time for him had come. "The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days" (Deuteronomy 34:8). And the leadership passed to Joshua: "Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him" (Deuteronomy 34:9).

The book ends with an epitaph: "Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, who did all those signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt.... For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel" (Deuteronomy 34:10–12). The phrase "face to face" is used of no one else in the Old Testament. Moses' relationship with God was unique.

Reflecting on Moses' life, we see a man anointed by God, who spoke with Him face to face as no one else did. And yet he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of one act of disobedience. That was a high price to pay. It reminds us that with great knowledge and privilege comes great responsibility. Jesus said, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded" (Luke 12:48).

Jesus' parable of the talents makes the same point. The servants who were entrusted with their master's money and put it to work heard, "Well done, good and faithful servant!... Come and share your master's happiness!" But the servant who buried his talent out of fear was called wicked and lazy, and was thrown "outside, into the darkness" (Matthew 25:21, 30). The parable is a sobering warning to those who try to hide from God's calling

and gifts. It is also a powerful encouragement to faithfulness. God has given each of us gifts and knowledge. Sometimes we act as though growing in our knowledge of God is too much work, not a priority, or something to fear because of what it might require of us. That is our sinful nature. By nature we do not want to know God; it is His Spirit who gives us that desire. We find peace when we align ourselves with His will and stop resisting the Spirit's leading.

Deuteronomy's epitaph for Moses stood as the high point of Israel's relationship with God for many centuries. And that is exactly why the New Testament's claims about Jesus are so astonishing. John writes, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (John 1:17–18). Moses spoke with God face to face; Jesus is God, who makes the Father known. Hebrews says, "Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself" (Hebrews 3:3). Even Moses' unmatched relationship with God was a shadow of what was coming.

And Moses did, at last, stand in the Promised Land. Centuries later, on a mountain in Galilee, he appeared with Elijah and spoke with Jesus about "his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). The man who could only see the land from Nebo stood in it beside the One who would bring God's people into their true and eternal rest.

So the five books of Moses end, not with Israel in the land, but with Israel on its edge, mourning their leader and looking to a new one. The story is not finished. The promise is not yet fully

realized. But God has been faithful at every step, and He will be faithful to the end.

We can be thankful for every day God gives us on this earth. Let us live worthy of His calling, remembering what He has done, proclaiming His name, and praising His greatness. God's words are not idle words for us. They are our life.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Moses called God "the Rock," whose works are perfect and whose ways are just. What are the "rocks" people trust in today? How has God proved to be a Rock in your life?
2. "Jeshurun grew fat and kicked." How does prosperity tempt God's people to forget Him? What helps you keep remembering Him in times of plenty?
3. God stayed His hand so that His name would not be misunderstood, and yet He also calls Himself Israel's Father who does not delight in judgment. How do God's holiness and His fatherly love fit together in your understanding of Him?
4. "I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal." How does God's sovereignty over all things comfort you? How can you hold onto that comfort without offering easy explanations for suffering?
5. "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." When have you most needed to rest in those arms? Who in your life needs to hear these words today?

6. Moses' epitaph says no prophet was like him, "whom the LORD knew face to face," and yet John says Jesus makes the Father known as no one else can. As you finish Deuteronomy, what has God taught you about remembering Him, and about the One greater than Moses?

Conclusion

The Word Made Near

We began this book with a man standing before a new generation on the plains of Moab, determined that the unbelief that turned eleven days into forty years would not be repeated by children who had not lived through its consequences. We end it with that same man laid in an unmarked grave, having delivered everything God gave him to deliver, and having entered nothing of the promise himself except the sight of a land he would never walk. Between those two points lies the most sustained act of remembering in the entire Bible: a book less interested in giving Israel new commands than in making sure the old ones, and the history behind them, were never allowed to fade from a people's memory.

Three threads ran through nearly every chapter. The first was the comprehensiveness of the call to remember and to teach. It covered every posture and every part of daily life, and every generation still to come. It refused to let faithfulness remain a private, occasional matter. God's Word was to be the center of a whole household's life, from the king writing out his own copy of the Law to the child asking at the table, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?" (Deuteronomy 6:20), and hearing in reply the story of how God rescued His people.

The second was the book's honesty about what lay ahead. Moses did not merely warn Israel that disobedience was possible. He predicted, with something close to certainty, that they would fail. God Himself told Moses, "I know what they are disposed to do, even before I bring them into the land"

(Deuteronomy 31:21). And yet God brought them in anyway, keeping His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with full knowledge of how His people would respond. The historical books that follow confirm, chapter after chapter, how right Moses was, and how faithful God remained.

The third, and deepest, was the promise buried in the middle of the book's harshest warnings: that God Himself would one day circumcise the very hearts the Law could only instruct from the outside. The Law was holy and good, and the word was near, in Israel's mouth and in their heart. But a people to whom God had not yet given "a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear" (Deuteronomy 29:4) needed more than a clear command. They needed a new heart. That promise is the clearest Old Testament anticipation of the New Covenant, which would come in Christ and be applied by His Spirit.

Along the way, Deuteronomy kept pointing beyond itself. Jesus answered Satan's temptations from its pages, succeeding in the wilderness where Israel had failed. He named its Shema as the greatest commandment. He is the Prophet like Moses whom Israel was told to listen to, and the King who fulfilled every requirement of Deuteronomy 17. He became a curse for us by hanging on a tree, bearing the curse the Law pronounced on all who fail to keep it. And Paul, reading Moses' words that "the word is very near you," heard in them the gospel itself: "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). The word Moses brought near has now come nearer still, made flesh in Jesus Christ.

Deuteronomy closes the Pentateuch, but it was never meant to close the story. In his final recorded act, Moses commissioned

Joshua to lead the people across the Jordan he himself would never cross, and the book of Joshua exists to answer the question this one leaves hanging: would the generation Moses spent a month reminding actually remember what they had been told, once the reminding stopped and the remembering became entirely their own responsibility? If our study of the five books of Moses has taught us anything, it is that the answer to that question is never automatic. It is never guaranteed by knowledge alone, however carefully that knowledge has been taught and received. It must be taken up in every generation by people willing to do what Israel on the plains of Moab was asked to do one final time: remember what God has done, teach it to whoever comes next, and choose, today and not merely someday, to walk in it.

And for those of us who belong to Christ, that choice rests on a deeper foundation than our own resolve. The God who told Israel, "Choose life," is the same God who promised to circumcise their hearts so that they could love Him and live. The One who commands us to remember is the One who remembers us. "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27). God's words, Moses said, "are not just idle words for you—they are your life" (Deuteronomy 32:47).

Appendix

Daily Bible Reading Plan

This is the same daily Bible reading plan we use at dailyqt.org, covering the entire Bible, Old and New Testaments alike, in three hundred sixty-five daily readings. It does not begin on January 1st, and neither must you; begin on whatever date suits you and simply follow the sequence from there. The twelve readings that correspond to the chapters of this book, Deuteronomy 1–2 through Deuteronomy 32–34, fall just under two months into the full sequence, but the complete year-long plan is reprinted here, as it is in every volume of this series, so that wherever you are in your reading you always have the whole plan close at hand. Check off each day's passage as you complete it, and feel no need to catch up all at once if you fall behind by a day or a week; simply pick up with the current day's reading. The goal was never a perfect record. It was a daily habit of opening God's Word, kept up faithfully enough, and long enough, that it becomes less a task to complete than simply the shape of an ordinary day.

Date	Passage	Date	Passage
1/10	Gen 1-3	1/11	Gen 4-7
1/12	Gen 8-11	1/13	Gen 12-15
1/14	Gen 16-18	1/15	Gen 19-21
1/16	Gen 22-24	1/17	Gen 25-26
1/18	Gen 27-29	1/19	Gen 30-31
1/20	Gen 32-34	1/21	Gen 35-37
1/22	Gen 38-40	1/23	Gen 41-42
1/24	Gen 43-45	1/25	Gen 46-47
1/26	Gen 48-50	1/27	Ex 1-3

Date	Passage	Date	Passage
1/28	Ex 4-6	1/29	Ex 7-9
1/30	Ex 10-12	1/31	Ex 13-15
2/1	Ex 16-18	2/2	Ex 19-21
2/3	Ex 22-24	2/4	Ex 25-27
2/5	Ex 28-29	2/6	Ex 30-32
2/7	Ex 33-35	2/8	Ex 36-38
2/9	Ex 39-40	2/10	Lev 1-4
2/11	Lev 5-7	2/12	Lev 8-10
2/13	Lev 11-13	2/14	Lev 14-15
2/15	Lev 16-18	2/16	Lev 19-21
2/17	Lev 22-23	2/18	Lev 24-25
2/19	Lev 26-27	2/20	Nu 1-2
2/21	Nu 3-4	2/22	Nu 5-6
2/23	Nu 7	2/24	Nu 8-10
2/25	Nu 11-13	2/26	Nu 14-15
2/27	Nu 16-17	2/28	Nu 18-20
3/1	Nu 21-22	3/2	Nu 23-25
3/3	Nu 26-27	3/4	Nu 28-30
3/5	Nu 31-32	3/6	Nu 33-34
3/7	Nu 35-36	3/8	Dt 1-2
3/9	Dt 3-4	3/10	Dt 5-7
3/11	Dt 8-10	3/12	Dt 11-13
3/13	Dt 14-16	3/14	Dt 17-20
3/15	Dt 21-23	3/16	Dt 24-27
3/17	Dt 28-29	3/18	Dt 30-31
3/19	Dt 32-34	3/20	Jos 1-4
3/21	Jos 5-8	3/22	Jos 9-11
3/23	Jos 12-15	3/24	Jos 16-18
3/25	Jos 19-21	3/26	Jos 22-24
3/27	Jdg 1-2	3/28	Jdg 3-5
3/29	Jdg 6-7	3/30	Jdg 8-9
3/31	Jdg 10-12	4/1	Jdg 13-15
4/2	Jdg 16-18	4/3	Jdg 19-21
4/4	Ruth	4/5	1 Sa 1-3
4/6	1 Sa 4-8	4/7	1 Sa 9-12
4/8	1 Sa 13-14	4/9	1 Sa 15-17
4/10	1 Sa 18-20	4/11	1 Sa 21-24

Date	Passage	Date	Passage
4/12	1 Sa 25-27	4/13	1 Sa 28-31
4/14	2 Sa 1-3	4/15	2 Sa 4-7
4/16	2 Sa 8-12	4/17	2 Sa 13-15
4/18	2 Sa 16-18	4/19	2 Sa 19-21
4/20	2 Sa 22-24	4/21	1 Ki 1-2
4/22	1 Ki 3-5	4/23	1 Ki 6-7
4/24	1 Ki 8-9	4/25	1 Ki 10-11
4/26	1 Ki 12-14	4/27	1 Ki 15-17
4/28	1 Ki 18-20	4/29	1 Ki 21-22
4/30	2 Ki 1-3	5/1	2 Ki 4-5
5/2	2 Ki 6-8	5/3	2 Ki 9-11
5/4	2 Ki 12-14	5/5	2 Ki 15-17
5/6	2 Ki 18-19	5/7	2 Ki 20-22
5/8	2 Ki 23-25	5/9	1 Ch 1-2
5/10	1 Ch 3-5	5/11	1 Ch 6
5/12	1 Ch 7-8	5/13	1 Ch 9-11
5/14	1 Ch 12-14	5/15	1 Ch 15-17
5/16	1 Ch 18-21	5/17	1 Ch 22-24
5/18	1 Ch 25-27	5/19	1 Ch 28-2 Ch 1
5/20	2 Ch 2-5	5/21	2 Ch 6-8
5/22	2 Ch 9-12	5/23	2 Ch 13-17
5/24	2 Ch 18-20	5/25	2 Ch 21-24
5/26	2 Ch 25-27	5/27	2 Ch 28-31
5/28	2 Ch 32-34	5/29	2 Ch 35-36
5/30	Ezr 1-3	5/31	Ezr 4-7
6/1	Ezr 8-10	6/2	Neh 1-3
6/3	Neh 4-6	6/4	Neh 7
6/5	Neh 8-9	6/6	Neh 10-11
6/7	Neh 12-13	6/8	Esth 1-5
6/9	Esth 6-10	6/10	Job 1-4
6/11	Job 5-7	6/12	Job 8-10
6/13	Job 11-13	6/14	Job 14-16
6/15	Job 17-20	6/16	Job 21-23
6/17	Job 24-28	6/18	Job 29-31
6/19	Job 32-34	6/20	Job 35-37
6/21	Job 38-39	6/22	Job 40-42
6/23	Ps 1-8	6/24	Ps 9-16

Date	Passage	Date	Passage
6/25	Ps 17-20	6/26	Ps 21-25
6/27	Ps 26-31	6/28	Ps 32-35
6/29	Ps 36-39	6/30	Ps 40-45
7/1	Ps 46-50	7/2	Ps 51-57
7/3	Ps 58-65	7/4	Ps 66-69
7/5	Ps 70-73	7/6	Ps 74-77
7/7	Ps 78-79	7/8	Ps 80-85
7/9	Ps 86-89	7/10	Ps 90-95
7/11	Ps 96-102	7/12	Ps 103-105
7/13	Ps 106-107	7/14	Ps 108-114
7/15	Ps 115-118	7/16	Ps 119:1-88
7/17	Ps 119:89-176	7/18	Ps 120-132
7/19	Ps 133-139	7/20	Ps 140-145
7/21	Ps 146-150	7/22	Prov 1-3
7/23	Prov 4-6	7/24	Prov 7-9
7/25	Prov 10-12	7/26	Prov 13-15
7/27	Prov 16-18	7/28	Prov 19-21
7/29	Prov 22-23	7/30	Prov 24-26
7/31	Prov 27-29	8/1	Prov 30-31
8/2	Ecc 1-4	8/3	Ecc 5-8
8/4	Ecc 9-12	8/5	Ss 1-8
8/6	Isa 1-4	8/7	Isa 5-8
8/8	Isa 9-12	8/9	Isa 13-17
8/10	Isa 18-22	8/11	Isa 23-27
8/12	Isa 28-30	8/13	Isa 31-35
8/14	Isa 36-41	8/15	Isa 42-44
8/16	Isa 45-48	8/17	Isa 49-53
8/18	Isa 54-58	8/19	Isa 59-63
8/20	Isa 64-66	8/21	Jer 1-3
8/22	Jer 4-6	8/23	Jer 7-9
8/24	Jer 10-13	8/25	Jer 14-17
8/26	Jer 18-22	8/27	Jer 23-25
8/28	Jer 26-29	8/29	Jer 30-31
8/30	Jer 32-34	8/31	Jer 35-37
9/1	Jer 38-41	9/2	Jer 42-45
9/3	Jer 46-48	9/4	Jer 49-50
9/5	Jer 51-52	9/6	Lam 1:1-3:36

Date	Passage	Date	Passage
9/7	Lam 3:37-5:22	9/8	Eze 1-4
9/9	Eze 5-8	9/10	Eze 9-12
9/11	Eze 13-15	9/12	Eze 16-17
9/13	Eze 18-20	9/14	Eze 21-22
9/15	Eze 23-24	9/16	Eze 25-27
9/17	Eze 28-30	9/18	Eze 31-33
9/19	Eze 34-36	9/20	Eze 37-39
9/21	Eze 40-42	9/22	Eze 43-45
9/23	Eze 46-48	9/24	Dan 1-3
9/25	Dan 4-6	9/26	Dan 7-9
9/27	Dan 10-12	9/28	Hos 1-7
9/29	Hos 8-14	9/30	Joel
10/1	Amos 1-5	10/2	Amos 6-9
10/3	Ob-Jonah	10/4	Micah
10/5	Nahum	10/6	Hab-Zeph
10/7	Haggai 1-2	10/8	Zech 1-7
10/9	Zech 8-14	10/10	Mal 1-4
10/11	Mat 1-4	10/12	Mat 5-6
10/13	Mat 7-8	10/14	Mat 9-10
10/15	Mat 11-12	10/16	Mat 13-14
10/17	Mat 15-17	10/18	Mat 18-19
10/19	Mat 20-21	10/20	Mat 22-23
10/21	Mat 24-25	10/22	Mat 26
10/23	Mat 27-28	10/24	Mark 1-3
10/25	Mark 4-5	10/26	Mark 6-7
10/27	Mark 8-9	10/28	Mark 10-11
10/29	Mark 12-13	10/30	Mark 14
10/31	Mark 15-16	11/1	Luke 1
11/2	Luke 2-3	11/3	Luke 4-5
11/4	Luke 6-7	11/5	Luke 8-9
11/6	Luke 10-11	11/7	Luke 12-13
11/8	Luke 14-16	11/9	Luke 17-18
11/10	Luke 19-20	11/11	Luke 21-22
11/12	Luke 23-24	11/13	John 1-2
11/14	John 3-4	11/15	John 5-6
11/16	John 7-8	11/17	John 9-10
11/18	John 11-12	11/19	John 13-15

Date	Passage	Date	Passage
11/20	John 16-18	11/21	John 19-21
11/22	Acts 1-3	11/23	Acts 4-6
11/24	Acts 7-8	11/25	Acts 9-10
11/26	Acts 11-13	11/27	Acts 14-15
11/28	Acts 16-17	11/29	Acts 18-20
11/30	Acts 21-23	12/1	Acts 24-26
12/2	Acts 27-28	12/3	Rom 1-3
12/4	Rom 4-7	12/5	Rom 8-10
12/6	Rom 11-13	12/7	Rom 14-16
12/8	1 Cor 1-4	12/9	1 Cor 5-8
12/10	1 Cor 9-11	12/11	1 Cor 12-14
12/12	1 Cor 15-16	12/13	2 Cor 1-4
12/14	2 Cor 5-9	12/15	2 Cor 10-13
12/16	Gal 1-3	12/17	Gal 4-6
12/18	Eph 1-3	12/19	Eph 4-6
12/20	Phi 1-4	12/21	Col 1-4
12/22	1 Thess 1-5	12/23	2 Thess 1-3
12/24	1 Tim 1-6	12/25	2 Tim 1-4
12/26	Titus-Phm	12/27	Heb 1-6
12/28	Heb 7-10	12/29	Heb 11-13
12/30	James	12/31	1 Pe
1/1	2 Pe	1/2	1 John
1/3	2 John-Jude	1/4	Rev 1-3
1/5	Rev 4-8	1/6	Rev 9-12
1/7	Rev 13-16	1/8	Rev 17-19
1/9	Rev 20-22		

About the Author

Eugene Han is the founder of dailyqt.org, an online community where readers have shared daily reflections on Scripture for more than a decade, following the reading plan printed in this book. He has taught Sunday School classes at First Baptist Church in Dallas for many years, and much of the material in *The Daily Quiet Time Reflections Series* was first discussed aloud in those classrooms. He previously worked at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health, and he has written books on personal finance and biblical theology as well as devotional works. He and his wife, Chi, live in Dallas, where their family runs a Taekwondo school together.

The Daily Quiet Time Reflections Series walks through the entire Bible, book by book, in daily readings designed to be read alongside an open Bible. More resources, including the daily readings and audio reflections, are available at dailyqt.org.